

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Walter Meyer
August 2, 1996
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Walter Meyer, conducted by Katie Davis on August 2, 1996 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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WALTER MEYER
August 2, 1996

Q: Let's start with you introducing yourself, saying where you live now _____?

A: My name is Walter Meyer, M-e-y-e-r, I was Born in Kassel, K-a-s-s-e-l, Germany, and grew up mostly in the Rhineland and Dusseldorf and I've been in way over 50 countries and have lived in the Lone Star state known as Texas, for some 30, more than 30 years, and I live in Austin, Texas.

Q: Do you remember your grandparents, can you tell us who they . . .

A: Yes, in part, simply because, not because my memory is so bad, but because my grandmother on my father's side, died when I was rather young and my grandmother on my mother's side, died before I was born. So I do remember my grandfathers, one I loved dearly, and the other one I kind of feared, sometimes despised. That was the, my father's father who was a police lieutenant. They used to call him the _____, or the police Meyer. In Dusseldorf he became quite famous, because he apprehended one of the, I think he was called the terror of Dusseldorf, a man who had killed a number of little children, so he was the one who apprehended him and then he became famous. Also, he was considered the strongest man, because they had a contest, who could pull the most roller skaters, well he won that contest, and he was very strong. I don't remember ever having seen him laugh and he had memorized catechism and served as an altar boy, or as an altar man in his case, and oh I see him very vividly. He was very unkind to my mother, so that's probably why I didn't like him very much.

Q: What was his name?

A: Paul.

Q: Paul Meyer?

A: Paul Meyer, yes.

Q: And the one you loved so dearly?

A: The one I loved dearly was my mother's father. He was a specialist in roofing cathedrals and domes and in addition, he was forest ranger for some duke and I remember him, he could kind of twist his legs one more time than I can. He had legs about as long as Gary Cooper, and he was kind. Whenever he came to visit, which was not very frequent, he brought me the kind of present that I enjoyed, like a trumpet or something like that, oh yes, I remember him for his much kindness.

Q: And his name?

A: His name was Wilhelm Summerhowser(ph), they came from a town called Summerhowsen(ph) and he died, oh I don't remember exactly the year, but it was in the forties.

Q: _____.

A: Yeah.

Q: How about, tell us about your mother and your father, where they lived _____, you know about.

A: Well, my father, I have to go back a little and tell you a little story about my grandfather. My grandfather came from a little town in the Eifel region. The Eifel region goes all the way up to the _____, where they had the major battles in World War One and World War Two. My father was born in Hollerath, you want me to spell it?

Q: Sure.

A: H-o-l-l-e-r-a-t-h, that is called the snow Eifel, that's the upper Eifel, right on the Belgian border. So I have relatives in Belgium and I have relatives in Germany. Well, that little town had 600 people and the girls there, of course there was no contraception, so people had many children, but they were extremely poor. I think the richest farmer had four cows. I used to go to take care of the cows so they wouldn't walk into the potato fields. Anyway the girls in that little village, since the parents had difficulties feeding them, would send them down to the valley to work as maids and prosper to find a husband. When my father's mother, she was one of those who was sent down to Olef, O-l-e-f, and she came into the household of the family, Meyer. They were farmers and schoolteachers. Well it looks like my grandfather and my grandmother, yep, had a little relationship in the haystack and as a consequence she became pregnant and she was told to go back to her mother, back to Hollerath, in 1890, when that part of Germany was extremely _____ was extremely poor, and the neighbors, when they found out, they were staunch Catholics, when they found out she was pregnant, threw stones at her until the priest, the pastor _____, may he who cast the first stone, you know. So, in the haystack, they'd made a little mattress with straw and that's where my father was born and he stayed there until he was 12 years old.

Q: He lived in the barn?

A: He lived in Hollerath, in that little village until he was 12, then my grandfather, the _____ Meyer, he was offered a job by _____, which was one of the largest steel producers, they made seamless steel parts, they asked him to go to Dusseldorf, this is the big city, to take care of the horses and carry steel parts to the railroad station from the factory. This is how then my father came to the big city, okay? And he didn't even speak

German, he only spoke the dialect of his hometown, and when he went to school, they put him in the last bench where all the, generally you put the retarded ones. And he told me that when the principal came once, he asked, what is that boy doing there. Oh, he is from the Eifel region, he is a little retarded. So to overcome the situation, he spent every minute in the library and he came one of the most educated, self-educated man I ever met. And changed jobs and every job was an improvement, see, until he came to Kassel. My mother was pregnant 10 times, but lost babies and a brother of mine was born, a year and a half earlier than I and one earlier and then of course my father moved again to Kassel and worked for Hensel(ph), which was at the time the largest locomotive factory in the world and he was in charge of export and took care of the linguistic aspect of exporting and so on, because he had acquired a number of languages. Already I am speaking about my father being my father, but actually maybe I should tell you that he volunteered in World War One to the garrison in Metz, which is Alsace-Lorraine in order to learn French. And he was in World War I from the first day to the last day and was in every major battle and wounded three times. Before the war started, he came to marry my mother, and then orders came, the war had started, so he couldn't stay, but three days and then he went back and my mother was born in M-u-c-h, pronounced in German _____, which is also in the Rhineland areas and she was born in a resort town, which became a resort town and I already mentioned her father. When my mother was two years old, her mother died during childbirth, and my grandfather, not being able to cope with children, married the housekeeper of the local priest and she was the, what you read in books about stepmothers, she was a witch. I don't remember her and if I did, I would try not to remember her. So there was quite a bit of child abuse, and then when my mother was 14, she was given a -- five marks or something like that, walk 10 miles to the railroad station and buy a ticket, fourth class, that was a little above the cattle and go to Cologne and you were expected there and my father met, my mother then started as a maid in a rather, rather fine household of a Jewish family. And I think, like my father, she was very eager to improve things, so she went to evening schools and ended up being the secretary of a very important man in Dusseldorf and one day walking her little dachshund, she saw a rather handsome man, my father and that's how they got together and eventually ended, it ended up in marriage.

Q: So you're describing two people who were very much self-made, certainly self-improving?

A: Totally, totally, but the point that I am astonished when I read what my mother wrote, it's so impeccable and so well expressed that well, it must be an innate thing with her. She was a very unusual, unusual woman who didn't fit in this century at all. To her there were only flowers and beautiful things, you know _____ she was extremely sensitive, neat. I hear my father always complaining, why don't you leave the broom away, why don't you quit cleaning, but even the handles of the brooms had to be sanded, it was ridiculous, so. But a lovely, lovely, lovely woman. I assume, probably because she didn't ever receive much love, she wondered, she went overboard with love. I remember she was 70, over 70, I'll tell you a nice thing about her, and she told me once, you know Walter, I wish I could have another baby. When she was 75, the newspaper, the leading newspaper of Dusseldorf promoted a jogging contest, 30 kilometers, which is 18 miles. She registered and she was told, you're too

old and she protested. After her fifth victory, at the age of 81, she had a special trophy from the Secretary of the Interior, true.

Q: Could you tell us her full name, her maiden name?

A: Yeah, Henriette Paula Summerhowser(ph).

Q: That's a great story.

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell us what it was like to have them as parents. What was it like growing up? Did they spend a lot of time with you, giving you instruction?

A: Well my mother was a mother plus. I sometimes wonder where she got all the knowledge, because we were exposed to, that is my brother and I, we were exposed to _____ food, which is now whole food, or . . .

Q: Natural food.

A: Natural food, yeah, and I had to drink carrot juice and lots of fruits and the butter had to be special butter and the eggs had to be from yard, yard eggs, yard chickens who ran free and all these things. Very little meat, and she said the fact that I survived is because she nursed me 18 months and my father was, he expected me to be the way he wanted me to be and I was exactly the opposite, so not getting any attention at home, I tried to get attention in other ways. That led to a situation where, he would probably beat me up three times a week. It came to the point where we didn't speak to each other, there was no communication, and I was not allowed to eat at the same table. So it was quite extreme. I think if you had given me a gun when I was 11, I probably would have shot him. It took me many years and nowadays I miss him. It took me many years to love him dearly, I hated him. So, you know, when he looked for me, he wouldn't ask for my son, he would ask for, have you seen Walter Meyer?

Q: How did he want you to be?

A: Follow his footsteps, to do, obey, be first in school, just be good. He kind of admired me, didn't show it much, because I was a top athlete and even the horrible things I did, he admired me for them, but he didn't openly agree to it and things started, probably he resented me and I don't think he liked very much the fact that I was born really. Became a liability, and I wet the bed every night. Well, that meant he had to get up during the night and oh, when he came I was already wet, or after he had come I wet the bed, so it started there and then I just didn't do the right things, I was late, I didn't -- whatever he expected me to do, I was the opposite of my brother, who looked like him, who did exactly what he expected of him, he was a kind of outstanding boy. I was the one who was always in trouble.

Q: So you were rebellious at first, within the family structure?

A: Yeah, I was probably born rebellious. Yeah, within the family structure, yes, my brother would receive chocolate and he would probably have it for three weeks, but I ate it immediately and hated him for having some left. I liked the outdoors, I should have been born in west Texas on a big ranch with animals. I was confined so. Fortunately my father, for example, he thought maybe if he embarrassed me in public by putting the bed sheets outside like flags, that would make a difference. Well that upon the teasing. Fortunately I was physically, I was in good shape, so anybody who would start teasing me, I didn't suffer much, because I would beat them up, so my physical status helped me in many ways to overcome this. But it was not a pleasant situation and it was kind of balanced with the enormous amount of love that I received from my mother.

Q: It's like it sounds like almost the two _____ you know, very, really kind of stern and sometimes brutal father and a mother _____.

Q: Yeah, except one time I was a little surprised, I was in school, I was already _____ 12, 13, I went to the high school. In Germany you start high school at 10, you don't have Junior High School and all of the -- and we had a teacher with one wooden foot and we call him the rhino, because when he came down the floor, it was like an earthquake and he liked to slap boys, there was no co-education, all boys and you generally had two answers to a question. If you answered A, he would slap you, if you answered B, he would slap you. And I think I always in my life hated for somebody to touch me, except with a nice embrace or a kiss, and so I came home and I left a note, because I didn't talk to him, I left a note with my father, told him about the situation, that I was not going to go back to school. Well, he went, I understand, checked with others, and found out that I had told the truth, so he left me a note that said, next time he hits you, hit him back. So I told everybody in class my father told me to hit him back, so I became an instant hero and a double hero after it was done. My God, everybody was in expect, expectation and sure enough, the next day he hit me and I hit him back and ran and ran. So there was a special conference and my father was called and I think he wanted to have the privilege of being the only one to hit me and the teacher actually was moved to another school or something like that.

Q: Did your father support you _____, in that classroom?

A: Well, I was not, I was not in the conference. He was called and obviously he explained it, that he actually had told me to do so.

Q: What did they teach you about being a German, and about community life, politics and _____.

A: I looked the other day at some of the biology and physic books and some.

Q: That you have?

