

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Joachim Baer
March 1, 2010
RG-50.030*0566**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Joachim Baer, conducted by Ina Navazelskis on March 1, 2010 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Silver Spring, Maryland and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

JOACHIM BAER

March 1, 2010

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. **Joachim Baer**, conducted by **Ina Navazelskis** on March 1st, 2010, in **Leisure World**, in **Wheaton, Maryland** – or **Silver Spring**?

Answer: **Silver Spring**.

Q: **Silver Spring, Maryland**. Thank you Mr. **Baer** for –

A: **Baer**.

Q: **Baer**, for coming to speak with us today. And as I said in our introduction that was not on tape, what we'd like to do is start at the very beginning. Where were you born; did you have siblings; what was your family circumstances – what were your family circumstances; who were your mother and father?

A: Fine.

Q: So maybe we could start there.

A: My – my name is **Joachim Baer**. I was born in **Hamburg** in December 20, 1929. I have a sister who is about four years older than I am. My father was a physician, he was a Zionist, and he didn't look Jewish. And he had good pair – relation with patient. Interesting enough, my – the patient always talked to the – to the – the doctors, and they told my father that **Hitler** is building tanks and preparing

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for war. And he make a statement and everyone thought that he is crazy, that he say that **Hitler** is going to gas the Jews.

Q: Who, this man?

A: No, my father make that sta –

Q: Your father – your father made the statement.

A: – ke – statement that that's what he's going to do. And most people thought my father is crazy.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that was the atmosphere that time. And interesting enough, my w – my wi – my mother was afraid to go to **Palestine**, that was like a desert land. And in 1933 they took a ship and went to **Palestine** to see if you can live there. And then he saw that's not so terrible, and that's when he start making preparation. But the t-turning point was that one day, I believe in 1935, **Hitler** decided Jewish phi-physician cannot have any more non-Jewish patient. And my father was a doctor like **[indecipherable]** where he lost a lot of his business. So that was a turning point, and he say, it's time to go.

Q: Can I i-interrupt just for a second?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Because I'd like to even step back a little further.

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A: Okay.

Q: You were born in 1929.

A: Right.

Q: And with a sister who was four years older.

A: About, yeah.

Q: Okay. And your father was a physician.

A: Right.

Q: Did your mother work outside the home, or was she at home?

A: No, no, she was a homemaker.

Q: Do you count yourself as a well-to-do family because your father was a physician, or was that not as such a prestigious post as it is in the **United States**, for example?

A: Well, doctors in **Germany**, they didn't wa – didn't make that kind of money like they do in the **United States**. But we had a very nice apartment, and he had a office near the harbor, because his specialty was venereal disease.

Q: Ah, venereal diseases.

A: And – yeah, and so he had to have all those sailor, which had syphilis. In those days there was no penicillin to cure them. So they suffer and it was a booming business, so to speak.

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Q: I can imagine, because there was that section in **Hamburg**, isn't there, where there's – what is it called now?

A: Yeah, there – yeah, the – the **Reeperbahn**.

Q: **Reeperbahn**, yeah, exactly.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yeah. So – so we were well-to-do, but I mean, the – it – the –

Q: Did you have servants at home?

A: Yes, we had a **dienstmädchen**, you know, for the kids.

Q: A nanny.

A: A nanny, and we had, I think, another help, we had about s-seven, eight rooms, I don't know. It was a – it was well-to-do, nice neighborhood. But we didn't go – the thing is, he was – I don't know what time, when he got to **Hamburg** to settle down, but it was not too many years.

Q: Oh, so he wasn't from **Hamburg**?

A: No, no, no. He was born in **Posen**, which is in east **Germany**, so to speak.

Q: Correct.

A: And then after World War I, **Posen** turned to be **Poland**.

Q: That's right.

A: So the family went and settled down in **Berlin**.

Q: I see.

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A: And the reason we got to **Hamburg**, because my father needed to have a harbor where the sailor comes. My father was high intellect person, and he knew all the language, Norwegian [**indecipherable**] so he could talk to all the sailors.

Q: Sailors.

A: Yeah.

Q: I wonder what he – if there was no penicillin, what kind of treatment he did give them.

A: Was a very unpleasant treatment. It wa – was a –

Q: Tough.

A: – was a – was a tough, yeah, it was a tough one, right. So, the thing is, one – how we got to – my mother wanted to go first maybe to **Europe**. And she and my father say no, if we go, we get out of **Europe**.

Q: Oh, wo-would your – I'm still back in **Berlin**.

A: Oh, oh, okay.

Q: Yeah, I really want to start at the beginning, before the politics.

A: Okay, okay.

Q: So, was your mother from **Posen** as well?

A: No, she was from **Marineburg**(ph) with **Auspoyzen**(ph), you know, was the same. And –

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Q: So, **Auspoyzen**(ph) near **Königsburg**?

A: No, she was **Marineburg**(ph), was a –

Q: **Marineburg**(ph) is –

A: – was a small town. No, not sm –

Q: Would that be **Marienbad** today?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So it's in **Czechoslovakia**, **Czech Republic**, I think? A **Marienbad** –

A: No, no, there's a different **Marienbad**, no, no –

Q: No.

A: – I think she – it's part of – part of **Poland**, you know, I think so.

Q: Oh, okay. She was from there.

A: Yeah. And my father came from a Zionist background family. My mother not.

My father was – came from a religious, not – not super Orthodox, but conservative

Orthodox family. And my mother had very little **Yiddishkeit**, so to speak. So he

was a – he was a philosopher too. I mean, he knew **Shea**, he knew **Spinoza** and he

knew th-the Bible, and he was a high intellect person. He gave speeches, he was

the president of a synagogue and [**indecipherable**]. So he was a –

Q: What are your first memories of your parents?

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A: Well, they were very nice parents, I mean, they were very lovely to me and as – my sister. And he was high intellect, so he used to take me for a walk and show me the – the – the st – the stars, and this is the big **[indecipherable]** there's the smaller **[indecipherable]**. And he gave lectures, and you know, so it was – and I had problem with my Bible, he always explained to me. So he was high intelligence.

Q: And do you have memories of **Hamburg** itself, of the apartment that you lived in?

A: Yeah, well, interesting, I remember – see – see, the harbor was a main port. And one day my father had a patient, a captain on the ship. So he mem – he took me, I think with my mother, for dinner, whatever it is, on this – on th-the captain table. An orange was a big sensation those days, an orange. So – so as I wi – wouldn't be caught in a – in a custom, I put the orange in my little ba – in my little coat. So this way we went though the custom.

Q: So, in other words, in order to be guests of the captain on the ship, you ha – you were leaving the territory of **Germany**, and had to go through customs?

A: Well, any time when you go in and out the harbor, you have to go through a checkpoint, you know.

Q: I see.

A: You have to do this all over the world, you know.

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Q: How old were you – how old were you at the time?

A: Five years.

Q: Oh, so it's the sort of thing a five year old would remember.

A: Yeah. The thing is, I – only the **[indecipherable]** thing I remember, there was a Greek boy in our building and I used to play with him. And one day he didn't want to play with him. So I came to my mother, oh, crying, he doesn't want to play with him. But the reason he wouldn't play me, because he knew I am Jewish, and Jewish was taboo. But my sister, who was 10 years old, she knew what was going on, and she really was so relieved getting out of **Germany**, because she knew what's going on.

Q: That – those few years made a huge difference.

A: Yes. Also, my – my sister was very – she got my intelligence of my father. She knew what exactly. Also, she went to a Jewish school.

Q: I see.

A: The **Mädchen** school.

Q: And you were – were you already going to school when you left?

A: No, this – I was too young.

Q: Yeah.

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A: Unfortunate, because I would have gotten some money from **Germany**, as i-
interrupting of – of my studying.

Q: Of education, yeah.

A: Yeah. And I didn't get it. So I really was – I didn't suffer from the Holocaust, we
– only this instant from the boy. But my sister, she knew what was going.

Hamburg was a liberal city. I know I have a friend of mind who was from
Königsburg, and that sh – the parents sent him to **Hamburg**, because **Hamburg**
was more liberal. And he went to **Talmud Tora Schule**, which was the school for
the boys. And my sister went to the **Mädchen Schule**. And –

Q: Mm-hm, the school for the girls.

A: – yeah [**indecipherable**] we were invited by the German – city hall you can call
it, a-and my sister came from **Israel** and I came from here, and we visited **Mädchen**
Schule and there were paperwork for my sister, me s – playing on the **shoka**(ph)
there, and –

Q: Oh – oh, you mean a photograph of you playing on –

A: No, they ha – ha – a memory book with painting and all that.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: It was very interesting, yeah. So that's – it g – it – it brought it back to me. So –

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Q: So **Hamburg** itself, so you remember in your mind's eye the harbor. You remember your apartment.

A: We-Well, no, the harb – and the fi – funny thing is, there was a Jewish, famous Jewish ware – not – what do you call it? It's a big store.

Q: **Bertheimer(ph)? Bertheim(ph)?**

A: Well, I mean like – like a **Macy's** here, you know, and it was called **Tietz**.

Q: Oh yes.

A: And I-I – they had act – also a store in – in **Berlin**, which I didn't know. So when I came to **Germany**, I don't know, you know, after war, you know.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I ask people, young people, where's **Tietz**? They didn't know. Then I asked an older people that she knew, and she knew that there was a – that's a Jewish store, and they change it to **Alster**, or whatever you want to change it.

Q: Well, I remember in **Berlin**, there is a store that the hu – the biggest store, department store in **Berlin** –

A: Ye-Yeah.

Q: – was **KaDeWe**.

A: Yes, that was Jewish, yes.

Q: That was also Jewish, yes.

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A: Yes. I will – I got the information from **Stella(ph)** [indecipherable] **Stella(ph)**

Q: Yeah.

A: He mentioned that, yes.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yes, yeah. Yeah, so –

Q: And that was like **Harrod's**, it was as big as **Harrod's** in many ways.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: It has a food hall that was amazing.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. What did I want to ask you now? So, do you remember anything of your – o-of your surroundings in those first six years of your life? Do you remember your servants and your nanny?

A: Well, naturally they were Gentiles, you know, and I don't know, we had full time – I – I don't remember exactly. But the only thing which I remember is this Greek boy, he didn't want to play with me. And I didn't understand what the others were talking about. But I – I remember my – my mother tried to sell some of her furniture, because they had what they call a lift. A lift was like a container –

Q: Yeah.

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A: – to take to **Palestine**. So, I remember selling the merchandise, and put it in a container. The interesting was, my father had to leave before January 1936 to **Palestine**, because it was a law, th-the British [**indecipherable**] any doctor who came before the first can practice their medicine without going for a test.

Q: Without having to be reexamined.

A: Right.

Q: Yes, okay.

A: So, the whole ship, which was a Jewish – I mean, it was called **Tel Aviv**, the ship. And they were – the whole ship was full of doctors. So my – my wife and my sister and me were – stayed behind, in order to finish all the s –

Q: You mean your mother and your sister and you –

A: Yeah.

Q: – rather – yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is you stayed behind to finish it.

A: Behind to finish all the – you know, getting rid of all the stuff, you know.

Q: Do you remember the ship going to **Palestine**?

A: Yes, that I remember, yes.

Q: Tell me about that, what was it like? Was it huge, was it –

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A: Well, those days there were no huge ship. One thing which I remember to this day is we went to **Yugoslavia** – forgot the name. And that time there was war of Italian and **Abyssinia**.

Q: That's right.

A: And there was not enough coal for the ship, so the ship had to make a stop in **Yugoslavia** to get coal. So we got off the ship, and for the first time I saw Muslim, with – you know, the fu-funny looking, funny – I didn't like it at all. So I was crying, the ship going to leave, the ship going to leave. I want back to the ship. My mother was saying no, no, don't worry about it. Oh no, I have to go back to the ship. I felt very uncomfortable. And then we come back and so Mom, you see, the ship is still waiting for us.

Q: Yeah.

A: I remember that. I remember staying in **Trieste** for one night on the – in the hotel til we got the ship.

Q: It's a pretty city.

A: Yeah. I haven't been there, I mean, since I was a –

Q: You were a little boy.

A: Yeah, a little boy, yeah. **Split** was the name of the –

Q: Ah, yes.

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A: We went to **Split** in **Yugoslavia**, **Split**, yeah, yeah.

Q: That's right, in **Croatia**.

A: And so I don't really have –

Q: Were there other children on that ship, were there –

A: Oh yes – no.

Q: – was it filled with – was it filled with German Jews, or was it –

A: Yes, yes, yes. Well, the thing is, our neighbor, which was across the street, he was a doctor too, so he was in the same ship with my – my father. So we travel four children, sh – th-the two [**indecipherable**] and she had two children, we had two children, so it was four children.

Q: Mm-hm. And do you remember how long the trip took?

A: Well, first we had to go by train to **Trieste**. And we left on the – on the **vynastin**(ph) on the –

Q: On Christmas?

A: – Christmas, and I remember all the Christmas trees, in each station was Christmas trees.

Q: Also, you – you went by train from **Hamburg** to **Trieste** –

A: Yes.

Q: – in **Italy**.

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A: Yes.

Q: So you pretty much crossed **Europe** from north to south.

A: Oh yeah. Yeah, we went the **Brenner** tunnel, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And did you feel – do you remember any feelings that you had at that time?

Were you feeling nervous, were you feeling excited?

A: My sister was, because she was relieve getting out of **Germany**. To me it was
[indecipherable]

Q: No. Did she talk at that time? Do you remember her talking about friends who
didn't play with her any more, or any of her experiences?

