

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Rolf Hirschberg
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PREFACE

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ROLF HIRSCHBERG

October 14, 1996

Question: Could you please tell us your name and when you were born and where you were born?

Answer: My name is Rolf _____ Hirschberg. I was born on March 30th, 1902, in Berlin, Germany.

Q: Where did you live in Berlin?

A: In Schallatanborg(ph), Mummelsenstrasser(ph), 26. For 30 years.

Q: Did your parents also live in Berlin all their life?

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: Did your parents live in Berlin all their life?

A: Who?

Q: Your parents.

A: My friend?

Q: Your parents.

A: My parents? My father died very, when I was six or, six, seven years old, a heart attack. He had a very, how should I say, active life, he _____, that's in Germany. He had a factory of glassware and so forth and he traveled around all Prague, Czechoslovakia, Budapest, England, France. A very, very strenuous life, you know. But he was very how should I say, strong willed. My mother always said to him, "Take it easy, you can't eat more than one schnitzel and that's enough." But he _____ and then one very bad day, he passed away and my brother, the oldest one, which unfortunately died in the first World War, took father's part. He was the one who kept the family going, you know what I mean? And then I grew up and when I was, yeah and that's a very funny part. My mother wanted not me, a boy, she always wanted a girl. And while she

wanted a girl, she, how shall I say, brought me up like a girl. I had long hair to my shoulders, reddish hair and so on, so forth and in school they called my Touchin(ph) because my hair, hair was like a girl. And I cried and went home and was like, I'm not going to school any more unless you cut my hair. If you don't, forget about it, they called me Touchin(ph) all ready and I don't like that at all. All right, all right, don't get excited and she went to the barber with me, cut, but what does she do? She cut it up to here, _____ you know, what we called in Germany, _____. But of course I was already happy that that long hair was gone and so on and so forth. And then as I said before, I went to the _____ for _____, high school _____. And I was a very, freak child but there's a funny story. I was not supposed to come really. I think my being here, how shall I say it in German? (speaks German here) I shouldn't have come. My mother was forty when I was born, so they didn't expect me and I came as a seven months boy, weighing only few pounds. The doctor always told, put Rolfie in the ruhrer(ph), you know what the ruhrer(ph) is? In Berlin they have the big ovens, from floor to the ceiling and in the middle they put apples in to be browned and stuff to keep warm and put Rolfie in the ruhrer(ph), they called that the ruhrer(ph) and Rolfie was put in the ruhrer(ph) and our landlord always said, "Can we see Rolfie?" Mother said, "No, he is in the ruhrer(ph)." They laughed their heads off because they didn't believe, how can a kid, child, be in the ruhrer(ph), you follow me? And here's the story. And as I said before I was very weak and so on and so forth and in school I learned Latin, English, French and I had a teacher, Dr. Mink(ph) and he says, "Rolfie, you are very intelligent, you should learn all..." I said, "Doctor, it's too much for me, I can't." I always lost, what do you call it, _____?

Q: Your consciousness?

A: Yeah. And my mother came then and said, may I make a long story short, after, as I said I've been up to _____ and then I left school.

Q: At what age did you leave school?

A: 15,16. And there I met my friend. He was two years older than I, I was 16, her was 18, but we met, how shall I say it, you know, like boys meet. He was very fond of me, he said, "You are a beautiful boy," bah, bah, bah and so on, so forth. He bought me chocolate, _____ chocolate and took me to the movies and so on, so forth an my mother said, "You spoil the boy, don't do that." He says, "But I like to. I get _____, pocket money and what shall I do with it? And Rolfie has _____, so I buy _____ chocolate." And we got very fond of each other, but nothing what you think, sex or so, just friendship. And then I went, my eldest brother, who died in the first World War was in a firm for over 20, 25 years and the boss of the firm knew my mother and me very well and he said, "Send the boy to me, I want him, to teach some ____." And I went there as a apprentice.

Q: What was the name of the firm?

A: Popo(ph) and Ferve(ph). I, they had buttons, dresses, what do you call it? Well anyway, short things, you know what I mean? And he thought I was very intelligent and soon he let me take a box with all the stuff and go in the neighborhood trying to sell stuff, you know. And believe it or not, I had a very good reception. Wherever I came, people were very nice to me, I sold and bah, bah, bah.

Q: At what time was that, what year did you start with apprentice?

A: 1926, 27, about that time. But then after awhile I didn't like it and I met another guy in the line and he said, "I have a much better job for you, you can sell much better inside, you don't have to wander around crazy" and I went to _____ Lehman(ph), _____ in Berlin and there Mr. Faulk(ph), the director, very friendly to me and I was there for four or five years and

then, '31, '32, I didn't like it, because they took advantage of me and so on, so forth, so my mother said, "Why don't you just take it easy for awhile." Because as I told you before, I wasn't too well and not too strong, you know.

Q: What kind of health problems did you have?

A: Pardon me?

Q: What health problems did you have?

A: I fell, I became _____, you know what _____ is?

Q: Yeah, you lost your consciousness.

A: Yeah. Well, my friend very often, if we went to a movie or _____ and so on, so forth, all of a sudden I was gone. So he was the one who really, how shall I say it? Took care of me and he always said, "Don't do that, don't do that," and so on. And my mother all of a sudden took a very big liking to him. He came every Friday evening for dinner to our house. He was like the second child, you know what I mean? And, but at that time, we started already having sex. And he took me on trips to Venice, Italy, to Budapest in Hungary, and we went practically everywhere. Switzerland very often and so on and so forth. And I had a good time.

Q: Can you describe your friend?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Can you describe your friend a little bit and how did he go, no, in those times?

A: Well he took over, his father, I don't know, when did you leave Germany?

Q: Say it again?

A: When did you leave Germany?

Q: 10 years ago.

A: Can you remember shoeboots _____ and cleaning _____? Well, his father had a factory on _____ in Berlin. But he got very old, 76, 78, so he and his brother took over the factory. He was a salesman, traveling all over Deutschland(ph) and even to Switzerland, so forth, selling, and his brother was the inside man, factory, you know, you know, the shoeboots, polish had to be done during the night and daytime it was too warm and too difficult to do. Anyway, they had a big outfit, very well known, _____ shoeboots and Spectrol(ph) _____, which was very well known. I show you later, an ashtray. And he was very well known, big department stores. Vairtime(ph), Teats(ph), Yandorf(ph), all these big stores. Mr. Kroner(ph), any time, we like your stuff and so on, so forth.

Q: He owned, no, he owned these department stores?

A: The father owned, started it in 1910 and he took it over 1926, not he, he and his brother, they two. His father remained in the factory, but only as a, how shall I say, giving advice, so on, so forth, but he wasn't practically any more in, in the firm, you follow me? He, my friend and his brother were the ones who were running the place.

Q: But I didn't understand fully, the connection to Vairtime(ph) for example, did he own Vairtime(ph) or work for Vairtime(ph) for the big department stores?

A: He sold to Vairtime(ph).

Q: He sold to Vairtime(ph)?

A: Yeah, that stuff, that shoeboots and that _____, which was very well known and very well liked. As I said, we had a wonderful life, traveled and couldn't be better, let's put it this way. And then came 1928, '29, his brother married a Jewish girl, she was very, how shall I say, she wasn't like a girl, she was like a man, you know and oh, I forgot to tell you, the brother, in the World War, first World War, went in the World War and got shot in his spine. They couldn't

remove it, they left it there and he was very handicapped from that shooting. Always laying down and bah, bah, bah. When he came from the factory she did everything for him, so on and so forth. But she didn't like that her brother-in-law, my friend, had an affair with me. And his mother told her once, what don't you like on Rolf? I think he's the most charming fellow, beautiful fellow, what do you want from him? And Emil(ph) is very fond of him. So, but you know in that time, homosexuality in the 20's was like the red cloth to the steer, you know what I mean? So she always, so she said one day, "You go with him." No, "I will arrange an appointment with Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld. He should see you and see whether he can help you to get rid of it." I laughed out loud, didn't say a word and when we were alone, I said to him, "I think she's crazy. She can't, this is not a sickness, what, what does she think that it is?" "But if she _____ you, I tell you what, we are going both to Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld, making an appointment, tell him what we experience with your sister-in-law, that we don't like it, that we are _____ crazy, crazy about things, she doesn't know more" and so on and so forth. And we went to Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld.

Q: Can you explain as to who Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld is, in that time?

A: Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld was a man who, in Germany was a law 175, yes the homosexuality law, number 175 and he had a big practice in the _____. That is like a little Central Park, you know what I mean? A big house, a villa and he had patients there, laying on one side and here was his private house and very often he made, how shall we say, balls on Saturday evening for the homosexual, with 150, 200 people there, dancing in the garden there and so on and so forth. High prices, but this money was good for him because for that he can experience, go places and look for, etcetera, etcetera. But anyway, as I said before, we went to him and he came in and I never forget that. Should I tell you? Where we hang our hat and our coats, there are all pricks out a foot around the whole thing, you know. I screamed out laughing and the guy who was sitting on the desk,

"What are you laughing mister?" I said, "That's too funny. To put hangers like this in a..." " Well," he says, "this is our trademark, period." We were besides ourself that's _____. So then he came in, he was a little, stout man, I expected something completely different, but he is very, how shall I say, imposing and I told him the story. And he said, "Why do you send that woman to me and I will clear her mind and tell her what is what and why is why. This is not a sickness, this is what you are born with, period. And there's no question about it." I said my friend was very, how shall I say, backward, you know, he never... So I said, "Doctor, would you do me a big favor?" "Certainly, what is it?" "Send a letter to that woman and just tell her, or write to her what you told us right now and I would be very, very happy and appreciate it no end." "No question about it, tomorrow the letter goes out." So the next Friday evening we came to Emil's(ph) parents for dinner and she came in. She didn't speak to him, she spoke right away to me, "What did you do?" I said, "What did I do?" "Well," she says, "I got a letter." I said, "And does that clear up your mind? Does that make you feeling better?" "It's unbelievable what you did and why you did, giving my address and my name." I said, "Look, you bothered Emil so much and he was so depressed that I wanted to shut it out once and for all and that's why we went to Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld and he sent you the letter and that should clear your mind, period." So his mother said, "When Rolf told you what he just told you, isn't that enough for you? Don't you have to go on?" "I have it my way and not his way." So we were, how shall I say, not very friendly all the time, you know, til we left.

Q: I have a question because you started to tell us that she proposed that you both go to Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld. Was he very known in Germany at this time?

A: Yeah. Very well known.

Q: Why?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Why was he so known?

A: Because, as I just told you, like here for instance, sex or, it was very open, you know. He had, as I told you, balls on Saturdays, making money and so on and so forth. People come, came from practical all over the world looking for advice from him and he was very, very well known. Very well known. So that made her, I think, she had the idea that he could do something about it. But he, smart man as he was, told her right away, this is not a sickness, there can be nothing done about it, this is something that you're born with, period. And that's why he wrote her the letter on my account. But she was still not 100 percent satisfied, but I didn't care any more because what we did was more than enough, period.

Q: You said that he lived in an institute, in a big villa. What did he do in this institute, exactly, do you know this?

A: There were people, how shall I explain it? It's like, not a hospital, it's like a, a there were people, men, who wanted to be a woman, and they were operated on. Were laying there for one or two months, til they healed and so and that was in 1925, '26, '27, a big affair, very big, very known people, I don't know, at the time being were, couple of them went and got operated on and as I told you before, this side was like a charity and this was a lift and then he was, has a big park and in that park were the parties for 175.

Q: Did you ever go to one of these parties?

A: Once I went. And I, I tell you why I went. He and I, we were very, very, how shall we say, careful. He had to be on account of his employers and the factory and I didn't want him to be laughed at or whatever it is, God forbid and so on and so forth, so we were very, very careful. Very seldom. But that time was a masquerade, so nobody would know. He didn't take it, I took a mask out, he didn't, he just went. So I said, "I want to go." "All right, if you want to go,

_____ , but I don't ____." So what shall I tell you? I went to a very famous masquerade man, who for the theater _____, I don't know whether that name rings a bell with you. I think he's, not today any more, but he was for a long time very famous. And I went there and I said, "Look, Hirschfeld gives a party, I'd like to, would love to go in a masquerade and then I can have my hat and my face masked and so on, so forth." "Mr. Hirschberg, don't worry. Show me your legs." I said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Show me your legs." I put my _____ up. "Oh, we _____, perfect, perfect." I said, "What's perfect?" "You have no bowlegs, that's very good, very important to that costume I want to give you." I said, "What kind of costume do you want to give me?" "You go as a fowl." What do you call it, a fowl, here in English? You know? _____?

Q: Is it a pheasant? No.

A: _____.

Q: Is feathers?

A: Yeah, feathers. Big and beautiful, blue. We call it a fowl at that time and a fowl has a big schnabbel(ph) you know what I mean and everything in blue silk and a red sweater and the legs blue and the red shoes and as I said, the wings, the arm.

Q: Feathers?

A: Yeah. And how much? "____ mark." I said, "What are you saying, _____ mark?" "But Mr. Hirschberg, when you get the prize you get 5000 marks and I bet you you get a prize. I went home, I said, "I'll let you know." And I came home and I spoke to Emil, he says, "If you like it, if you want it, take it. Once you go and once you want to have fun, why not? Take it." So I went back next day and he measured everything, bah, bah, bah. "And next Saturday, one day before next Saturday, you come and we try your costume." I went there and we tried. He says, "I don't know

what to say, if you don't get the prize, I am, my name isn't Hans any more. Okay. So the evening comes and Emil took the car and he drove me, we have drove to Sasetten(ph), that is a park where it is. And at 12 o'clock, they had Potlesser(ph), is that a name you know of? Hans Potlesser(ph)? No? Potlesser(ph) came as the queen of Alba, _____. She worked for a big confections house, you know, in Brussels and so forth. And as _____, I know only _____, she came as Carmen Miranda, something like that, you know. But anyway, make a long story short, as of we were sitting and Emil was sitting with me on the table _____ us, but nobody knew anybody, you know. So there was a gentleman who always came, two or three times, "May I dance with the lady?" Emil said, "Please do." And I was dancing and he was always firm, you know what I mean and it was too funny for words, for anyway.

Q: What would, I didn't understand that? He was too funny?