A: That I still have. When you -- I'm speaking now about '41, the war had started already. In history of course you would see _____ in other countries of the world, you would see a _____ education of everything, German and Germanic, which made you believe that we were a superior race. We learned, in an intellectual way, to recognize Jews and others. Jews were then regarded as a race, rather than a religion, were inferior. It was explained very thoroughly that even statements made by _____ and other prominent Jews who spoke negatively about their _____, so to speak, so there was justification. The history of the Jews as nomads and _____, you learned to appreciate that Jews were inferior or no good. Maybe similar to the United States where you learn that blacks are there to shine your shoes, period. I had a little problem understanding that, because there are so many instances in my life where there are confusion, simply because I was born at a time where I played with Jewish children, I went to their houses. I loved to go to their houses because their mothers had goodies, nice cookies and they had better toys than I had, but then, there was nothing wrong with them and suddenly they kind of became outcast and they disappeared and had David stars on their clothes and so on. That was a little confusing to me, and I became, probably because I liked the attention, I became an altar boy, and I asked the priest one day, I said, why is all this anti-Jewish sentiment and Jesus was Jewish. I says it says INRI, that means Jesus was _____ King of the Jews, he was a Jew and the answer then was, you are not supposed to ask these questions, and to express doubt. Doubt is not a very Christian thing to do, just accept things as they are. And he called me son and I hated him because I knew he couldn't have a son and he called me son, I didn't. So one day, I was just so mad I just, see the big book that you have, I just threw it on the altar steps and ran. I didn't go back there. But that was very controversial issue with me. Then of course we came to, when I was rather young, I was 12 years old, we came to _____. I don't know how many times I tried to, to, to start a fire in the synagogue. There was a gorgeous building, but so massively built out of, I think sandstone, that you couldn't even start a fire. So I don't know how many times they tried to burn it, and then I looked and I saw people throwing _____ through the window. I said, why do they do this to poor people and so on, it just didn't make any sense.

Q: Who was throwing the _____?

A: The SA and SS, after a member of the German embassy in _____ was killed by, I understand by a Jew, the Crystal night started and they just cleaned out, and told the Jews to leave because we want to have a _____ Germany, a racially pure Germany and they were asked to leave. So I remember that very vividly, it was like an uncontrolled revolution. The mob took over, and it seems whenever there are revolutions, many people look for an opportunity to do ridiculous, nasty, violent things. It seems to be part of the German element, especially those who have been oppressed for some years, all of this is a golden opportunity to just go without asking why, they just go.

Q: Think about that night and when did you realize something funny was going on, did you hear sounds, did you smell the fire, did you run out of the house?

A: As I remember it, we used to have, well every German family was supposed to have a little radio, it was called a _____. The Volkes receiver, like the Volkswagen? It was the Volkes receiver, which was the standard model, if you had more money, you bought a more sophisticated one, but the _____ allowed you to listen to the news, to Hitler and so on _____. But there were many who did not have the money to buy one, so there were large radios on public squares, people stood around and listened, okay? And so the big news was that a Jew had killed a member of the diplomatic corps and of course I didn't know the name, _____, that came later on, but it was called the _____, because of all the Crystal that was broken. And then when I went through the street, you could see out of the window came things, I mean it was -- police was there and move on _____ while they threw things out, it was a nightmare, and that went over throughout the city, especially in those areas where Jews lived. And Jews as a whole had certain areas of the city where they had their locations and _____ was close to the zoo and the zoological garden and there were quite a few Jews.

Q: How did you parents react to that? Did they try to get you to stay home, what were their reactions to the event even happening?

A: No, I don't think we even discussed it, my mother asked questions like, asked my father, why do they do that, why are people like that? Those are the questions that I remember and my father was very short-tempered with answer, like you know people are beasts and that would be the end of that conversation, so it was not discussed widely. Discussions came a little later, after the war had started and my father would make clear that it would be impossible to win the war. He had been in World War One. Especially when the Germans marched into Russia, he said that'll be the end, that's the end of the war. He had a very important position, because of his rather impeccable knowledge of France. He was sent to Liedel(ph), which is in Northern France, it's kind of the Pittsburgh of France, under German occupation, to become the liaison man and to see that things would run smoothly and he was in charge of about 750 factories, mostly iron and steel. So Liedel(ph) was his headquarters, and he was one of the few who had never become a member of the National Socialist Party, because he just hated these men who suddenly appeared with brown shirts and swastikas who became functionary with the party, and in many cases people without any outstanding reputation. And I remember people coming to the house, we did not have too many visitors, but when he spoke, he really didn't care, he didn't give a damn, really. But I heard people say, Paul, or Mr. Meyer, you shouldn't talk like that because you know what happens to those who talk to much, ah, he just shook it off. Anyway, he was in France and I had a letter the other day, the French government wants to decorate him posthumously for all the things he has done for the French during his stay in France. I'm in many ways, I don't know whether I hate to recognize it, but I'm in many ways exactly like him. So that's the genetic secret. Back to your question, that is what I remember, glass, broken things everywhere, furniture being thrown out of the window, to the point where it was so wild that you, you tried to stay at home, you tried to go away, it looked a little dangerous.

Q: What was the mood among you and your friends or other families? Okay, _____ that there's this horror going on outside, things are being broken and thrown, people don't really understand it, there's not a lot of discussion going on at home about it, what was the mood? Did you know what was coming _____? Did it surprise you that it happened?

A: I think my generation, we were a little too young to understand, but you would hear those who would make remarks like, all this good stuff, just destroying it, makes no sense and you would hear others say, they asked for it, they asked for it, they had it coming, suits them well. So you had these two parties, and then others who had learned to shut up, to say nothing, and that party was probably the strongest one. They didn't ask. Another party would say, they know what they're doing. Don't forget the, well Germany's a very young country is Germany, but let's say Germanic people, for endless generations, have obeyed government, faithfully, stupidly, without asking questions, and when you read the paper, or you just read the paper in Germany and then this is the truth. Nobody would say ah they lie, papers don't tell the truth, this was the word. So there was no open rejection, resistance, uproar, _____, no. But you have to understand that by that time _____ Jewish propaganda in newspapers, films, radio, schools, etcetera had already come to a high point and, but this was not the first time in German history that anti-Jewish feelings had been prevalent, in the middle ages for example, so this was just one repetition, so the Jews had always been somewhat outcast, somewhat _____, kind of unwanted minority, so even I remembered when I went through my father's home town to take care of the cows, which I liked, because I never had to brush my teeth or wash my face, so that I was beautiful. I still love to go there today. I remember Jews coming up to buy cattle, or to advance money to the farmers, with the understanding they would, they would buy the _____ from them the next year and so, and they looked a little different and well you wouldn't refer to them as Mr. Mason or Mr. Sauder, you'd say, did you see the Jew? I mean this was it, it was different, and I try to make analogies of like here and see that nigger? You understand? It was an identification _____.

Q: _____ had that and yet you were questioning as a child, you were asking the priest, why?

A: Oh, I don't know, I think I'm a questionnaire, so to speak, or questioner, I like to ask questions to the point where somebody would, quit asking so many questions, I heard this all my life. It didn't make any sense to me. But that doesn't hold true for everybody else, many people don't ask questions. So I go, to Panama, I say why is it called Panama, people, I don't know. Well _____ ask until I finally find somebody, Panama means wealth of fish, ah, that's _____, so I like to ask questions and I remember the time my argument was with the priest, why I asked, it just occurred to me that it didn't make too much sense, but it was not a common thing, to ask questions.

Q: Did you have discussions with friends of yours that were Jewish, do you remember them being concerned, or their parents?

A: No, because when it came to the persecution, that was when they disappeared and there was no argument any more, as a matter of fact, you were not allowed to associate with them, they were not allowed to come to your store to buy, they were not allowed to attend your schools, it was suddenly a war and that was it, so you couldn't argue with them, and say what happened to you, what happened to your father and so on, you couldn't, that was it, you did not know that they were moved to concentration camps. You later on heard _____, which meant concentration camp, _____, you heard that, but that was more or less like hearing about, if you don't behave, you're going to end up in a _____, you're going to end up in a labor camp, but definitely there was nothing known about gassing people, mass executions. _____ was a word like, oh maybe an exaggeration would be if you don't behave, you're going to go to the electric chair, something like that.

Q: It was used casually?

A: It was used casually, yes, it was used casually. Nobody knew, when I say nobody I mean the masses didn't know that there were as many, and I'm talking now about the early 40's, as many as there were, and nobody knew what happened in them, because the ones that were inside, couldn't talk, so you knew that it was bad, mass killing, no you didn't know.

Q: Help us understand this, at one point you're going to the friends house, that they have great bon bons, they have great toys and then there's a shift, you don't go to their houses any more and then there's another shift and maybe these kids aren't even here any more. So how did that unfold in your life? Perhaps there's a trend.

A: Well, I should have explained that one of my good friends for example, his name was Winter and they had an office supply store, and he was Jewish or half Jewish, I think he was half Jewish and it's not like all the Jews or half Jews disappeared like overnight, there was a gradual process. Don't forget some of them went to England or to other places, others said Hitler's not going to last, so we're going to stick it out. So they didn't quite disappear, but since they were not allowed to go to school, you ask me an interesting question, I don't know whether I asked myself consciously the question, where are they now, I think maybe I assumed that they went to other institutions, maybe to Jewish schools or something like that, so it is not as shocking as you think it was, it was kind of a gradual process and maybe I said I wonder where they are, but you kind of assumed that they went to another school or that they, maybe a greater assumption was that they probably went to, to America, to somewhere, but I mean it was not known that -- you see in 38 they were asked to leave, and many did. And so I think that many, I don't even know that I remember that, but I assume in 38 when that happened, I was 12 years old, that was just they're unwanted here and they're leaving, and that was about it.

Q: Your friend, I don't know if you were going to tell a story about the friend ____?

A: Yeah, what surprised me, that he lasted as far as I know, throughout the war there, and we had a, I never met his parents, we had a Jewish boy, but I am talking now about 43 and he

played with us, his name was Brendon Brook(ph) and I discussed it when I was in Germany _____ with a friend of mine, he said remember Brandon Brook(ph), I said yes, whatever happened to him, I don't know, but we knew he was Jewish, I don't know what happened to his parents, but he played with us and we used to hide them, hide him. He stayed three days with me, we put him in the basement, then he stayed with my friend. We didn't want anything to happen to him, because we liked him, we always, he was a buddy, understand? And whatever happened to him I don't know, because I was arrested, I was gone, so whatever happened to him, I don't know.

Q: Did your parents know you were hiding him?

A: I don't know because my father was, I was pretty much independent at the time because my father was in France and my mother, she asked me questions, where you going tonight, oh you ask too many question, I'll be back soon or something like that was the answer you see, so I was pretty much I had my bike and I was gone. I lived more, more outside that in the house.

Q: But there was a sense that this, your friend needed to be hidden, hidden from view?

A: Oh, hidden from the Nazis. Oh, there was no question about it, we knew, we knew that they were picked up and sent away and assumed, not only did we, it was not so much because he was Jewish, if we had been friends with Chinese, we would have done the same thing. It was kind of an entire authoritarian thing. We would not allow the police to pick him up, he's a good kid, so let's hide him.

Q: Do you have a first memory of being aware of the Nazi's in uniform, seeing the swastika?

A: Yeah, I think I was maybe eight or nine years old, where I saw for the first time, brown shirts and I saw a man who was frequently drunk and would abuse his family and nobody liked him very much, he became somewhat of a lieutenant or something like that with the SA and _____ the first remarks of my father, saying something like, we don't got the kind of pigs that they recruit, something like that. He was very negative towards them, simply because the SA and later SS, or the National Socialist Party, a party affiliation that sort of everything was Nazified, so to speak, you saw too many people who were not very qualified men, became suddenly leaders within that movement and that is what my father didn't like.

Q: So the messages you were getting from your father were very skeptical of the Nazis?

A: Yeah.

Q: It seemed to you?