A: Well, she went to a Jewish school.

Q: Ah, that's right, so it wouldn't –

A: So – so – so she didn't have that problem, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, but she – she was quite aware and scared what's going on, because she was
intelli – to realize what the parents, the others were talking about.

Q: Wow, a 10 year old, that's quite amazing –

A: Yes, yeah, why no –

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Q: – that there would be the – that she would be that sophisticated.

A: Well, she was intelligent [**indecipherable**]

Q: Yeah.

A: – so she knew what's going on, yeah.

Q: Okay. So – so the trip when the – you took a train from **Hamburg** to **Trieste** –

A: **Trieste**.

Q: – and then took the boat –

A: Yeah, to – to – to **Palestine**.

Q: – to **Palestine**. And it was called **Tel Aviv**, the boat?

A: No – yeah, the boat called **Tel Aviv**, was a Jewish boat.

Q: Okay. And do you remember, was it hu – were there hundreds of people on, or not that many?

A: Oh, I would say probably five, 600 people, yeah. It was not a small ship, no.

Q: And was all from **Germany**?

A: Well, probably most of the people were. This I don't know, wh-who – yeah.

Q: Yeah. And when did the – and the boat landed in where?

A: In **Haifa**.

Q: In **Haifa**.

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A: And **Haifa** was actually you can dock, but there was no room at the dock, so I know that they – they – they – when we were in the port, and we had to take boats.

And what I –

Q: Excuse me for a second, sorry. [tape break]

A: Okay.

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. **Joachim Baer**.

A: Right.

Q: Okay.

A: Interesting enough, the Arabs had a fun – funny pants to have like ventilation, it was si – I don't know if you ever saw it. And I saw those pants, I said, what's going on here? I really didn't like it at all. But – so finally we went with a little tent, a little boat and we got to the thing. And there was waiting ga – oh, well, I got confused because I had a Uncle **Gaoke**(ph) which was a brother of my – my mother, and he didn't look like **Gaoke**(ph) which I knew. This was the brother of my father, who was practically kick out, who had to leave **Hitler** in '33. He was on the – on the blue list they call it, or the black list.

Q: Black list.

A: Black list.

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Q: Why would he have been on the black list?

A: He had a big mouth.

Q: Ah.

A: And he was attacking **Hitler** [indecipherable]

Q: Crazy man.

A: Yeah, yeah. So, he was put on the black list. And this an interesting story, he had a partner in his business in **Berlin**. He was a Gentile, and he was like aristocrat. And he found out that **Gaoke**(ph), my uncle was on the black list and he tipped him off. So he just took a little suitcase [indecipherable] and went. And then it turns out that that **graf**(ph), or that aristocrat, the Nazi found out he tipped my uncle off, they put in concentration camp and got killed.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: So – yeah, so it's interesting.

Q: What a price he paid.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So –

Q: Did you have any other relatives that you left behind in **Germany**?

A: Well, my father's side, they all were Zionists, so they went to **Israel** before we went. But there was one uncle who was a communist. And he managed to get out to

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England as a butler. England they wa – were looking for a butler. So on the '39, he were able to leave the – to **England** as a butler.

Q: Well, that was quite late.

A: Yes, very late.

Q: And – and my uncle for my – my mother's side, he meant – he had a friend in **Columbia** and he got an affidavits to go to **Columbia**. So basically all my family was – survived the Holocaust.

Q: And your grandparents, had they been alive at that point, or –

A: And – one grandmother from my father's side, she went to – with her daughter, my aunt, to **Israel**, and the husband passed away before the Holocaust. And my grandmother from my mother's side, she came and lived with us in – in **Israel**, and her husband also survi – I mean, passed away before the Holocaust.

Q: This is an unusual situation.

A: Yeah, that –

Q: That you – that the – the larger family –

A: – the whole f – the – yeah, they all survived, right.

Q: Yeah. And tell me, when you were growing up then, in what town did you grow up in – in **Israel**, in **Palestine**, first?

A: Well, I had a hard time, was six years, just turned six year –

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Q: Yeah.

A: – and I have a hard time because new language, new way of life. And my father had a hard time to make a living, because – well, he knew Hebrew before, so there was no problem. He knows Arabic later on. But there were so many doctors. There were more doctors than patients. Herr doctor begets a doctor begets a doctor. So it's – so we really had a hard time to make a – the first year or two he eats – he ate up what he's – from the saving he brought from **Germany**, and then was the end.

Q: Yeah.

A: And we really had a hard time to ma – he claimed that he cannot – many doctors switched to another occupation, was a bus driver, whatever. He thi –

Q: That's very difficult on a person.

A: Yeah, that's what he claim. He is a doctor. That's all what he knows, and that what he can do. So we really suffer.

Q: You remember those days, huh?

A: Yes, it was very difficult.

Q: Was there tension between your parents because of this?

A: No, no, was [**indecipherable**] but we had a three room apartment, we had to rent one to release it, and then the one that I had, the sleeping room was also for the – for the **patsientin**(ph) for the –

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Q: For the patients.

A: Patient, and – and then a – I don't know, it's very – I don't even want

[indecipherable] remember is was, it was very, very hard time, yes.

Q: And it was when you were still growing up –

A: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: – as a – as a boy.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And at home was the lang – was your language German?

A: Yes, yes, because my mother didn't know anything, and my father knew Hebrew.

And so my mother, til her last day – I mean, she knew a little bit. But the whole thing, everyone – th-the grocery, whatever, they all spoke German for – and they called my mum – my mother **Frau** doctor. That's was very in – **Frau** doctor

[indecipherable], **Frau** doctor **[indecipherable]**

Q: Yeah, yeah, it makes a difference when you come from a society where that means something.

A: Yeah, yeah, and you know, she starts selling her jewelry, whatever she has, to make – to buy bread. I mean, it's was very difficult.

Q: Is this before the war, or even during –

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A: Well, wa – in 1939, well, then you had the – remember the war where Italian came and bombarded **Haifa**.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So this bomb coming down, wheee. It was –

Q: I had no idea that **Haifa** was bombed.

A: Yeah. Well, first the Italian one, now they were not too good. And then the German came, and they're –

Q: They're more precision.

A: Yeah. You see, there was a refinery, it was a horrible [**indecipherable**] very important and was a – a British base, you know, so – so it's [**indecipherable**] and i- it's – we really went through hell, I mean.

Q: Yeah.

A: Not he – I mean, not like Holocaust, you know, but still, well –

Q: But very difficult.

A: Yeah, specially my wife – my – my mother, who came from, you know, well-to-do, so to speak, and then she has to go to the market and schlep with the grocery to save few pennies, and it – it was very – it was hell, you know?

Q: And how many years did this last?

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A: Well, the biggest things came in 1953 - '54, **Adenauer** make arrangement reparation, and then the German money came in. So –

Q: So, it was a good 18 years –

A: Yes, and I –

Q: – that you – that you had a tough –

A: An-And also the old physician passed away, and retire, so suddenly my father was more busy, and then – and then so he make money, and then German money came in, so they – so they do okay.

Q: So then after that – but 18 years is a very long time.

A: Ob – 30s, yeah, it's – it's was – it was not easy, yeah.

Q: When you were in **Israel** and you were growing up, and the war started –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – do you – now you're a little older, now your eliv – 11 years old – well, first '39 is 10 years old, and so on.

A: Yeah. Well, I was 18 in 1948 when the Independence War came out.

Q: Yeah. But I would like to start before –

A: Okay.

Q: – when you're still a boy at – at 1939, and the – the World War II starts. What kind –

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A: Well, the thing is – well, the thing is, between '36 and '39 was a
[indecipherable] they call it. It was Arabs start attacking Jews.

Q: I see.

A: And was very unpreda – I remember someone came, and it was fully of blood, it was stoned by the Arabs, and you know, it's – we live inside a Jewish area. I mean, there was no Arabs living there, so we were, so to speak, safe, to speak. But there was tension of all those attacks.

Q: Attacks, yeah.

A: So bese – between economy and attacks, it was not pleasant. And in '39 came the World War II, with the bombs. And then – then I was 16 or something, sevent – they ca – they start approaching me to be a member of the **Haganah**.

Q: Excuse me for a second. **[tape break]** Okay.

A: Well, in 1944, I began **[sneeze]**

Q: Bless you.

A: I began the technical high school. In fact, it was expensive, so a friend of my father, who was qu-quite well-to-do, he pay for my tuition. And – and my sister til this day don't forgive me, because when she was 14 she had to go working. See, they had primary school eight years.

Q: Yes.

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A: And then, oh, you went to high school, or you went to – to go working. And she – went – had to go to work to earn some money.

Q: Yeah.

A: So –

Q: What did she do?

A: Well, she was working for the seamstress, and then she was working as a secretary, and you know, she –

Q: Did she ever finish higher education?

A: No, no, no. She went – she worked for a hospital as a medical secretary. In order to do that, she went to school to medical secretary. And – but si – til this day she doesn't forgive me, cause she was a intellect, she could have been a doctor just like that, she was very intellect – she is intellect, and I am not so intellect, so I got the [indecipherable] because I am the boy, and the girl didn't have to have, in the education, you know, that's the [indecipherable]

Q: I know, that's the old fashioned way.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: What did I want to ask? Did World War II, in some ways aside from the bombing, did it ever kind of come up in conversation as to what's going on in **Germany**, what's going on in –

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A: Oh yes, yes. In 19 – 1943, I was 13 years old, and my father author big speeches for my Bar Mitzvah. And in the Bar Mitzvah – I still have that – that thing, he mentioned that the Holocaust in **Europe**.

Q: Well, very few people knew, though.

A: Well, they knew, in 1943. And he talks about and – you know, and there's a – and he – I really have to go find his li – li – speech, it was very interesting. And the thing is, in World War II, naturally, we had American and Australian, and we had a lot of military people base in **Haifa**, in the area, in the camps, in the airport base. But there was no more friction between Jews and Arabs in World War II, that was stop.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: That stopped.

Q: And why?

A: Because the – the war, when they knew they cannot achieve anything, you know. But then it was the white paper, so to speak, in 1939. And I remember marching in the street against the white – white paper and all the others, so –

Q: Mm-hm. What was the white paper?

A: White paper say to limit immigration to Jews to 1,500 people a month, or something.

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Q: I see.

A: And so that's when the illegal **Aliyah** came.

Q: I see.

A: The people – I remember boats came and – and the **patrian**(ph) and they sank the boats, and so people got the – well, some hundred people got killed in that thing, what th – it was a lot of friction. So, you lived a daily friction over there, always something.

Q: Tense.

A: Tense, yeah.

Q: Sounds tense.

A: Tense, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah. And I remember walking on the street one day, probably 14 years old, and suddenly a British – some kind of mini truck or whatever it is, stop and he got off and say, where's your papers, to me. I gave him the paper, and I had my paper. But it was not pleasant, you know? And the reason they did it, because a lot of il-illegal immigrant came and if they didn't have their paper, they would send them to **Cypress** or whatever it is. So –

Q: And did these illegal immigrants also talk about what's going on in **Europe**?

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A: Oh yes.

Q: Or did news come from them?

A: Oh yes, I mean, let's face, I mean you know the story. There was a – a – a Polish priest, who he managed to get to **London**. I know this [**indecipherable**] and he told **Eden** –

Q: That's right.

A: – about. And **Eden** say yes, yes, yes. The thing is, **Eden** knew about it, because they had the teleprinter, and they were listening to the German conversation. So they knew what's going on, but they cou – he couldn't tell him that I know what's going on, but they didn't do anything anyway, you know? So it's –

Q: But you didn't know that at the time.

A: No, no, no, the – but they all knew in – in **Israel**, that's – that the Holocaust going on, they knew it.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's why **Hannah Szenes** was sent to **Yugoslavia** and – and they were talking about it. That's time they started very – getting the **Palmach**. And when I was a kid –

Q: The **Palmach** was an underground organization, yes?

A: Well, but it was sponsored by the Jewish agency.

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Q: I see.

A: And I was – was more in the kibbutzim when they got **mili** training, and then came **Wingate**, the – the British officer, who was very poor Jewish, and he trained them the night fight against the Arab and all that. But they approached me to join **Hagana** and I was not the type of fighting, so I di – I had a hard time to **[indecipherable]** but when we were in high school, we had m – po – military – you could call it military, mini-military training, you know, with a stick.

Q: And you si – when – did you learn Hebrew fairly quickly?

A: I had a hard time. I had a hard time, but in about a year I learned Hebrew, because first they send me to kindergarten to learn, and then I had – I had a very good teacher in my first grade. So I didn't miss any – any – because I went to first grade, and it was close to seven, but still good enough to be in th – in the six **[indecipherable]** so I really didn't lose –

Q: Any time.

A: – any – yeah, right.

Q: Yeah. But at home it was **alisov(ph) deutsche**.

A: **Alice(ph) deutsche**, yeah

Q: **Alice(ph) deutsche**.

A: That's what I speak in **Germany**, cause there's a **[indecipherable]**

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Q: And – and today, what do you spe – your wife, is she – is –

A: Well, my wi – [indecipherable] we got married in **Israel**, and my wife pick up the German from my mother. She knows a little bit Yiddish.

Q: Was she an Israeli, your wife?

A: No, she's an American.

Q: She was an American.

A: Well, that's a little more story. I was in the **Israel** Navy, and they sent me to **Washington** in 1952, because there was an opening for a technical [indecipherable] school in – in **Washington** southwest naval gun factory. And the reason they picked me out, because I was the only one who [indecipherable] technical high school, I knew English. And I had a hard time here [indecipherable] because the people in the [indecipherable] optical experience, and I had no experience, so I really had a hell of a time here. But I – I got my **C** and I survive. But I really had a hard time here. And there were anti-Semitism there. The-They didn't like Jews [indecipherable] I had a hell of a time, really. But anyway, so that's where I met my wife, here.

Q: I see.

A: And then she finished college and then she came to **Israel** and we got married there, and she learned from [indecipherable] German. So she can speak German,

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and she also had to pick up Hebrew. So she learned Hebrew and German. She is very intelligent, my wife.

Q: And – and now, between you, what is it, English?

A: We speak English, yes. But when the children grew up and we didn't want – want [indecipherable] we spoke Hebrew, right.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: That came – that was a [indecipherable]

A: But when we visit **Israel** to my parents, and it was German.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: So when did you leave **Israel**?

A: In 1956. The thing is, my – my wife was a single daughter – I mean the only kids.

Q: The only daughter.

A: Only daught – only kids. And they used drive us crazy, the parents, come back, come back, come back. And I wanted to study, so I went to **G.W.** here in **Washington**, and I study.

Q: What did you study?

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A: E-Electr – electrical engineering, but then my kids came along. So I figure out another two years, it's – it's too much, you know, to live, and they have to support me, I say that's – that's so – so I stop my – my – my study, and so – but we di – she was a teacher, so she could make good money, and I make some money, so we did okay.

Q: When did you go back to **Germany**? You mentioned that you –

A: Well, we were – well, in 19 – when – when my mother passed away, I went there before she passed away, about a week before she passed away, and she was told she got a health [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, so health – some – yeah –

A: Some compensation with health. She has a – so – so I went to **Hamburg** to talk to the lawyer. So that's when I first came to **Hamburg**.

Q: And that was in 19 –

A: I don't remember. Well, let's see, my – my daughter was supposed to have Bar Mitz – Bat Mitzvah. No, she was supposed to be 80, I don't know. I don't know, I don't know exactly. So anyway, so that's my first time I was by myself.

Q: Well, would it be like the 70s, the 80s?

A: Yeah, something like that. But then we were invited by the municipality to visit, and they pay for everything. And so – and my – my sister turned 70 in that year, so

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I told the German I want to celebrate my sister's 70 in **Germany** where she was born. So they say okay, so we both came to **Hamburg**.

Q: So that would have been mid-90s. 1995.

A: My sister is now – my sister is now 80 – 75, and that was 10 years ago. So, 10 years ago –

Q: No, now she would be 85.

A: Yeah, pushing 80 – no, no, no, no, she is going to be 85 in this year, in this year.

Q: Yeah. So it was seven – her seven –

A: Her 70th was 15 years ago, yeah s –

Q: Years ago. So 1995, something like that.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, right.

Q: And how did you feel when you were in **Germany**?

A: Well, I was – see, I [indecipherable] remember anything. So, my sister remember, and she show me all the places. And there is also a book who – it was written on the Holocaust survivor that her name is – and has a picture of [indecipherable] of my sister, and I'm a little boy there, in **Hamburg**. And she wrote three books about the Holocaust, she was the f – so sh – no, what was this – she – she wrote the three book, she lecture in Holocaust all the time. Name?

Q: It will come to you.

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A: Yeah, right, anyway, yeah.

Q: It will come to you. But – so your sister remembered things, but did you have any feeling at all, positive or negative? Did you feel at home when you heard German, or was it still in some ways **fremd**, strange?

A: Well, some people went to **Israel**, they didn't want to hear German, they were very –

Q: Of course.

A: – mad about German, they didn't want recuperation and all that. See, my father liked the German culture. He knew **Spinoza**, he knew **Schiller**, he knew all that culture of German. So he say well, this is Nazi, but it's German culture, so you cannot mix them up, you know. So –

Q: He sounds like a very wise man.

A: Oh yes, he was, he was, he was. And my mother didn't need any other language because every one her friends spoke **Germany**, the grocery spoke **Germany**, and also when she went to the bus, they knew all German, or Yiddish, you know, so she – there was no – but she tried to learn Hebrew. She went to school to Hebrew, but –

Q: It wasn't as successful.

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A: No, i-it was okay, but – but she didn't had no need for it, you know. And when they came to the – the patient came in [indecipherable] sit down and **Herr** doctor is gonna – it was okay, you know.

Q: And – but when you went back, being in this German speaking environment, did it – did it affect you in any way?

A: Well, on – I remember that on the bus there was a young teenager, the daughter of one [indecipherable] and the explanation was in German, and she told them, in our house they forbid to speak German and you – oh, here everything is in German, everything in German. So then, the next day, they brought the German student who spoke English and German, and he did the explanation in English.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah. So it was a resentment. The – one of the people that, at the end of the thing, there was a party with the mayor. And the – our spokesman say – he said that his father, like my father, had the **hakenkreuz**. And two of my brothers –

Q: A **hakenkreuz** is an iron cross, right –

A: Yes.

Q: – from World War I.

A: Yeah, right. In fact, two of my brother, they gave their life in World War I. And he [indecipherable] and say, we fought, Germans, our country and all that, and

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look what you guys did to us, you know, and he gave it to them. And naturally the – this was younger generation, you know. My father made one statement which is interesting. They say, why don't you go back to **Germany**? He say, how can I go back as a – as a physician, and th – my patient can be one of the [indecipherable]

Q: The – the – fe – one of the criminals.

A: Yeah. How can I treat as a doctor? I cannot do it, you know. But he was a Zionist anyway, had even – he didn't think about it, but some doctors from **Haifa** went back to **Hamburg**.

Q: After the war.

A: After the war. And they practi – what I think I couldn't understand is, when we were to the [indecipherable] of the Black Forest, that's where I met my parents, and there was people from **Israel**, who went to ho – went to –

Q: Excuse me. [tape break] Sorry. Uh-huh?

A: There was people who went from the concentration camp. The German government paid for their **holung**, for their treatment. But I couldn't understand, how can you go through hell, and come to **Germany**, and get treatment here? I couldn't not under – understand it. And then also we met one Gentile from **Hamburg**. And he said, oh, this building is caput, this one is caput. And I was

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thinking myself, good, that he went caput, but he, oh, caput, caput, caput, caput. So

—

Q: It's a — yeah.

A: It's a — now today you have only new generation, you know, so — but interesting, the guy in the — in the bus, which I mention, his — his grandfather was a Nazi. And he was very, very interesting about the Holocaust and what they did. And he really — that's why he had this job to translate, because he really wanted to have [indecipherable] Holocaust survivor, because he was inside, very, very disturb about it.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: So, that was interesting.

Q: This is in '95, when you were there with your sister?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Well, is there anything you would like to add to this, that you think is important for people to know?

A: Well, even I didn't go for the Holocaust, and even I didn't really knew too much about it, cause I didn't — it still in the back on — of you. You know, you went through all that hell, so to speak. Even was not hell, but it's there.

Q: Well, your life was affected by it.

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A: Yes, it's – someone asked me, what is the most in – who was – who – who – who affected your life the most? And my answer is **Hitler**. **Hitler** got me – in fact, when I came back to **Germany**, to **Hamburg**, and I wanted a money from them for the interruption of my education, I told them if I would live today in **Germany**, I would have been probably a doctor like my father.

Q: Yeah.

A: And you say, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah [**indecipherable**]. But I told him that. And interesting, I says, the Nazi, they didn't like to hear the word Nazi. They said **social** – they – the Nazi didn't – Nazi –

Q: Nats – **Nationale Socialiste** [**indecipherable**], yeah.

A: Yes, they didn't – didn't want me to say the word Nazi. So that hits me.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, anyway, I mean, you never forget about this period.

Q: Well, I think that what you bring up is something extraordinarily important.

Your father is the one that seems to have saved your family.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: You know, with a great deal of foresight.

A: Yes.

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Q: And yet, nevertheless, even though you were spared all of that catastrophe that others –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: – you had so many years in **Israel** where you struggled.

A: It was **Palestine** then [**indecipherable**] yeah, yeah.

Q: – and that's – in **Palestine**, in **Palestine**.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Now, during those 18 years, was your father a doctor the whole time, in good and bad?

A: In – in – in World War I, he was not a full doctor, he wa – he worked with the Red Cross. But he was more assistant, as he was too young. He was born in 1890.

Q: But what I'm talking about is from a – 1936 to 1954, when you had such a hard time, he never did any other profession, just doctor.

A: No, no, yeah. My – my mother – my mother had to – she was a good cook, so she had like a restaurant inside our little two room. The people came for lunch, and she fa – cooked for them for lunch, and – and we really struggle, you know, yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Well, that's also a legacy. That's also a legacy, it wouldn't have happened.

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A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: So –

Q: So – well, thank you for – thank you for sharing –

A: Okay.

Q: – your story, your – your memories.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview
with Mr. **Joachim Baer**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview