

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Michael W. Wolff October 17, 2010 RG-50.030*0604

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PREFACE

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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.

Transcribed by Tracy B. Marinelli, RPR, National Court Reporters Association.

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MICHAEL W. WOLFF
October 17, 2010

Question: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Michael Wolff, conducted by Julia Danilina on October 17th of 2010 at the Kindertransport Association conference in Arlington, Virginia. First of all, I would like to -- you to introduce yourself. Tell me your first and last name, where you were born and when.

Answer: My name is Michael Wolff. I was born in Breslau, Germany on June 29th, 1936.

Q: First of all, let me thank you for taking the time to conduct this interview with us, and I would like to return to your early years and I would like to ask you about your family and about your town. Was it small, big, how many brothers and sisters you had?

A: Okay. I was born in Breslau to -- to Arnold and Elsa Wolff, who lived in Reichenbach, where my father had an interest in a sawmill. I was very young when I left Germany. I don't have any recollection of the size of the town. The reason I was born in Breslau is that my father did not like the clinic in Reichenbach so he sent my mother to Breslau, but we actually lived in Reichenbach. As far as the town, I have no memories at all because I was just -- I left just before my third birthday.

Q: I see. Did you have -- and do you have any brothers and sisters?

A: I don't have brothers and sisters. I'm an only child. As a matter of fact, when my mother told her father that she was pregnant he was very annoyed with her. His comment was that you don't bring a Jewish child into the world under the present conditions in Germany.

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Interview with Michael W. Wolff

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Q: So both of your parents were Jewish or just --

A: Both of my parents were Jewish. My father was born into an orthodox family. He was the youngest of six, of Doctor Wilhelm (ph) Wolff and Hermenia (ph) Wolff. My mother was -- was the youngest of two. She was born into the Frantz and Martha David family in -- in Guben.

Q: What was their occupations by the time --

A: My father -- my mother worked in -- in my grandfather's store when she was young. Her mother died when -- when she was only 13, and -- no, I'm sorry, 17, and she -- so she worked in the store helping my grandfather. He had a general -- a small general store, toys and, you know, home goods and that kind of thing. My father was set up by my grandfather with a half interest in a sawmill in Reichenbach. He was the youngest, like I said, and the rest of them, the older kids went to college, but by the time my father was ready to go my grandfather was getting old so he just bought a business interest, half interest in the business.

Q: Would you describe your family as well off or middle class or, do you remember that?

A: I would -- I don't remember much, but my -- my feeling is there -- they were reasonably well off. I think middle class is probably appropriate. My mother worked as a bookkeeper for quite a while until she got married, and I know she got pregnant pretty quick after that.

Q: Do you remember if your parents were religious?

A: My father was born -- was raised orthodox, and he had a problem when one of his favorite cousins married out of the religion. They sit Shiva for her, and -- which really

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annoyed him, so he left -- he had nothing to do with orthodoxy the rest of his life. We were not extremely religious, but we -- he always celebrated the holidays. That's about the extent of the -- of their religious activities for -- for various reasons. Shavuot was never a big thing in our house, but the Passover was very big always, always had Passover, and they always attended services for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, and we did almost nothing for Hanukkah, so that was basically it.

Q: Do you remember that day when you were sent off as a Kindertransport child?

A: No, I don't.

Q: You don't remember that?

A: No, I don't, but I can tell you the story behind it.

Q: Sure.

A: Of course in -- in early 1939 my mother's best friend sent her daughter Eva to be taken in by foster parents in Scotland, in Glasgow, Scotland, and my mother was unwilling to let me go at that time. When -- by May she decided it was probably best if I go, so she made arrangements for me to be adopted by the same family or by -- by a member of that family in -- in -- also in Glasgow, Scotland. So in mid June, and I believe it's the 15th of June, but I'm not totally certain, she went to Berlin with me, and since I was -- I was two weeks short of my third birthday, she was allowed to go on the train to -- to the -- to the ship. So as a matter of fact the story she tells is that they had to stop the train because a -- the head count was one over. They had counted her as one of the children. So once they got it straightened out we went to the -- shipboard, and she handed me over to one of the older girls, you know, please take care of my child, and that's how I got onto the ship.

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There were approximately 180. I don't know the name of the ship. She wouldn't -- it was very, very difficult for her to talk about it. You know, it was really hard, and she had handed me off on a ship. She thinks there were about 180 on it, and I was the youngest of the -- the group. When we got to London, Liverpool station, she had arranged -- with her usual thoroughness she had arranged for her -- one of her girlfriends who lived in London to meet me there, and I met this lady much later on in life and she told me that, you know, she was the only person in the London station speaking German, so I grabbed onto her and I wouldn't let go. Now, the family that adopted me in Glasgow, Mr. and Mrs. Ness, Mr. Ness came down to London in his car and picked me up, and she actually -- this lady Elsa Weiss (ph), was her name, you know, made sure I got with him, and we went to Glasgow.

Q: And what are your first recollections of --

A: I remember the house in Glasgow. I don't remember anything about the trip, but I do remember the house in Glasgow. You know, I remember at the end we were at a dead end street. At the end of the street there was a hill, and across the hill was a railroad track, and the trains would always fascinate me going by. I remember Mr. Ness very well. I don't remember Mrs. Ness, and I don't remember Anita, their daughter, who was two years older than I am, and I do remember him -- you know, they were very orthodox, and he was -- he always put on his tefillin in the morning prayers, and I had my -- my building blocks, my wooden building blocks, and I would tie those on standing next to him and I would dove in with him, you know, kind of imitating him. That I remember.

Q: Do you -- did you know the story, like how you came to England? Did they tell you

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the story?

A: The -- my -- my -- you know, I pieced it together from my father. My father had a small prayer book, and inside that prayer book he has -- he took notes from this whole thing, you know, of when he was arrested in Christinenthal (ph) and where he was and when he got to England, so a lot of this stuff I pieced back from, you know, taking -- you know, trying to get stuff out of my mother and from his notes in his prayer book, which I still have.

Q: Oh, so your parents ended up also in England?

A: Not really, but let me go through with that.

Q: Sure.

A: Okay. According to my father's records, he came to -- he came to England in August of '39. My mother -- back in Germany she was, you know, taking care of her father, who lived with her. She was -- took over the -- charge of the sawmill because the partner was also arrested. My father was arrested. The partner was arrested in Christinenthal (ph). They were sent to Doha (ph), and my mother had all this responsibility, so -- plus she was trying to get him out of there, and if you had a visa to get out to anywhere you could -- they would let you out, and, you know, a little money also under the table also helped. So in August of 1939 he came over to England, but he was not allowed to land in England per se. They kept him in what they called concentration camps at the time, which were actually work camps. He was on the Isle of Man, and then he was on several other ones during his stay. They kept moving him around. He -- he came to see me, and this is what I get from his notes. He came to see me, and of course I wouldn't -- I didn't

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recognize him, and I denied that he was my father. He was trying to tell me he was my father. He came to visit me several times in Scotland. While this was going on my mother was applying for visas worldwide, anywhere that she could go, and the only place that would take her, the only visa she was able to get was in Bolivia, South America. So in early 1940 she left for Bolivia. Somehow they managed to keep in touch with each other constantly, and my father asked that she go through Italy and not through Holland because a lot of the ships out of Holland were being torpedoed. Well, she went through Holland, and not -- and not out of Italy, and irony would have it the ship out of Italy was sunk and the ship she was on, she made it to Bolivia. As soon as she got to Bolivia, she went to work for a Jewish lawyer, who happened to be the partner of a Bolivian senator, Dr. Bachnorsodo (ph), and through his help she got visas for my father and I to come and join her in Bolivia. We had -- Mr. Ness drove us down to Liverpool, and we had three hiccups so to speak. We got to Liverpool the first time and my father was late because they didn't release him on time, so we had to go back. We missed the boat. The second time they arrested my father because his papers were out of date, so we had to go back, and he was in jail, and then they finally got it straightened out. On the third time -- excuse me -- in late 1940, I think it was December 23rd, around there, we finally sailed for -- for South America. I remember very little about the crossing. I remember that I heard cannon fires, and I heard -- you know, we were on emergencies. I don't know if it was a drill or actually a boat sighting, but we -- we came through, and I remember a little bit of Bermuda. There was -- I remember very vividly there was a big ship model in -- in a

window that I really wanted. You know, I was spoiled. I had a lot of toys in England,

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and, you know, my father, you know, he had basically two coins to rub together in his pocket, and it was -- there was a big tantrum. We went through the Panama Canal, went through -- you know, came down to Chile and to Bolivia, and I met this woman at the station in La Paz. You know, my mother hadn't seen me for a year and-a-half, and of course I didn't know her. You know, it was a strange woman. We -- we were very poor. When my father had the sawmill back in Germany, he built a series of about 12 or 13 boxes in which they put all their -- their goods in, big wooden boxes, and we went -- we managed to get one of them to Bolivia, and it happened to be linens and bedding, and she kept selling the linens and bedding to keep us going. My father finally found a job, which was out of town, in a sawmill, run by a fellow Jew. My mother was working for this -- Doctor Brecker (ph) was his name, you know, as a -- as a secretary or something like that, so I was in -- I was in day school, and sometimes I would stay with the Breckers (ph) in the evening. I can remember very little about the day school, but I do remember that for lunch every day we had this fruit compote, and even at that age I would pick the raisins out of the compote because I never liked them, so just that's what I remember. Eventually my father got job with a -- in a mining town, Potosi, which is very high up in the Andes, about 12, 14,000 feet up in the Andes, and so we moved to Potosi, and we stayed with -- the first place we stayed was with my mother's girlfriend from -- my mother's grammar school girlfriend. Her name was Erma (ph) Freed (ph), and they had an apartment. They let us stay there -- they had an extra bedroom -- until we got settled. Her and I were just -- you know, Erma was the total opposite of my mother. My mother was a very, very serious person, you know, very straight, and Erma was a total cutup, and we

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would, you know, call each other names and pick at each other, and you know, do tricks to each other constantly, and we did this -- as long as she was alive we did this. And then we moved into a -- our own apartment, which is kind of an interesting apartment. We had a bedroom, a dining room and a kitchen, a very large kitchen, and the bathroom was -- I always tell this to my grandkids because they don't believe me, but the bathroom was across the patio, and it was shared by -- by three or four apartments. It did not have running water. It did not have any lights, so I always traipsed across the patio with my bucket to flush, my little board to sit on and toilet paper, a candle and matches. You know, it was a big trick. We -- like I say, there was -- the only running water we had was in the kitchen, and we would take a bath once a week, you know, in a big tub just like the farmers used to do, and you know, the water had to be boiled and the water had to be filtered because it came to town in open channels. It was pretty primitive. And I went to school, and I went to grammar school, and of course I stood out like a sore thumb. There was about three or four of us gringos in the school, and the first -- my first year there I got -- during one recess I got tripped up and broke my arm, so my parents didn't want me there. So they moved me to a Catholic school, which was really -- really across the street from our house, and I wasn't treated very well there. They -- you know, they -- they didn't like Jews, you know. They made me go to services. I got to kneel. I got to cross myself. I probably knew more about the Catholicism than I did about the Jewish religion, but I survived. Later on my father became a manager up in the mine, up in his section of the mine, and they gave us company housing, so we moved out to -- to a place called Chaco,

which was outside of town, and it was kind of far out. While I was in town we -- I was

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going to Hebrew school once a week to learn a few -- a few things, but once we were out of town that was impossible because we didn't have a car, but it was a nice home. We had a really nice house, you know, compared to what we had before, and I went to the -- the -- to the school, the company school, which had, I think, eight kids total, you know, from all -- from first grade through -- through sixth, seventh -- sixth grade, so we were in a company school. I started learning English again, which I had totally forgotten. My mother always kidded me. She says when I first got to Bolivia I spoke Spanish, English and German in one sentence until I -- you know, I lost the English and then picked up Spanish and the German. So I went to school there until the sixth grade, and then they sent me out of town to school in Aurora, which is a town approximately 400 miles away, and I was at boarding school -- I was in boarding school and went to an American school there. It was an Angelo-American school, which mainly teaches from the states, retired teachers from the states, spinsters mainly, and I was bar mitzvahed there in town, and I -- I learned my Hebrew for, you know, a month -- two months before, and I forgot it two months afterwards, but it was -- it was interesting, the school. My mother believed that -- you know, in Germany you wear short pants, so I had to wear short pants. So my first year there I'm -- I'm taller than most kids, and I was -- I was wearing short pants, and that was -- that was terrible. That was just a really bad year. The second year I grew into long pants, and, you know, I was one of the older kids so we were pulling the tricks that had been pulled on me on the younger kids, so that was a little bit better. You know, as soon as we got to Bolivia my -- my parents applied for a visa to come to the United States, and my father was actually Polish quota. He was born in

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Germany, but it became Poland after World War I, so they considered him Polish quota, so we applied right away. Now, the whole time we were in Bolivia my parents and the Ness family were corresponding with each other. They kept in touch. You know, my parents kept -- you know, I don't know -- through the Elfbaugh (ph), which was the publication for the German Jews basically, they kept -- I think it came out of New York. I'm pretty sure it was. They kept -- you know, you could put ads in there, you know, Arnold and Elsa Wolff from Reichenbach, Germany looking for their family and friends, and they -- they got in contact with all my -- all my uncles on my father's side and my aunt, and they -- they got in touch with a lot of their friends. So they -- they kept in -- they were big writers. They always wrote letters and always kept in touch, and they still corresponded with the Ness family so -- while this was going on. In March of '52 we finally got okay to come, so we left Potosi and we went through Oruro to La Paz, which was a beautiful city, and then eventually to Arica, where we boarded the ship to come to the states. We came up the West Coast of South America to the Panama Canal, and the first thing I saw -- actually Panama City was in United States territory. I saw first an African-American speaking English, which just totally blew me away because in Bolivia, you know, the Mestizos and the Indians only spoke Ketroamina (ph). They didn't even speak Spanish, so that was a real surprise to me, and we flew to New Orleans and then to Memphis, Tennessee, where my mother had a cousin, and they -- they actually vouched for us, and that's how we got in. I went to high school there. Well, they put me back a year because we got here in March. The -- the school year here was almost over, so they put me back a grade, and they -- so I had to struggle with that. I remember Mrs. Mosey

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(ph) at Central High School flunked me in English because during the test I had to ask her what some words meant, and she wouldn't tell me, and, you know, I had only been here two weeks, and I didn't know all the English language and she wouldn't help me so she flunked me. I joined an AZA group, you know, the AZA group, leg of the B'nai B'rith, and I met a lot of kids and a lot of friends. My father was having a hard time with -- with the heat in Memphis. He had arthritis and it was bothering him a lot, and, you know, jobs were hard to get, so my mother had another cousin in San Francisco, and my father decided he was going to go to San Francisco, so he went ahead of us.

Sometime, I believe, in March or April of '53, went to San Francisco, found a job and found -- found a place for us to stay with a Jewish -- a boarding -- like a board house type of thing. So in June -- as soon as school was out in June of '53 my mother and I followed him. We -- you know, we railroaded across the country into San Francisco, and there I again joined another a see AZA chapter. Some of those -- some of my friends from the AZA chapter I'm still in touch with today, and that was a good experience for me. That was really very interesting for me, and I went to high school there, and all this time -- oh, actually I forgot -- I forgot to mention that while we were in Memphis Mr. and Mrs. Ness were coming to New York, and they wanted my parents to -- to meet -- you know, bring me up there so they could see me, and my parents had just arrived in the country. They both had new jobs, and we really didn't have any money to -- to -- to spend on a trip. So my parents, you know, were denied -- refused them, and they were very angry. They had -- you know, they really wanted to see me. As irony would have it Mr. Ness got very sick and they never made it to New York, so they didn't actually come to New York.

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So while we were in San Francisco, like I said, I went to high school there and graduated from George Washington High School, and I went to city college for a couple years and eventually went to -- to Berkeley, where I got my BS degree in engineering, and I met my wife at Berkeley, and then I got -- we got married, and I had -- I went to work for Pacific Gas Electric Company in Pittsburgh, California. I lived in Concord, worked in Pittsburgh, and then I got drafted. What had happened is, I went to work for Pacific Gas Electric because of getting deferments from the Army and as soon as I got there they cut out the deferments so I got drafted. So I went to Fort Ord for, you know, three months for basic training, and then on the way to -- to Dugway, Utah, where I was going to be stationed, I picked up my wife in San Francisco and we went on, and it was -- it was kind of interesting. We got to this -- you know, we got to Salt Lake City on a Sunday morning, didn't know a sole, you know, found a soldier, and he was going up to Dugway, and so we got on here and we -- we drive out of Salt Lake City, and we drive for miles and miles and finally come to a little town, and all we could see was a snowbank because it had snowed for a while, and he said this is where you're going to live because there is no house on the post, and then we drive for another hour and we come to this gate in the middle of the desert, and, you know, what is this. We finally got to the main post, and sure enough I -- we couldn't get -- we couldn't get any on post housing, and we ended up in a little dinky basement apartment in town, and I had -- I had to commute back and forth, usually on the bus, and you had to get up at five in the morning and walk over to the bus. It was always icy and slippery. So half the time I was on my -- sitting on my butt trying to get to the bus, and we went there, and we stayed there for a couple years. My

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son -- my oldest -- my son was born there on June 13th, 1960. He was born there, and it was -- you know, we managed to make it through. I finally got out of the Army in '62, early '62. They extended us because they had a problem in Berlin, and we settled in -- in Orange County, California, and my -- my daughter was born there, and eventually I got -- I got tired of Orange County. You know, it's just too crowded, too many people. I'm very impatient. I don't like to wait. Every time you went to a restaurant you had to wait in line. Every time you went to a show you had to wait in line, so I started looking around and I found a job in Santa Barbara. So in -- in May of 1970 I went up to Santa Barbara and stayed in a private home, just rented a bedroom and stayed there for -- for three or four months until we found a house, and eventually my wife and the kids came up and we settled in Santa Barbara. All this time I was still corresponding with the Nesses, but the -- you know, my parents had stopped because they were mad at them. The Nesses were mad at my parents, and my -- you know, I eventually lost contact with them. They -- you know, letters didn't -- weren't -- there was no response to me, so in -- you know, the next thing that happened, my parents moved down to Orange County to -- to -- you know, to leisure world, and so they were close. We always visited them. We always had Passover with them, but, you know, they lived a little bit away so we only saw them three or four times a year maybe. And fast forward to 1992. I have a bunch of people -- a bunch of friends that we go to lunch with. We go to lunch almost every day -- every weekday, and we've been doing this since 1971. So on this day in 1992 one of the guys was -- who happened to be my dentist, came to lunch, and he was one of our regulars, and he brought another fellow, Bob, who I also know, and Bob makes the

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statement that he was so happy. They had a big bar mitzvah, orthodox Jews, and the Moschoas (ph) finally went back to Scotland. They got out of his house and out of their hair, and I asked him, I said, where in Scotland, and he says Glasgow, and I said, well, you know, next time your wife talks to her relatives have them find out what happened to the Ness girl. This is Anita Ness, the daughter of the couple that adopted me, and she -- he said okay, well, I'll do it, and I forgot about it. Three, four days later I get a phone call. He says I got a phone number for you, and this is Sunday night about 6:00, so obviously I can't call. You know, 5:00 Monday morning the phone rings. It's Anita, where have you been? Why haven't you called me? I said, I didn't know your name. You got married. I didn't know your married name. So we started corresponding, and in mid -- in the summer of '92 my wife and I went over there. She insisted that -- you know, that we stay with her, and she wanted to go on the trip with us, and I said -- I told Lani, I said, well, let's -- let's just see how it goes. We actually came into London. We stayed in London for a week, and her son, Richard, picked me up, picked us up and took us to dinner at their home, which was very nice. They had two children. Lauren and Jonathan were the two kids, and, you know, we got along fine. Everything was fine, and then we finally took the train up to -- up to Scotland, and Anita is -- is a strange bird. She's very nervous, I don't know, very sheltered person is, I guess, the best way to put it. So, you know, she met us, but she was real scared to death, maybe we have two heads or we're weird or something, but everything worked out fine. We got along fine. She got a report from her son so she wasn't quite as nervous as she should be, but she -- she was -- she

was okay with it, and we -- we stayed with her at the flat, and I got to meet -- you know,

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a couple days after we got there she had a big party and all her -- they had a big family. All their cousins came. Of course they all knew me. They were all older than I am, and I was told how I used to bite Anita. I was told, you know, I had a purse and I used to hit her with it, and the thing that really, really bothered me was that when I left her mother lost her child, so her mother was really upset when I had left. And one thing we learned just this year when we were back in London, from Anita, is that when I -- when my father came to -- when Mr. Ness took me away, they had -- Anita was out of the house. They -- they -- they took her someplace so she wouldn't see the departure, so she wouldn't, you know, get sad at me leaving, and I just found that out this year. I didn't know about that before. Anyway, we -- you know, like I say, we met the family, and I was -- I was really unhappy that I, you know, caused that much pain to the mother. It just never occurred to me. Why I don't know, and the night before we left for England my mother had called me and she says find out what happened to Eva. That was a little girl that went ahead of me in 1939, and I said, who is Eva? That's the first I ever heard about it. So she told me. So I -- Eva was there in Glasgow at this -- this party. She was one of the cousins. Her parents didn't make it through, so she -- she stayed there, and she is, you know, the child of the family that adopted her. So that was -- that worked out very nice. It was -- it was a pretty good reunion, and, you know -- you know, we keep in touch still to this day, and I finally convinced Anita that -- to come to the states a couple years later. So in 1995, scared to death to fly, just actually petrified of flying, she and Eva came, and we -- you know, we went all over. We went to San Francisco, went to Vegas, went to Disneyland. They wouldn't even get on the people mover at Disneyland. That's how

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scared the people were. I was amazed at how sheltered and scared they were. I finally got them on there, and we went of course to see my mother, who lived in Orange County at that time, and my mother wouldn't talk about it. I couldn't get -- my mother, you know, really wouldn't talk about it. She did get the Spielberg tapes, very, very reluctantly and never watched them. She was just -- it was just too hard for her, but she did it because we really pushed her. Mainly my wife pushed her, and so I finally cornered my mother. I said, you know, you're the only living person that has met Eva's mother, and you have to talk to her. So they finally went into a room. I don't know what happened, but hopefully she told her something. So that's basically, you know, my story. I keep in touch with Anita, and we went over for the Bar Mitzvah of her grandson in -- in '97 I believe it was, and then we went over again in June of this year. We went to London. I took two of my grandkids, an 18-year-old grandson and a 21-year-old granddaughter. We took them there, and I made arrangements for Anita to come down to -- to visit us in -- in London, and we went to the -- we went to the war -- to the Kindertransport Monument. We finally found it. It took a while because nobody knows where it is. We found it and took a lot of pictures there with the kids, and then Anita came down, and both her daughter and her son live in London, although they don't speak to each other, so they came in separate groups, and we sat down and we talked, and it was kind of interesting to see the reaction of my grandkids. You know, they were really taken. They really never -- you know, I've told them the story, but they never really, you know, got to hear this as firsthand, you know, knowledge, first hand talking about what happened, and then her daughter came

with her -- her son, and so we had another -- you know, another round of talks, and that

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was basically it. That is my story.

Q: Did you ever go to your native town in Germany?

A: No. I've never been -- I've been back to Germany. I went back -- when I worked at Burroughs (ph), I went to Belgium, and I went to Germany for one day because I had -- and I met my uncle. He is the only -- the only relative I have ever met. Well, I shouldn't say that. I met some of my cousins but the only one of that -- of that generation I met, and, you know, he was a doctor in Bonn, and so I went and had lunch with him and his wife. That's -- that's all. That -- that was the only day, up in Germany.

Q: Did you have --

A: I don't travel well so I just don't go much.

Go ahead.

Q: Yeah. Did -- did you have some family who stayed back then in Germany when your parents --

A: Yeah. My grandfather -- my father's father and mother, they were both dead. My grandfather on my mother's side and her sister Kate did not want to leave Germany, and they were -- I know Kate -- there was a Gastronaught (ph). We have the Red Cross report, and my father (sic) was in a -- like a ghetto, a small ghetto, and I don't recall exactly where, but he was sick and he was old so he just probably passed away in there, don't have any real documentation on him. All my uncles -- my aunt, my father's oldest sister, went to England. I don't know when. All my uncles left. One of them was in Argentina, and the rest of them went to Israel, so they all got out, so the only ones -- the only really close relatives I had was my -- my grandfather and my aunt, and they both

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perished. They both stayed back.

Q: And did your parents ever go back to their --

A: My parents went back. My parents went back. My father was very leery of going. He says, I know, you don't want to go and say goodbye to them because he figured that would be his last trip, but they went back, and they eventually went to Israel and -- and -- and Germany, and they -- they saw -- they saw the people. My Aunt Hannah (ph) came to the United States, but I never met her because I was in Utah, and I don't -- I still don't know to this day when she was coming through Utah, my father said don't go -- don't go to the station. I don't know why. It was very strange, and my father was such an easy person to get along with. I just don't know what happened. Something went wrong, but yeah, eventually most of them moved back to Germany, and most of my cousins are in Germany and in Israel. I tried -- my father was the youngest. I'm the oldest of the next generation. I tried to get us together, and my mother said you're going to get one response. I think there is 12 of us, and I got one response, and nobody was interested. I have seen a few of my cousins as they come to the states, and, you know, if they come to LA I usually meet with them, and one of my cousin's sons was in Orange County so we met with him quite often, but they moved to Texas.

Q: So let's continue.

A: That's basically it. I -- I don't have any more to --

Q: Have you heard from your parents what happened to their property back in Germany?

A: I know they got restitution.

Q: Oh, they did?

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A: I don't -- I don't know -- the property -- the sawmill was sold, and, you know, ten cents on the dollar or some -- some ridiculous amount, so that was sold. My father's store, he sold -- my grandfather's store, very early on, you know, '34, end of '33, '34 the brown church started coming in -- you know, standing in front of the store and telling people don't go in here because this is owned by Jews, you know, so he eventually sold it and he moved in with -- with my father and mother and myself in Reichenbach. He moved in with us, so that's the only property we basically had, and so -- I have the bill of sale. It was sold to -- you know, sold by Arnold Wolff, a Jew, to Doctor such and such, Arian. It's right on the -- on the bill of sale.

Q: And you told this story to your -- to your kids, right, and to your grandkids?

A: Yeah, kids and grandkids. I'm writing a book. I'm an engineer. I don't write well, so it's very slow, but I am trying to.

Q: What is their attitude -- attitude to your experience, to them being Jewish?

A: Well, it was basically -- well, both of my kids married out of their -- you know, their spouses were not Jewish, although my -- and they are both divorced now so it doesn't really matter, but they have nothing. I think my -- my daughter has converted to Christianity, so she's basically lost, and her -- her son is being raised as a Christian, and so that's my youngest grandson. My oldest grandson is married. He's married to an Italian Mexican gal, and I don't know -- they -- I don't think they do anything. His -- her side of the family did nothing, and my -- my son did nothing. When my son got married, he went to our rabbi, and he wanted him to -- to get married -- you know, to marry them, and at that time the -- you know, the reform didn't do mixed marriages so they refused them, so

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they -- we lost them totally. That kind of soured him on everything. Now that he is divorced and he is -- he has had major health problems -- he had a bypass operation -- now he is coming back. He has joined a temple and he is on the choir and he is starting to come back. He came up to Rosh Hashanah for services with us, so he is coming back after the fold. My granddaughter today as a matter of fact is going to Israel on the Birthright trip. She is leaving from New York probably right about now, so I'm curious -- very curious to see what the effect will be when she comes back. I know that -- she was also in London with me. They were very taken by the Holocaust Museum in London, and then when they heard the story, you know, that -- that really affected them. They were -- the other kid that was there, Mikey, my middle grandson, you know, he is a real goff-off, and he was -- he was all ears, and he was really attentive, and he told me, he says if you don't publish your book I will, so he was -- I know -- I know he took it very seriously, and it finally -- I think it finally sunk in. The 12-year old -- it was interesting. In Santa Barbara there is -- they did an exhibition. It's a room that the Jewish Federation did. I guess they copied Toronto. Toronto has a wall of Holocaust survivors, not particularly KTA but just Holocaust survivors, where they have big plaques. They're probably about, oh, a foot and-a-half wide and about three or four foot tall, three foot tall, where they have the pictures and the stories of the -- of the survivors, and Santa Barbara copied that, and I'm one on the wall, and so we do -- we do -- we do speak to groups. I go out several times a year and speak to schools or -- or you know, sometimes universities, sometimes adults, whenever -- whenever somebody comes and asks, so we do do that,

and when my grandson, the youngest one, Joshua, was in third grade they were learning

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the Holocaust, which kind of surprised me. I thought it was a little early. Of course my daughter told the teacher about it so I was invited to speak, and I spoke, and they had one -- they had about -- about 25 kids in the classroom. One -- one was a problem. You know, he had attention deficit, but the rest of them were just amazingly attentive, and to be honest with you, I got the best questions from those kids that I ever got on any speech. Most of the time we talked to, you know, high schoolers, and it's not cool to ask questions so they don't ask a lot of questions, but I don't know -- since then Joshua has probably not even thought about it.

Q: Looking back at -- at your life in England and the early years of your life, do you think that this Kindertransport and Holocaust experience was decisive in your life, like did it affect certain decisions?

A: I don't think so. I don't think so because I was so young. You know, I talked to some of the fellow, you know, Kindertransporters, and it's kind of the same story. The younger ones, we did okay. Of course my mother took the extra effort to place with me with a family and some of them just went over. You know, some of them went with siblings and they were separated. Some of them went to -- into farms where they were put to work, and so, you know, some of them had a harder life than I had. I was so young. It just -- by the time I -- I got to Bolivia I was five years old, and, you know, life from there was -- you know, I wasn't used to anything else. You know, we were -- we were poor, and we -- we did what we could. You know, until we got to living in -- in the company house we were -- you know, in real dumps so to speak, and after that it was -- you know, it's always -- you do what you have to. You know, that -- that was my parent's way, you

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know, and, you know, today over here my mother would have to go to therapy and whatever to -- to recover, but, you know, it wasn't done. I don't know how she gave me up. I just -- I can't visualize giving my one child, you know, at three years old, giving them away and not knowing whether you'll ever see them again. You know, how hard is that? Just -- you know, it was just unbelievable what they went through, but for me it was -- you know, I just don't have a memory of anything. The only bad thing probably happened when I crossed the Atlantic and we had some gunfire, and that's about it. That's about all I heard.

Q: Do you remember when you just came to Bolivia what your parents were speaking about, talking to each other about the situation in Europe, about Nazis and what was going on? Do you remember that?

A: The only thing -- the only thing I remember really is when we -- I don't remember anything when we first got there. They probably wouldn't have talked in front of me. I'm sure of that, and -- well, then I started learning German so I could understand it. I remember very distinctly the day the war was over in Europe, there was a -- kind of like a bachelor's quarters for the people that worked for the mining -- you know, there was an American mining company. They had a big party, and the only time I saw my mother drunk. She got tipsy. That's the only time, and the first comment she made is, I'm going to go see what happened to -- you know, to her father and her sister and contact the Red Cross right away. We didn't hear for almost 15 years later, but that was her first action. That's the only time I really remember them talking. There were always -- there was a group of Nazis in town, and we never associated, and they were always, you know, the

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enemy, and even when I went to school in Aurora (ph) there was a big group of Nazis in there, and, you know, it was -- we never associated with them, and most of the kids I went to school with were -- were Gentiles. There was a few Jews. Well, eventually I lived with a Jewish family in Aurora (ph), and, you know, they were the same way. We just stuck to each other and I never associated with them.

Q: And nowadays do you feel more like you're Jewish or American? Do you keep a more Jewish traditional life or --

A: We go to temple very seldom. We do -- we do the holidays. We always have a Passover. We belong to Havurah, you know, in -- in our temple, and so we have that extended family, but we don't really practice Judaism. You know, we do it during the holidays and we do Passover and we do -- we do a little bit of Hanukah, but Passover is always big, but, you know, we celebrate Thanksgiving big, and my wife was -- was what they call a valley girl in Los Angeles, and they're sort of Jews. You know, they -- they had a Christmas tree, and they -- you know, they -- I don't think her -- except for her father nobody ever went to temple. She is probably much more religious now than she ever was because she is part of the choir at the temple. She belongs to the sisterhood. I belong to the B'nai B'rith -- you know, the B'nai B'rith Lodge in town, but most of my friends are Jewish, You know, not all of them but most of them, but we -- we don't really practice the religion.

Q: Well, do you want to add something to the story about your -- experiences?

A: Not much. You know, it is what it is and, you know, you kind of roll with it. You

know, I was always taught my parents, you know, you do the best you can and that's it,

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you know. Things happen. You know, who knows what would have happened? We were just talking downstairs with one of the Kindertransport -- you know, do you ever think of what would have happened if there hadn't been a Hitler? I said, well, my son wouldn't be here. That was one thing. Well, who knows? Who knows?

Q: Well, Mr. Wolff, I would like to thank you for the time --

A: Well, thank you.

Q: Thank you for the amazing story, and good luck with your book. Thank you so much.

A: Thank you.

Q: And this concludes the United States Holocaust Museum interview story with Michael Wolff conducted by Julia Danilina on October 17th of 2010 at the Kindertransport conference in Arlington, Virginia. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview

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