A: Yes. But that doesn't mean that it had much influence on me, first of all I didn't agree with them and secondly I was tough enough to find out things for myself. But you must turn the

page a little bit and see the part that I enjoyed and that was, first I was _____ the _____, the young people, 10 to 14, that was the evolution from Boy Scouts, to the Hitler youth, which was a small step, really, even the uniform looked somewhat alike and I had been in school in _____ Switzerland for a year, and there was part of the Boy Scouts. So the Hitler youth was 10 to 14, because of the _____ was 10 to 14 and the Hitler youths, the HJ, Hitler youth 14 through 18 and the same existed for _____, the young girls and the BDM, BDM. BDM means _____, the association of German girls, so you had the male and the female version, but that was like going to camp, that was like having fun, that was like not having to go to church, so that was a pleasant thing. I was a drummer in the _____, and you have to do a lot of marching, a lot of singing, a lot of playing. That did not have an ill effect. Hitler youth, well first of all, it was obligatory, secondly, I became pretty much a star swimmer and it used to be, to make an analogy, aquatic club of Washington competing against the aquatic group of New York. _____ became _____, section six, Dusseldorf, competing with _____, section seven, Cologne and it went then from city to city and then terminated in the _____ Youth Championship of the _____ of Germany, okay? So you swam for the Hitler youth. The Hitler youths were then divided like the armed forces to infantry, _____, Calvary, navy and as a swimmer of course I had to _____ the navy and I was trained and had become an underwater demolition expert, or a frogman, okay, which was very interesting. What I didn't like, maybe that would be in front of my father, it's hard to say when you become older, what made you tick and why did you do this and so on, but I was pretty much a king on the street. If something had to be done, like stealing apples or whatever, they would call me. And I saw guys that I considered sissies and weaklings, they suddenly got a star, they became lieutenant, and I had to salute them. Well I was not about to do anything like that. That brought about the first resentment, that's how it started all. And there were others who kind of felt the same way I did, that prompted me to start a little movement, which in reality, after the war, it was called a political movement, but at the _____, it was nothing but a gag. Not war and not love. We were much too young to have ideological conviction. We just didn't like these crummy guys whom we didn't see as young men, but sissies and no good for nothings and so on, that they became leaders and they told us what to do and they forced us to salute them. So they brought upon this entire sentiment and it seems everything we did was negative, we enjoyed it even more. We used to put condoms on their bicycles, on the little reflector. We used to deflate the bike, steal the saddle. We did everything that would be, that would bring them physically and mental harm of some sort. Then I think I went a little too far, so.

Q: Yeah, I'm going to pull back actually, just get some more detail on some . . .

A: Yeah.

Q: Actually, I'm going to go pretty far back with you, because you mentioned something. What -- maybe I won't do that, I think I'll wait on that one and I'll just have it for you later, details here. When you joined the _____, was that voluntary?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: Obligatory.

Q: That was obligatory?

A: Hmm-mm.

Q: The same with the Hitler youth?

A: Let me, let me, let me justify, if you had a son who had flat feet, or he had something that prevented him, then you would be excused, okay, but as long as you were a somewhat perfect specimen, yes you had to go.

Q: And you were healthy?

A: I was a perfect specimen, yes.

Q: Okay, so that, did you have to wear uniforms?

A: Oh sure, oh yes.

Q: What were the uniforms like?

A: Shorts and often, where I lived in the Rhineland, we adapted _____, a brown shirt, with the suspenders, brown shirts and a _____. I had these, what we call in Germany, swallow nest. These little things _____ that meant I was a drummer, okay? I had a little black tie, I got _____, really very similar to the Boy Scouts.

Q: Were they brown?

A: Yeah. Boy Scout is green.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: So there just _____ the point where okay, Walter is 10, he has to go in the _____ now?

A: True.

Q: Did they have you recite anything when you were in the group, of the mottoes, the

philosophy?

A: No, the _____ is mostly, it's mostly learning to build fires, things just like the Boy Scouts, go out to camp and having some instructions and a lot of physical education, getting tough and some, within the group, wrestling matches and things like that.

Q: _____ we should stop and rest _____.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

- Q: I wanted to touch a little more deeply on religion. If you could just tell us how you grew up and how important was the church in your family. And then it seems you made some personal choices also, as a young boy, about religious commitment.
- A: Okay. Religion was totally unimportant in my family. The Meyers were not the church going family, much to the disappointment of my grandfather. My father, well let me explain in Germany, you had to pay taxes, church taxes and so you have a little book, if you don't pay for September, then they write you a little note and if you still don't pay, then you cease to be a member, so it's very easy not to be a member any longer. My father decided that he did not like all the hocus pocus and he didn't, he was a little disappointed that the churches did not do enough or presented no resistance at all to what was going on. As a matter of fact they seemed to be very much in favor of it. So he quit paying and he became a former member. My mother hardly ever went to church, but not because she didn't believe in God, or she was not a Christian, but there was too much work to do at home. Took them ____ take care of the kids and so on, especially the way she worked. Why did I go to church, well, I became not only an altar boy, but I became a prayer. That means I had to read and then the whole people joined me, so that means they gave me acquisition of some category, became a star, so to speak. That was quite a bit of attention, which suited me fine. Besides they had a ping pong table there in the parish house, and they always had cookies. So those were the attractive parts and at one time they had a priest whom I liked very much. He was a good man. But you, when you ask me questions, you have to also understand that I moved around a little bit. I was not always at the same school and the same environment. And when the environment changed, I even, believe it or not, sometimes thought of myself as not being a good boy. I thought maybe I should do a little something to get better grades, or getting better -- but my gypsy blood didn't permit me to do that for too long a period of time, but there were moments that I kind of recognized that my behavior was sickening.
- Q: What do you mean by that? What were you doing that was so bad?
- A: Well, maybe the question should be, what did you do that was good? I'll give you an example. When things didn't work too well, and there were eventually too many complaints from my mother, and my father was already gone, I was sent to a school in Munhan(ph). The school was in one part of the city and the dormitory was in a building of four or five story building and the upper part was the apartment of the director, he lived there with his family. I lived with a boy whose father was a physician. Well-to-do family, the boy always had a little money, so we got along fine, and the food we got there was quite poor, and yet you could smell, German houses don't have ventilation systems like you have in modern structures, so you generally know whether somebody is cooking a roast a block away. So the director ate rather well, and one day, it was before Easter, or, I think it was before Easter, or around Easter time, he and his family had a baking contest of some sort, I mean they cooked cookies forever and the smell penetrated the building. The director went out in the evening to some theater function, I said this is it, so I broke in and distributed the cookies throughout the

dormitory. Of course everybody was happy with me, but I knew that somebody would sing once they asked who did, somebody would say I did it, so I told my companion, my buddy, let's get out of here. I was on the third floor, so we put sheets together, it was about 10:30 in the evening, and climbed out of the window, on the street. And I asked him to give me a little money, he did and I said, well let's go. We put the sheets in the garbage can and then he stopped and said, I won't go, my father is going to kill me, no, no, no, so he went into the front door, to wait for the director to come and I took off and I joined then with a girl I had met and that's a little story I don't know whether you want to know about it, but I met her playing hit ball, which is kind of a baseball and we had eye contact and eventually I saw a little more of her and she came to every game and I tried to sneak out and talk to her a little more. Well, I went to her house, she had a little garden and I threw a little stone at her window, she came out and we went and checked into a hotel. I wanted her to go with me, just let's go and I knew that the police would come, the police would come to every hotel to check who was living there and so on and so we took two rooms. And the police came to my room, _____ police, I said look, and I had told her what to say, look my cousin, we went to a party and we have to go, we have to leave early, why don't you let her sleep and so on, so they left her alone, but after that, she joined me and I took her home in the morning, I explained to her parents we'd been to a party, there was no telephone. Very few people had telephones. And they understood, they knew that she was a good girl. So I didn't have enough money to take the train, I thought well, since I was rather unusual I felt, well it would be a hell of a lot of fun to take a barge. I went down and convinced the captain to take me along, I did. So I went by barge down the Rhine River to Dusseldorf, which is most unusual, but it was quite an event and I first met with the guys, they were happy to see me again, I told them what happened and my father was in France already, so I remember my mother looking at me and saying, why are you so different? Why don't you give us nothing but problems? But I would find a way to say, but you love me, don't you, things like that, you know. What is your father going to say? Oh, you don't have to tell him. So, mailmen had disappeared, they were in the army, so we had mailwomen and I had developed a little relationship with the mailwoman, who taught me a little about sex and I told her, any mail that comes for me, give it to me. A letter came from Elsie, that was the girl I had left and I read, I said oh my God, put the letter in my pocket, the letter said, I'm pregnant. So I didn't quite know what to do, she needed help, but my father had come to town that day or a day earlier and my mother thought it was time to change _____, so they took everything out of the pocket and there was the letter. So my father woke me up, did you sleep with the girl? Yes, sir. If you're old enough to sleep with a girl, you're old enough to become a father. And my mother, I see her go to pieces, Paul, he's not even 13, how can you say that? Well, I tried selling things, toys I had, things of value, sent to the girl, who had an abortion by some kind of alley doctor and it ran into complications, my father finally intervened and _____, but those are the things, so it's not only like I beat somebody up, or built a fire somewhere, I mean it was just one incident after another, so I can't blame my father too much, except that with love he would have done so much more. That means, what I'm trying to tell you is that there were different environments, so I'm now going back to the school, which I attended earlier, so something new had to be created, there was a new beginning again, you understand, and that was about the time of the Hitler youth, because the Hitler

youth returned. The Hitler youth, I believe in 41.

Q: Did you want to join Hitler youth, or you knew you had to, did you say uck?

A: No, no. There was absolutely no . . .

Q: What did you do?

A: Yeah, I was fine, yeah it was fine because there was nothing really negative. It meant you had to go to service, I think twice a week, generally on Sundays, and the, I have to tell you another thing about another school, generally on Sundays and it was instructional and that it, you learned the Morse alphabet, or you learned the flags, in the navy, you know, a, b, c, d, x and all. It was a pre-military thing, very physical education centric and then of course I wanted to swim and the only way you could swim was by being a member. Without being a member I couldn't even swim. So I was representing now, the Hitler youth of Dusseldorf. Even though I belonged to a swim club, the swim club went into the background and I swam for the Hitler youth. But I was in _____, which meant I was about 11, I think and the truth is I don't know exactly where they were _____, but a new kind of school had _____ called the Adolf Hitler school. I hate to make that kind of analogy, but it was about as select as the Air Force Academy, something of that sort. A one directional school, and I was chosen to go to the Adolf Hitler school, because I had, my intelligence level was really high, physically I was in top condition and no Jewish blood for at least five generations, so I was a top candidate. That was quite an honor. But before going to the Adolf Hitler school, I was sent, with a group of other candidates to a kind of pre-screening school, where there were certain tests, physical and mental tests. I was there for about a week. When my father heard about that, he said forget it, it's out, you're not going to any, that kind of school. And I hated him for it. And he explained then, with a very few words, saying things like today you won't understand, one day you will thank me for it. So I didn't go. But I was chosen for it.

Q: Did you ever talk to him about why he didn't want you to go?

A: No, it was the other way around, he told me, you now understand why I resented, yes I said, I do and I appreciate it. So he was in many ways very far-sighted and very, very realistic.

Q: You _____ disappointed.

A: I was very disappointed at the time. I was very disappointed at the time. I was also, there were many disappointments one after the other, when I was even younger I wanted to go to the movies, well you can't go to the movies, there's no money for a movie, it was a ridiculous waste of time. So I went to the grocery store for a lady who gave me five cents and did something for somebody else and delivered hot bread in the morning, buns in the morning at six o'clock to make a little money so I could go to the movies and have a little money to play around, ____ I was never with that. I remember the first, well the movies that you saw in

Germany at the time, we'd see a wild west film, then definitely, what's the little child? Shirley Temple. Shirley Temple and Nelson Eddy(ph), Jeannette McDonald, _____ things. The funny thing is, I always saw Andy Devine, remember him, the one with the funny voice?

Q: Hmm-mm.

A: Okay. I ended up doing a portrait of Andy Devine in Austin, Texas. _____ just an incredible man, I saw as a child, I meet him now in person, only I didn't meet him. _____ a thing, because the big event. I think I was 10 or 11, 11 maybe. I, for some reason, I could write like an adult, a weird thing, but I could. So I would make money by writing excuses for other students. My son could not attend today because he had fever, _____ so on and so on, and they would give me one mark or something. But I was very, very good with a pencil. With my fountain pen I _____ of my grandfather, _____ and my teacher would not believe that I had done it. They realized that I had done it, I was sent to the Academy of Fine Arts in Dusseldorf, which is _____ Munich, Dusseldorf, Milan, Florence and there are a few academies with big names, and I was there, I went there for a period of time, maybe three months. All these weird, weird professors and teachers, I don't know, a strange environment, kind of hippyish and nude models. But I learned quite a bit, so this was another kind of filler in my life, to be exposed to all that.

Q: _____ you describe you father, he basically, is this a fair assessment, he was anti-Nazi?

A: Yeah, he was very, very anti-Nazi, very much in favor of the underdog, very much in favor of the sufferer. My father would pick up people on the street, you hungry? Come on. He was like this. And my mother would say, how can you ask total strangers to come to my house? Shut up, feed him. And the guy would be someone educated, say, no I have enough, no you don't have enough, eat another plate. This is how my father was. So there was a golden heart, within a concrete shell. He was a very good man, and well _____ later, when he saw me again, when I came back. Anyway, so, yeah, he was very, very anti-Nazi, anti-authoritarian. He was, in many ways like me, or I am in many ways like him, except that we didn't understand each other, because I was too much of a, I don't know, if you got into a psychological analysis, maybe he envied me. Maybe he wanted to be like me, I don't know.

Q: Did you feel any conflict, being a part of the Hitler youth, at first, when you first were a part of it, you were embracing it when you were real young. Did your father say don't go there, don't do that?

A: No, no he didn't, he didn't do that because the Hitler youth was really not an aggressive anti-anything thing, was a youth movement in which certainly there was a certain amount of indoctrination, but that part of indoctrination you had in every school, you had all over, similar to other countries, so that there, that did not mean much, besides, I have to emphasize that my father spent very little time, he was already in France. Of course, he went to Belgium

when he was in France, so the greatest part of the war, he was not at home.

Q: He didn't really know exactly what you were doing _____?

A: No, no.

Q: Tell us a bit about the indoctrination, what did it mean when you were required to join the Hitler youth? On your birthday did you have to go down and register and then you were expected to make _____ at these meetings? Did they give you a uniform, what was it like?

A: The uniform you had to buy, also those who didn't have the money were given the uniform. Since everything is known pretty much like nowadays in the United States, about you, somebody knew, somebody knew about your birthday _____, so then you were asked to come, the Hitler youth was divided into, let's say the Northwest Headquarters, the East headquarters, south headquarters, so each district of town had a little headquarter and you would then report to your district, okay? And then you would be _____ to be at what time, and when the service would be and when he would come. You would march, you would learn songs, you would go camping and you would participate in social things like going through the streets, cashing money for the winter aid program. That means those who were a little cold, in northeastern Germany, they helped them with clothing and _____, you would have a little box and cash money. You would help, on some corners they had what they called the _____, where they made soup for something like a nickel, you would get a bowl of soup, good soup, good soup and you would help there by firing the cannon, or by cashing the money or something like that, you would help to collect raw material that was used for the war effort. Steel, aluminum, things of that sort. Then you would go through the service to learn the specialty of your particular section, like in the Navy, you would learn one thing, artillery, you would learn another thing, aviation, you would learn, so in that sense it was a pre-military organization, okay? They wanted you to be in superb conditions once you reached 17 or 18. When I was 17, right offhand I think three or four weeks after I was arrested. Four weeks, three weeks before I had written a letter, forging my father's language, signature, asking for admittance to the navy in Wilhelmshaven, which was the headquarters and three weeks or four weeks after I was arrested, orders came for me to go, of course then it was too late, otherwise I would have joined the navy.

Q: So you, as a young man say, 13, 14, 15, you were beginning to see yourself fighting in the war?

A: No question of it, no question of it. And really with some enthusiasm, because it meant adventures, it meant seeing things, it meant growing up fast, it meant proving that you were a hero, it meant all kinds of things that were appealing.

Q: Which some of your stories already show, I mean, you liked adventure, you were an adventurer.

A: Oh, right. The greater the danger, the more I was for it.

Q: Did you, what other sense did you have about the purpose of the war? How did you make sense of the war?

A: I don't believe that at that time I asked that question. I know what I read and heard eight hours a day, left some sort of explanation within me, Germany was not the aggressor, Germany was the victim. The Poles had killed a number of poor Germans. Took me a long time to read the true story, but this is what I was exposed to, _____ the Germans than retaliated, so there was a justification. Then you learn about, we going a little ahead, but as I remember it, you see one victory after the other, no problem going through, taking Czechoslovakia, no problem Austria, everybody in Austria said _____ Hitler, they were the happiest people in the world to be, to come home, they called home to the _____, being to reenter and so no opposition at all, you would roar. I think once in awhile I said how horrible it must be to be bombed or torpedoed and then die. Yeah, I thought, and my mother frequently said, those poor mothers when they receive notice, but then there would be a voice from someone, my father, so and so, well, that's war, that's war. You kind of got used to it, and then it didn't take very long really before you were bombed. Kind of every night.

Q: How old were you when?

A: 15.

Q: What was the first one like, the first experience?

A: You were, oh I remember my mother, probably I was 10 years old when my mother was trained against gas attacks to wear a mask and all this, so in retrospect, it's rather interesting to realize that that happened that early already, but you didn't see it as a threat of war, you saw it more or less as a good exercise to be prepared if ever, you understand? I remember how I laughed as a kid when I saw her with the mask. It was kind of a brutal thing to look at. Well, you heard, as I told you before, over radio, newspaper and so on, that attacks were expected, aerial attacks had taken place and of course always would be the enemy had no respect for hospitals or schools or anything, they would gladly bomb, therefore you had to be prepared. Bunkers had been built, either above ground of solid concrete, or below ground, and the siren, when the siren up and down, that meant they're coming, one tone meant they've gone, then you could get out of the bunker, see? So you kind of prepared that and well the first attacks, maybe they were a little bit too far from you, so you didn't worry too much, but by 19, by the end of 42, the beginning of 43, a great part of Dusseldorf was pretty bombed and of course eventually was bombed about 75% of Dusseldorf was destroyed.

Q: _____ ?

A: No, not every, we lived in the _____ did not suffer much, when you say the _____ did not suffer much, I mean you saw destruction maybe a mile from here, okay, and all suffered a little bit but speak about total destruction or just some shrapnels, of course Dusseldorf not only suffered air attack, but also the Americans eventually came across the Rhine River so that you had artillery, so you had from both sides. Anyway, so you, you get used to it and see suddenly a bunch of houses that look like being under construction, but they were destroyed, you see only some walls standing and you hear cruel things like one family decided not to go in the bunker and they were found in bed on the next block, you feel these tremendous deprivations and so you then develop, oh a small minority will say we asked for it, the majority will say, will display a tremendous amount of anger, would say oh, let's help to kill the enemy, so there are very few people, in reality who said, well really, we begun it. We kind of, it was felt that we were right.

Q: Did you? How did you feel?

A: I don't know. I don't, I don't really know and I don't really, I don't think that any of my comrades, my friends, we discussed it. I believe strongly that we considered this a temporary situation, after all, Germany would win, therefore we didn't take it very seriously. Well, they throw a few bombs, but we're going to get them eventually. I don't remember there's, as a intelligent conversation, but I believe that was the thinking.

Q: You're talking about that you would go to the service, was it actually when you were with the Hitler youth, was there some sort of ceremony once a week, you mentioned singing songs, what was the songs about?

A: Oh, the songs were typical marching songs, you know. The words were very nationalistic, you know. Tomorrow we have Germany, today we have Germany, tomorrow the whole world, things of that, you know. It was a place on the Rhine River where we had all the tools of instruction, the flags and the Morse alphabet and the pictures and so on. It was a very nice place, right on the water. It was very far from my town, so I had to go a long way, and the truth is I didn't go there very often simply because swimming meets, championships were generally on the weekends, so every Sunday I was in Krefeld, in Essen, and every German city and finally went to Stuttgart or _____ for the German youth championship, so I was gone away. But during the week I was home and on the weekends, we generally had a meet. So in the beginning, before I swam competitively, I went through the service a few times, but it was not that I went there for three years in a row.

Q: It wasn't a really big, big part of your life?

A: No, not really, no not really, no, I was pretty much married to swimming and to becoming the goalie of the German water polo team.

Q: Tell us about the Edelweiss _____.

A: Edelweiss, do you know, is a little flower that grows in the Alps, there's _____, my brother, who was a year and a half older, fell to his death picking Edelweiss for his mother, and when he was found he had an Edelweiss in his hand. So that was an extremely tragic event in my family. Oh, there was hardly a day that my mother didn't cry, and my father. But Edelweiss has a very, it's much stronger than the Bluebell of Texas. It has the effect that it grows only up in the mountains makes it a kind of a special thing, and _____ means pirates, so _____ is a very good name, but it was not coined by me, as a matter of fact the anti-Nazi movement, called the _____, that started in Berlin or somewhere, so this was not an organized, satellite organization. I kind of organized it and gave it that name, which was not a registered, patented name, but we just called it the _____.

Q: You took that name from another group?

A: That is correct.

Q: From the anti-Nazi group?

A: That is correct, and as I said before, we resented those punks who wanted to tell us what to do and what not to do and we were supposed to salute them, that started this.

Q: You mean you used, how _____ sitting around with some friends or one night when you were home thinking?

A: Well, we all got together and said, did you see Fritz? You see he's got a star now? We're supposed to salute him. Let's make life difficult for him. This is the way it went. Afterward, I had, I'm a linguist almost by nature, I pick up languages rather easily. I spoke French rather well. But not too far from us, from my home, was a paper machine factory, I think they made paper. In the basement were French prisoners of war. No? French prisoners, right? Yeah I guess they were prisoners of war, or just French prisoners. They're working there and I liked to go to practice a little French. I could hardly see them, because you had to look down and then there were bars on the window. And one _____ used to give me, or gave me a little piece of _____ and he said, when the French prisoners go on to be freed, and I brought them sometimes a little extra bread that I had, I always organized things, I always knew where to get things or steal things, or God knows what. So I, that was reported. That was a big, big no-no. That was considered espionage with the enemy. So it wasn't, but I didn't know how well it was known. I kept on going, which leads now to my arrest.

Q: The things that I'd like to know a little bit more about, how many other kids were in the Edelweiss Pirates, what did you actually _____, was it meetings, did you kick some people out because you thought they might snitch on you?

A: We had meetings generally at least _____, generally at a cafe on Kings Avenue, which is, in Germany there are a number of streets which are well known like Fifth Avenue, well Kings Avenue in Dusseldorf, it's one of the best known Avenues in the world. It's gorgeous white

and has a river in the middle and all chestnut trees and so on. Well there was a cafe and on the back of the cafe was a pool room. We used to play pool and we had little meetings there and one would say, we have a new member and we would ask him questions, test him, and why do you like to join us and you know, whether they have some assurance, and then we put, what are we going to do next and maybe one would say, you know, the Hitler youths, they all stored their equipment at such and such a place, let's make it disappear. Okay, when are we going to meet, such and such a time, and that's what we did. It became, it came to the point where we became enemies and people began to look for us because we went a little too drastic, you know we started by deflating the tires, then we made the whole bicycle disappear, so it came to the point where too many complained. Well, I went to see my French friends and I took the bike over to the cafe and the alarm went off. And so we waited for the siren, and it eventually went up, and we knew by the shaking that a bomb had dropped rather close by, so we went out. Everything is dark of course, I mean all the cities were dark. I found that, we found, because there was another guy with me, that, oh I was on foot because my bike had disappeared, I left it outside, it was gone and I went outside, I found, we found a shoe store, totally destroyed and the shoes were everywhere, so I said come on, let's pick up _____ shoes. Put the shoes in my coat, it was winter. Then we walked towards the main square where there were a few lights where the bunker was, and I said let's see what we have, I looked and I had only left shoes. And I said what are we going to do and a lady came out of the bunker and I said, do you want these shoes and she, she was a little confused and it became more of a discussion, trying to tell her to come on take the shoes and _____. Well there was a policeman close by, said what's going on here, and as he approached us I started running and he screamed, hold him, hold him, for maybe six, seven, eight blocks down the street. Somebody opened his arms like a bear and held me and from there I went to the police station. And the one who tried to arrest me showed up and he whipped me very nicely, making clear that you shouldn't escape from a German police officer.

Q: That's why you understood he hit you?

A: When we started, it was about one o'clock in the morning I think, a few questions were asked, name, telephone call to this, this and that and they decided to take me to the police headquarters. I wrote about it. If you want me to read about it, then?

Q: Yeah, would you read a couple _____?

A: I was in the main police headquarters, I had already been caned for fleeing the scene earlier. The banging from the hallway becoming louder. An SS officer was coming to fetch me and the sound of his boots was ricocheting down the corridor and into the little room where I was waiting. It was an impressive sound. At parades, the SS would march down the street, dozens of them clicking their metal studded heels against the ground and singing. They love to sing. My childhood memories of the glory of Dusseldorf are marked with the thunderous rhythm of a hundred boot heels and loud, boisterous singing of soldiers. And so did the boots of the SS elicit quite a different connotation. Why did you take the shoes? I don't know. Do

you realize the penalty for looting is death? I'd been walking home after an air raid and had helped myself to some shoes that I had found scattered around. From there I spent maybe two hours, questions and questions and.

Q: How old were you?

A: 16. I would have been, yeah, my birthday was in May, this was in January. And then came questions, the first man sit in front of me and stared coldly into my eyes, while the second _____ relentlessly beckoned forward across the back of the room. And where were you before the air raid, he asked, the tone in his voice suggested that he already knew the answer. Some friends, we were socializing. Liar, he shouted, you were with a group of boys planning subversive activities against the Hitler youth. We know about your involvement in the Edelweiss _____, and we know you sympathize with the French. I wanted to argue, tell the officer that he had no right to accuse me of such things. Unfortunately what he'd said had been true. From there I went, I was transferred to Gestapo headquarters, Gestapo means secret state police. And that was quite a terror, because I was beaten, kicked and I had to clean my own blood and my own vomit and then I was called before a man, I was asked to undress, and one looked at my penis, and he looked at the other and said, he's Jewish. I should explain that there are men who are born almost circumcised and I'm one of them. Matter of fact when I was oh, I guess 11, I began to masturbate and that caused a little problem, it caused pain and like in most cases, like circumcision of the Jews, they just stretch the foreskin and then cut it, so it kind of rolls back and the whole head of the penis is exposed. In my case the skin was glued to the head, so I had to go to the doctor with my father and I remember the doctor looking at me, what have you been doing? I played innocent, nothing face and then he said, well we have to _____ maybe had long needle and my father said, I remember it well, I give you marks if you don't scream. I didn't scream. So he loosened the skin, but anyway I looked circumcised. So then they called a _____ specialist, a race, a race expert. He looked at me, he turned me, he looked at my nose and my eyes, he turned me around, I felt like a prize bull, and very convincing, said, ah, he's not Jewish, forget that part. And I could hardly move, I was so beaten and then I was transferred from there, early in the morning to a prison that was called _____, which means, pre-trial prison. Course that didn't mean anything. I mean you stayed there as long as they decided that you should stay. I remember prison because I used, there was the northern swimming pool, we had to drive by the prison and the prison was known as the _____ strasser(ph), _____ street prison. And among the guys we used to call it the _____ cafe. I never dreamed that I would become an inmate there. But anyway, that's where I went. I was in a cell, concrete floor and it was very much like taking an African lion and put him in a cage. I was a wild boy, I didn't belong into a cage, I belonged into the wilderness, where I could go free. So I suffered enormously and I dreamed day and night, how in the world I'm going to get out. So escape was foremost in my mind. I started doing work there, sewing buttons, or different things, and the way it was, I remember the first time, there was only a large ceramic bowl and a wooden stand, that was your bathroom, there was no running water and a ceramic giraffe? Carafe? Carafe, carafe with water, and then you had a bed that you would push up, that had to be made properly, there was an

inspection every day. The floor was polished concrete. There was a lamp that you could pull up or push it, pull down or push up, had a little, little lead balls in it, for weight. And got up early and then there was lunch and dinner, mostly soup and bread. First time I didn't quite know what to do so there was generally a guard with a privileged prisoner, _____ would push the cart with the bowls of food, he would open, and then you have to stand there and donk, donk, give you the bread and then he would lock. The first time, didn't know quite what to do, so I wasn't quite ready, so they locked the door again, I had missed lunch. In the morning they opened the door and you would have to get your big bowl, your sanitary bowl so to speak, and walk down the row and empty it, rinse it out and then you were allowed to do your business so that was the time you were able to exchange some words with fellow prisoners, although there was always the guys that shut up, but what are you here for, what's new and, but that did not teach you much.

Q: What were the guards saying to you ____, how were they treating you, why were they saying you were there, because _____, why were they saying you were there? Was anybody saying _____?

A: They didn't. You had no communication with the guard.

Q: What was your understanding of why you were there?

A: I had dealt with the enemy, with the French. I was the head of the Edelweiss _____, and I had quote stolen shoes, which was even worse, I had, what do they call it, after disaster?

Q: Looted.

A: I had looted. So I knew I was guilty, there was no question about it, I just didn't think that I deserved that much for so little.

Q: Was there any, did your parents know where you were?

A: They were, yes, they checked and they were informed, that they, they were told that they could not visit me until, they had to wait until the trial.

Q: _____ stop now.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

- Q: Before we go into more detail about your time in prison, just want to return to the Edelweiss Pirates and ask you, what were you _____, what was the purpose of this group?
- A: Oh, if you, well, forced to give you one word I would say anti-authority. We are going into psychoanalysis here. It may be because I hated authority of a, I really did not hate authority of a benevolent man, but authority was always, in my life, somehow related to something bad. My father's authority meant beating me up, the principal authority, there was nothing positive about that, so the guys becoming leaders, telling me what to do, that was no good, so, anti-authority is probably the answer, coupled with lust for adventure.
- Q: So it wasn't per se that you were anti Hitler, or anti what was going on with the Jews?
- A: I was much too young to understand that, however, after the war, there were a few members of course who were in my group, they were kind of glorified as the ones who resisted Hitler, but _____. That's a wild story. No, it wasn't that, but it was interpreted as such. I mean if I wanted to glorify my life, I would probably say at a very tender age, I resisted and fought against Hitler, but that would be a lie, so I was nothing but, as I told you before, it's like a gang, and like gangs fear, kind of resent other gangs and resent the police and resent authority, that's what I did, I resented authority, because to me, authority was negative.
- Q: Well what _____, because some of the things you were doing were, in a positive way, part of Hitler's plan for young people, the swimming, maybe going to a special academy. You wanted to do that.
- A: True, true, I was a, let me be a little sarcastic, I was a fine German specimen, as expected by the leaders of the Third Reich. I just took the _____ everywhere.
- Q: How did you feel about that?
- A: Oh, I guess I was kind of a little cocky and proud about it, you know. I think so. I was enormously healthy. I was strong and I would make bets for 50 cents to pick somebody up with my teeth, just picking up his belt, picking up with my, I did all kinds of crazy _____. Very strong, very tough, very healthy, very yeah, and not dumb, so that combination is rare to find.
- Q: I'm trying to place your family, your family, to get a sense of it, how any of the rest of _____, your father didn't respect the Nazis, and yet they sort of lived during the war, your father got some good jobs. You did and you didn't and so I'm trying to get a sense of you being . . .
- A: I think that's a little difficult.

Q: _____, I don't know.

A: I think I should, I should say to you with all sincerity that there's nothing normal about my family. My father a very unusual man in every sense of the word, who spent little time with me when I was a child because he didn't particularly care for me and when I was a youngster he was away. My mother didn't fit in the picture, she was probably the most naive woman of the 20th century. So we were quite unusual, and as my father was a self-made man, I definitely was self-made. Even though I had a relatively good education, but life taught me much more and my traveling around the world, much more than my education in Germany, I was well prepared, like every high school, like every high school boy. So it was my free spirit, my resentment of authority, resenting anybody who told me you have to, which prompt me to say why and that got me in trouble automatically. I sometimes ask teachers why and that was almost like a sin, you were not supposed to ask questions. So I was the one who asked and looked for explanations for all kinds of things, but that does not mean that at the tender age of 14 or 15, I wanted to have a, if there is such a thing, a logical explanation to the existence of Hitler, or to the Jewish question, so no, that's, I would have been a genius. That just would have been somewhat unnatural. Would I ask, which I didn't understand why suddenly there was so much anti-Jewish feeling, then the explanation came, well because they have nothing to do but _____ this and that, so they have taken over the university, they have taken over education, they are parasites, they are, they have white German girls, they have done this and this and that, and whether you believe all of that or not, but they're, it creates certain doubts, are they really bad? And as you grew up in this atmosphere, you don't ask questions like is that really all true? No, you accept it and it does not become a dispute within you as far as rationality is concerned.

Q: _____, was there some other group like yours in the city or in the country?

A: Well in the country, yes, I understand, I don't know this is true, but I think the Edelweiss Pirates, they began and some of the older ones actually had ideological ideas. This is probably why some of the guys who met with me were later kind of glorified. So they were _____ Berlin, Berlin was some of the cradle of things. But why do you join an, why do you join a gang? Because you're bored, because you don't like what goes on, in terms of some weirdos becoming lieutenants and captains and so on, and you want to have a little fun. You get the attention that you don't get at home. That combination makes you do certain things.

Q: So you had, on one level, you were this perfect specimen, as you said, healthy, incredibly strong _____, perfect German _____, everything to be a perfect Nazi, on the other hand, you have this questioning spirit, so you didn't quite fit in.

A: That is correct and that's why I had to suffer. You see, I have to tell myself now, that if I had behaved the way I was expected to behave, that I would have been killed in the navy, or I would have become an outstanding officer, and there's no question about that. Of course that is all hypothetical, we don't know about that. But even in the navy I would have had

problems, because I would have questioned the authority of my superior, unless he had treated me properly, in a justifiable way.

Q: Did it ever occur to you that you might have been asked to some way be involved in _____ of Jews _____ ?

A: I have _____ because it was not a navy thing to do, but killing, I have asked myself the question, I don't know the answer to that. I wasn't there. I had to kill a few times in my life, but self defense or whatever the circumstances were. At the time, at the age of 17, if I had been asked to kill, would I have, would I have asked questions why, I don't know that. I do not know that.

Q: Let's go back to the point you were in prison, where we were about 10 minutes ago. You've been in prison for a few days now. _____ getting used to it, are you able to have any contact with the _____.

A: Oh no, I never get used to it. I think it was the third day or the fourth day when a guard came and he was from my part of town. And I assume that he disliked the fact that a member of his district of town embarrassed him in a certain way, so he came, opened the door, and I stood there, with my ceramic pot, he said, aha you, he said something like you are the embarrassment of the town. Shame on you and so on. He said empty the pot in your cell. When I come back I want this clean. There was a little piece of, of course I had the water, a little piece of cloth, and I had to clean the cell. It was my first devastating experience so to speak after I'd been beaten up before. Then I had a neighbor, I mean in the next cell, he was _____ from morning to evening, _____, I can still hear it, that makes _____, _____, his voice was gone. And one of the prisoners told me that he was taken away after they had found him eating his own feces. Whether he was a superb actor or he was insane, I don't know. But as I told you before, I was going to escape somehow and putting two by two together, I said well if I get sick, they have to take me to the hospital and from the hospital I escape. Not knowing that hospitals have certain rooms with bars for prisoners. Anyway, said how am I going to get sick? Well, I swallowed all of the lead pebbles in the lamp, but just as I swallowed them, they came out the other end. Then I found some rusty nails. It was rather difficult to swallow them, but I did. And they came out without destroying any of my interior and finally I took a piece of the ceramic pot, from the edge, it was like a _____. That didn't do any harm either. I forgot, as part of the furniture, I had a little stool and that was probably the most difficult thing I ever did in my life in terms of concentration. I was going to fall on my head and just pass out, because I couldn't stand it any more. But every time I fell down, a kind of self-preservation, I put my hands up, until eventually, click. I don't know how long I had passed out, but I had blood all over my face. And life went on and nobody knew that it ever had happened. Then I said okay, I'm not going to eat. So I did not eat, I only drank water for 12 days and after 12 days, well we had, we had walking outside on the courtyard, you know, five meter distance between each prisoner, walk around. I fell, I passed out. Well rather than take me to the nursery or something, I was whipped half to death because it was evident that I had not

eaten, that I purposely wanted to get sick, that was a no no. So then I kind of gave up and said, well it won't work I have to wait for better opportunities. On April the 12th, April the 12th, 1943, I was taken to court. My trial, the state attorney I think they call it here, district attorney, state attorney, asked for the death penalty. My thought is, first time I saw my father and my mother, my mother couldn't control herself, so she was crying, and my father didn't quite know what to do. There were two attorneys, when he recommended the death penalty, I know they kind of jumped over and hugged my arm and said, that's not the last word. Then kind of the judge and the state attorney and somebody else, some functionary, they kind of argued about whether it was looting, or whether it was theft. The idea was that the two had different consequences. And so they retired and when we came back, the judge decided, or had decided that it was, well before they'd had an argument and the state attorney that, I would call it theft, but this man, having had intimate contact with our enemy, and being the leader of the Edelweiss _____, having destroyed state goods, and state property, does not deserve any kind of consideration. So when the judge came back and said, on the grounds of his outstanding involvement in athleticism, and considering age and circumstances, I condemn you to one to four years in prison. Let me explain, they said, with good conduct after one year, you may be relieved and join the armed forces, and if not, you will remain. That was it, and maybe a week later I was put in, what in prison slang is called, I was put on transport. So I was taken to the railroad station, we took a train, and at that time, I don't know how it is today, at that time, if you go let's say from Washington to California, you would not go non-stop, you would maybe go from Washington to maybe North Carolina and stay there a couple of days, three days in a prison and then join other prisoners and form another group that goes and you eventually come to California. So, first I went to Cologne, the _____ prison. And there I was exposed to, it was a dirty prison, to bedbugs and lice and fleas and so on. And we all were set to move in the afternoon, all of us, the one side of the prison had to move to the other side, because we could look into the courtyard and they used to chop heads, so they had executions in the courtyard, if you hear ding, ding, the little bell, so we weren't allowed to witness that, so we had to go the other side.

Q: Who would it be?

A: Well, whoever was condemned to death, but instead of electric chair they had beheading, which is really not an axe like so many people believe, but is an extremely sharp instrument that just go kind of straight through. So, from Cologne, I went to _____, that took two or three days. From there to Frankfurt, from Frankfurt I was accompanied to _____ where a few of the group, _____ was a kind of security prison for harsh criminals, I was condemned to one to three years in _____, which was a youth place, or juvenile institution. So _____ left the handcuffs, harsh criminals and then I had one guard who went with me. I went and I looked at him for a few _____, I said this is my chance, but he could read me, he said, don't do anything foolish. It's not that bad, this is better than being on the Russian front, so just behave and you'll get out. So, I was always receptive to a kind word. So I said I'm not going to do anything. I think he said something like, you don't want me to shoot you. So he took me to the _____ prison, which is not too far from Frankfurt and it sounds a little funny when I say it's a beautiful

prison, but it actually is. The front part, the administration building was once a convent. It had walls about three feet wide. And then from there you go this never-ending walk and then comes the prison. Of course most prisons are, there's a cross or there's a star so that from the center you can see all over. And well, like in most prisons you receive your uniform and then you are _____ to go to a cell, and we had, three times a week we had school, which was limited pretty much to German history and geography, something like that. It was very limited to the new Germany, so we talk about _____ nation. There was more indoctrination there than anywhere else. And I assumed that they found out that I was probably at the intelligence level, more educated than any of the others, so I got a job as assistant to the buyer. We bought groceries and sent to the kitchen, the kitchen was underway, it was a separate building on the way from the administration building to the prison proper. And I assure you that if I had been a good boy, I would have laughed at the war, I probably would have gained 100 pounds. And the old guard, you know to me at the time, anything that was over 50 was pretty old, like my grandfather was an antique, you know. And anyway, he was so kind, so good, that I, I was not about to escape from him, because life was a little too good. But in one day, I had to do, I don't remember what, I had to do something, and the old convent building on one side and I remember, and I discovered in one of the windows, there were three bars. Thick. You know, octagonal, they have eight corners or six corners, whatever, these bars, and one was loose. That was just too much temptation. My father was coming to visit and I wrote a little note. I will be at such and such a time at that window, please pick me up and I thought he's going to take me in a car to France and I'm going to disappear. I put it in my pocket. I think I needed a key or something and the note fell out of my pocket and the guard saw it. I never got to see my father. I was taken to the warden, whom I called the spider because he looked like a spider. This immense room and I had to enter a circle, stand there. He had a big nose and his gold rimmed glasses sitting on his nose, said, well, well, mistake, mistake, mistake. I thought you were kind of a _____ prisoner sample, an inspiration, and I thought this is probably one I will release soon, but I don't think you appreciate the treatment we gave you, so I have no choice, take him away. Four weeks in the bunker. That means, actually 28 days. 28 days in a cell without light, without a bed, 200 grams of bread, that makes two slices of bread a day and water. And that was a little too much. I don't know if it was then, no it was the next time. Anyway, 28 went by and one day a guard brought me bread and hit me in the face and I never knew why. You have so much time to think and you become so desperate, you want to be dead. When they released me the guard said, okay, took a shower, I said, oh God, I want a hot shower. He turned the cold water on, thought I was going to die. Oh. And of course he hears those remarks, and it'll bring senses back to you. Back to the cell. And then nobody treats you as if you have been on a very special diet for four weeks. Life goes on, you have to work, and when you exercise, everybody starts picking on you then, because you are an outcast. Okay, 50 pushups. Count. You reach 30. But you made a mistake, start again. Then finally you just fall down and, get up, you're kicked and kicked again, until finally you try again. Well, that went on for awhile, seemed like I had lost a considerable amount of weight, I said I just can't, I can't, I can't. So from where I walked I could see that there was a pole to pull up the cable over the wall. It was a little foggy, kind of bad weather, I tried to stay behind, everybody went in and I ran, and up the pole, there were two cables and I ran. One of

guards saw me and shot me in the leg, so I fell. Back to the spider. So you have this dialog. I have prisoners who make my life difficult, I like to have a peaceful existence. I don't know why you're that way, but I think that the only way for you is to go back to the bunker, it'll do you some good. Something of that nature. So I went back. Another 28 days. By that time I thought, I picked flies, I picked anything and put it in the wound, so it would become infected. I was too damn healthy for that, I mean my immune system was too damn strong for any bug. But for a long time it stayed open.

Q: Why did you put that bug in the wound?

A: I thought I would have an infection.

Q: And you _____ the bunker _____?

A: Cause an infection, dirty _____.

Q: Cause an infection.

A: Cause an infection, yeah. That would take me to the hospital.

Q: So you kind of did it?

A: That didn't work, so I tried to find anything sharp and I tried to commit suicide, well I couldn't, I have scars here, all over when I look now. Couldn't get the vein, just a little blood, so that didn't do any good. Well and life goes on and 20 days go past, back to the cell. This time a guard opened the, he ran the hot water. You have no idea how much I loved the man. And I think he was responsible for getting me a job to peel potatoes. And I remember maybe the first or second or third day. These are cooked potatoes, I cooked a bunch of potato peels and ate them because I was so hungry, and got so sick. Well, we were given an atlas from the school situation, every prisoner had an atlas, but each map had a back page which was blank. And I don't know where I got a pencil, but I had a pencil, maybe I was given a pencil, and I did a drawing, a satire drawing of the warden. Drew him as a spider. Even an idiot would have recognized him. And then I drew two or three guards. That was discovered. Back to the warden for a third time. I'm back in the ring. Well at one time, at one time, I think the second time I was taken to the little _____, which means the little _____, not hospital, but a little doctor's office kind of, where a nurse was, and I remember she told me, don't touch it. She put some gauze around it. Anyway, the spider then accused me of having destroyed state property. Nobody can use this atlas any longer. I wanted so badly to kill him, so badly, and I could hardly stay in the circle. I wanted to sit down. Well, they take me away for the third 28 days. By that time, I was in bad shape. But then many times when you, something happens and you see the warden, you join the others for your morning walk, they go, what happened, what happened, but you don't walk together, you walk one behind the other and well I had been called, this was the fourth time before the warden, yeah. And he told me that on the basis of his experience with me, he felt that the best thing would be for

me to join the armed forces, because there was nobody else who could handle me. And whether he told me or I knew this would be the penal division, I would be first line. So when I walked with the guys, I said, well I said something like, he's trying to make me cannon food, and they all wanted to become soldiers badly, everybody wanted to get out, so he kind of reported what I had said, and I was called. Did you say you don't want to become cannon food, or you refuse to join the armed forces, I think that's what _____. That's all. Three, four, five days later, I was told to get ready, I was being transferred. Where I am going? Sachsenhausen. Sachsenhausen was known as a _____, as a concentration camp, and that was, that was bad news. But you have to understand that was, I was not in condition to discuss, to appreciate, to fear. I think it was more of some relief to get out somehow. So I packed and I went on transport, and thankfully I met several other prisoners, and we took the train to Berlin, _____ station, there was several cars, we were given some soup in aluminum bowls and water and bread, and there was, well I talked to one prisoner, we talked and then I slept _____, I was pretty weak and there was one who was Jewish and I tried to get away from a conversation, said oh, what are you, I'm Jewish also. I said, oh, okay. That was more or less the end, and I asked him what is the other guy doing, he looked funny. He's homosexual. Oh, okay.

Q: You said that you were a Jew?

A: Yeah. Just because I didn't want a lengthy conversation, I said if I tell him I'm Jewish, he's going to leave me alone. So I went to Berlin, I had to change a train in Berlin and there were only five of us, and one was kind of, well we ended up being three only, eventually, and one, one prisoners made kind of serious _____, do you remember Einstein? We were like the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost and we will all die and things like that and oh, quit this bullshit, we will live. Got to Sachsenhausen and stayed there overnight, so I never went to the Sachsenhausen camp, I went to a barrack, and somebody told me that I was going to, up in a youth _____, and whether there was confusion, whether there was misunderstanding, I do not know, but in 1941, Ravensbruck became the most notorious women's camp, where they committed all these atrocities, these medical experiments and so on and when people hear that I was in Ravensbruck they say but you're not a woman, well in 1941, a satellite man's camp, Sachsenhausen, a satellite man's camp, Ravensbruck for men was installed, installed in 41. It had I think, all together a little over 20,000 prisoners. Anyway the next day I think I went to the, with the, we were three, and taken from Sachsenhausen to _____, that is really a short distance, then from _____ you can walk, Ravenbruck is next door. And I didn't quite understand why they didn't make us walk the short distance, they drove us, I assume because they didn't want us to happen to see much of what was going on. Anyway we went to the camp, left in Ravensbruck and then I was a little confused because there was a lot of hocus pocus going on, a train had arrived, trucks arrived. Lot of movement and the Jew was picked up and immediately moved to the left, so I never saw him again, and the other one, there was an SS soldier, I was standing by, I didn't quite understand what, but he asked him something. The guy gave an answer that offended the SS soldier. He shot him right there and said to his comrade, he's too old to work anyway. Not even worth a bullet, something like that. I said, oh my God. Thought for a

moment. His family, will they ever know how he died? So then I was deloused and when I _____ bath, when I was in there, was for the first time in a long time I saw there was a woman prisoner who took care and gave me clothes and allowed us to take a shower. It kind of embarrassed me and I was more embarrassed to blush. Then I was taken to an _____, that's one of those guards in charge, and I met the first couple, and I was told which barrack I would go to and you will be part of a commando, you'll do outside work and really there were many satellite camps all around because of all kinds of companies had established factories so prisoners would work, and concentration camps made money with the prisoners, the prisoners weren't paid, but the companies paid the concentration camps, so they had an income. And I wasn't too long, I don't remember how many, but there were three beds, three beds, three beds, one _____ the other and I learned eventually that you could buy things in the canteen if you had money and I learned that when one says, do you have any money, do you have any money, the other prisoners. I didn't have any money, why do you need money, oh, can buy things. Somehow I was accompanied by the notice that I was a possible SKP, that was probably part of the dossier that accompanied me from the prison. SKP? One who likes to escape.

Q: SKP, okay.

A: Okay? And so I was a dangerous one, for watching, so to tell the other guards about me, they had left a crown, like a mark, what's it?

Q: _____?

A: Yeah. I don't know how long they _____, probably a week there or two. I was called, well we had a pill every day, _____ which means the big square, you see, dance, dance. Administration building, and barracks and then in the middle, see and the ones that we had built, there was, we had masonry walls and there was a section where the masonry were held in front with barbed wire, and it was loaded with electricity and I remember one guard, obviously didn't like one of the prisoners, took his head, we wore square hats, threw it away to the fence, or in the fence _____, go and pick it up and the prisoner refused. I told you pick it up and he whipped him and by that time we drove off, so I don't know whether he ever went to pick it up, of course that would mean electrocution, or not. There was one guard who was very nice to me. But I was old enough to appreciate he was gay. Tried to stay away from him. So when I heard there was a possibility to go to a satellite camp to work in a quarry, there I went. So I went to a quarry, which was quite far away so we came only once a week to the main camp, change clothes. Some to receive mail. I wasn't _____ because my parents didn't know where I was. And also if you wanted to see the lager doctor, you had the choice. Very few people did that because the rumor went if you're sick, they're going to liquidate you, so you didn't want to go to the doctor. On one of my trips I was asked to stay because another prisoner was ill and I was destined to clean the clinic, and I had met the doctor. And he was not the mean SOB, he was kind of, oh I don't know whether pleasant is the word, but he was not a sadistic idiot. So I had made his acquaintance. And back to the camp, to the quarry, which was divided, there was a mill. I never knew what

they did with the rocks, but the different layers, the Russian prisoners were at the bottom, the French prisoners and we were on top and what you had, you had rails going up and on top of the privileged character, I had this big, big handle that would bring the lorries, a lorry's a flat bed, these had sides on them, get them down to the mill, and pump, and empty one up and he would pick it up and then go the rail and there you had your little areas, whatever area was destined. I had one prisoner who showed me how to cut a vein, because it's not, you can't be all day long, you have to fill 12 cars a day, that was the _____, _____ means quota. And boy after a few days, my hand, oh my God, it was raw meat, it was huge, and after that of course if you have time and effort become like leather. There were two outhouses. The outhouses had no sides so the guards could see you. The beginning there was two guards, but towards the end of '44, the younger guards disappeared. There were older ones and one was an invalid, no dogs, everything was a little lax. If you didn't have 12, you would get no food, so everybody worked like a little bee. And I remember once picking up a big rock, I remember years, years, years, years later I worked picking up some rocks, I lived on a rock that was big. I _____ all the way down to the lake to pick up some rocks and people asked me, where'd you learn all about these rocks? I said you wouldn't believe me. So I know a lot about rocks, but anyway, five o'clock whistle blew and marched, marched down, there was a little camp where we slept, we were all passed out. One thing I remember was one of the most disgusting experiences of my life, we had what we called the thunder beam, a long pole, it was lying over two barrels, it had to open the traps where we sat down to do our business one after the other, and then when it was full, you know they would _____ and open another trench actually, like a simplified outhouse. One of the guards had a prisoner cut the pole in half, so then when you sit on, of course it gave way with all the weight that we all _____ in. There is no manure that is as bad as human manure. Kitty cats are not as bad as human. So that was horrible and then of course you came out of it, so they give you 10 minutes to clean up and the ones who didn't come out right again, he sent them back in, oh yeah. Anyway I worked there until January of '45, and one day I went to the camp to change clothes, I went to the public rest room. I sat there in the normal position and I hear tick, tick, tick, tick. Blood. Blood came out of my mouth and my nose. I said that's weird, huh? I didn't get hurt or anything. But I lost so much blood that when I got up I passed out, and this guard, he _____ part of a little stove. So, the other prisoners kind of liked me, I was the youngest and one cleaned me up and cleaned my uniform so that nobody would get mad at me and so on. I began to hurt. Like needles stuck in my lungs and I told, I had a friend, a Russian prisoner, Ivan, I don't know whether that was his real name, but they called him Ivan _____. But don't ask for the doctor, it'll be your end. Nobody has come back after they've seen the doctor. But I had to know and I just couldn't stand it and so I asked for _____. I had to see the doctor, the doctor for whom I'd cleaned before and I remember his name was Herr Mann(ph) and I said, this is what happened and I've been _____, I feel good and I can work and I just want to know, where's all the blood coming from and tapped my shoulders a little bit and looked at me and said, you have tuberculosis, you can't work, oh yes I can, oh yes I can, I can work, yes, oh please let me work, please let me work. You want to work? Yes I want to work. Okay. So he signed and I went to work. And there was pain, there was pain and there was pain. And I said I'm going to get out of here, because I'm dying. And I planned and I looked around and I said, there's just no way, but I'm

going to die. Days passed, in a few days I thought this is it, I'm going to die, spitting blood, pain, could hardly work. I came to the point, which is very interesting, when you're hungry you fight, you'll kill for bread. Then comes a time where your body doesn't demand any more, you give it away. That's when you're ready to go. I gave away bread. But there was this ____ of my, my body couldn't do it any more, but the spirit was still going strong. So one day the whistle blew and we went up. It was the foggiest day ever. Dogs had disappeared and you can hardly see, I mean it was not quite as dense at the upper levels.

Q: I think we'll take a break here.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

Q: Okay, so it is 1944, and you're still working . . .

A: No, it's 1945.

Q: Okay, it's 1945, and you're working at the rock quarry and you feel, not _____, but you feel you must do something. One day you decide to do something, that's really what . . .

A: I knew I was dying and I didn't want to die there. I said, I have to try to get out of here and if I get shot, well that's better than dying here. So, looked like all the gods and all the angels looked at me and brought dense fog and to test the climate I asked the guard to excuse me, I had to go to the outhouse. He kind of waved like, I don't care, this kind of attitude, as I said, everything was a little lax. See, it was total fog, so I went back to work and maybe a couple of hours later, maybe three hours later, maybe enough time has spend and I asked the guard again, and he waved me along, and I looked and I couldn't see anything and in a moment of desperation, concentration, whatever, I ran. And, of course in retrospect you think you ran 50,000 miles, but I didn't run really far because I didn't have the stamina to run. I was coughing, but when I stopped I realized that as crazy as I was I had almost run in a circle, so I almost came back where I had started, so that gave me a certain impulse to run again. And I ran, mostly downhill, until I saw a, well farmers have these, look like giant carports kind of, where they store hay or straw to keep it from getting wet, so I saw that, I tried to make it and _____ I kind of covered myself with the last _____ of straw and the next thing I remember is somebody shaking me. I was terrified, I looked into the eyes of the farmer and before I could say anything he said, don't be afraid, I know where you come from, I'm going to help you. Well you have these mixed emotions, is he actually going to take you now to the police and he just wants you to keep quiet, does he really mean it. But you don't have the power any more, you don't have the energy to fight so you just say oh, what the hell. So he had two horses. He covered me in the wagon and drove me to his modest stone little ranch house, _____ from the stalls on one side. He told me that he had lost his son in Stalingrad. He was a little apologetic, because things didn't look too neat, but his wife had left already, she had evacuated because they heard the Russians were coming and that the Russians had nothing to do but rape, and that he was going to leave also in a week or two, and he, I think he did to me what he would have done for his son. He bathed me, he put me to bed and he looked at me, I remember he asked me, how old are you? I said 18, he just moved his head and he looked at my body and said, how could they? And he covered me nicely, he talked to me. Maybe the next day he said, I cannot keep you here too long, but I have a way. The milk truck comes. He explained they don't allow us to sell the milk any more, they're afraid we keep too much cream and make butter on the black market so I have to _____ all the milk and you can go with the milk truck, he goes to the town and I'm going to give you my son's uniform, now you don't worry about a thing, because you see soldiers everywhere, entire divisions have been eliminated and survivors come, they have no papers, so try to remember that you belong to such and such a division if anybody asks. So prisoner Meyer became a corporal in the German army.

Q: _____ you ended up as _____?

A: No, it was infantry division, no I don't, but I was never asked a question. The milk truck, I remember the driver of the milk truck, he thought of doing me the greatest favor in the world by offering me a cigarette. Kind of a self-rolled cigarette and that's the last thing in the world that I wanted. But I felt a little better, but weak and he took me, he left me kind of, you could see the railroad station, he left me there, said don't worry about tickets _____, there are no tickets any more, you just take the train. I went up there and sit on the bench. I was afraid. And I heard some people conversing, I heard about somebody who had escaped, and they were looking for him in the neighborhood of _____, which was not too far from there. I tried to be as unseen as possible, I was trying to shrink like a turtle under the shell so nobody would see me. There were some girls talking, about my age, and they came because they felt that I looked so miserable they felt they had to help. So one asked me soldier, where do you need to go and I said, well I have to join my garrison, the _____ garrison, I have to go to Dusseldorf, so I had to take a train to Cologne and then Dusseldorf, so, you just wait here and they came back and then told me that the train would leave at five o'clock or something like that and do you feel hungry or thirsty and no, that's just, I'm okay. So they left and then as I sit there, pretty much by myself because one train had come and a railroad employee came, uniforms. Well that shook me so badly, oh God it was terrible. He said, soldier are you waiting for the five o'clock train to Cologne? Yes. Well come on in, I have a better place for you. There's this feeling, can you trust him, can you not trust but there's a big room that had equipment, railroad equipment and some uniforms hanging there, he said, you be comfortable, sleep a little while, I'll call you, nobody's going to bother you, and I knew this was genuine, but you something have to remember, I'm a corporal. Five o'clock I went on the train and in Berlin I had to change to another train, but that was just across, so that was very, but I looked out of the window, mad, everything was bombed. I mean it looked disgusting, horrible. And I didn't have much, I didn't look for conversations, I just stayed by myself, but when I took the train from Berlin, it was packed and I took, the trains were dark, so enemy wouldn't see any light. There was a guy who was smoking, kind of homemade tobacco, it stank, oh. But before that I told one lady I think, would you give me your seat, I'm sick, and another guy said, that's a hell of a way to get a seat. But then this guy lit a cigarette and they saw me, and I must have looked so miserable that one said, you better feel sorry, this is one of our soldiers, just look at him. So he apologized and I sat down. And I went through misery then, I thought this is it, but when we came to Frankfurt, alarm, everybody off the train, we had to go into a bunker. When I was in the bunker, I suddenly felt this enormous pain in my legs, which in later years was explained as a consequence of malnutrition, lack of vitamins, the nerves of my legs had suffered to the point where they played dirty tricks on me, they don't know what to do any more, or the vein doesn't know. So I cannot stand for a long time, because I _____, and I feel it every day, but it's just one of those things. So when they said, everybody ready, the train will continue, I couldn't walk. So two guys helped me and carried me, under my arm, one on this side, one on, like a football player. But when we came out the train was gone, but another one followed about half an hour later, and we went in that, we finally, I finally arrived in Dusseldorf. Then,

walking was out of the question, so two guys, I put my feet on and then waterskied kind of, I skied and they took me to the Red Cross. The Red Cross took my temperature and so on, hospital. I said I don't want to go to the hospital, I want to go home. _____ by the way _____, has that been bombed? The whole city's probably, can't tell you. And the nurse talked to one of the, I don't know whether she said that, but I could feel said look he's going to die anyway so let's forget about the hospital, just drive him home where he can die in peace. There was an old Mercedes-Benz car, they had kind of taken things out so you had a little more room, used it as an emergency vehicle and there's a little thing, a little steel round thing where you go in and out, you know, in the Volvo station, well they took that out so they had more space and drove me out, put me in this car and drove me home. Had snowed, everything was white. House was still there, it had suffered but it was there and I told the driver, do me a favor, go second floor, ask for my father. If he's not there, don't tell my mother her son is here. Just take it easy. Later on I heard he'd gone up, rang the bell, my mother came to the door, is Mr. Meyer there? No, he is not here. Well I have something for you and do you have any tobacco in the house? Which was a normal thing, everyone was bartering. I think my mother had some tobacco, gave him something, said what do you have? And my mother had, my father had shipped some suitcases from France, they never arrived, so my mother said this is it. You better come down with me. My mother came to the car, looked at me, that's tough, _____ and she looked again and said, Walter? Because she didn't recognize me. And then she called the neighbors to help. And the lady who lived above us came and she touched my legs. I screamed, and they carried me up. Somebody on the train had given me an apple and I had a little diarrhea, said take me to the bathroom, and then the bell rang three times. That meant my father and my mother yelled, Walter is here. He jumped up the steps and he looked at me, and he never stopped crying. And they took me to the basement, because Dusseldorf was still under artillery fire, the bombs. I think three or four, five days later, my father had been successful in getting a doctor to see me and the doctor made it clear that there was no hope. So I don't know whose idea it was, the doctor says, I call a priest. I received the last rites. Maybe a day or two days later the police came. Two police officers, one knew me, because I had made a name as a swimmer, come to the door. We're looking for Walter Meyer. My father said he's here, would you like to see him? He took the sheets off my body. You want to take him like this? And they left without saying a word. Then a couple of weeks later, Americans marched in. My father went to see the commandant, whomever, explained the situation. But before that, before that I knew I was dying, I called my mother and said, come be with me, I'm leaving now. And I really went through the experience of death. It was rather beautiful, rather peaceful. And then suddenly I had to vomit. Vomit blood like from here to the wall. Later on the doctor told me that this was a very good sign. What it meant medically I don't know. And then after that, it was like my body was on fire, and I had to drink gallons. My mother had a flower vase that she filled. The Americans took me to the German hospital occupied by a medical company and the head of the medical company was Jewish. I think he didn't like anything German, which was understandable. But after awhile the doctor came and, Wally, you have to get up today, you can't go on. I gained about almost two pounds a day, looked like a balloon, I looked sick, abnormal. Said your heart is not going to support all this weight. The first time I was weighed, I weighed 76 pounds. and so I had to get up, which believe me, was a nightmare,

and I had to jump on one foot 13 times and then the other foot and he encouraged, see, come on, good boy and so on. Well, with the GI's, actually they drove me on a wheelchair and I used to do sketches, portraits of the GI's, I learned quite a bit of English. I think the greatest shock was _____ respect to you, one of the guys referred to the major, the medical, he's a Jew, he's a fucking Jew, he's no good. And to digest that was very, very difficult. I mean in retrospect I understand, I understand the world pretty well, but at the time, it was, it was confused the hell out of me. But it was shortly thereafter I received my credentials, I think I have a copy here. It was from the, I have it somewhere, from the union _____, from the Union of Former Political Concentration Camp Prisoners, and political prisoners. This was to give me a seat in railroads and so on, because of TB. This was later, from the French police, when they ask I said that I'm a Francophile who has paid for his sympathy to the French prisoners with time in a concentration camp and so on _____. So the first doctor, German doctor I saw, which was the 24th of September in 1946, he said that on the 10th of April 1944, he was 174 centimeters tall and at that time he weighed 42.8 kilos, so that was under 100 I already gained, and with fever and so on and so forth he had contracted _____ tuberculosis in a concentration camp of Ravensbruck and this is made for the military authorities because at the time my father wanted, the idea was TB, you had to go to the mountain air, they wanted to send me to Switzerland, to _____, which was a special hospital for TB patients.

Q: When you tell this story about what's happening, it's hard to make it jive with the fact that you were a star athlete, perfect German heritage, I mean it sounds like at that point in the country, the Germans were not just persecuting Jews, but really anyone that had gotten in the way, or perceived to be in their way. What were your thoughts on that?

A: Almost, almost automatically, when people ask me, how long have you been in the states, oh you were _____, were you in the army? No. What'd you do? Well, I don't volunteer all kinds of information, so I said, well actually I was a prisoner. Oh, what a Russian prisoner? No, a German prisoner. Well that of course is a little shocking, I was in a concentration camp. Oh, are you Jewish? That's the first thing. Very few people know the concentrations were full of non-Jews. That is not to say the majority, but yeah, quite a few, anybody who was not in agreement, or presented some sort of an obstacle to the Third Reich was put away. Either put away for good or put away in a concentration camp, or another camp of some sort, so I was one of those, so I was, I had fallen in disgrace.

Q: Were there times when it was happening to you that it surprised you? That you were being treated like that? _____?

A: No, not really. No, not really, maybe what, you see, the questions always implied that one preserved this rational thinking and that rational thinking goes away pretty soon. You have all kinds of weird thoughts and you become mentally and physically a kind of wet rag, so to speak, you don't function well any more, you don't ask certain questions, in some instances you don't care any more, so you just go along and like a little robot. So these rational questions, you may ask them in retrospect, but not so much at the time, and you look left and

right, you see people being creative, I know some prisoners who were chewing bread and let the bread dry and made little chess figures because they were more eager in playing chess than anything else. There were others who would denounce anything in order to get a little reward from the SS or from the _____, so they would sell, probably even sell their own mothers for a piece of bread. You have all kinds of people. And we arrive in a concentration camp _____, so things don't change much.

Q: The story you tell about the farmer looking at you and asking your age and saying, how could they have done this? How do you make sense of that? How the people who shot people in front of you, who kept sending you back to solitary confinement, how do you make sense of how they could have done that to you?

A: I don't know whether I can makes sense out of it, but I have been in many places and I see that people kill each other like flies, in Ireland in 1996. People put bombs there, people put bombs on airplanes. Half a million people died in Rwanda, others are going to die maybe in _____ Burundi, so have things changed? No they have not. Is there any country that can say we have never done anything wrong? No. I think the Germans are the only ones who did it in the most systematic way. Others have done it in a more, I mean, the Spaniards have killed probably six million Indians and brought all kinds of diseases over here. The Americans killed all the Bison so Indians didn't have anything to eat and force marched them all the way to Florida from Oklahoma and so on, so forth, not to speak about the Negroes. And it's a disgusting chapter in the history. Look at the French with the, look at the British, first concentration camps in South Africa. So I don't know what happens in Israel. So if I were to accuse, I would accuse humanity, but I wouldn't pick one in particular. There are people who think that Germans were born to be sadistic, that's not true at all. They're good ones. What has happened is a, I think I would be more interested in looking at those who could have prevented and didn't and one of those is these United States of America. I look at Sweden. I look at Switzerland, who made billions and billions of dollars taking advantage of the situation. Turning Jews back after they had successfully escaped. Shiploads of Jews who tried to come to America, the chosen land, and were rejected. Those are a little more interesting to me. I know what happened, I was there. Could it happen anywhere else? Yes it could. There is the part that is sorry. That is the part that is tough to understand how humans become such atrocious beasts. That is tough to digest, to understand. No, it's not that hard to understand, but to understand the German question, like that, you have to go almost into the history before Christ and definitely bring in the church and definitely bring in whatever that contribute to factors. Treaty of Versailles, anti-Jewish sentiment at different times in the world, not only in Germany. How one can do certain things. How can a man rape an innocent girl? The simple answer is you have to be sick, yeah. Unfortunately a lot of it's probably like when you go to high school, if you say one day, hey guys, why don't we get together this weekend and help some elderly people in a rest home? Nobody shows up. But if you say hey I got a little grass, let's smoke some joint and raise some hell, and screw some girls. So the negative seems to be more attractive to people, especially those who don't have a very healthy foundation, and so there is no way in the world I can excuse, I cannot justify. Can I understand? Yeah, I can understand. I really resent the fact that I can understand. I

wish I couldn't, but I can. The first time, after I left Germany, in a cargo train, so here I am escaping again. After seven years I returned to Germany and I had prepared how to go back and kill the spider. I remembered him more than any SS guard, especially the Lithuanian SS guards who were the most sadistic ones. No, the spider, the spider was on my mind day and night. I had a gun and I went to the village in which he lived, the village was right next to the _____ prison. And I kind of had rehearsed with myself, nobody knew. I said, do you remember me? I'm the one who stood in the circle four or five times, I'm the one you let suffer. I'm the one this and this, you remember me now, does it come back to your senses? Then I would have killed him. I went to the house. The lady came to the door and I said I would like to speak to Dr. _____, that was his name. Oh, I'm sorry, but he moved about a month ago, he went to Hamburg. Well, I didn't go after him in Hamburg because after that came the moment of reconsideration. What do I do, what do I do by killing him, what do I establish in that, so then you kind of put it behind. But that was, that was a moment I will always remember, I went to the door and I hoped I would see him. God, I hated him. Because you just don't have a right to make a human or an animal suffer to that point. Unfortunately there are people who derive pleasure from doing that.

Q: Sounded like he enjoyed it.

A: Getting a power trip.

Q: I think what I'll do is _____, but before I ask you this, we just don't have the time to go into the post war experience _____, so I don't think I'll really move into that, so instead of doing it separately, we do want to _____ in on the picture and maybe _____ piece of paper you showed us. _____ because that's going to take a little time _____, so before I do that, just in this section we hear something, is there anything that might have _____ to your mind in the last couple hours that you thought, well I'll have to make sure I tell, tell that?

A: Oh well, there are so many little episodes, but it's not really enjoyable to talk about them. It's a little tough so I think, but I told you enough really and I was asked before I gave the interview to bring pictures and I'm very sorry to say that the only picture I could find is a picture of me when I was 15 and you see me in the uniform of the Hitler youth and that was I at 15 and I know that this is true, because my mother wrote on the back this is Walter and the picture was taken by my brother Paul in the spring of 1941, so this is two years before I became a prisoner. I think the certificates _____ have very little value, I just brought them along.

Q: Do you _____ that closer or just _____? Why don't you just show us that one certificate?

A: Well this _____ lives any more, but this is a copy, this you'll see is the barbed wire here, this is an organization that sprung up, about right after the liberation and it became known as the Union of Former Political Concentration Camp Prisoners and Political

Prisoners and this simply asked the railroad and buses and so on to give me a seat and be nice to me because I had TB. This is mainly it.

Q: The TB cleared up?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Your TB cleared up?

A: Yes, except when I was admitted to the United States, then an x-ray was taken and I was told, well I'm very sorry but we cannot give you your final documents because we have to take another x-ray and see whether what we see on the x-ray is scar tissue, or whether it's active. So I had to go to a quarantine station in Staten Island I think. They took another x-ray and compared, there was no change, so that meant it was just scar tissue. So other than that, I'm pretty healthy.

Q: Thank you very much _____.

A: It was, well it was not a pleasure, but it was, not a pleasure to talk about it, it was pleasure to meet you.

Conclusion of Interview