A: This is the, you know, try to be sexy.

[End of Side 1]

Q: So how many people were there at this Saturday night, this special party?

A: 200, approximately. Well any, can I talk? Anyway, he came and danced a dance with me and then all of a sudden he said to me, "Can we have a drink at the bar?" I said, "No, we can't, I'm here with my friend and..." "Oh, your friend, your friend." To make a long story short, 12 o'clock, please _____ and there was a big stairway, one, two, about 20 stairs. So first Miss Potlesser(ph) went, with her big ermine cape, everybody applauded, bravo. And then _____ as Carmen Miranda and _____. Finally Emil said, "Why don't you?" "All right," I said, "I'll go." Now I _____, the man _____ were there, he said, "Rolfie, don't forget, when you're in the middle of the stairs, you take your arms, as the wings

_____ out and make ooooo." Well, I felt like an actor, you know and I came on the stairs and I opened my wings, people went crazy, I'm telling you, they applauded, they hollered, "Beautiful, marvelous, gorgeous." I can't tell you what. So now we go to passing by the what do you call them, the men who decide who gets the prizes and all and I was number five and always on the _____. 200, number one, 754, number 5 and I got 2000 dollars, marks. I fell on my behind I'm telling you when they came and gave me the check. I said, "I don't believe I got." Well, you see, I told you if you got the prize. And Emil was embarrassed, "Don't take the money." I said, "I certainly take the money. We paid _____, shoot I'm not crazy, of course I take it." Well that was the one ball we went to Marcus Hirschfeld. Never again and so on and so forth. And everything was fine, fine, fine. Then came '32, all of a sudden, Mr. Hitler appeared on the horizon, you know. And we went once to the, what was the name of the movie _____, all the way up, oh good lord, well anyway, we went there and next to us was a Nazi sitting there in uniform with this girl. And they were very noisy and very and I said, "We would like to listen to the picture, sir." "You dirty Jew, what do you want? If you don't like it, get the hell out of here." And you know, Emil, gentleman from tip to toe, pushed my hand, let's go out and we went out. I went to the manager, told him what happened. "We want our money back," I said, because I was very, very annoyed. And, "Sir, I can't help it, I know you are two gentlemen, but this _____, scum of the scum, what can I do?" And so on, so forth. "But I go and tell him something." And he went inside, I saw him going in talk to the, "You made such a gentlemen leaving because you were very, very noisy." "Now what does that dirty Jew want, if I want to talk, I'll talk." "But not during the picture, it's not allowed, you shouldn't have." "But my girl wanted to know something, to be explained and I did it." Anyway, that was beginning. And from that day on, we didn't, we went to the theater, we went also to concerts and so forth, but movie where you sit close to, we tried to avoid, you know what I

mean? And 1936, I started getting letter, you dirty Jew, we know you are a homosexual and so on, so forth, you better look out and but we get you and bah, bah, bah. I was very excited and my mother said, "Ah, that's stupid." I said, "Don't say that's nonsense, these guys are liable to do everything or anything." So I went to my lawyer. My lawyer, unfortunately, he went to Switzerland too, a Jew too and he was, _____ terrible, _____, young man, 35 years old. Well anyway, so my friend says, "You know what? I think it's the time we are leaving. My father is here, my brother is here, they can keep the factory going as long as possible and we are leaving." I said, "What I do with my mother?" Well, there was in the _____ a rabbi, _____. He took, where the many young Jewish children left for France, for England, for Switzerland, for America, for Israel and they didn't know what to do with those old mothers. They couldn't take them right away and he had in the _____, how you call it, like an old aged home, but it was like an old age home, you have to pay for it, you follow me? And before I left he asked for me about 3000 mark. I said, "My God, that's a lot of money, what you need for?" "Well he says, this pays for the first, first year, so and so money every month and when, let's hope and pray your mother is well here and then you pay, let's see _____." So, shortly before Christmas '36, we went to Prague. But something very funny happened. We had, I had reservations, Hotel Steiner(ph), was a very, very nice hotel, but I said for two and they thought a couple had maybe arrived there. They had the bridal suite, with flowers, with, I said, "Oh my God, what is this? We are two men." "Oh, you didn't say that. Well, all right, we give you another room." That was our reception to Prague. Well in Prague we stayed two months I think, a little more than two months. Emil had a, a man there, who sold his stuff and had us sit in Prague. Mr. Salzman(ph), he was very nice, he, he would give us money, he helped us and so on, so forth. And what was that short one, the Nazi's, Goebbels?

Q: Goebbels?

A: That short one? Goebbels, he was _____ there was a very famous movie, like _____, you know and he had a woman there, we were told, I didn't even want to see him, so on and so forth. Anyway and then we went to Yuhr(ph). We had friends in Holland, I had a niece there, that is still there. I, we had friends in England, Emil had a cousin there and everywhere we _____ and on the 11th of April, 1937, our boat went to America.

Q: Could I, I would like to go a step back and we go back to this boat in a moment. Can you tell us, before we go on, little bit, you were brought up Jewish, can you tell us a little bit how that was before 1933 and how that changed, what was the effect after Hitler's rise to power in 1933?

A: Well of course the, what was that famous night? Kristallnacht, when the _____ and they, and they light off the factory, from Emil's factory, stood in Nazi uniform in front of _____ and Emil and I, we passed him and he says, "What are you doing here?" "Well my _____, whatever it is, told me I have to stay here and _____ and what happened in the factory," says Emil. "Nobody here?" "Well there's somebody taking care, your brother _____." And that's where Emil got very upset and very annoyed, of course. And after the Kristallnacht, I went to his house, his parents house and he came to my mother's house and we didn't go out much very much. Sometimes to the theater when we knew that it's safe enough you know _____. Besides, we lived in a circle where you could walk to the, the theater part of the _____. _____ on all the names. And it became very and we had, I had a very _____ friend and as I said before, when I heard that we are going, I went to that rabbi, to talk to him for my mother and I had a very nice friend, she said to me, _____ Freideberger(ph), she said to me, "Rolfie, don't sleep home any more. You come and sleep at my house. God forbid, bring a few things that you need," so on, so forth. So I always went to her

house, before we left, weeks after weeks, I got so annoyed, I can't tell you. Anyway, the day came, I brought my mother to the _____, to the house of that rabbi and then Emil said, "You know, just pack a few things, don't make it too obvious." _____ sent them and we went to, as I told you, to Prague. And there, his brother put things together and at that time, when we left, I still could take my things from my apartment. They packed it and sent it to me and he took part, his whole thing in there, from his apartment. So we left as I said, on the 11th of April, 1937, with the Normandy. Our _____ cost 2500 marks, but we didn't do it for _____, we did it because we got the half price in New York, back, if we don't go back on the same. And that's why we like to have some money here, when we come on, you know. I don't, you should have seen that cabin. With green silk, I can't tell you, it was total. But unfortunately, it was such a storm, even the captain go seasick. It was awful. And when we came here, oh yeah, the main thing is, my, I had to go in Berlin, to the military board there because I was still due to serve military. So in the _____ I went one morning with my passport and I said, "I want to go to America." Yeah and there was a man like Hindenburg(ph), that fat, big, oh _____. I thought, oh my God. Emil was sitting downstairs in the car waiting for me and I was up there. And he _____, so he says, "What do you want?" "I want to visit relatives." They were old people, 80, 90 years old. God knows when I ever see them again and so on, so forth. "Are you coming back?" I said, "I certainly do, my mother is here" and so on and so forth. Of course everything was a lie. And he will ask question and question. Finally he took the stamp, put it on my passport and my heart was jumping. But then, I still see him coming around the desk and he said, "Mr. Hirschberg, come back in six months, that paper map hanger will be here any more." The map of the military. But anyway, I knew that I wouldn't come back anyway. So we went to America and _____, I come here and he got through, my passport, I ask in Prague, I ask, if three months after you coming back.

I come here, they take me to Ellis island. The passport has to be six months later. I thought I'd die. Well, I went over, he said, "You want to take a taxi?" I said, "We have," what was that hotel on 58th Street and Central Park West? That guy took it over now, I always forget the name. Anyway, we had rented a room there from Germany for four weeks. I said to them, "If you take me to the hotel, I will pay, but if you take me somewhere else, you have to pay." So _____. I can't tell you what I went through. One night and the morning. "Mr. Hirschberg, your cousin, Mr. Kroner(ph), he has a lease for you." He pays a 500 dollar, what do you call it, _____ in other words. Oh when I came out I said, "I go back with the next ship, I don't stay here, it's over." "Don't be silly, this is a _____, that's bad, people have bad advice, it's all their fault." And then we came to the hotel, in the 24th floor and he said, "Look, Central Park. Is that lovely? _____." Anyway. Then I got over it and we stayed here and the first four weeks, went to school on Third Avenue and 46th Street, to learn American life. And they were all the, from _____, the dentist, 79 years old, was there, he says, "I couldn't take the Nazi's any more." And he wanted to have, makes the examination too. I thank God, I still can show you, I have the, I made it. Emil didn't, he speaks, his knowledge of languages was for him, very. He was a businessman, you know. And I, I said to him, "Thank God you don't need it," and so on, so forth. And I need it and _____. So we stayed here for four weeks, we had friends here and he had a relative here and so on and so forth. And I was here, we were here six, six months, yeah. So they said the first summer in New York is very rough on you Rolf, you can't take it, it's too much. And he had a cousin in Great Neck and they said right away, "You come and stay with us." So we stayed at Great Neck _____ and that of course was very lovely, very nice and then we, in August, I went _____, I says, "We have to look for an apartment." So his cousin, or friend and _____, he was a dentist, he said, "Go and see, I have a very nice friend living on 245 West 74th

Street," and she said, there's just an apartment empty this week." And they liked that neighborhood very much. "You go." I said, "I go, but I have to have _____ with me, I can't go alone." "So you go tomorrow." So we went to school, after school we went there and the doorman, no not the doorman, the, what is a man who takes care of the house?

Q: Concierge.

A: The concierge, yeah the concierge. Not the concierge, he cleans, does everything.

Q: Janitor? Or Supervisor?

A: Not Supervisor. Anyway, the guy was a Swede and spoke German and when he heard we were German was very nice to us, he says, "I have a lovely apartment." I said, "I need an apartment with walls. I have a big bibliotech, things ____" And he says, "This has a lot of walls." We went up here, we liked it, so on and so forth. And it's a free, you can look to 79th Street, right through. That was very important to us. And he says, "So how much is the rent?" The Super. The Super said, "I can't tell you anything, you have to leave everything to the owner." And at that time it was a little owner, Ottenberger(ph), also Jew and we came the next day and we realized he just looked at us. Eyes open. He says, "You want to rent the apartment? Are you cooking?" I said, "No." "Are you washing?" I said, "No." All right I said. "Well the apartment is really 125 dollars." "How much?" I said, "125 dollars, no, that's too much money." "Okay, you don't cook, you don't wash, you don't eat too much, all right, I give you the apartment for 75 dollars, starting, you can move in on the first of September and pay me the first rent on the first of January." I thought we were in seventh heaven. I knew that we had an apartment, I was so happy, so on and so forth. We stayed til the middle of August and then we went here, it was empty already, they just cleaned it and I wanted to, I was measuring everything, you know. Then we had the furniture parked at Silverstein(ph), it's a house which takes things which you have to, anyway. When we brought the things over, you

should have seen 74th Street. In September 8, 1937. Children were playing with the ____, everything was in ____, you know, unbelievable. Next door was a old lady, she knocked at the door and she said, "I saw your furniture and I think they are gorgeous. Can I come in and look at them?" I said, "My dear lady, we just moved in. Everything is honky tonky toodle, you won't even know. When we are finished, I call you and you can come in." "But don't forget, I'm so impressed." I said, "No, no, I won't forget." Period. That was our entry in 245 West 74th Street.

Q: And this is the same apartment where you are living today? So how many years did you live here?

A: 60 years.

Q: 60 years. I would like to ask a couple of questions, but I need to make a big jump backwards for that. Course, we heard a little bit about the friendship and the relationship, but very little so far about growing up Jewish in Germany before 1933. You mentioned that you are Jewish, but how was it growing up Jewish before 1933 in Berlin?

A: Like everybody else. The religion had to do anything with you or for you or against you. As a matter of fact, they never held my friend or me as a Jew? Why? A Jew hasn't got blue eyes, they have dark eyes and don't have red hair and are not blonde like he was. That was their sign for a Jew, you follow me? So we weren't even kept for Jews to tell you the truth, but even if and when, there was no _____, nothing doing. I mean there were of course certain things which, take for instance the _____, they were Jews who came from the, from _____ east, with pious long thing. Children run after them. They thought they go to a masquerade. They didn't even know what it is. I saw it once too, didn't believe my eyes. But that was a very, how shall I saw, a very small park in the middle of the city in the _____. Where if you go a little more to the left, _____, I remember the name,

_____ and there were those Jews, but they lived like in a ghetto, you know what I mean? And this was the only thing I can remember ever being annoyed as a Jew.

Q: Annoyed, why?

A: Of course, when we went to _____, shopping, as I told you, children went after them, they thought it was a masquerade, they didn't even know what it is, because they had the long coats, you know, pious, _____, a hat and long hair. That was the only time that people, what shall I say, took notice. Otherwise, as I said before, we in Shallatanborg(ph) in the _____, I never heard anything like it, never, never. Til '34, '35, when it started.

Q: Were you brought up Jewish, going to the synagogue?

A: No, no. I was, he was brought, his father was a very religious Jew, but as I told you my father died very early and we, even my mother, God wasn't good to us she said, you know, she felt hurt that she lost her husband so early and so tragically, you know what I mean? And that's why I believe the high holidays were always observed and stuff like this, but we weren't that we go every Friday and Saturday, the synagogue or what. On holidays we observed it, but then lived like everybody else.

Q: But were you aware, we change the tape.

End of Tape 1.

Tape 2

Q: Were you aware before 1933, anti-Semitism in Germany?

A: How shall I say? I, I heard about it. In the east of the city, Frankfurt _____, the lower classes, they _____, they hit a Jewish girl or they hit somebody looked like Jews but wasn't even Jew, happened also and so on, so forth, you know what I mean? But where I lived, Shallatanborg(ph) _____ very rarely, very rarely, I really must say. And there was a big temple, _____ . Hundreds and hundreds of Jews went there, including us and so on and so forth. And knock wood, up til, even '33 still, '34. '35 started already being little voklish(ph), you know what I mean? But..

Q: What is voklish(ph)?

A: It's, could happen, that you were molested or, but as I told you before, neither he nor I, we tried very, very little to, in masses or, just stay our way, you know what I mean and mostly we traveled. We were more out of Berlin than in Berlin.

Q: Did you stay out of crowds, of masses because you...

A: We never liked it, never. Neither he nor I. Never, never. We always, how shall I say? Not that we were hide or hidden, no, no, no, we just didn't like it, period.

Q: When did you experience for the first time, discrimination or anti-Jewish remarks or an experience?

A: That was in 19, when we went to that movie where the Nazi sat next to us and made that lousy remark and _____, as I said before, he looked like a gentile and I looked like a gentile, nobody cared, thought we were Jews. And then all of a sudden that guy that made that remark and we were very. He got up right away out and I followed him _____. We never liked any complications, you know, never, never, ever. The only terrible thing that happened is, I'd have, also

a very friend of my youth, school friend, Richard Piker(ph), he, we went back, Emil was a traveling salesman. He was sometimes away three weeks, four weeks and I was alone. So I had over the friend or somebody and I had a school friend also and in 1934, Emil was just in _____ the east, _____ and he came to my apartment and we wanted go to _____. I always feeded the, the apes, the _____. And I opened the door and here, I thought I saw, I thought I don't see right. He's sitting there in full uniform as a Nazi. I said, "Richard, what happened? Are you crazy or am I crazy?" "No," he says, "Rolf you must realize, I don't get a job if I don't join the Nazi's. And since I been looking for over a year already and can't find anything, I finally said to myself, I have no choice." "But Richard," I said, "you should have told me. I could have fallen dead, because you as a Nazi? Do me one favor, don't come into my house any more, not in the uniform. If you come as a civil man, fine. In uniform we are strangers, period." And I closed the door. This was my experience with the Nazis.

Q: What happened to your mother when you left her in the house for elderly?

A: I had, 1936, she went and thank God, there was another friend of the daughter, went to Israel and this woman knew my mother very well and they were in one room with two beds. So she wrote me a letter, unfortunately I lost them, I don't know why, she's very happy, Mrs. Cooper is so nice to her. My mother was nearsighted, she's helping me and so on and so forth and bah, bah, bah and I'm not alone. Unexpectedly, I'm so happy I can't tell you. And I was happy too, knowing that she was satisfied, so on, so forth. And as a year, oh yeah, now, when we had this apartment, after three weeks, my telephone rung. "Yes?" I said. "Can I speak to Mr. Hirschberg?" I said, "Speaking." "Here is Adele Livingston." "Yes, what can I do for you?" "Oh you speak such nice English. I thought you hardly would..." "I speak, I spoke the English already the school," I said, "that's why. But how are you, what do you want?" "I'm your godmother." I said, "Who are you?" "Your

godmother. I am from the Council of Jewish women." And every Jew, in '37, who came over as a stranger, had a godmother and she was, got my name. And she says, "Can I see you?" I said, "Yes, but why do you want see me?" She says, "As I told you before, I'm your godmother, I would love to see you, to know you" and bah, bah, bah. I said, "Where do you live?" "On 72nd Street, between Park and Flexing(ph). Would you like to come tomorrow?" I said, "Not tomorrow." Oh yeah and I forgot, in the meantime, while we were on 46th Street in the school, Emil met a gentleman who has a drugstore in Breslow(ph) in Germany. And when he saw Emil, he hugged and kissed him, "What are you doing here?" And so on and so forth, and he says, "Would you like to open with me?" Emil says, "I can't, I, because I try in Haifa to my shoeboots and ..." "Yeah, but we can in the meantime make here, that we make some money and ____." You know _____? Raspberry syrup. And he was another one, _____, was his name? It doesn't matter. Emil said, "Fine, for the time being." And they had, in Brooklyn, a little house and in the cellar, they built these machines and they called it _____. And I sold and he sold. We went to all the German refugees, we got lists and so on, so forth. And I told her that. No, next morning, I said, "I have no time, I have deliveries." "What do you deliver?" And I told her, "Raspberry syrup." And there was another Jew, Gorman(ph), he made _____. And this together was a very good combination and my friends called, "Rolfie, bring us orange juice, raspberry syrup and chocolate." Well anyway, I said, "The next morning I can come because then I have to take no deliveries." So I went to her. I come in and she said, "Who do you want?" I said, "Miss Livingston." "Oh, oh, on the 14th floor." All right, I go up, ring the bell, come a girl, the girl speaks German. She says (speaks German here). "Oh," she says, "let him in, let him in." And she came, typical American _____ she came in and she looked at me and I was dressed because I thought I go to the east side. She expected I come with _____, you know, like a refugee. "You are

Rolf Hirschberg?" I said, "Yeah, I'm Rolf Hirschberg. Why, don't you like me?" "I am surprised. I am so pleasantly surprised, I can't tell you. And you speak English so nicely, how come? You want the coffee and there was ____." I said, "No, no thank you, I had my breakfast." So she sits down with me and, "All right, I tell you what, I am the directoress of a big _____ club." In the hotel that doesn't exist any more on Madison Avenue and 45th Street. It was torn down later. "Come bring a bottle and a piece of chocolate and the next morning you will come." I say, "I'll come and bring." And I come with a very elegant hotel, you should have seen place, that ladies wear fur coats, it was winter, so forth. She clapped her hands and says, "Ladies, attention, here is that young gentleman from Germany, he has some raspberry syrup and some chocolate. Chocolate excellent, I tasted it," so forth. "I want your orders. All right, are you ready Mr. Hirschberg?" I said, "Yeah." "10 bottles of raspberry, two pound chocolate, _____ bah, bah, bah, Park Avenue, bah, bah, bah, bah." The next one. I had in no time, 20 orders and so big that we couldn't make it, that was so much for us and I told her, I said, "But _____." "You deliver when you can and do when you have the order in your hand, that's the main thing." Well, I said _____. I came home, I told Waxman(ph), he hugged and kissed me, he didn't know what to do. Emil says, "Why could you take such orders?" I said, "She, I didn't even ask," I said, "she only said, right, right." So we started making whatever we could and the cousins, they were happy, they made, they didn't sleep in the night, they made the chocolate. And the first time I go Park Avenue and deliver 20 bottles and five pounds of chocolate and of course he didn't let me go the main entrance, I had to go, with the, I had all these little bags, you know, that I didn't want to, he says, "No, you can't, in the back." Oh so I thought 19th floor and I'm ringing the bell. "The young man is for the delivery here, madam." "Yes, come in, come in, come in. How much is it? Oh, I'm so glad ____, now we have some floor polish." I said, "What have you have? Floor polish? My

God, you will stick to it. This is raspberry." They didn't even know what they ordered. "This is raspberry syrup. You put it over farina, you put it in a drink, you put it, but God forbid, don't put it on the floor. You stick to it. You never walk again for God's sakes." "Oh am I glad you called my attention to that. I would the girl have, next day, with a piece of, wax the floor." How do you like that? That's what they, at that time the American ladies bought. They didn't even know what they bought. And that went, couple of months. One day I said, "You know madam, that's not for us, all this syrup and chocolate. I mean it's nice, but..." She says, "I tell you what, would you like to go in a jewelry store?" I said, "Yeah, but I don't know anything about jewelry." She says, "That's not necessary, my brother-in-law has a big diamond outfit. Rings, bracelets, watch." I said, "A store?" "No, no, no, wholesale." "What can I do there?" I said. "Well that, leave to him, he is a very smart man. He came from Russia _____, but he didn't come very educated and very dressed like you did, he came with hardly shoes on his feet" and so on, so forth. 1910 or whatever it was. But I said, "We can talk about it." I came home, I talked to Emil, I said, "What shall I do?" He says, "You can talk to the man, there's no harm in it. See what he wants _____." So I called her, I said, "Madam, where is the address?" "Five West 46th Street on the 22nd floor. Mr. Schliss(ph), Maury(ph) Schliss(ph) is his name. You tell him that you come from me. I tell him that you are coming." Next morning I dress myself again, _____, go, big house, 22nd floor. Very nice outfit, very _____ you know, big. And the lady, "Yes?" I said, "My name is Rolf Hirschberg, Mr. Schliss(ph) is expecting me." "Oh yeah, I heard, but he's not here yet. He's coming any minute, will you please take a seat?" Take a seat. In comes a man, after 10 minutes, black coat, _____, a hat, very well, nicely dressed, nicely educated. "Mr. Hirschberg?" I said, "Yeah." "My name is Maury(ph) Schliss(ph), I know who you are, sister-in-law told me. So glad to meet you." He looked at me, his eyes popping out. They all thought the

minute you come as a refugee, you come as a _____, you know what I mean? So he says, "All right, come in my _____, my room and I talk to you." I came in. "Would you like to sell jewelry?" "How do you mean sell? Go from door to door? That I don't like." "No, no, no, no, no, no, wholesale, wholesale, people come to you." I said, "That's much better." Yeah, but what I, all right. "I tell you what, you want to start today?" I said, "No, I can't, I have so much to do," My, our floor was with orders for the chocolate and the _____ and I should stay right away. I said, "No, no." "Could you come tomorrow?" I said, "Yes I could." "So you come the next morning at nine o'clock and I talk to you." Next morning I told my friend, he said, "Well this is something at least has hand on foot, that is something which, go and see what it is." I went. Very nice man. He said, "Mr. Hirschberg, I have one thing in mind. You don't start the ladder from the top, you start the ladder from the bottom. If you agree to that, very fine. I'll take a chance with you." Well that's fine, so I went there next day, oh yeah and then I said, "Mr. Schliss(ph), what would you pay me?" _____, "Well, Rolf, I'll start you with 12 dollars a week." I couldn't believe my ears. Friends of mine went on 14th Street, what was that store there, they took the dresses, hang them on the, up you know, they got seven, eight dollars. Another one was on a dock store living, he got eight dollars. I got 12 dollars. I came home like, big, you know. And I come home and I tell Emil I have. "So what are you losing? Try." So the next day _____, I had to pack, packages, bring them to the post office, so on, so forth. Friday comes and I get my first paycheck, 14 dollars. 10 dollars social security, _____, 13.90. I run to the bookkeeper, I said, "Bessie, you made a mistake." Mr. Schliss(ph) hired me for 12 dollars, you gave me 14." "Do you think I am a stupid ass, I make a mistake like this? He said, I watched Rolf, he is working very diligently, give him 14 dollars." I came home, the king of Persia, you know what I mean?

Emil didn't believe his ears. When I told my few friends that I knew, "Rolfie, I don't believe it."

Yeah, I says, I do.

Q: I would like to, to interrupt here because I have a couple of questions I forgot you to ask earlier and since we are running, the time is running, I would like to go back once again to the time before 1933 and the years '33 and '37, before you went to the States. Because one thing that I really would like to know and I'm sure because you have such a detailed memory, you said your friend and you, you didn't like to, to go out very much. But besides that, that one episode when you told us about _____, that big ball, did you go to other bars at that time, because we know very little about these bars.

A: We knew a bar, where we knew the owner and the son, the Class Casino in, I think it's still existing, no? But you remember the Class Casino? It was near _____ perhaps, but it's a side street there, I forgot. But anyway, and Mr., he was a Dutchman and he was very fond of him and very fond of me and he had a friend and we went there and we came, when we came in there, it was as if you come to a relative and say hello. He had a table for us, he right away said to us, "Instead of a drink, first have a cup of coffee, I have wunderbar pretzels, ____" And very often we sat, Emil sat, _____, we have to pay. No, no, no, you are my guests. That's what, where we went very often.

Q: How did the Class Casino look?

A: Very simple. You came in and you saw it first, the first _____ you came in on the right, on the left was a bar where the friend, the young friend was sitting and a waiter and then you went through that, there was like my living room, little larger, see? And there was a second room where you were dancing and in here was on the side, a man who played piano and one guy played the _____ or sometimes a violin. That was it, very small.

Q: How many people were there when it was really full?

A: 30, 35. Sometimes on Saturday, might be even 40.

Q: Did you go a lot of times to the Class Casino?

A: When I was alone, as I told you, Emil was very often three weeks, four weeks on the road. I was alone. That Richard Piker(ph) who became the Nazi, he was a one and there was another one, Walter Blume(ph), they were two I knew very well, so friends or so, I don't know how. Anyway, they called and we went together there and had a nice time. Or I went to the _____. That was _____ from _____.

Q: _____.

A: A movie, _____.

Q: How did it look, like was it a bar as well?

A: _____, it had marble, the entrance, a small, you know and you went in. It was a very intimate movie, I think right on the corner.

Q: It was a cinema?

A: Yeah. Cinema.

Q: Did you go to other bars besides the Class Casino?

A: Yeah. Five o'clock _____ on the first, on the first floor in the afternoon from five to seven was a very distinguished, nice people, you know, not the. The only one which was very ugly and very, the _____ they called her. She was very, I always told the owner, "Why don't you tell her to go somewhere else?" He says, "I would love to, but what can I do?" And _____ very often I liked it too because it was dignified, very nice.

Q: And other bars, do you remember?

A: There was an _____. There was also a better class of our people, you know what I mean? I always picked where I could have and then _____ there was, in the center of the city, Alexander _____. Hilda Hilderbrand(ph). _____ Hugo. They came every Saturday to see Alexander _____, to see the queens dancing. I very often, I knew _____ Hugo, I met her once on a trip to Venice on a boat and well she called me often and she had a boyfriend. She says, "I like him but I don't like him. I like you much better." I said, "But what do you want from me, you know I'm not into..." "That doesn't matter, that's not so important to me," she said. "The main thing for me is nice entertainment, a nice looking gentleman next to me. With you I don't have to be ashamed to go somewhere and that's a main point for me."

Q: Were there a lot of bars for homosexuals in Berlin at that time, before 1933?

A: There were 100 _____, but I don't remember the name. It wasn't so nice, I didn't, this, two or three things, you know, I'm very, how shall I say, if I like some _____, I stick to it, you know what I mean? And that's what it was for me, three, four things. Sometimes I went to, _____, I forget all the names.

Q: Okay we...

[End of Side 1 of Tape 2]

Q: You said that you made a choice to which bars you went, so I was wondering, even when you, when you said you stuck to some bars, but it sounds as if there were many other bars for homosexuals?

A: Oh, there were _____ I don't even remember the name, but as I said, I didn't like to go, how did we say in Berlin, the old, we are _____, you know what I'm trying to say? I liked it assorted. The place, well, _____ for instance, _____, the owner, looked very, if somebody came in we are crowded, we have no space. He was very clever that way. He

wouldn't like, he knew already his customers. And when I came I always got an extra table because as I said before, he was very fond of me, at that time I was still very young and he always said, "If I _____ my Hans, you were the one." But I said, "But you weren't my one." And he always laughed.

Q: Was it not dangerous to go to these bars before 1933?

A: No, no, no.

Q: Because there was the law 175 that prohibited homosexual contacts?

A: No. I, you see there were, _____ and things, there were the afternoons where people, even among the _____ sometimes, had evenings advertised in the, the _____. All the time, _____, overcrowded. He made it not often, but when he made it, you can rest assured, the cream of the _____ and the _____, you know the _____ hotel? At the _____. I don't think she's alive any more, she was, she was married, she had even children, but she still was the other way around, you know.

Q: Was Marcus Hirschfeld homosexual?

A: _____?

Q: Was Marcus Hirschfeld homosexual?

A: Absolutely. But he was, how did I say, _____.

Q: What does that mean?

A: He went sometimes out a night and could swallow four or five boys. And I said...

Q: How do you know?

A: Because a friend of mine worked for him in the laboratory where the people got, from men to women change and so on and so forth. He was a, the doctor ____ and I'd, he says, you have no idea, sometimes I'm as surprised, because he, when I met him he was no youngster any more.

Q: How old was he when you met him?

A: In my opinion when I met him, he was in the 50, beginning of 60.

Q: You described him as imposing, how did he look like, can you describe him?

A: Imposing? He was a short nobody. A belly, a full beard, and he had glasses and you could give me money I wouldn't say yes, if you know what I'm trying to say. No, no, no, he wasn't. That's why I was so surprised that a man of his stature could be so impressive.

Q: Was, besides his looks, did you like him?

A: His looks, he was short.

Q: No, besides his looks, did he make a good impression?

A: When he, when he talked, he was winning and so far, he spoke, how shall I say? No nonsense, you follow me? What he said had hand and foot. You could believe it, you know that when he said no, no, when he said yes, yes, period. And that's what I appreciated of him.

Q: Was he Jewish as well?

A: Yeah and very convinced.

Q: Was it known to the general public that he was homosexual?

A: Yeah. After all, he was a father, they said.

Q: Was a father?

A: He has born it.

Q: The father of what?

A: 175.

Q: The father of the paragraph?

A: You know, then didn't know him enough, many didn't even know that his name was Hirschfeld, from them, the doctor 175.

Q: Oh, that was his nickname?

A: Yeah.

Q: But what did he do in the 20's, I mean he founded this institute?

A: He did. He, how shall I say it? The first couple of times, they laughed at it. They kept it as a joke. I remember that in the news they always had caricatures of him. Look at him, the new paragraph 175. A little stout, a little nearsighted, but clever, oh ho. Stuff like that you know, making fun of him. And then was a very, a Prince of Wales, was once, we even have a very nice remembrance. Emil and I were in Vienna in hotel, what is that famous cake, that bakery? God, oh God, forget all the names. Anyway we were in that hotel and have a room. And Emil had a very funny idea. When we sleep together, he never closed the door with a key, he closed the door and says, "Who's coming in?" _____ and when we are two. I want to think of the name.

Q: Of the cake? The name of the cake is _____.

A: _____, Hotel _____. There we stayed and I know we're 374 and he had 375 and was alone there and stink drunk. He drunk like a, I can't tell you, I saw, I saw him with two eyes in Paris.

Q: Emil?

A: What?

Q: Emil who did drink?

A: Yeah. And even I _____ the best of sleep already, I have a very light sleep, you can scratch it, I hear it. And I heard, I push up, I said, "Somebody coming in _____, that's your dumb thing not to close the door, somebody coming in." And he put on his _____ and who you think it were? The Prince of Wales stink drunk. And he didn't know that he made a mistake in the room and since it was open he figured it's his room and he walked in. My friend Richard, the Nazi later, "Ach, you should have taken pictures, you could have made a fortune." I said, "How

could I know, in the middle of the night, the Prince of Wales comes in, stink drunk? How can I know?" Very, very funny. But, the, the, he excused himself _____ "I beg your pardon." He hardly could speak, he was stink drunk, stink drunk. I swear.

Q: What happened to, to Dr. Marcus Hirschfeld after Hitler's rise to power, after 1933, do you know?

A: He went to America and here he couldn't find hand or foot. People didn't, how should I say it? They didn't acknowledge him, so over there he was he, you follow me and here, besides, when he came, he was already, how shall I say, old, overstuffed, not impressive, not, okay the first couple of times, people who knew him, that's the famous Dr. Hirschfeld, you know, they were impressed. But after awhile and then the...

Q: What happened to his institute?

A: Closed it right away. Confiscated money, everything and the private villa I heard, I don't know, was sold privately for very large money and that he, charity house, I think was closed, or even tore down, something like that.

Q: But who closed it?

A: The fuhrer(ph).

Q: Did you read that in a newspaper or did you hear it from friends?

A: I read in the papers, I read in the, here we have so many _____, you know what I'm trying to say, they tell you more than you want to know, you know what I mean? And that we were too and we said, "This is the end of a famous era."

Q: What happened to all the bars you went to after 1933, were they still opened?

A: Class Casino I heard was still open. Jenny(ph) I think was closed. Alexander Poloff's(ph) were right away closed and there was another one on the _____ which was very famous, I

forgot the name, they closed _____. In the beginning, when we left, there were already three closed and then we heard from friends that, half a year later, practically everything. And in, in '39, '40, 175 was like nobody to talk about it.

Q: What happened to friends of yours who were homosexual?

A: Some went to Israel, Jewish ones, some went to Holland and two of them went to Paris, but in Paris they were caught when Hitler came in.

Q: What happened to them?

A: Auschwitz.

Q: Do you remember their names?

A: _____, Albert Putsier(ph) and the other one is Jacob(ph) Smirr(ph), _____ Jacob Smirr(ph). So long I can't you know, hardly remember. Thank God I don't remember.

Q: But did you talk with your friends, your homosexual friends about what you would do, was there talk about emigrating or how you should react in 1934, 5?

A: I tell you, I had a friend, _____ he lived opposite me on _____. He said, "Rolfie, for us there are two possibilities. Either we over live it or out live it or we die, there's no other way. What do you want to do?" I said, "I don't want to give those bastards the possibility to kill me, I'd rather go out." And he, when I told that, he went to Israel.

Q: Were these mostly Jewish homosexuals or also non-Jewish homosexuals?

A: Two, three non, they were very Jew, Jew friendly, you know what I mean, but they became a little, how shall I say it, nonchalant, you know, they, "Rolfie, your spirit that you still," I said, "What shall I do?" As long as up here _____, I can't put a _____ veil around me, I can

either yes or no. There are only two possibilities and finally we made up our mind the possibility to leave and here I am.

Q: What happened to your family?

A: If I could, what I don't get, I would take Hitler out of his grave and put each his fingers, _____. I had a brother-in-law who lost his eyesight in the first World War, they came to him. My sister, two nephews, two nieces, they _____ were married again, 14 people they took to Auschwitz and my brother-in-law said, the doctors _____ on this, that's why I lost my eyesight, but you people don't talk to me, talk to the Fuhrer(ph). That the Nazi's tell to him. From my mother's side there's a brother, Jacob Speck(ph) _____, three children, _____ children, they are all _____ they all were taken, but I think, yeah all of them to Dachau. I had the _____ cards in my hand for my mother to send it to her that she comes and I just wanted to go to the Post Office and like this is fate, you know what I mean, I went to my box and in the box, I got a card, your mother died in Auschwitz. And I had my ___ card in the hand that my mother should come. Can you imagine how I felt? What else can I tell you?

Q: When did you hear about your mother's death? _____?

A: '45.

Q: '45.

A: Yep. Of course it was an old woman, but she was full of pep, she still wrote me letters, she still said, "Darling we will be together" and so on and so forth. And as I said, just that day I went and I thought, try to get a _____ card, she didn't want to go with a ship, the water's too much for her so I said she will fly, but I had the card in my hand. And as I said before, fate. I go the post, downstairs, open, I thought I don't see right. Yup. This is a wonderful life my dear. What that bastard did to us. My whole family, 45 people, he killed. More I can't tell you.

Q: I think, one question, you answered it already, with different answers, but maybe when we, when we talk about it again, because it's such a long time ago, the tension between, on one hand, in Germany you had the paragraph 175 that prohibited homosexuality. On the other hand you had in Berlin, as you told us, many bars for homosexuals, also different kinds of bars. You were in a relationship. So how did you feel as a homosexual in these years before '33 and then between '33 and '37.

A: Like a stranger, to tell you the truth. Because I was born in Berlin, right? And I was a Berliner. But when the Nazi's came you had the feeling you are a stranger, all of a sudden. Why? As I told you my school friend, who I know in his heart he hated the Nazi's, but he put on the Nazi's uniform, comes to a Jews house, surprises me that I nearly got a heart attack when I opened the door and saw him as a Nazi, I said, "Richard, are you crazy? Or do you want to frighten me? Or is that a masquerade?" And then he told me that if he wants to live and if he has to get work, he has to put on the uniform. And I know deep in his heart, I know him so well, that he hated them and I, I don't know what to say, you know? And still he put it on. And in my opinion there were many, many like him. In their heart they hated them, but outside they had to agree. Why? They had to live, period.

Q: Did you feel accepted being a homosexual and being Jewish in Germany before 1933?

A: It doesn't even occur to me, it doesn't even matter. As I told you before, they never thought, neither my friend nor I, as I told you, I spoke once, you have blue eyes. Jews have don't eyes, they always have brown eyes. He said, "You're crazy." "No, no, no, no _____", he said. Jews, my friend was blonde and had all blue eyes. They had an imagination a Jew had to be dark, black hair and brown or black eyes. The minute you have blue eyes, you are no Jew, no gentile.

Q: So you were not seen by your looks as a Jew?

A: Never.

Q: Therefore you didn't have firsthand experience...

A: Frankly speaking, I wasn't really afraid. The first time I was afraid, that happened when we were in that movie, that was the first time and from that time he was very annoyed and he says, "That's it." We went, I never forget we went home, he says, "Let's go to America." I says, "Why?" _____ . "That's the end for me," he says. I hear him like today.

Q: But were you ever recognized or discriminated as a homosexual before 1933?

A: We never, how shall I say it? We never dressed or overdressed, you follow me? Like our people were used to do. On the contrary, sometimes, I had once a fur jacket or what for a birthday, I think, on my 25th or what, he bought it and he, I had it at home since the time, that Nazi's came to power, but it shouldn't, _____, you see, a friend of mine in the house took the _____, a very famous doctor, he wrote me a letter, "Rolfie, _____ wouldn't believe it, the day you left, they had two Nazi's families, set in your apartment."

Q: But you said you were very careful in public, also before 1933, when you were together with your friend Emil, why? Why were you careful?

A: Because he was afraid when his employees, they, they very often took _____ woman, out to the theater, to a party, to a _____ you know and so on, so forth. We hardly knew them but we took them because just to, he didn't want to give the people, the employees the opportunity to ridicule him or make even a _____.

Q: What is a _____?

A: Get money, that he is a homosexual and they take advantage of it. And that 's why he always, you know that I went in the _____ there was a famous barhouse, I forget the name. I was dancing downstairs, he was in the balcony behind a pillar, sitting and _____

always to be dancer, enjoy yourself, because he was afraid of his employees. If you have 250 employees, how do you know there is one there and finds out he's dancing with one man.

Q: And in these times, when one of his employees would have blackmailed him, how would he have reacted? Would he have gone to the police?

A: Oh no, he would have, _____ you know, they are very, very fresh. _____ well I know you, but if you are willing to stop my mouth, I will keep quiet, but you see and that he didn't want, he wanted to avoid it, that's why he kept always aside, always. I sometimes say, "You're crazy, you're a young man, you should," "I enjoy myself in my way. I don't have to dance like you do and so forth, so on. I enjoy it. I enjoyed seeing you dancing, having a good time." He always said that, always.

Q: But he couldn't have gone to the police when he would have been blackmailed?

A: That was a beginning that we thought to walk out of Germany, when I got those letters, that was a start. Beginning of '36, for six or eight months and my lawyer _____, he said, "Rolfie, don't be afraid, these are beginners. They don't even know that simply, lousy, Nazi youngsters, they want to make money and thing they can _____ you, that's it."

Q: But in the letters, they wrote, we know that you are Jewish and we know that you are homosexuals, both?

A: Yeah. And that, my friend says never. As I told you before, I have a friend, she said to me, "Don't sleep at home any more, you come to my house, you sleep there." For weeks and that was a trip from Schallatanborg(ph), she lived in Friedenelle(ph), where that was, just a _____. But thank God Emil had a car and he always drove me.

Q: After 1933, how much did you follow politics, how much were you aware that the Nazi's were anti-Jewish and that the Nazi's were anti-homosexual.

A: '33 we didn't _____. We didn't _____ notice it til the end, 1934, Goebbels had, you see, that bastard, Göring, Emil's father didn't go to the factory any more, only his other son, the brother of Emil went to the factory. And when he, when we wrote him he should come over and he came in '38, I still see him on the boat, taking his two pockets out, meaning I haven't got a penny, you know? He say he gave him the passport and you know what he asked him? To pay the Nazi's 180,000 marks. Then you can have the passport. Göring. Boy I could tell you stories, you wouldn't believe it. If it didn't happen to me I wouldn't believe it either, but it's the truth. The God honest truth and it's not enough punishment for them, that they should get what they did to innocent, wonderful, honest people like Kronor(ph), a prince I tell you and those bastards took everything away from him. Everything.

Conclusion of interview