United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with John Lang
October 15, 2010
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with John Lang, conducted on October 15, 2010 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Arlington, VA and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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JOHN LANG
October 15, 2010

Question: This is an oral history interview, conducted with **John Lang**, on October 15, 2010. It is conducted by the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** in **Crystal City**, **Arlington**, **Virginia**. Welcome **John**.

Answer: Thank you.

Q: First off, what was your name at birth?

A: **Hans Ludwig Lange**.

Q: And can you spell those names, please?

A: **Hans, h-a-n-s**, which turned out to be **John**. **Ludwig**, which would be **Louie**, which was in honor of my grandfather. **Lange**, **l-a-n-g-e**, and when we came – when I came to the **United States**, I dropped the – the **E** for easier pronunciation and added an **H** to my name in honor of my father.

Q: And what was your – what is your date of birth?

A: 6-28-30.

Q: Okay. What were your parents' names?

A: My father's name was **Herman** and my mother's name was **Emmy**.

Q: And do you recall what your mother's maiden name was?

A: Yes, her maiden name was **Seelig**, **s-e-e-l-i-g**.

Q: Okay. Did you have any sibling?

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A: Yes, I have a sister.

Q: And her name is?

A: **Erika**(ph).

Q: All right, well, can you describe your childhood for me?

A: We had a very happy childhood. My father was a very productive merchant. We had a wonderful family life. My family was very active in our congregation, and our congregation in **Berlin** encompassed and really was the – the last of the giant synagogues that were built in **Berlin**. When I say giant synagogues, I'm talking about a synagogue that housed in excess of a thousand people. But it was the very last one that ga – its inauguration came about in 1930, the year that I was born, and it died, or was extinguished in 1938, on **Kristallnacht**.

Q: Do you recall the name of this synagogue?

A: Well, the – yes I do. The synagogues in **Berlin** were not named for a congregation whatever the name was. The large synagogues were named for the streets that they were on. And the street that – that my synagogue was on was **Prince – Prince Regenten Strasse**, **Prince Regent Street**. I was about 10 minute – less than a 10 minute walk from – from my home to the synagogue.

Q: What denomination was it? Was it Orthodox?

A: It was a lit – what we call in **Germany** was called Liberal. It had a choir, it had an organ, it had those things that Orthodoxy would not have smiled on.

Q: You mentioned that your father was a merchant. What was his line of business exactly?

A: My father had a – along with his brothers owned a wholesale – wholesale merchant of women's hosiery. I think that was really the main part of their business, and some other accessories in addition thereto. But mainly – mainly their business consisted of wholesale hosiery. Remember everything at – during those – those years was constituted by Mom and Pop businesses, and my father was a very successful merchant. And also, very sharing, very sharing a-as far as his willingness to share his good fortune with the community. My father also was a front line soldier in World War I. And he was active – he was – he was in the – he was very active in the congregation.

Q: So, I'm – I'm guessing that that means that your family didn't only go to high holiday services, they would – they would have practiced every week, or how – how did that work at the time?

A: I – I would – I would generally go t – with my father almost every Friday night to services. Maybe some once in a while on Saturday, but Friday night was a – a norm for us.

Q: What – what did your mother do during the day? Did she have a job, or did she stay at home?

A: My father – my – my mother was a home – a home-keeper, if that's the proper terminology. We had a – we had a beautiful apartment and my mother kept things flowing.

Q: You mentioned that your father was a successful businessman. Would you describe your family as middle class, upper-middle class –

A: Upper-middle class.

Q: Can you describe the apartment or house that you used to own?

A: Well, if I took you there I could tell you – show you exactly where it is, as I have taken members of my family. Unfortunately it's not standing any more. I can visualize the apartment in my head exactly. My – my room was towards the end – the rear of the – of the apartment building. I had a balcony, and – where I raised vegetables, tomatoes, occasionally flowers. We had a lovely residence, beautiful residence.

Q: Was this in the garden, the vegetables and flowers?

A: No, this – this was in a – on a – on the window box in – on the balcony.

Q: Do you recall how many rooms were in this house?

A: Substantial number of rooms, that's all I can tell you, I've no idea.

Q: Did your family have any housekeepers or –

A: Yeah, we had a – we had a – we had a housekeeper.

Q: Okay, any nannies, or –

A: Yes, I had a nanny. And a matter of fact, at home, I think we have a picture of myself dressed up as little boys were during that time period, with my nanny.

Q: Do you recall whether your nanny was Jewish or Gentile?

A: Definitely not Jewish.

Q: Do you remember going to school in **Germany**?

A: Yes, when my – my parents enrolled me in public school in **Berlin**, it was decided that's where I would go, and I lasted in that school for about maybe a day, maybe two days, three days, I don't know. Very, very quickly, I was beaten during that time period and – because the other boys asked me what I was, who I was, and th-the minute I said Jew, I was put to the test immediately. And my mother was called to school, she was told by the principal of the school that it would be best for my – my protection to be taken out of that school. So I – my experience of public school may have been extinguished then after one day, or – or two days at the most.

Q: Do you recall what year this was, was this first grade –

A: Well, would have been – it would have been 19 – roughly about 1936, I would imagine.

Q: Because you just mentioned that they had asked you who they were and you replied you were a Jew, I know this might be hard to answer, but did you have a sense that this was something you could talk about? Did your parents warn you not to say that you were a Jew, or conversely did they say that that's fine?

A: I think my parents tried to protect me by not saying much of anything. And I was never told what to say or what not to say. But I think I, from that experience, I learned rather quickly as to what I was, who I was. And I think my parents shielded me from all the discriminatory acts that had been ongoing in the mid-1930s. For example, I had an uncle of mine, a brother of my – of my – my mother, who was a very successful attorney in **Germany** and **Berlin**. And of course he was – you know, I found out later on why he wasn't working any more, because he was excluded from – from that possibility. But generally I would say my parents really shielded me up to that time period. That's about the best way I can – I can put it.

Q: So you said you were taken out of school almost immediately.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then what happened?

A: I was enrolled in a school, in a Jewish school with obviously, Jewish students, but not a religious school, okay? So, there were no – there – there was – there were no re – Jewish religious courses given. It was taking the regular curriculum within a

framework of Jewish teachers and – and just a framework of – of Jews – Jewish children.

Q: Do you recall some friends or friendships from that time?

A: Yes, I do. We – we get a – a bulletin from the municipality of **Berlin**, where I recognized a young lady – a young lady – a – a – a person's name, and I wrote to her, and she sent me back, she recognized my name immediately, and I don't know how, and sent me back a picture of our class, which was unbelievable. So yes, I – I-I think that's the – the only person that I – that I have recog – I have a memory thereof. When we – when we left **Berlin**, we had – when we – I should sa – correct this; when children were fortunate enough to leave school, to go out of the country in some fashion or other, we would all have little autograph books and we would sign off on a little note to that st – t-to that boy or girl. Maybe it was just putting our name and saying in German, best wishes for the future, maybe a little poem, maybe a little picture. But I do have a book like that at home, with about – the names of about maybe 15 to 20 different students, and – and likewise a – a number of teachers who – whose classes I attended, wishing me well.

Q: Since you went to a Jewish school, I suppose most of your friends came from that circle. Do you recall having any Gentile friends?

A: No, I don't – do not, no.

Q: What are your first memories of Nazis or Nazism?

A: I th – I think probably that experience in school was probably the – the – the first experience that I had at that point. My parents were no longer able to subdue their – their thoughts as to trying to shield and protect me. And I do remember very clearly that either with my father or my mother, I went to a grocery store nearby, and the – the merchant, the owner of that establishment, who knew my parents, looked at me with my blond hair at that time, and said, he doesn't look like a Jew. And that scared the hell out of me, because I knew what that meant. And then in 1938, obviously the – my father and – and I, every Sunday would go to a park that was like two or three minutes away from our home, and we would sit on the bench and my father would schmooze, if that's the correct word, with neighbors who would come by. And my father delighted in showing me off as – as his son, and – and then one day we could no longer sit on the park bench, we had to sit on a – on a yellow bench, which said, **nur für Juden**, for Jews only. And several times when we did that, we sat down, we were stoned.

Q: That means people threw stones at you.

A: Threw stones, yeah.

Q: How did your father react, what did he do?

A: My father always said to me, I always – I told my father the last time that I went to synagogue with him that I was afraid for my life. And my father said to me that he had fought for **Germany** in World War I, and nothing would happen to me, that **Germany** had had waves of anti-Semitism previously, they come and they go, and because of our – of our nature, of what my father has achieved, what he had done, he would protect me, and nothing would happen to us. Whether he actually believed that, I don't know. It di-didn't – after those words, while they were encouraging, I have to tell you that I honestly did not feel very much better.

Q: Do you remember a moment where you started feeling unease, or fear, or did it just build gradually?

A: It built gradually, and I – I think it gradually – and the – the – the heightened moment of fear was about a week or two weeks prior to **Kristallnacht**, when as I said, we went to – we, my father and I, went to services generally every Friday evening. And on this particular Friday evening, uniformed members of brown shirts, black shirts, call it whatever you want, uniformed Nazis, came into the front door of our synagogue, and threatened – threatened the congregation, threatened our rabbi, and our rabbi was magnificent in defending us verbally, and ultimately the Nazis retreated. And at that moment, as I said, when we walked home I told my

father I was afraid for my life. Then two weeks later, you know, we experienced **Kristallnacht**.

Q: I'm going to ask you about that in just a moment, but I'd like to get back to your nanny. You mentioned that she was not Jewish. Do you recall how long she stayed in your household, and when she would have to leave?

A: I – I think – by the time I was six years old, I did not have one any more. So my – my recollection of her are more – more photographic than – than anything that might have transpired between us. I will say this, that on **Kristallnacht**, my parents, by some fluke of miracles, were not with me. They were on vacation, and I learned later on that my father really, physically was not doing well. But they were not with us, and I was with my grandmother. My grandmother had a non-Jewish worker – servant in the house and I think – I certainly can recall that – that she told my grandmother that she needed to get out of the house because something – something was going to happen that evening.

Q: So what did your grandmother do?

A: Really nothing, except to – she was a very, very tight – tightfisted. **[knocking]**

Q: One moment. **[break]** You had said that you were with your grandmother on **Kristallnacht –**

A: Right.

Q: – and that one of the people who worked for her had warned her that she should leave the house, is that correct?

A: No, that – that she was going to leave the house.

Q: She was going to leave the house.

A: She was not – she was not going to stay all day, that – that she had some ideas that something of an – she wouldn't say what, and maybe she didn't even know, but she felt that she should not stay there all day, and left. And my grandmother was a very primped, starched lady, never smiled. You know, it's one of those grandmothers that – you know. And I experienced **Kristallnacht** in her hou – in – in her home. And unfortunately, her apartment that she lived in overlooked the synagogue, over – was – e-even though our synagogue was a block or two – I think one block away, I think we were on the floor where we could look and see the top of our synagogue. And I could see the – you know, I could see the fires bursting through the – through the roof.

Q: So, can you describe basically that day, and/or that night to me? What happened in the building that you were, and what were you seeing outside?

A: Well that – that night I – I was in my – my grandmother's apartment, I had a room that was mine, that was facing out in the street, that overlooked a block away that – what did overlook our synagogue. And during the night, two uncles of mine

came. One on my mother's side, who hid in a linen closet, one on my father's side, who hid underneath the bed that I was supposed to be sleeping in. And the only th – only thought wi – these are terrible thoughts to have – the only thought that I had, that if my uncle is found underneath my bed, should the Nazis come and invade the house, I would be taken also. So I really hadn't – had little – little hope that I would live through the night. I heard all the screams of the – of – of what was – what might be or what was going on in the streets below us. And – and every knock on the door, my heart – was everybody's heart in that apartment stopped – stopped running, because we all – always thought that maybe the Nazis would come to – to the door, break in the hou – break into the apartment, search the apartment and only – God only knows what would happen at – at that particular point. It was the most horrific night of my life. I have never, never, never experienced a night of fear, that I did on that night, never. And I remember it to this day, and I will remember it for the rest of my life.

Q: What happened in the morning, and did anyone end up breaking in that night?

A: No, we're – as luck would have it, there were no, other than neighbors just checking on us and so forth, and my two uncles, I said, who came to the door and sought sanctuary – shelter. The apartment was not broken into. The next morning, I left the apartment. I don't know how in the hell my – my grandmother would ha –

would have let me go, but she did. And I walked myself back to our home, which was maybe five minutes away, to see whether our home had been broken into – our apartment had been broken into. And what I – what I saw … indescribable.

Q: You were unaccompanied? You were alone?

A: I – unaccompanied.

Q: Did you go into the apartment?

A: No, I did not go into the apartment. I saw the door was closed, I saw there was no damage to the outside of the – of the apartment. But when I came out, we were just maybe a hundred yards away from a – from a square, and I – I've told my children this, there was a huge stain on the – on the pavement, on the – and one of the Nazis asked another one, what is that? And he said, that is the blood of a Jew. Every store in our – in our neighborhood that was Jewish owned had been broken into, had been vandalized, had been vandalized, not only broken into and – and – and – but it was painted Jew, star of **David**, and it was – it was the most – and – and people were cheering. That was the beginning of death.

Q: Were you still alone at this time on the streets?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Where did you end up going?

A: I think ultimately I went back to my grandmother's apartment.

Q: Did you find members of your family there?

A: No. My – my – in the meantime, I think my – my – my mother and father had called, because they had heard – I don't know where they were, but they were on vacation. They had heard what had gone on, and I think my grandmother told them to stay away and not come back from where they – and they did not come back for several days later on.

Q: How were you reu-reunited with an adult at that point?

A: Well, I stayed with my grandmother until my – until my parents returned from wherever they were.

Q: What happened when your parents returned?

A: For me it was just a continuation of fear. And I think – I think at that time, I think we – I think my parents showed fear for the first time as well. Openly. I'm sure they were – they were – they were in fear previously. My father, as I found out later on, had to take on a non-Jewish partner into the business, in order for the business to continue. And that happened maybe a year or two years even before that time. I didn't know the reasons for it, why someone else had to be taken in the business. But these were things that were kept from me, to shield me as much as possible from a family, a Jewish family, that was descending into hell.

Q: How soon after –

A: I do know – do know one thing. That during this time period, my father was always was – was cognizant of the need to help those that were less fortunate, that could not help themselves. And I remember on several occasions, my father would ask my mother to load up a bag of groceries, as me to u – to take some of my best toys, and he had a list of – of names of people that we would drive to, and we would walk up in the apar – to the apartment dwellings, and be greeted by name, sometimes just with smiles, and my father would always hand them an envelope, and I knew that that was mor – was money, and you know, these people were so thankful. And I'm sure none of them survived.

Q: At this point, were you still living in your apartment or house – at home?

A: Yes, yeah. Immediately after my – my parents returned, which was within days after **Kristallnacht**, I returned and we lived in our apartment until – until I left **Germany**.

Q: When did you first hear that you were leaving? How was the news broken to you?

A: Well, let me take you back in time a little bit. **Kristallnacht** was November 9th, 1938, and I don't know the reasons for it, but in – sometime in December of 1938, on a winter day, I was walking with my sister, not far from – from where our apartment was, and something within me, I lashed out – physically I lashed out at a

– at a member of the **Hitler** youth who was collecting money for whatever, whatever the purpose was, I have no idea, okay, for whatever the **Hitler** youth was collecting money for. And when I say lashed out, I'm talking about physically assaulted. And inflicted damage to the uniform, inflicted damage to that person. My sister dragged me home, told my – my – my parents. I guess they found out very quickly who it was, that individual that I had accosted. I cannot give you the reason for it, I don't know. And at that juncture, the – my p – my parents, my mother, contacted the parents of this individual. I can't even tell you whether it was male or female that I accosted, but I do know the individual was a good – good head taller than I was. That I can tell you. My mother promised to pay whatever damages they – they wanted to have for this incident not to be reported to the **Hitler** youth leader, which could possibly lead to my being taken away permanently. That did not happen, and a week or two later, I found myself with my mother. We went to what's considered a court in this – in this **Hitler** youth leader's home, where I was going to be judged one way or the other. Either I wasn't coming home, or something would happen. And I guess my mother gave me my life for the second time.

Q: Do you remember anything about that court proceeding?

A: Yes. Tha-That – I heard my mother screaming, crying, pleading, begging and myself sitting silently in an – an outside room, because I was not immediately in the room. I cannot tell you the – the words that were exchanged, but certainly the description I've given you is accurate, I know that it is. And then after a while, I was called into the room, and my mother said – I was told in advance that if I had the chance to apologize, to do so, and I apologized in the most profuse manner that I could, and my life was spared. My mother gave me my second life.

Q: What happened next? Did your parents get a sense that they needed to leave?

A: I think I – and again, here's where the guesswork comes in. An eight year old is not told too much, an eight year old, and maybe today they are, but in those times an eight year is told what to do and when to do it and how to do it. And at that point, I am sure my mother and father must have thought how they were going to get me out of – out of **Berlin**, and do it fast, before anything changes, before – before somebody in the **Hitler** youth group that had decided – by the way, my – my parents, my mother dis – paid a – a very substantial fine, I was told – before someone changed their mind. I think that – my guesstimate is that I got onto the **Kindertransport** list possibly a little faster, and maybe I got onto the list at all because of – of this terrible incident. And I left – I left **Berlin** sometime in –

towards the end of January. So roughly about a – within four weeks after this – after this incident, I was out of – out of **Berlin**.

Q: What were you told, where were you going to be going and why?

A: Well, we had – we had had papers to come to **America** for some time, except that they were taken out rather late. My – my parents, or my mother had a third or fourth cousin living in **America**, somebody who I'd never met, somebody whose name I'd never heard of before. But anyway, they had given us the affidavit to come to **America**. What was lacking to come to **America** was the quota number, because my parents, my mother, my father, I guess, always believed to the end that things would not get to that point in time. So we – we had the affidavit, but no quota number to come to **America**. Had we stayed and had I stayed in – in **England –** or had I stayed in, excuse me, had I stayed in **Germany** for my quota number to appear from the American consulate there, I would have been dead. So I went to **England**, and my – my – my family did have – did have – we did have family in – in **England**, but I was bounced around all over the place in – in – in **England**, including I lived with a wonderful Christian family in a small town about two and a half hours north of **London** for about half a year or so, and went to church with them. They shared what they shared with – whatever they had they shared with me. They were wonderful, caring, giving people, and only a year ago, did I lose contact

with – with that family. We would exchange Christmas cards or Thanksgiving cards, and it was only last year that I finally failed to get a card, and that – as a matter of fact, only recently, I wrote to the ca – the municipality, asking whether they had any records as to what might have happened to this, you know, person of that – of that family. So I'm – I'm very, very grateful. And you should know **Kindertransport**, I mean, people tell you, **Kindertransport** came about because of a group of Quakers persuading Parliament to take action, and – which – that allowed 10,000 un-unaccompanied children to enter **England**. So Christians have been very, very good to me, and I have a great love and admiration for – for Christians. And to this day, where I participate in a lot of Christian activities.

Q: We do want to hear about your time in **England** and exactly how that unfolded, but let's go back a bit to the **Kindertransport** itself. Do you recall the date?

A: End of January, or – and it – when I say end, roughly of – I've tried to look that up several times. To the best of my abilities to come up with records, it looks like the third week in January. That's why I said roughly about a month after this terrible incident, which was an act of sheer stupidity on my part. It wasn't bravery, it was stupidity that could have cost me my life. I – I should have wound up in **Theresienstadt** or in one of the – probably in that camp, and – and that only the love of my mother pleading kept me from that.

Q: Do you recall the train itself?

A: Yes, I remember standing on the platform in – in **Berlin**, on the **Hauptbahnhof**, and that – and the – the – the Nazi official calling out the list of names. And I remember that my name was not immediately called on the first go-round. All the other names were there, and I started to cry, because I knew down deep in my heart, that if I didn't get out, it would cost me my life. Now that's a hell of a thought for an eight year old to have, but those were my thoughts. And – and I cried, and my mother and father who I re – I already separated from, they were standing on one side, and I was on the other side, we had already had our goodbyes. And my mother said, he doesn't want to leave us. And I didn't have the courage to tell her that the reason I was crying because my name wasn't – was not on the list, and my life wasn't going to be saved. And then the second go-round, my – my name was called. Yeah, it was – it was a horrendous – horrendous day at a train station, parents and children were – were kissing, hugging. Most children would never see their parents; I was fortunate to some degree, but nevertheless, whatever the circumstance was, for the child and parent, it was traumatic. Absolutely traumatic. What – what parent today would part with their seven, eight year old, nine year old, 10 year old, no, doesn't really matter. And say, and realize that it might be the final goodbye hug or kiss that they would – would receive. Train – train went to – went to **Holland**. We

sat – I remember sitting on – I should tell you, I – we were allowed – **Kindertransport** told us that – that each child could bring along one specified size suitcase. I should tell you about two weeks before that time, my father took me to the leading store in – in **Berlin**, and bought every suit that he could – that I had an eye on, and he was going to deck me out in as many suits and coats and jackets as he could find, and – and ultimately it was all reduced down to nothing, because all those things had to be left behind.

Q: Did they have to be left behind before you packed, or was it somehow on the train –

A: Yes, yes, this all had to – the train – the only thing we could take on the train was one small suitcase, that was it. Whatever fit in that suitcase was fine, but seven or eight suits were not going to fit into that suitcase. So – but my father always wanted to do the best for – for – for me, all the time.

Q: Once you're on the train, what was happening? How many kids were around you?

A: I – I would s – I would say – well, the train – we – we sat in a – each – ea – the train was sectioned off with little compartments, and each compartment had maybe six or eight chil – six or eight people, in this case children, in the compartment. And all I can tell you is that I think we all sat stone-faced, afraid to say a word, either to

each other, or to anyone. We were told to be as quiet as possible, not to say anything, not to say anything at all. And it wasn't until we crossed the border into **Holland** that some words were said to – between each other.

Q: So you were aware of the border crossing?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Do you –

A: And we were aware at that point before – before – obviously before the train left **Berlin**, and the train, in going across the border at that – at both junctures, Nazis came on, and – to inspect our – our documentation. Which was also a terrible moment because God forbid they'd saw something that we were unaware of, that might cause you to be pulled off the train. Which did not happen, to the best of my knowledge, but that thought was always with us.

Q: What happened once the train was in Dutch territory?

A: I don't know where – ultimately we were given food. We were g – we – we were given food and hot chocolate, and it was welcomed. The ultimate port that we went to, I can't tell you the name. And we then embarked o-on – some people may call it a ferry. I call it a terrifying boat ride across the English channel. Terrifying because the waves, and I think everybody got seasick. But terrifying only from – from the

physical aspect of – of crossing water, by crossing a – a rather – I would say – not a dangerous body of water, but certainly a body of water that was not smooth.

Q: Do you remember arriving in **Britain**?

A: Yeah. From there – from – again, I don't know the – the name of the port that we arrived at, but from there we took a train to **London**, and where we were welcomed by lots of individuals, organizations, people. You know, little bit of normalcy crept into – there wasn't any normalcy in our lives, none.

Q: Di-Did you know anyone on the train?

A: No, nobody. I should say – or, I ta-take that back, my sister was on the train. But I don't remember whether she sat with me in my compartment. I don't know.

Q: We haven't spoken about your sister yet, was she – is she older, younger?

A: Yeah, she's seven years older. So as far as I'm concerned, my sister was a – and I'm not denigrating, or talking down about my sister. But my sister was a person that I really had little relationship with as I was growing up, because she was a completely different age group than I was. So my sister was a – a sister in – in name, but not in actuality, if – if – if – if I can say that a – openly and honestly.

Q: So the two of you tra-traveled together to **Britain**?

A: Correct.

Q: And you disembark.

A: Right.

Q: Are you at that point together, are you being separated, what happens?

A: Separated, but I can't tell you where – where my sister went. I do know that for a time period, I was fortunate enough to – to live with an uncle of mine for a short period of time, and – and then I got moved around, and ultimately I wound up in – as I said, in this town called **Kettering**, in – two and a half hours away from – from **London** as – as war – war came to – to pass. And before – before – just before war – war broke out, my parents were able to come extricate. The – the interesting thing is **[indecipherable]** terrible thing for me, is that I had a very close, loving relationship with my father, and – and I never heard from my father during this whole time that I was in **England**. And – and at that point I thought that my father had a – had abandoned me, that – and no longer wanted me, and I felt completely a – completely abandoned. And it was only later on that I found – found out that my father had suffered a very severe stroke within days after my leaving, and was unable to communicate, write, do anything. And my parents got out of – got out of **Germany**, I would say, just weeks before the – before the war started. I lived with them briefly when – up until the time that war broke out, and then I was moved, as I said, to – to this community up in – in northern **England**.

Q: Okay, so I – I would like a little more information on this part, because it seems that there's a lot – a lot of details going on. You get to **England** some time at the end of January, is that correct?

A: Correct.

Q: War breaks out in September.

A: Right.

Q: So there's a-about seven or eight months, and at first you're with an uncle.

A: Right.

Q: Is that right?

A: Correct.

Q: And then you get moved around a few times, but you do end up in one place for most of the time?

A: Well I'm – I'm – I'm – mainly I'm with – I'm really with my uncle in th – in their residence, but mentally, I really – mentally I'm totally confused. I don't know whether I'll ever see my parents again. Living with an uncle is not the same as living with – with – with parents. I had nobody that I could – could talk to, and – and I would – I remember – I'll tell you one quick incident. I remember one afternoon I was so distraught that I went to a nearby park and I sat down and I start to cry. I didn't know what the hell else to do. And a – an English lady stopped, with

her – with her little – little daughter, maybe two or three years even younger than – than me, and asked me – cause I couldn't speak English very well at that point, cause nobody gave a damn whether I learned the English language or not – asked me what was wrong, and in my halting English I explained to her that – how – how lost I was. And that was – she was the first person that – that offered a shoulder to – to cry on, and – and gave me some hopeful encouragement. And when she – when she left, she put a couple of coins in my hand, which I thought was so gracious, and so nice. It was the first person that really showed that they – they really did care. So most of that time, I was with my – lived in my uncle's home. I was moved around from school to school, I can't tell you why. Nobody really gave me any – any real instruction on the English language. We were told to be quiet, not to – not to complain, not to speak German loudly or anything like that. And weeks before the war, and maybe – maybe a month or so before the war broke out, my parents were able to extricate themselves from – from **Berlin**, came t – came to e – to **England**, and I moved in with them for a short period of time, maybe weeks or a couple of months, until war broke out and it was decided that I would be evacuated, as it was called, to this country – country place. And I stayed there until – I stayed there for at least six months' time, came back to **London** under very unfavorable

circumstances, because at that point, my father had suffered a second stroke, and was in the hospital, and I knew that there would be no hope for him.

Q: During those eight months when you were separated from your parents, you said that you weren't getting any news of them, and you later found out that your father had suffered a stroke. Do you know why your mother was –

A: My mother wrote – my mother wrote to me, and it was – it was very pleasant, very nice. But I had the – it's not that I did not appreciate words from my mother, I certainly did. But not hearing from my father led me to believe that my father wanted to ba – had abandoned me and did not want to talk to me any further. And I – and I wrote back to my mother several times, what I – what had I done to deserve that, when I always cared and loved my father.

Q: How did your parents get out?

A: We had – as I said, we had documentation, we – we had the affidavit to come to **America**, the family did, but nobody – but the visa number we did not have. And somehow, **England** took my parents in as transients, knowing that they would not stay there for a prolonged period of time. Wer – you know, how long that time period might be until their – until their quota number was called, or whatever the circumstances were that would allow them to travel on to **America**. And that's the –

that's the way that my parents were able to convince the authorities for them to exit **Germany**, **Berlin**.

Q: Do you know what they were doing – oh, first of all wer – where were they, were they in **London –**

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: – when they arrived? Were they working?

A: Yeah – no. My father – my father – as I said, my father had been recovering from a stroke that he had – that he had suffered, and my father was no longer able to work at all. My mother had no – without saying anything adversely about my – my mom, had no skills. Had no skills. As most – as most German wives, who were good wi – good wives, home – home-keepers, homemakers to their husbands and their families, but they really possessed no – no real skills, and females in the working place was not something that was a common occurrence in – in that time period.

Q: So your family at this point was staying with your uncle?

A: My – what my uncle did was, my uncle paid for – for us to have an apartment, a separate apartment.

Q: And at one point – and this is afterwards, you're being sent away to the countryside, is that correct?

A: Correct.

Q: D-Do you know how much time elapsed between your parents arrival and you – you being sent away.

A: I would say se – only several months. Maybe a month or two months, because a – they only came shortly – they only arrived in **England** shortly before the outbreak of war, and I was evacuated out of **London**. I'd say I was evacuated out of **London** relatively quickly. I can't tell you how quickly, but relatively quickly. And I will s – will say that – that I missed – I missed **London**, I missed not – not being in touch with my – my mother and father, even though my mo – my father was no longer physically well. And I really wanted to get back to – to **London**, and ultimately, after six, seven months I guess, being – being in the countryside, it was decided that because I really wanted to come back, even though **London** at that time was really being bombed. We had five, six, 700 bombers overnight. I mean, I can remember the nights, one night after the other, was worse than the other one. And I was back in – in **London**, and shortly after I was back, my father suffered his second stroke and that was debilitating, that was the end.

Q: When you were sent away to the countryside –

A: Right.

Q: – what were you told, why was this being done?

A: That is – is being – it was being done for my safety and well-being, because everyone feared that **London** would be bombed, and that – and children – it was very common for children at that time to be evacu – as we call it, evacuated. I can't tell you whether – whether – how I got evacuated, whether it was with my school or my class, I have no idea. But it was a common occurrence for large groups of – of English kids to be evacuated.

Q: At that point were you placed with a family, or was it an institutional situation –

A: I was – and – when I was –

Q: Evacuated.

A: – I was placed – all I know – remember, somebody walked around with – with boys and girls, somebody knocked on the door, that person would knock on the door of a home and say, we have a boy, or we have a girl, or in this case, we have a boy, he needs a home, and a – and a family took me in. A very proper, straight-laced English family. Looking back on that, I don't know anybody else, coming back to if that would be here today, I don't know whether – whether a family here today would do what this family did for me.

Q: By that time, what – what was your command of English like?

A: Poor. I – I hadn't – there was nobody giving me any English instruction. The only English – the only English that I had was picking up a word now and then, and

maybe I'd string two or three words together and make myself understood. And there were – there was nothing –

Q: Did anyone react to the fact that you were foreign, and especially that you were from **Germany**?

A: No, I-I'd say in – in the – in this particular town – village, as I call it, everyone treated me extremely kindly, extremely fairly. I will tell you one – one incident in **London** that I'd experienced. In prior – in the – in the morning we'd kind of congregate outside of – before going into the building, and I was constantly being called a – a dirty Nazi. And by – by the boys, and that – that was all right, I – I was, you know, at that point I was able to – that flowed off me like water off a duck's back. And one day, a – a – there was one other Jewish student in the – in that class of mine, and I guess he didn't – he felt that he wasn't getting his licks in on me, and he called me a dirty Jew. And he probably regretted that, because his face was a bloody mess within – within less than a minute. I picked him up in my arms, and I said, **Raymond**, you were supposed to be my friend, and I threw him down on the floor and never spoke to him again. And no one ever picked on me again either, that was the end of it.

Q: This was once you had returned to **London**, is that correct?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Now, in this small town in the – in the countryside, do you know whether people knew you were Jewish?

A: Oh I'm sure they had to know. They had to know because the people that I was with, being that – that I couldn't speak English very well, they were told – they knew that I was Jewish, and I'm sure they, you know, when – when – when their neighbors asked who I was, I'm sure they explained – they c – explicitly, who I was. There was never – never a word said against me at all.

Q: So you arrived back in **London**.

A: Right.

Q: What happens next?

A: Well, the blitz is on, you know, the blitz is on within – within, I'd say within – I was going to say days, but it might have been within weeks of my return to **London**, my father suffers the second stroke, he's taken into hospital in the middle of the night, and I knew that it was a terrible night, because I remember what was – I wasn't told what was happening, but I knew what was happening, and I knew that would be the last time that – that the day before was the last time that I would have been able to speak to my father. He was paralyzed on one side, he had lost – he had no sight, he had no speech. I mean, I wasn't told it was the beginning of the end, or the end was – I knew that was – was a matter of wha – only time.

Q: Where was your sister during these months?

A: I can't even tell you.

Q: Was she there in **London** at that point?

A: Yes. I can't tell you, I don't know. Maybe – maybe my world – my world was so insular, if that's the proper word, that – that – that I really had no – no real thoughts about anything. It's cruel to say it, but my thoughts were, you know, what am I gonna do the next hour, tomorrow and so forth.

Q: Do you recall the bombings?

A: My – my – my parents, I should tell you, that my parents, in going back to **Germany** took – actually my mother and my fa – my – my – my mother and my sister, in retrospect, took English lessons in **Germany** during the last maybe six months or so in ninet – of maybe –in – in the beginning of 1938. They would always close the door to the – to the living room, or they wou – the room where the – where the English teacher came, and I was told it was not for me to know what was going on. I was e – I was excluded from certain things, and that's – you know, that's a common occurrence. But a couple of English words wouldn't have hurt me. I did not learn – I really did not learn English – did not learn to speak as well as I might until I came to **America** and that – I started going to the movies and I would listen to **Spencer Tracy** and **Clark Gable** and – and **Henry Fonda**, and I would

mimic their words, mimic they – the way that they pronounced words. When I came out of the – th-the movie theater, I would try to remember the words that I'd heard, that some which I did not know, and – many which I did not know. And when – when I went to school the following Monday, I would try to memorize those words from the movies, and – and then I would look them up in the dictionary. So I learned – I-I would say my – my prime teachers for the English language were the stars of the – of the 1940s, and the best of them.

Q: So you said you were in **London** during the blitz –

A: Yes.

Q: – is that correct?

A: Yeah.

Q: And that's when your father passes away?

A: No, he didn't pass away. He's – my father lingered for a long time, a long time. I would say from some time in – sometime in 1940 to 1941. So I'd say my father was par-paralyzed, incapacitated – totally incapacitated during this whole time period, and did not pass away until I would say maybe three, four months, five months after I came to **America**. And then one day my aunt told me that she had to sit down and tell me something rather seriously, and I knew already what it was, and it wasn't a great big shock, even I was, at that time I was – I was 10 years old. You know, it

was – it was sad news for me, but what was sad really was – the saddest moment for me in **England** really was separation from my father, because at that point when – when I was supposed to come to **America**, I was taken to the hospital. And my father could understand, but he couldn't talk. My father was told that I was going to **America** the following day, and this would be the last time that he would – that I would be in his presence, or that I would be able to see him. And … my father placed his hand on my – on my head. I didn't know what that meant, and – and I didn't have – eight, nine year olds, 10 year olds, don't ask anything, we just listen. And then, when I was 13, I was Bar Mitzvahed in **New York**, and a rabbi put his hand on my head, and I knew what my father was doing. That probably was the saddest day that I had in **England**. And my mother came to **America**. My mother stayed in – in **England** with my father obviously, to the end, which was maybe a half a year or so after I came to **America**. At that time, even as I came to **America** on a ship – and I have the – the boarding pass still at home, and I even have a picture of the ship which one of my assistants dredged up for me from the internet. That was a ship that took me from **Liverpool** to **Montreal**. Took about 10 days, 10 - 12 days. We were in a convoy for about the first two or three days. We were a relatively modest sized ship, passenger cargo ship. Had a – as I said, a convoy for the first two or three days' time, which you – where you felt relatively safe, because

the destroyers were throwing depth charges around, and you never knew whether they were firing at somebody – something in reality, or just as a – a precaution. And then maybe on the the third or fourth day, the convoy was gone, and you were alone. And there you were in the north **Atlantic**, and as I found out later on, maybe only 30 or 40 percent of the ships that sailed on the north **Atlantic** during that time period actually got through. I was de – certainly much aware of the fact that the chances of getting through were – were at best 50 – 50, and a life jacket was something that was on me continuously, but hell, if that ship was torpedoed, I knew that we were gone, all of us were gone.

Q: So I'm very interested in exactly what you knew at the time as a child, and going back to when you're still in **London**, how was the decision made that you were able to get to **America**? How much did you know in advance that you were able to – to do this and where were you spatially, were you still living at your uncles? Were the bombs coming down, did you need to go underground? Can you describe that for me?

A: I'm going to take it back to **Kristallnacht**. I was eight years, eight and a half years old on November eighth. On November ninth I was 18 years old. I had peripheral vision at that point. I could see what was going on. I had fear built into me. There wasn't anything that I was not prepared to do or see. So I did not – I was

not any more – and I don't want to use the word normal, I was not normal any more at that time. And there was – you know, I – I could – I did things – I'd experienced life as no other eight year old ever had, and as a result was able to cope with life on my own in a way that no eight, nine or 10 year old ever would. During the time period of the **London** blitz, I was with – I lived with my – with my mother and father, and it was my – there was – the blitz started every – every evening, every night time from – from as soon as it got dark, til early in the morning, four or five hours of intense bombing. It was unbelievable. As I said the – you know, you could hear the – the roar of the planes, it was – it was frightening, it was dreadful. In the morning you could see the glow, you could s – buildings would shake around us. You could see buildings that had been b-bombed out, you could see fires on the street. All the – all the wreckage – the only thing that was not wrecked was the spirit of the **London** people, who always remained calm, and had their brooms in hand to tidy up the best way they could. They were – they were miraculous. Absolutely miraculous. Once in a while we did s-sleep in the – in the underground, which was deep underground. Underground being subway, but which protected us from – from bombs up above. And once in a while – actually I remember one day when I went to school, that the air raids started in – in the day time, and that was unusual because most of the bombing runs, the air raids started in the – in the early

evening. And at that point I was in a bomb shelter from early in the morning to middle of the afternoon. I rushed home, and within an hour later, I was back in the bomb shelter. So I spent maybe 20 hours that day in various bomb shelters. So I don't get too excited any more about people saying that you know, you don't know – you don't know what it like – what it's like being bombed, I certainly do know what it's like. And I do know what it means to have four or five, six, seven, 800 planes overhead in **London**, bombing the – the **[indecipherable]** city to daylights. Was unbel – unbelievable. And then one – one day I was told by my mother that – that my papers had – that our papers had come due to come to **America**, and I gather they came due faster than – than people had thought. Because basically, people were being eradicated, or people were not able to leave **Germany** because of the war, they had – they – they might have had papers also, or they were in concentration camps now, and as a result our – our number – our quota number came up somewhat faster than – that had been an-anticipated, and say my – our quota number came up in September, October of 1940, and that's when I exited from – from – from – from **London**. And my mother would have been free to go, had she decided to – to – to – but she wasn't going to leave my father there.

Q: How long did it take to cross the **Atlantic**?

A: I would say somewhere between 10 and 14 days. It was a – it was quite a voyage, quite a voyage. And as I said, the – the lifejacket, this cork lifejacket, bulky, was part of – part of my – my attire. Almost tha – or certainly all day, and at night it was always right there for me to wear. But it was frightening as all hell to think that – that death would await us in the water, which it certainly was a – a great possibility of that happening. Ships were being torpedoed left and right.

Q: Were you many – were you one of many children, or were you the only unaccompanied child at that point?

A: My sister was on that ship. How many passengers on the ship, I have no idea.

Q: So at this point your sister is 17?

A: Yeah. My sister's always seven years older than I am, okay? If I am 10, she's 17, if I – she's always – she always is ahead of me, and as I said, there is no relationship per se, between a 10 year old and a 17 year old. It's a – it's a different element.

Q: Did you know where you were going?

A: To **America –** yes I did. I knew that we were going, that this cousin, this third or fourth cousin who I had never heard of before, who was kind enough to – they came to **America** from **Germany**, roughly about 1935 – '36 from what I was told, and had settled in **New York**, they had given my parents the affidavit to come to

America. And that's where I was bound for. So I landed in **Montreal**. I should tell you when we – when I – the 10 hours or so, six hours prior to landing, somebody – somebody said, it smells differently. And it does smell differently on the water, when land is nearby. And ultimately somebody said, land. And you couldn't – couldn't believe the cheers that went up from all the people on deck. And of course me, being the internal pessimist said **Jesus**, ships can get torpedoed just as easily fro – you know, five or six hours away from shore, than – than – than out on the – further out on the waters. And ships actually were torpedoed closer, I found out later on. And we – we went to – to **Montreal**, exited the ship in **Montreal**, took a train from **Montreal** to **New York**, and we – we was welcomed by my uncle and aunt, as I said, third – third or fourth cousins, who welcomed me to **New York** and tried to, you know, who accepted me, who – who cared – who had no other children, who cared for me. They had very limited means. My – my uncle was – these – these people had a – a small dry goods – they had a successful dry goods operation in **Germany**, I'm not quite sure where, I think in **Stettin**. And came to **America**, realized what was happening, and my father – my – my uncle rather, became an elevator operator, local **32B**. And ran an elevator in a – in a freight building. My aunt did something that you probably don't even know, called piecework. Wa – were – meaning that she embroidered sweaters. And I would help

her to embroider these sweaters, and a result, at the end of the week I would get my dime allowance, and I would spend that on the movies. And after I felt a little bit sure of myself, I would use some of that money for a comic book. And I graduated from – once I – once I mastered the art of comic books, I then graduated to real books, and that's how I learned to read, write. I had some wonderful teachers in – in **New York**, the first school I went to, who decided I would – should go back a grade, should be set back so I wouldn't have the pressure to perform. I-I was – I did that for about oh, several months' time. And then they decided I was ready, language-wise, skill-wise, and they moved up – moved me up to grade level. And I've – we moved into a – an area of **New York** called **Washington Heights**, which many ca – many people called what the – the fourth or fifth Reich, because there were so many Germans – German Jewish people living up in that area. And then I got moved around.

[break]

Q: So, was your sister put in school?

A: No, my sister obviously at that – that time, I think, to the best of my knowledge, and the best as I recall, my sister became a – a – an au – au pair, not a domestic, an au pair in a family somewhere in mid-town, and took care of a – a child for that family. And she did that immediately upon coming here.

Interview with John Lang
October 15, 2010

Q: What was **America** like for you? What does – what did it seem like?

A: Well, **America** was very scary for me, it was – it was a-adjusting to a – a brand new environment. Give you another – another aside. Obviously I-I gravitated to some children, Jewish children that were in my school to play with after – after hours. You know, we play on the street and play some games. And that happened for about a week or two – two, and those children, those boys asked me how – who I was and told me – asked me about something about my background. And I told them very freely and o-openly where I came from, what I had experienced, the war, and so forth and so on. And one of them said, well why don't you come up, my – my parents would like to meet you. So I went upstairs to their apartment, and spoke to the parents, father, and again I repeated, you know, my – what we had gone through, and what life was like. And the next day the boy came to me and said, my father doesn't wish – wish me to play with you anymore, because your stories are not believable, and they're too dark. And from that point on I gravi – I stayed away from Jewish children altogether. And my best friend during this time period, that was **New York**, before I moved elsewhere, was a Methodist family, who almost adopted me. Took me wi – on – I lived with them after school, and observed holidays, they bought gifts for me at Christmastime. They made me feel as part of the family. They were Methodists. And again, non-Jews had more compassion for

me than Jewish people. And that Jewish people here in **New York** could not have it, could not find it in their hearts to believe what I was talking about, I found it indescribable. It – it really was destroying to me. But I said at that point in time, I would not – I would not play with a Jewish child again, period.

Q: When did your mother come over to **United States**?

A: Well, after about – living here in **New York** for about, I would say maybe eight, nine months or so, my aunt and uncle here in **New York** had a rather small apartment, and actually my – my bed was a collapsible one that was set up in the kitchen. And it became more and more difficult for my aunt and uncle to take care of me, I think financially as well. And an uncle – another uncle of mine, during this time period had – had gone – had emigrated from **Berlin** to **London** and then from **London** to **California**, and it was decided that I would move to **California**. And I did something that probably no 10 year old had ever done before, and probably never will, I flew – my uncle paid for me to fly to **California**, and th – and to fly to **California** in the year 1940 was a – was something, very, very, very exceptional. Took about almost 18 hours to fly to – from **New York** to **California**. My uncle, as I said, had been a successful lawyer. He had a very lovely apartment in – in **Los Angeles**. I was enrolled in school in **Los Angeles**. My uncle had a – had some wonderful, well-to-do friends. I learned how to live a little bit again, I learned how

to smile again, a little bit. My – my uncle was – was a – had a great love of classical music which I – which I – not adopted, but which came off – which rubbed off on me, which I also, I think received from my father, going back in time. He too, had a great love of classical music. And – but I did learn something in addition to that. I learned how to live – I learned how to talk with people, and I learned something about finance in my – in that early age, because I – my – my uncle would be glued to the – to the – to the radio every afternoon to listen to the outcome of the financial markets. And from that, I would listen to my uncle with – with bated breath, as to what was going on in the financial markets – didn't understand it that well, but became very interested in it, and I believe because of that interest, it undoubtedly sparked my further interest into seeing what went – what was out in this – in this world, which had served my uncle so well, and which ultimately has served our family well, because that – that became my profession.

Q: At this point you were living in **California**?

A: I was living in **California**.

Q: Where?

A: In **Los Angeles**.

Q: How long were you there?

A: I would say maybe a – also another – a year, a year and a half or something like that. Probably a year and a half.

Q: And at this point –

A: I went – I learned – I learned what a hamburger was, I learned what a drive-in was. I learned how live l – live life again, the way that we had – that I had not experienced possibly for the preceding three years before that time, before leav – leaving **Berlin**.

Q: And during this year or so, where is your mother and where is your sister?

A: My – my – my sister is in **New York**, still doing exactly – I think she might have mi – been moved – might have moved her position to another family. But essentially doing that – that type of work. And my mother was still in **England**. And my mother came from **England** to the **U**.**S**. – and I'm guessing here – somewhere around 1943, maybe very late '42, but I would – I would judge very early '43.

Q: What happens after you leave **California**, where do you go?

A: **New York**. I come back here, I again embark on an adventure of a lifetime as a child, and come back, my uncle just asks me – I mean, what child is asked these kinds of questions, he asked me, how would you like to go back to **New York**? I said, what are my choices, I remember. He said, well, you can fly back to **New**

York, or you can take a train back to **New York**. He said, taking a train back to **New York** will probably take roughly about five days. I said, let's take the train. I'd flown one way, I said, let me see what it's like seeing **America** through the windows of a train.

Q: And what was it like?

A: It was terrific, terrific. People were – the people on the train were very, very kind, making sure that I went into the dining car. And of course my – my uncle had given me su-sufficient monies to go into the dining car for – for my meals, and given me a long – a – a – a kit with cookies that I know that I – I would enjoy, and things of that sort. But it was fantastic, seeing **America** through the windows of a train.

Q: Did you feel that you felt differently about say the British, as opposed to the Americans, or was that one group for you?

A: I felt – I – I f – I've always felt that my – my – my blood is red, white and blue, for – for **England** and for **America**. I am thankful beyond words for what **England** did for me. If my parents would not have gotten out at all, I would have gotten out, and – and I should also tell you that two years ago, a – the – a Holocaust museum in our area asked me to do a kinder – a program on the **Kindertransport**. I told them I would only do such a program if we brought somebody up from the English

consulate to express my – my gratitude in person. Approximately two years ago, I did run a program for the – for the Holocaust museum of our area on the **Kindertransport**, and – and I had made contact with the consul general's office in **New York**, and the – the vice-consul and deputy consul general came up and **Ilsa** and I had enjoyed his company, we had ka – the private company with him for lunch and then we brought him up to the program, and I said to **Ilsa**, I said, we'll probably have 50 people at the program, I said, nobody ever comes to listen to any of these things. And – and 350 people came. I – I couldn't believe it. 350 people came and – and listened to the program, which consisted mainly of my s – my speech, and obviously a – some remarks from – from the consul general. And we've stayed in contact with each other, and – and if I can carry that on a little bit further, we've also established a relationship with the consul general o-of the – the German consul general in – in **New York** and – and **Ilsa** and I will be s – I wish it – I wish – I can't – I don't like to use this word, being recognized, honored, we're being – we're going to be recognized, honored by our Holocaust center next Sunday, a week from today. And again, I – I said I wanted the consul generals to come up, and that's the way I wanted it, and I was sure that he would, and – because we had established a – a previous relationship with him already, and – and he was only too happy to do that. So he will be our guest speaker next Sunday and – and I'm kind of

shaking, quivering in my boots, because even though I am not afraid of anything, I am – I am very tenuous about the – about what I – what I am going to say, or what I might say or not say and do. But it will be an exciting evening, and we do have a – a substantial number of people coming to that dinner.

A2: A record number.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you went back to **New York**. What happened next?

A: When I came back to **New York**, we moved – when I say – at that point, my mother took an apartment in – in uptown **Washington Heights**. It's an – an area known as really **Inwood**. **Inwood**, **Washington Heights**. My mother went to work doing factory work. Had never done this – had never done the kind of work that she was now doing. She was working 10 - 12 hours a night, in the most menial position, to sustain us. And I moved into the apartment – we moved into an apartment house, I said, in **Inwood**. And there were many families, like families of our – called refugee status, or whatever. And I formed a bond with three other boys, very close in age proximity, not all having gone through a similar type of experience that I had to undergo, but boys that also had fled with their families from **Germany**. And we formed a very close bond, and we called ourselves the boys of 1815, because it was 1815 **Riverside Drive**. And it was – unfortunately, the last one of those boys – the

last one is me, but the last other one passed on last year, which was a very sad event. And we would work together in the **Catskills** and **Fleischmanns**, **New York**. We made our first – first money, we became rich, at least tho – so we thought, earning 500 bucks for the – 500 dollars for the season, in 50 cent and dollar tips. But it gave us our first entry into earning some money.

Q: What year was this? When did you earn your first dollar?

A: I would say – I would say the minute – I – I would say, when I was 14. I – I told – I told a – the – the hotel – hotel people I was 16. I did. I – cause you weren't supposed to work at that time – at that – at that age yet. You could not get work – not get working papers, but still you weren't – you were only supposed to work limited number of hours, and you had to fudge the truth. Not lie, fudge the truth. There's a difference. So we – we worked in – in – in **Fleischmanns New York**. It was a hell of an experience, and we – we gained financial independence from our parents, which was very important.

Q: I suppose you were aware of the fact that **America** had entered into the war?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: We followed the n – the – the news of **America's** involvement in the war. I probably could – could show you the maps of what was happening with greater

accuracy than any other American, because I knew **Europe**. What I could not quite understand, is at the onset of the war, which was still the – the end of the Great Depression here in this country, and people again in this country, who really did not quite fathom the depravity that had occurred in – in **Europe**, and how bad – how badly things had gotten, and the reason I really mention this, because there were still people here in **America** that were striking for benefits. And looking back on – on the scene now, I could understand what was happening here. People were concerned about eking out a living here. They were – they were more concerned about that until really the onset – once war broke out, then I think the country really became – became – the country became unified as nothing I'd ever seen before, the same way as it would happen in **England**.

Q: Were you able to be in touch with anyone back in **Germany** during those years, or al-all ties were severed at that –

A: All ties were severed. All ties were severed. I did have family remaining in **England**, and I would say contact was at best intermittent. Letter writing was still something that went on, and – and who wants to write letters at let – when you're 12 - 13 - 14 years old, you know, that's not a great – if my mother would write a letter to – to our relatives, I would – I would be asked to – to join in, I would wr- write one sentence, you know? For t – for boys and girls do at that age. But we went

– we went back – we had been back – we've gone back to **Berlin** rather quickly, I would say probably within five or six years at the end of the war. We've been back to **Berlin**, I would say at least – at least every two years' time, from the 50s on, and as recently as – as the – the commemoration of **Kristallnacht**, the 70th anni- anniversary. We – we were in – in **Berlin** with Chancellor **Merkel** at the **Reich**(ph) **strasse** synagogue. Wonderful ceremony, sad ceremony. I took my – my – my children – I shouldn't say my children, I took my daughter – we have three children, I took my daughter, my son-in-law. They had been to **Berlin** with me previously. And I also took one of their children who was free at that time, a young lady. And we went to the ceremony. That – that was all aided, the – the logistics of attaining that ceremony was all aided by the consul general's office, who we got to know very closely during that time period as an extremely fine gentleman. And he aided us to make sure that we were included in that – in that ceremony. When I say included, being able to attend that ceremony. And we spent a day with – with our children, showing them where our synagogue had been, what had transpired, and I stood at – at the site where my synagogue was, where there is now a large bronze plaque, which I say unashamedly is there because I asked the **[indecipherable]** to fix that – that – that plaque. There had been a – there had been a – there had been a small marker as to where – what had been on the site previously, and many, many

years ago I had contacted the **Berlin** authorities, asked them to renew that plaque with an – with one that really was more meaningful, which they did almost immediately. Germans are the – are the most thorough people, and the most – they are the most willing to – to please, and they are most willing to understand what transpired. Chancellor **Merkel** spoke at – at that ceremony spoke about the past, Jewish relationship, the present, of never having something like that again, spoke about the future, of – of Israeli German relationship and of the danger of the Iranian situation. So she covered all the bases, spoke eloquently about them. And I again saw Chancellor **Merkel** in a rather small ceremony, roughly about a month ago, when I was asked to attend a ceremony at the **Leo Beck Institute** in **New York City**, where Chancellor **Merkel** was given the **Leo Beck** Medal of Freedom, which is a very high commendation. And I later found out that ch – that **Leo Beck**, a wonderful, distinguished rabbi, theologian, rabbi, was the guest speaker in 1930 at the synagogue that I'd mentioned to you previously, my synagogue was inaugurated by cha – by chancellor **Leo –** Rabbi **Leo Beck**, which I found an absolutely wonderful coin-coincidence.

A2: I have pictures of a lot of stuff that we saw in – two years ago, and previously.

A: We – we have –

A2: **[indecipherable]** tomorrow.

A: – we have tried to – we have tried to – I have tr – I have tried, we have tried to share our history in a way that – all – we've taken all of our children to – to **Germany**. We have taken some of our children to **Germany** as either th – based upon their availability, based upon their – what we felt was their age group, that they would be able to comprehend what – what – what it was like, and what the past was like, so it was not just a – a vacation for them.

Q: So, I'd like to know a little bit more about 1944 and 1945 for you. You said you were looking at the news very, very closely. Was there any news about the Jewish community in **Berlin**?

A: Not that I –

Q: **[background noise]** Just waiting for the door to close. Okay.

A: No, I did not know any specific facts about the Jewish community in **Berlin**, or know any specific facts about any Jewish community. But, I knew on November – November 9th, 1938, that conc – I knew of concentration camps, and I knew that Jews were being taken away to concentration camps on a regular basis. So I knew where – where – where Jews were. And I didn't have to be shown pictures, or – or told something and say God, I never knew that. I knew – I knew what was happening. As I left, I kn-knew what was ha – I knew what was happening while I was in **Germany**. As I said, the sad – the – the – the – the sad thing that I remember

coming to **New York** was this father not wanting – wanting to evade the truth of what was happening.

Q: Do you recall the end of the war? Do you remember **V-E Day**?

A: Absolutely.

Q: What was that day like?

A: A miracle. A miracle. Absolutely a miracle. Couldn't – you know, I think, I don't – wh-what was **V Day**? In – in August of – I don – I forget exactly what –

Q: Well, the end of the war in **Europe** was in May –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and the end of the war in the **Pacific** was in August.

A: Yeah, well, at – at that time, in – in August, we were – we were working in **Fleischmanns**, **New York**, okay? And that – and again, this was – **Fleischmanns**, **New York** was a haven for German Jews on vacation. And yes, we experienced **V-E Day** there, and as I remember, this was pandum – joy of pandemonium proportions, that's the only way – that's the only way I can describe it. And – and as far as – as far as the end of the – the war in **Europe**, there was – there was a great deal of – of – I hate to say it, of joy on my part when I heard that **Dresden** was – was carpet firebombed, that **Berlin** was firebombed, that other cities were firebombed. Remember, I was in – in – in **England** when **Coventry** was leveled,

okay? And I saw **London** being leveled, and **Coventry** being leveled because there was a church there they wanted to – to bomb. So I had no – I had absolutely zero compassion, zero heart. I wanted to see as much destruction of **Germany** as possible, as much destruction. And the first – the first time that we were back in **Germany**, you know, you – I could s – I would say a large proportion of people had amputated limbs. And I knew what were they from, they were from bombings. Either they – either they had fought in the war, the men had fought in the war, or they had been com – had been civilians. I had no compassion for them, none.

Q: So it's interesting, you said that you had no compassion for them, yet you went back to **Germany** five or six years after the war.

A: Yeah.

Q: What was your motivation to go back?

A: I survived. I had survived. I am not a religious Jew, but I will tell you, every time that we go back to **Berlin**, I made sure that our time period in **Berlin** is over the Sabbath. And I insist that we always, that anybody who's with me, knows that we're going to services. And I'll tell you also something special. There's a synagogue in **Berlin**, it's not very f – not f – it's within walking distance of the – of the **Kempinski** Hotel on **Kurfürstendamm**, that – we go to 10 services. That synagogue sits within a courtyard of apartment dwellings, apartment buildings. As a

result, the synagogue was ransacked, but not burned down, because had it been torched, buildings and surrounding buildings would have also gone down; they weren't going to do that. I found out later on here in the **U.S.** from my sister that that was a synagogue that my uncle, a – a brother of my father, had been the president of in 1930s. And from a diary, from a written diary of my grandfather, that my grandfather wrote that he celebrated his 75th birthday in that particular synagogue. I want you to know that I too celebrated my 75th birthday in that synagogue and was called to the Torah.

Q: Well, thank you very much, do you have –

A2: **[inaudible]**

Q: That was wonderful note. If you have any other comments you would like to make at this time.

A: No, I've probably taken up too much of your time.

Q: Absolutely not. Thank you very much for your interview today.

A: I've probably bored you with too much –

Q: Absolutely not.

A: – and I apologize if I've taken up –

Q: No need to apologize, this was wonderful.

A2: Just one interesting postscript.

Q: Sure.

A2: When we were in **Berlin** two years ago for the 70th anniversary, and we went to **John's** old neighborhood and we saw the plaque at the synagogue and the benches that had – you know, a – in the square there were various commemorative things up on these lampposts. The – the tow – the commu – whatever, the borough, had put up a big floral arrangement at the site.

Q: At the site of – at the site of my synagogue, where this lar – it's a really large bronze plaque, and on that bronze plaque i-is an inscription of my – of our rabbi, o-of – of **Kristallnacht**, saying in essence, we had believed that – that **Germany** was our future, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, whate-whatever it was, very appropriate – very appropriately put words. And the borough had placed two large wreaths on – on the site, on – on the – on – yeah, anniversary of **Kristallnacht**. And I spoke to my – my children and my – my granddaughter, exactly what I'd experienced. Within – within seconds, I had a group of German citizens who lived in – right there, came – came around and listened to me. And one woman came with a memorial candle that she lit. It was amazing, absolutely amazing, and – and people expressed their – you know, spoke in – you know, they – they heard that I could also speak German, and – and you know, they expressed their – their –

Q2: **[indecipherable]** English.

A: Yeah, th-th – they expressed in words their – the – you know, how they felt about what had – what had – what had transpired. And a Christian group, again Christian, okay? They are so important in my life. A Christian group in – in – in my area had set up a storefront and boarded it up and put on a Star of **David**, and c-call it **Jude**, and – and desecrated the front of a – of a storefront as a kind of a replica as to what we had endured during that time period. And I found that touching. And as my – my wife said, on the lampposts around – around the park where we lived, there were signs as to what had transpired against Jews in that period. What I also found very interesting is that two blocks away from where we lived – and my parents never told me this, I – **Albert Einstein** lived. Okay? And there's a large – a large stone – I can't say a memorial, what do you – lar – large – a very, very large stone plaque that this was the residence of **Albert Einstein**. I said, my God, I never knew that I lived in such a – such a prestigious neighborhood. But – but – but ger – German – German citizens are much more aware – I – I think – my gut feeling tells me that the Holocaust will be – will be nothing other than a museum piece in years to come, that who knows whether even our Jewish grandchildren or their children will have knowledge of the Holocaust? I think it's going to – I think – I think it will disappear in time, and you will – you will stay around. When I say you, I'm talking about the Holocaust Museum, and maybe a couple of other ones wi-will stay

around. But I – we'll se – I – I – I see that in the next 10 years town, some of the Holocaust centers, unless they're well-endowed, will not make it. Because that generation that has supported them will no longer be there, and the next generation will not ha – will not step up to the plate.

A2: But the German schools are actively teaching the Holocaust.

A: There is nobody – there is nobody that is – maybe that's why I have a great affinity for **Germany** at this time, because number one, I can say I have survived, and the others are dead, because they – they have passed on, and it's a new generation of Germans. And that's why I c – I get along with – wa – you know, I get along on a first name basis with the consul general, and with other Germans, I – I greet them. They are, as far as I'm concerned, part of – part of my life, part of a new life. Lot of – lot of my generation cannot, have not, will not say what I've just sa – told you. They will live in the past and say they will never forgive or forget. I can never forgive and forget, but I can move on. And maybe that's why life has also been somewhat more successful for me than maybe some other people, because I've always believed in looking – in – in being a forward-looking person.

Q: That's a wonderful way to end the interview. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview