

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Gerald Liebenau
September 12, 2012
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PREFACE

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GERALD LIEBENAU

September 12, 2012

Question: This a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Gerald Liebenau**, on September 12th, 2012, here at the museum, in the **Rubinstein** auditorium. Welcome Mr. **Liebenau**, and thank you for agreeing to speak with us.

Answer: Thank you.

Q: We're going to begin the interview, like we always do, at the beginning. We're going to want to know a little bit about your early life, who your family was, and so on. So I shout – I shoot out the first question. Where were you born, when were you born? Tell me a little bit about your father, your mother, and any siblings you might have had.

A: I was born in **Berlin**, in a place called **Elssholzstrasse**, which is located across a park which has something to do with what happens eventually. I was born November 30, 1925, and I lived in **Berlin** until 1938, when my family escaped from **Germany**. My father was a – at that time was working in textiles. He was also born in **Berlin**, as was his grandfather, and probably generations beyond that. And he was in the army, and the World War I. He was a machine-gunner, and spent four years in – in the army. He survived without any injury, but he did suffer from dysentery and almost died, but survived, obviously. He fought in both the eastern part, that is in the Russian sector, as well as the western front. And he was a very

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patriotic German, and was highly decorated the end of the war, for his achievements.

Q: Do you remember some of the decorations that he got?

A: He – he – he earned the Iron Cross on the first and second class, and must have done some outsta – he never talked about the war. The only thing I know about him is from a military pass, which is a little booklet that soldiers have, in which all of their battles are described. Every battle that's the unit that he was in, participated in, was identified. And I was able to put all this on a map one day, and I saw that he indeed fought on all fronts. He was also – before he went into the war, he was a – he – he – he – he – a window decorator. He was apprenticed at one of the large **Berlin** department stores.

Q: Do you remember the name?

A: Well, it was probably **Tietz**, or one of the – **Hermann Tietz**. And he was quite good in his field. But after the war, when he finally was relieved, he decided he would change his trade. And I'll go into that later.

Q: Okay.

A: While he was in the army, he was stationed in an occupation force, in **Estonia**. And in – in what was then **Reval**, now **Tallinn**, the capital of the ci – of the state. And he was in uniform. And I only assume that the occupation, at least in that part

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of the world, was quite peaceful. So's he – no one seemed to mind that he was in uniform. He went to Jewish services on Friday night, and at the end of the service, an elderly man came up to him and invited him to come to dinner at his home, which was [indecipherable] I guess, for Jewish soldiers, when they go to services. There he met a young girl. He was born in 18 na – 1889, and my mother was born eight – no, he was born – and my mother was born in 1898.

Q: That can get confusing.

A: That can be confusing, but it – it does turn out that way, he – he was obviously a little bit older than she. But they apparently fell in love. And while I've never had him talk about it, or my mother, they were – there were letters that I saw, that he'd written. I should add that he was an avid letter writer. He eventually learned to type with one finger, and was quite good at it. And everything he typed, he made a carbon copy, so that I now have v-volumes of his letters, which describe almost anything that ever happened to him. The war years are not there. The war years are a f – World War I, that is, were not in any of his letters. But there was a postcard which he had sent to his then sweetheart, in **Tallinn**, probably from **Berlin**, which he bemoans the fact that he is all alone. And he drew a picture of an umbrella standing and leaning against the fence of the house that apparently they lived in. And he is as lonely as the umbrella.

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Q: How could that not melt somebody's heart, you know?

A: Exactly. My mother was studying piano. She was – first studied in **Tallinn**, and then went to **Saint Petersburg**. And when the revolution began –

Q: You're talking about the Russian revolution?

A: Russian revolution began, the – my mo – my grandmother insist that she come home, and she did. And then – and this becomes til – mysterious, she ended up going to **Berlin**. She said she went there to study, and then she explained how one day he was – she was walking on **Potsdamer Platz**, which is sort of the equivalent of **Times Square**, and happened to bump into my father. That, obviously, is a made-up story, but that's as far as I could get from her. They were married, and in –

Q: What was your mother's maiden name?

A: Her name was **Organitsky**(ph).

Q: And what was her first name?

A: Well, she was – **Helene** was her first name. She was also known as **Lola**. My father's explanation was that he had so many girlfriends, he gave them all the same name, so **Lola** was the name that he picked for her as well, and she became known as **Lola** throughout her life. They had a very happy marriage.

Q: Were you the oldest child?

A: I was the first-born, yes. My sister is five years younger, and when she was –

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Q: What is her name?

A: – when she was born, we moved from our first domain, to another section of **Schreudenburg**(ph). That's where I grew up, at least until –

Q: You grew up in the center of **Berlin**, almost.

A: It was not far from **Kofsterdam**(ph). **Bayerischer Platz** is – there – there were no Jewish districts of **Berlin**, but there were places where there may be more Jews than not. There was a – a Jewish textile section in **Berlin**, which was quite active, and that's where my father ended up. He decided that being a window trimmer is not a job that a man, when he gets older, can perform, because he's standing in a window all day long. And it's – it's very hard on the body, and it's hot in the summer and cold in the winter, and that's not something he wanted to do for the rest of his life. Ironically, that's exactly what he did to the rest of his life. But that was after he came to the **United States**. While in **Germany**, he was attracted to the textile business because his brother-in-law, my – his sister's husband –

Q: From the **Liebenau** side.

A: On the **Liebenau** side. His name was **Hersheft**(ph), now known as **Hartley**(ph). They were well-off. I mean, they – they were considered to be the wealthy part of the family, and my father was able to apprentice, or get a job with his brother-in-law, and eventually open up his own store. He had the textiles.

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Q: Oh, your father had a textile store?

A: Textile store which he imported the textiles from **London**, or **England**, and **Czechoslovakia**, which is also something that was important.

Q: Would this have been tex – all kinds of textiles, both for furniture, and furnishings, as well as for clothing, or would of –

A: I – I believe it was clothing. I – I'm not sure about that, but I think it was clothing, that's what seemed to be the more main thing.

Q: Can you tell me – well, I have two questions. One of them you anticipated and answered in some way, which was o – what you knew of your father's war years, and of his family life, had he told you stories, and you say no, he never talked of it. And yet, you seem to know quite a bit about – about what his early years were like. How did you find out?

A: Well, these are, at best side remarks he might have made. Some of his letters, of course, do give me some insight in what happened. But there was never any session with him where I would sit down and say, now tell me about the war years, even after I became a soldier myself. He would tell me little bits and pieces about his experience, which I guess was meant to teach me how to be – how to take care of myself. It so happened I also became a heavy machine-gunner, which was in the family, I guess.

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Q: But it completely by coincidence, huh?

A: Completely by coincidence, yes. I can talk about that later on –

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: – but that's – but my – so my family consisted of my mother's family in **Estonia**, which was her two brothers. One of them was a doctor, the other was an engineer. And my grandfather was in the hops, and what's beer made of?

Q: Brewery? Brewery? Ah, yeah, hops. So he was a brewer?

A: Yeah – no, he was not a brewer, he was importing just the –

Q: The grain?

A: – the grain, yes, so – so that was just his job. That's what I understand. He must have done well, because th – we visited him about three or four times.

Q: Do you have memories of being there?

A: Oh yes, I have pictures of his **dacha**(ph), which was quite large, and – and – and – and looked very prosperous. He used to – he – he had that in – in a seas – seaside resort, called **Novai**(ph) **Aizel**(ph), which had a lovely beach, and was right on the **Baltic**, and we spent a lot of time swimming there. That was one of the pleasant **remembries** I have of his being –

Q: What was the language that you spoke with your maternal grandparents?

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A: In her family, German and Russian were the language. She does speak Estonian, but I doubt very much – I think she once said that's only spoken by the maids, but that's a very nasty comment to make. But –

Q: Well, it's also – y-you know, the – tha-that – that was the social structure at the time.

A: It was the social structure and German was the, you know, the – the language of the cultured, and ed-educated. Russian was also considered a major language. So she was fluent in Russian and German and I noticed also she spoke French at one point. She had a musical ear, and languages just flowed into her. The moment she stepped foot on the **United States**, she spoke English.

Q: That's amazing. There – there are people who have that –

A: And my father has totally opposite, no – which is the same, my – my problem.

Q: Yeah?

A: My – my language abilities are very limited. I don't learn languages easily.

Q: But at home in **Berlin**, German was how you spoke, yes?

A: Germ – only German, yes.

Q: Only German.

A: There was no other language spoken at home.

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Q: Yeah. I wanted to step back a minute, and ask two questions. One, which is, do you have any earliest memories from your childhood, that you can recall?

A: Well, I – I was a fairly pampered child. I – my – my parents took good care of me. I remember my first day in school, I had one of those cornucopias.

Q: You mean, like a real basket of cornucopia?

A: It was a large paper – sort of a large ice cream cone, stuffed with toys, and meant to – a-and s – and candy, where candy was the prime factor in that baggage, to sweeten school, your school year.

Q: Well, the currency of children.

A: Yes.

Q: If cigarettes are the currency of soldiers, then candy is the currency of kids.

A: Exactly, and it worked.

Q: Yeah.

A: My school years were very happy. I began school in a public school, which was just a block down from where we lived. A long block, but it was walkable, and I walked every day to school. My teacher was a very kind man, even though his name was **Zorn**, which also is the name of a red skinned coach that we had at one time. But **Zorn** was not angry, which is what **zorn** means, he was a very kind person. I never had the feeling as I was any different from anyone else. My – my integration

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– I played with whoever was willing to play cowboys and Indians, which was the main game of the time, and it was inspired by a man named **Karl May**, who wrote volumes and volumes about the Indians and cowboys in **America**, and I heard that he never was in the **United States**, but he described it so beautifully, that it must have been only he, that he thought what he saw was authentic.

Q: Well, **Karl May** exists to this day in – in – when I went to school in **Germany**, people would tell me about this great writer of Indian stories, who, as an American, I had never heard.

A: No, I – every – every child was – was reading that.

Q: Excuse us – excuse us for a second. **[technical interruption]** Before we go into school, I wanted to dwell a little bit more about your family. Not only your mother's and father's background, but tell me a little bit about what their personalities were like. Who did you feel closer to, if you did, and what did they – what were they like at home?

A: My – my father was a typical German businessman. I mean, he would come home, and there would be dinner on the table. And my mother was a typical German housewife. Her interests were in playing piano. We always had a piano, and she was always practicing. I can remember those practice sessions seemed to be

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forever, and the same things were played over and over again, and she made the same mistake every time she practiced. It was a –

Q: What is a typical German businessman of the time?

A: I'm sor –

Q: Who wa – what is a typical German businessman of the time?

A: Well, it – it – a businessman went into the home, he never talked about his business, but his schedule was very routine, and when he went to work, his mode of transportation was a motorcycle with a sidecar. And the sidecar had the two compartments, and we all fit into that; my mother, my sister, I was in back of my father. And I even have a picture of the maid being in there somewhere. But we did have maids. There was a maid who took care of the house, so that my mother really had a lot of time to herself, and she had – she visited with people of her own age, her – her – her people with whom she had relations for many, many years.

Q: She was a shi – sociable person?

A: She was very sociable, she was a very sociable, outgoing person, and my father was very supportive. I have pictures of them going to masked balls, and occasions where obviously social life was number one. And she was always **[indecipherable]**. She was a very lovely, beautiful woman, and she had a lot of talents. And so she was, you know, eas – easy to live with.

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Q: Were they both approachable?

A: Yes, my mother was. My father was also, although there was never much intimacy, there was enough connection so that you never felt that you were alone [indecipherable], they – they were very close to their children. They did go out by themselves [indecipherable] they – they went skiing in **Czechoslovakia**. And we did take trips to – all of us together took trips to **Estonia**. And –

Q: And your sister – were you and your sister close, or were – because she was a girl and you were a boy, and there were so many years, that your worlds were –

A: I must confess that my – my – unto this day, we have a nice relationship. I mean, she lives in **Connecticut**, and we telephone each other every week, and we speak, and this – but we – we – we are different in – in many ways. She has lived in the same place all her life, and I was all over the world. She – she's married to an optometrist, and she live – they live in a very small town, you know, that's – all her life. My mother, of course, was unhappy with that, because she felt someone should live in a big city, and should participate in all the – all the cultural offerings that were there. So, in ways, we were different. We – we did travel a little bit to – to – I think we were once in **Denmark**, on seaside. And – but otherwise my – my family's weekend activity was in the Jewish rowing club.

Q: Tell us a little bit about that. What was the Jewish rowing club?

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A: The Jewish rowing club was founded in 1905, and it consisted of approximately between 50 and 70 people. I have a little history of the club, which I just skimmed over again. And it was very active. They had a number of rowing boats, which were used for regattas. My father was very active in this, and he was a very skilled sculls – scull man. He had his own boat, a double boat, that is for two people, for my mother was also rowing with him. And I, on many occasions was the coxswain, even though I was just a little kid, I kept a seat there, and acted like I was steering the boat. We loved being near the water, I mean that was our social life. The place itself was not a lot –

Q: Is this – on what – what body of water was this within **Berlin**? Was it the river **Spree**?

A: Yes, it was on the **Spree**.

Q: Okay.

A: And the club was called **Oberspree**.

Q: **Oberspree**.

A: Which meant the – the upper end of the **Spree**, but it was one of several Jewish clubs. There were maybe a half a dozen of them, and they competed with one another, and big deals were made when they win, and they would [**indecipherable**]

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when they lost. The men were mostly engaged in the sport. The women spend most of their time drinking coffee, and talking about whatever women talk about.

Q: To this day, that's a mystery to men.

A: Yes, it is. But we were all busy. And it was very social. People grew very close to each other. This was – these were the people with whom they socialized, these are the people whom they celebrated any big events. And it was always open to them. The weekend –

Q: So did you have your friends there too, in –

A: I developed my own friends, I had – my girlfriends were there, I mean, I was then 12 years old, 11 – 10, 11. I started going when I was probably five, or six, but eventually I became more conscious of what it – what it was like. That's where I learned to swim, and to this day I believe that I have avoided major diseases because I was –

Q: Inoculated?

A: – inoculated in – in the **Spree**.

Q: Which is not the cleanest river.

A: It – if it isn't now, you should have seen it then. **Siemens** had a big plant across the river, right on the other side, and I'm sure when they spilt chemicals, they were not too careful as to where it went. And so I must have been exposed to everything

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that could possibly be given to a youngster. So I had a very healthy life in many ways, and I attribute some of that to the fact that I had the **Spree** water to inoculate me.

Q: Yeah. Well, it sounds like a very happy childhood.

A: It was a happy childhood, the Jewish community in **Berlin** was large. It was very self-confident. People felt that they were as much part of the culture and population of the city as anyone else. There was never any sign of anti-Semitism.

Q: Can I interrupt just for a second, however? You say self-confident, but it also sounds self-contained, in that I don't hear that there would be much interaction with people who were non-Jews.

A: I think they did have quite a close social – I mean, my – my parents, if I speak only for them, had mostly Jewish friends. My father was never a member of any army organizations of any sort. He was – he was – he was v – a very patriotic man. I mean, when the war came, Jews just went for the – for the – the recruiting offices to – to participate in this disaster.

Q: You're talking about World War I.

A: World War I, yes.

Q: Yeah. So did you have any interaction with kids who were not Jewish?

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A: Oh my – the friends I played with were not Jewish, no. When I was – now I'm talking about, these were the very early years, until I was about 12 years old, and then things began to change, and it was quite clear – and there were several ways I know now that there were changes. Fo –

Q: Well, let's go – I'm sorry, I'm interrupting again, but –

A: Yeah.

Q: – I'd like to get the sense from you, as through a child's eyes, how you perceived them, and, you know, what one learns afterwards, can put it into context. But how did you experience those larger political changes, in your own life?

A: Well, first of all, I was not aware they were really political.

Q: Okay.

A: There – there were changes which were so different that I remember them clearly.

Q: Okay.

A: The first one was in the park. We were playing cowboys and Indians, as we usually did, and again, it was a big scud – I don't think it was a Jew – they never talked about these things. We didn't talk about religion, they didn't talk about religion, we didn't. I didn't have much to talk about, I was not from that kind of a

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religious home where my Judaism was that obvious, or that much practiced. But we did –

Q: So your family was not religious, really.

A: Not in the sense that they would be kosher, or have any other – but they attended, certainly, all the holidays. They went to synagogue, they were members of a synagogue. I went to a Jewish school, to a – to a religious school where – as I would have here.

Q: Okay.

A: And so it was not that we were outside of the religion, we were just not very active in the religion. But we were playing in this park, and all of a sudden there was a crowd of people who gathered in front of a very large courthouse. On both sides of the steps were Gestapo, or actually, I guess they were Gestapo, but they were dressed as **Hitler** – **Hitler** Stormtroopers.

Q: Do you remember their uniforms, what they looked like?

A: They were – yes, they were brown uniforms, with black pants, and a leather strap across. The leather strap was used whenever there was a fight, they'd take them off and just whip people with them. So it was not just a costume, it was a weapon of sorts. They stood on both sides of this entryway, which was rather large. And out came a – a group of men, all dressed in black, carrying attaché cases. And there was

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a lot of booing. Many people had come to the scene by this time. There was a lot of noise being made, shouts. And there was also many people yelling **heil Hitler**. So something was going on which was not pleasant. I did not know, as a child, what exactly this was. I also began to see now, that the newspapers had turned their attention to Jews. The Stormtroopers had their own publication called “**Der Stürmer**,” which means Stormtrooper, this was their maga – which was everywhere, it was so widely publicized. I think they practically gave it away. But every –

Q: Was it on those th – I don’t know what they’re called, but in **Berlin** they’re these sort of like cylindrical –

A: Advertising columns, yes.

Q: Right.

A: But that was the only one. Every corner had a newspaper stand –

Q: I see.

A: – and the newspapers were open so people could see what’s there. And I began to see these things which I recognized as anti-Semitic.

Q: Did you a – ask your parents about it, what does this mean, what’s going on?

A: Well, it was discussed at home, but not to the point where I was being instructed what this is about. I mean, this – these are all personal feelings I had. First of all,

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they displayed Jews as non-humans. I mean, they had faces that no human would have, and hands and hair and noses, and – ah, caricatures that were obviously highly offensive. And as a kid, it was offensive to me as well. I also began to notice that in one of the side streets, the corner where we lived – I lived in a block, in a – in five, six story building, which was part of a block, the whole street was the same buildings.

Q: Is this **Elssholzstrasse**?

A: **Elssholz** –

Q: Yeah, **Elssholz**, yeah.

A: **Elssholzstrasse**, yes. And e-every – when we finally moved to another section of **Berlin**, the **Haberland Strasse**, it was the same type of – we lived on the fourth floor, there were no elevators, and I learned to walk steps early in life. Fights began to break out between young men, almost boys, dressed in their **Hitler** youth outfits, which were similar to the others. And red shirted young men on the other side. Obviously the communists and the Nazis were girding up for a struggle. And it was a – a pretty wild scene, that I, as a child remember very distinct –

Q: Were you scared?

A: I was scared enough not to go near them, but on the other hand, there was a certain amount of jealousy. Here was this cult of young boys, they were always

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marching and singing, and it was something I obviously couldn't join. That became clear to me also, that I was not wanted in that crowd.

Q: How did it become clear?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: How did this become clear? Was there an incident, or was it just you just knew?

A: I must have felt it. If my parents were concerned about this, they did not demonstrate it to me. I mean, I – I think they made a real effort not to let our home become infected by the lo – the hatred outside.

Q: Did you sense though, that they themselves were more – or that they were less easygoing than earlier, or were they sadder, or more serious at home? Or you didn't sense these things?

A: Not yet, not yet.

Q: Okay.

A: Eventually, this will happen, yes, but while we were still living in **Elssholzstrasse**, this was still only a public school. Nothing happened in the school that I remember as being addressed to me. It was still a – a place I enjoyed going to.

Q: So this would be the early 1930s?

A: This was between 19 – to 1936, 1933 to 1936, something like that.

Q: Okay, **Hitler** is already in power.

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A: **Hitler** has the power, yes.

Q: What about the –

A: I became –

Q: Okay.

A: – obvi – you know, th – let me –

Q: Okay.

A: – interject here, th-the – I have saved my e-early report cards, and they were a good indication of what really happened to me, now that I look at it back out, it was – became clear to me. I started out with – a fairly good student. I was not at the top, but I was a good student. I behaved well, my grades were two and fi – wa – one being the best, and five the worst, I was between two and three.

Q: So that would be a **B** grade, something –

A: A **B** grade student. And the comments of the teachers began to make some interesting observations. By 1933 – by – by 1936, our – Jews were no longer allowed – Jewish children no longer allowed to go to public school, and we came to a Jewish school, which was not at all a pleasant experience. The whole thing was strange, and I was not much at ease. My report cards also reflected the decline in my attention span, in my – my behavior was okay, but there was enough to be said, in each of those subsequent comments by teachers, that –

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Q: Like, what would they say? Do you remember any specific examples of what they would say?

A: I have them at home, I have the report cards, and comments by the teachers. And while nothing was terribly bad, it was beginning to look negative, as to my behavior and attention.

Q: Okay. Now, do you think that might have been because the teachers were being – becoming more biased, or because your behavior was really that way?

A: No, it was a lot of tension at home. Tension began to build up.

Q: Okay.

A: Eventually we moved to **Haberland Strasse**, which was a – a more comfortable apartment, was a little bigger. It had a –

Q: How many rooms?

A: Ther – I would say about three. The maid had hers, and I had mine, my sister had a room. I guess three or four bedrooms.

Q: Mm-hm. That's pretty large.

A: And again, the piano was the center of the – of the room. My new school was not a happy place for me, and I – I can only attribute to the fact that I was – I was beginning to get obviously more tense about what was happening at home. My

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father started learning English. Why, I'm not sure, but I guess he felt there was a possibility we may get – have to get out of **Germany**.

Q: Did his business change after 1933? If he owned a textiles –

A: I'm not aware of that.

Q: Okay.

A: No, he was – he was active in business, almost to the end.

Q: Okay.

A: And I'm not aware that there was much that changed. My mother, and her girlfriends began talking about jobs which one could do overseas, away from **Germany**. And they were usually either in the maids, or couples, man and wife would go work for some [**indecipherable**] family, and he would do the yardwork, and she would do the home cleaning. They did not have any very ambitious future for themselves. They – they – they knew they wouldn't speak the language, and they were more left preparing for fairly low skill kind of job. And this – this seems peculiar to me now; it wasn't then. There was tension in the family. My father was an avid listener to the – to the radio, and he picked up **BBC**, which was a very dangerous thing to do, because if he got caught, he would certainly be arrested immediately. But he managed to put his ear next to the ra-radio, and then listen to the news, so was fairly well-informed.

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Q: Did your mother not like that?

A: My mother was not that much involved. She – first of all, she seemed to know English anyhow, from where I don't know, but she must have learned it somewhere. But there was more. My father was an avid stamp collector. And like his decorating skills, his skills with stamps was remarkable. Every single stamp was specially protected against any possible damage. His albums were the neatest and best looking, and he was very careful to buy good stamps. He had a very good – a valuable collection of stamps. That was his hobby, stamps was his hobby. Rowing was his sport, and the motorcycle, I guess was part of his sport, because he – we did go out with the cycle very often. I was not at all a sports-type person. I participated reluctantly in any sport that I had to participate in. I was good in nothing. I – I – I must say, to this day, sports are not high on my list, either as an active sportsman, or as anything else.

Q: But did you like the rowing?

A: I liked rowing, yes, a matter of fact, when I was in college, I did at one point try that, but I could see that was – was not my talent. I was just not an – I – I was more of the studious type, and learning took a lot of work for me, and I did spend much time just doing my work, my homework.

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Q: It sounds like the tension was internalized, without you even realizing it, when you were, you know, during these school years. Or, is it that you did realize it?

A: I – I had the tension – yes, I clearly did realize. I mean, there were – there were certain things said and done at home, which – which did bother me.

Q: Can you tell us what they were?

A: Well, there were discussions about how to get out, and how to find somebody to provide us the help that we needed. And this leads to, you know, at a certain point, and – and it was so late in deciding that something had to be done, that it's almost miraculous that something did get – come out of this. The first thing they did was try to find somebody who could provide us with affidavit to go somewhere. And my mother, somehow became a ter – different person, all of a sudden. She turned from a social, very light, butterfly-type person, into a real tiger. She remembered that her father said at one point that he had a brother who had emigrated to the **United States**, and he not only knew that, he also knew his name, which no longer was **Organitsky**(ph), but now became **Miller**. And he knew where he was located. So my mother started writing letters to her – to her uncle, and there was a lot of communications with her father, as well, because –

Q: Well, he was in **Estonia**.

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A: He was in **Estonia**, and – and it was always about, you know, can you help us here, and can you help us there. And the father was, you know, was – certainly was willing, but I don't think he had many resources to turn to, except for this brother, which was remarkable. There was also our good fort – now, this began in 1937 - 1938, I mean –

Q: That's pretty late.

A: – that's pretty late. It was also very fortunate that his son **David** –

Q: Uh-huh. His uncle's son.

A: His – my uncle – her uncle's son, yes, was – just graduated from law school. And he was obviously the person to whom they turn when question of affidavits came up. He was willing to give us an affidavit. He wrote the affidavit skillfully, as a lawyer can be expected, and we thought we had what we needed to get out of **Germany**.

Q: So they would have been your sponsors, in other words, in the **United States**.

A: I'm sorry?

Q: They would have been your sponsors, your uncle would have been the sponsor.

A: He would have been the sponsor, he would – the affidavit was for the purpose of di – of swearing to the **U.S.** government that these people will never become a ward of the state.

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Q: Yeah.

A: Which I became for the rest of my life.

Q: We'll get to that, we'll get to that.

A: But i-i-it – it was a big commitment to make, and it was very difficult to get anyone to do that. And we were very fortunate that not only was he able, willing, but he had a man who could write an affidavit skillfully. But it was to no use at all. They took the affidavit to the American embassy, and here I must say a word about the foreign service –

Q: Yes.

A: – of the **United States**, which was highly anti-Semitic. I mean, they really didn't want Jews to come to the **United States**.

Q: This was the embassy in **Berlin**.

A: The embassy in **Berlin**, but this was also true in **Washington**, that the whole idea of rescuing Jews never come up. They turned down the affidavit, because Uncle **Miller** – Uncle **Morris**(ph) did not have enough money. He owned a second-hand clothing store on **Lackawanna** Avenue in **Scranton, Pennsylvania**, which is merely the dumps. And I to this day remember the smell of that place, and why anybody would even go to buy something there is itself a question. But he made enough money to send his son to college, but it was certainly not enough for the

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[**indecipherable**] foreign service officer who was looking this over, and say, that's not good enough.

Q: Can I stop, just for a second? Did your mother – I mean, can you des – were you there, did you go to the embassy, did she go by herself, did your father go? Do you have any – any details from how – what kind of experience they had?

A: I know this was a very tedious experience. I imagine my mother must have gone at some time, because my father was still working.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and the lines to the embassies were long, and the time they gave you was short. So that I could only imagine that my mother must have done a good bit of the standing in line and – and talking. And she was a wonderful talker. I mean, she could persuade anyone of anything that she needed done. So she should have been successful, but this was not – not here. Anyhow, a letter went back to my Uncle **Morris**(ph), and told him this was not good enough. But he was obviously not satisfied with that, and he found himself a – another man. There were several other correspondences that went on here that led eventually to **Morris**(ph) going to a man with whom he emigrated from **Estonia**, and who was a much more – a much wealthy man. He owned movie theaters, these little movie theaters they had in those days, for 20 cents, or 10 cents you can get in. And – but he had a number of them,

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and obviously had a lot of money, and he wrote an affidavit, or **David** wrote it for him. And this time they went to this [indecipherable] **Berlin** embassy, and they rejected it because the man was not a blood relative.

Q: This is the **U.S.** embassy in **Berlin**.

A: The **U.S.** embassy in **Berlin** was – felt that this was no good because that was – was a blood relative. At this point my father became almost panicky. It was his belief that the most dangerous – the greatest danger was for Jewish men; that they were not after the women, or after the children, they were only after the men. And he wrote one of his letters to one of his friends that he – would you like me to read from that –

Q: Yes, I'd like, very much. And at the same time, let's not forget, I'd like to hear a little bit more about the Jewish communities, not just one, in **Berlin**. I believe you have a book that shows just how many there were. So I'd like to show that, but let's read the letter first. Okay. I think it's in the other side, the – the glasses.

A: One of his major correspondents was a man by the name of **Martin Schwartz**(ph), who emigrated to **Mexico City**. He was a very close friend, an-and to my father confided him in his feelings, and how he was doing as a refugee. He decided to escape.

Q: So this is the letter he's written before he becomes a refugee?

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A: Yes. No, this after. After he became. He decided that he had to get out, and he was willing to try to cross the border legally. But it turned out the borders by this time, were so closely guarded, that this was impossible. So he applied at the British embassy for a visa – a business visa. That is to go – to put in for a short period of time, and that he would be expected to return to **Berlin**. I-I – that was an instinct he had to wait for this visa to come to him. It was – he ha – in addition to the visa, there had to be an exit permit of some sort, given by the German government, and that was not forthcoming. So that the period of time in his visa, which was about five weeks, was quickly running short. And it was just almost in the last moment that the permission to leave **Germany** was given to him.

Q: How nerve-racking.

A: And li – di – by the way, the Nazis in the beginning were not objecting to German Jews leaving, and – but there was no country they could go to, it was almost impossible. So when he got to **London**, in September 1938, he wrote to see – letter to **Martin Schwartz**(ph). “I arrived here yesterday. I probably don’t have to describe to you the struggle I have endured. First was the decision to leave my family, four days before the high holidays, and then to have to celebrate them here. The situation for the Jews in **Germany** have reached the point where every Jewish male was in danger for his life. They are picked up directly in the streets to fill the

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concentration camps, where entire military installations, factories and centers are being constructed underground. There are also non-Jews in these places, but their condition and food cannot be compared to those of the Jews. They lived in separate camps.” He knew a great deal.

Q: But you – but he didn’t pass it on to you at home.

A: Well –

Q: And – and it – in such detail.

A: This – thi – no, he would not write that home because the mail – there was a chance the mail was being watched.

Q: No, what I mean to say – I – I meant to express it this way, that he didn’t – this knowledge that he had, he did not talk about it with you at home, in an effort to protect you. That’s what I’m getting this –

A: No.

Q: No?

A: My mother, of course, was part of this. I mean, he – he had no secrets from her, and – and she was full aw – fully aware of the danger he thought he was in. And the interesting part is that he thought it was only men, and that that’s why he moved to escape, because he felt that once he was in **England**, he could get his family to

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follow him. And, as he said in the same letter, he said, if I had stayed and – and got picked up, then I would be of no help to my family at all.

Q: Well, had you heard then, in your family, of acquaintances, or people that you knew, who were arrested all of a sudden on the street, like he mentions in this letter? Had that been something that was common knowledge in discussion?

A: Apparently it was. I mean, by this time Jews became very much aware of what was going on, because people were disappearing, and interestingly, they knew where they were going, and they had some idea that these people will never come back. That's what my father wrote in his letter.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: And so it was not a mystery as to what was happening, they knew. And –

Q: My question is a little bit more precise, it is, do you remember hearing about such things?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: No, I did not hear any of it. It was not until **Kristallnacht** that I became aware of what was going on, really.

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Q: Let's go back, just for a second. I know I'm interrupting again.

A: Yeah, yeah. Jewish community?

Q: That, and we never finished finding out who were these men who were with the black suits and the suitcases, who were being booed out of that building?

A: Oh, they were the Jewish lawyers.

Q: And why were they being booed?

A: Well, by this time the – the **Nuremberg** – [technical interruption]

Q: So, they – they – these were Jewish lawyers?

A: They were Jewish lawyers. The – the **Nuremberg** laws took effect almost immediately when **Hitler** came into power.

Q: And that was – and you were eight years old when – 1933, and – and so you saw this probably, very soon thereafter.

A: I saw this, and it made a big impression on me.

Q: Yeah.

A: Now, I'm not going to tell you that I had any knowledge that this were Nazis, and these were lawyers, but that's what – who they were. They were clearly lawyers, and the –

Q: Ah – okay, I just wanted to clear –

A: Yeah.

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Q: – I di – you know, address that – that they were being dismissed from their jobs, probably.

A: They were from – dimiss from – dismissed fro – they might have even gone to concentration camp, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: But the – but the Gestapo was there, and the Stormtroopers were there, and I imagine they were there not only for the purpose of – of watching them leave the building, but maybe they also took them away. I'm not sure.

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't know what happened.

Q: And then – so let's jump forward again, and you talk about **Kristallnacht**. Tell us about how **Kristallnacht** happened in your life.

A: I was going to school, I was walking. There were all within walking distance, I walked to school. At the corner of the street where I lived, there was a very large art supply shop. Now, I was always interested in art, a-and drawing, an-and – and pictures and things of that sort. And I stopped at that window almost every day I went to school or came home, looking for anything that – new that might have appeared, any implement for artists. And while most of this was well beyond my cap-capability, it was interesting for me to do that. But one day I came by, and the

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store was totally demolished. I mean [**indecipherable**] window was broken, glass was all over the street, and big s – letters – in big letters it said, Jews.

Q: Jude.

A: Juden.

Q: Yeah.

A: And everything in the window was stole, there was nothing left. And that was – made a big impression. Not only did I lose my happy window shopping, but I saw some – some very dangerous things were happening.

Q: Did you feel like you were in danger at that point, by that point?

A: Not personally, no.

Q: And your family, did they – did – you know, was your father still there?

A: My family – I can't say my fam – my family obviously knew what was going on.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean, my father was an astute listener to the news, and my mother was bright enough to know what was going on, yes, I would say they do. And – but I – I've never talked to them about that.

Q: Now, was your father in **London** by the time **Kristallnacht** happened?

A: Yes.

Q: He was. So you were alone in **Berlin** with your mom.

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A: I was al – and my – again, my mother became a totally different woman, she took charge.

Q: Yeah.

A: Before my father left, he did two things. He bought tickets for a sh – a sea voyage to **New York**, on the **Cunard** lines, which left, that time, **Hamburg**. And he had these tickets, I guess, or had them – at least bought and had some kind of receipt for them. Cause when he was in **London**, he sent a letter to **Cunard**, saying, I bought these in **Berlin**, can I use them in **London** as well? And I guess, yes, they could. And so he had tickets. He also hired a furniture moving company to take our furniture and sell it to **Scranton, Pennsylvania**. And whereas every other home was immediately ransacked by whoever was the Gestapo that time, when we were about to leave, my mother then was in charge, she couldn't take any money with her, or any jewelry, but she bought watches for all of us, so we were walking around with watches. But otherwise, there was no money at all. And lo and behold, this huge truck pulls up in front of our house with a lift van, these huge boxes that they put furniture in, took our furniture and six months later when we came to **Scranton**, there is was. The – they called us up, says pick it up in the port of **New York**. I mean, it was – it was – I can only attest that to German bureaucracy, that once it gets going, it just doesn't stop, I mean –

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Q: Yeah.

A: This was paid for, he had receipt, and they're supposed to go get it, and that's what they did. They were not part of the Gestapo, obviously, and if the Gestapo were there, they probably would have immediately interceded and stopped them. We eventually were sorry that all that furniture came, because we had no place to put that furniture. But that's another story.

Q: I want to ask a few thing – now, that means then, that those first denials by the U.S. embassy in **Berlin** were reversed, that eventually you did get permission to go to the U.S.

A: Not – I'm not there yet.

Q: Okay. All right. All right, so –

A: Can we talk about the **Berlin** Jewish community?

Q: Yes, let's do that.

A: I should have started that earlier, but it – it's – it's important to note how well established, how confident, and how open they were, as a Jewish community. I have a book here.

Q: Mm-hm, let's take a look at it.

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A: It's called "**Judisches Adressbuch fur Gross-Berlin, Ausgabe 1931.**" 1931 they published this address book, which contains the name of every Jewish household in **Berlin**.

Q: That's huge.

A: Now, there were about 160,000 Jews in **Berlin**. I don't know whether this is 160,000, or what that number is. But it lists every Jewish name, every Jewish household, and a street address, and had an introduction, which is quite voluminous, to explain the position on all of the Jewish community in **Berlin**, and some of the people who were exceptionally well-known, including **Albert Einstein**.

Q: Yeah. Do you think his address is in there?

A: Well, I wouldn't be surprised if it were in there.

Q: It's a hu – that's a very thick book for just a Jewish com – is it the only time that such a book was put together, or was it part of a regular printing?

A: No, it was the only – no, this apparently is something that – that was designed to let the ge – Nazi government know that the Jewish community in **Berlin** was sub – sa – was substantial, it was well-endowed, and that it was – historically been there forever.

Q: So this was done in 1931 - 1932, that means that they were anticipating that the Nazis were –

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A: They were anticipating what might come. They felt it was still a time where they could influence the new government, if it were to come, of where the Jewish community was. And all I could think of was that this must have been very helpful to the Gestapo, because it was now easy to find every Jew in **Berlin**.

Q: How iron – how sadly ironic.

A: And they needed to go no further than this book, until pub – published in many copies.

Q: Can I take a look at that? Thank you very much. Can we focus on this a little?

Q2: Yeah, and I did get a shot of it, but it's – it – you got it in the dark there, so I need to –

Q: Okay. “**Judisches Adressbuch fur Gross-Berlin**,” means Jewish Address book from Greater **Berlin**.

Q2: Hold it there just a second.

Q: And I saw earlier that –

Q2: Yeah, do me a favor then, just turn it a – turn it around and open it.

Q: Turn it around and open it, yeah. Okay. And, if I can, I would like to look up two names here. We talked about Mr. **Einstein**, let's see if he's in here. **Einhorn**, **Einick**(ph). **Einstein, Albert**, professor, West 30. I don't know if you can see that.

Q2: Hold it so I can see it.

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Q: Pardon?

Q2: No, no, no, no, just keep it there.

Q: Okay. **Einstein**, second column. Okay, am I still in the way?

Q2: No, you're good. Let me just find it, though. Point it out.

Q: Right here.

Q2: Oh, over here. There he is.

Q: Got it?

Q2: Mm-hm.

Q: All right, and then we're going to look up Mr. **Liebenau's** family. It was very thorough, we found **Albert**. Excuse me. **Liebenau**, right here, **Kurt(ph)**. Second column again, right there. That was –

Q2: Now move your finger down.

Q: Do you see? **Kurt(ph) Liebenau** above it. Mr. **Liebenau's** father. Thank you.

Well, that's –

A: Well there's no – no doubt that this community was powerful, it thought it was powerful.

Q: Yeah.

A: It thought it had a contribution to make to the society as a whole, and that it would have been a big mistake to do anything to flatten, or to demolish that

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community. Just to let you know how much they were involved, the Germans had a collection of – the people would be standing on corners with boxes, and – to collect money for helping the poor in the winter. It's called **Winterhilfe**.

Q: Okay.

A: In other words, they collected money and then would take care of people who had no shelter, or food. The rowing club, **Oberspree**, was also a part of the organizations that would help in this effort. But at one point, after the Nazis came into power, and the **Nuremberg** laws came into effect, the club was no longer allowed to participate in this effort, and it was obviously hurtful to them, that they were all sad and left out of such an important –

Q: Altruistic kind of charity event.

A: – mission –

Q: Yeah.

A: – to help the poor. That's how integrated they were. That's how much they felt they were part of the body politics on – and of the society as a whole. They even felt being left out of such a activity which was totally non-political, was a – an act of unbelievable –

Q: Yeah. You know, you have the furniture movers coming to your family home, your father is in **London**, you're – you've walked by after **Kristallnacht**, and

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you've seen – was your father, by the way, ever in danger himself? Did – was there ever any attempt to find him? Did the Gestapo ever come looking for him?

A: Not that we know. Having this book now, I think there would have been no trouble finding him.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I'm – I'm not aware that they're actually looking for him.

Q: Okay.

A: But he felt in danger – he was – he – he felt threatened. There's no question about it.

Q: What about your uncles, his brothers, and his larger family? What happened with them?

A: They – they left, they went to **England** several years before, when it was still possible to go –

Q: Okay.

A: – and they took their furniture, they had a lovely home in **London**. And so it was, for them it was just a – a normal emigration to another country. My father's brother, who was also living in **Berlin**, he had two children, he was unfortunate, and could not leave **Berlin**, he just had no way to – well, there was a lot of correspondence about how to help him, and help my mother's sister. She was

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married to a German, and also could not – had – had nowhere to go except to her father, back to her father.

Q: In **Estonia**?

A: In **Estonia**. She made the mistake of leaving her father's home, to go back to ger – to **Berlin**, probably to be with her husband. She had a small child, and on her way to **Estonia**, the train stopped, the people are taken off and shot, in along the woods along the way, I don't know where that was.

Q: Was this in 1941, or was this earlier, do you know?

A: Probably was in '41, or something like that, yes.

Q: But you don't know the date, yeah.

A: Hm?

Q: You don't know the year?

A: No, no. I – I – I imagine it can be found, I'm not sure when it was. On the other hand, my uncle and his wife, my father's brother, who was also a veteran of World War I, were taken into – arrested and sent to a concentration camp, and eventually died. Their two children were on this children's transport, the **Kindertransport**, which was organized by the British, and they ended up in **London**, in **England**. He became a mechanic, skilled mechanic, and his sister became a nurse, and she eventually emigrated to **Canada**, where she was married. Their story is quite

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different from mine. I mean, he did not have an easy life in **England**, and the – I – I could tell long stories about that, but that was a different – totally different situation from mine.

Q: So you were –

A: I had my parents with me. He was – I – I mean, it wa – you can imagine what – what it was like for him to be – and knowing that his parents di – disap – because there was correspondence between him and his mother, and his parents, and then stopped. And that was then decided there was – they were no longer alive.

Q: So some members of you f – larger, extended family, made it to **England** much earlier, under normal immigration –

A: Yes.

Q: – circumstances, whereas your – your close uncle, who was your father's brother, did not, even though his children were in **Kindertransport**.

A: Well, the **Kindertransport** occurred, I believe – I'm not sure – before they went into the camps, yes –

Q: I see, yeah.

A: – I think they – the parents took the children to the trains, I think that's how it worked, and then, eventually they were picked up, too.

Q: But the – this **Kindertransport** was before you and your mother left, or aft –

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A: No, I believe it was after. I'm – I'm not sure what the dates are, but I – I have a feeling it was after we left.

Q: Okay, so I go back to where I started, which was the – the movers are – have come up to your house, the furniture is taken, your mother has – your mother is there, she's in charge. What does she do? How does – what happens?

A: Well, my mother became very resourceful at this point. She went to the British embassy, and only my mother could do it, she talked them into giving her a visa to visit her fa – her husband and to spend time with him until he has to return to **Germany**. And he – she was given such a visa. So we had a visa for us, and we all – now – now we are about to leave **Germany**. We got on a train, and there was a lot of fear. I mean, I could tell this was not something that was going to be a pleasant voyage. And sure enough, when we got to the Dutch border, our train was stopped, all passengers were ordered to leave the train, and my mother at that time, just lost it all. And I became the – the man of the house, I'm not sure –

Q: That's means she – she just couldn't – she just fell apart?

A: She – she fell – she – well, she didn't fall apart, but she – but she was very shocked by all this. Cause she – by – to – to her mind this was the end. We were taken to a hotel, we all slept in the same bed. Was a decent hotel. And my mother just never, you know, tha – at that point I had to tell my mother whatever I could

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tell her, make her feel better. Next morning we were told to come back to the station, and the train continued, and we left.

Q: So the – what – the amount of tension, the amount of nerve –

A: The tension was horrible.

Q: Yeah.

A: My father, in **London**, in the same letter I just read, explained how he was – waited for the train to come, on which she was scheduled to arrive from **London**. For two hours he waited and no train came. He said he was just devastated. But then he re – received a cable from **Holland**. My mother thinks of these things, I mean this is just amazing. She had the – the – she – she obviously gained back her – her self-confidence, and she – she knew what she was doing, she sent him a cable, saying I'm in **London** – I'm – I'm in **Holland**, I'm coming home – see you. So he went back to the station. All was well.

Q: What happened to his stamp collection? You mentioned his stamp collection.

A: I'm – I'm glad you asked that, because that's – that's a chapter of my father's doing – I'm not sure, it's a certain amount of ingenuity, and **clandestinity**(ph). What he did, h-he invented a – a concealment device. He had another member of the club, again, many of these connections were through the rowing club, who manufactured albums. And the albums are usually a fairly thick covers, filled with

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some kind of cotton, or material to make them soft. And what my father said, take all that stuff out of the covers, so you leave a – an empty space, and then put my stamps in there. He had a number of those made by him, and they all looked like photo albums, but no pictures in them. I don't know whether he took pictures in them or not. But he sent them out as photo albums. **Martin Schwartz**(ph) got several of them. And I am not sure whether he sent any to **London**. But that was his way of at least bringing his colle – as much of his collection as possible out of **Germany**, because there was no other way it would have come out.

Q: Amazing, amazing.

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Amazing. Amazing that he was – succeeded in it – in it –

A: Yes, he – he had this idea, and he came up with a solution, and it – and it worked.

Q: Did he then try and sell the stamps, or – in later times, or did he keep them?

What happened to them?

A: Well, stamp collecting is – is a – is a very chancy business, and there's a market for it sometime, and sometimes not, and certain stamps are more expensive than others, and – and it doesn't always happen to be a – a – a continuous growing –

Q: Right.

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A: – source of income. He did sell a number of stamps, yes, and by this time, I guess it helped to keep the family going.

Q: Oh. Yeah. So, when you left **Germany**, do you remember anything of what you were feeling, as you were leaving? Did y – when you left **Germany**, do you remember anything of what you were feeling, as you were leaving? Whether or not you were glad to leave, whether you were sad to leave?

A: Well, at this time, tension had grown to the point where we were very much relieved to leaving. I mean, there was no question, after seeing what happened to the – to the art store, and the fear that was common now among friends. I mean, the – the discussion among the women in the club now was only about who went where, and who can find someplace to go. And the only place you could go to, actually, was **Shanghai**, which became a refugee settlement, and I believe this museum had the exhibit there one time of it. And it – it was the only country where you could absolutely go with no questions asked. Every other country was not – there was just no one there willing to do this. A-And that was the greatest block.

Q: That must have been a hu – I – I mean, the – the sense – I'm trying to picture what kind of an – what kind of a shock a community, not only individuals, but a community can feel, at – if – if, in the 1930, and 1931, still feel self-confident, strong, powerful, integrated. All of a sudden, it's marginalized. If it was a

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community where people were involved in international business, and had trips abroad, and was a well-to-do, and all of a sudden the doors are closed.

A: Yeah.

Q: That must be quite a feeling of betrayal. Do you think that – that that permeated, that that was what the sense was?

A: There were people who did go to **China**, I mean, because they had no other – no other escape. But not many. I mean, this was a well-to-do community, and they were not about to go into a country where they didn't have all the ec – a-amenities that they were used to. I-I think that's part of it, I mean, that was just – but there were people who did.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean, I have [indecipherable] who ended up in **Shanghai**, and eventually came back to the **States**, and were not the worse off for having done so. But that – those were very few.

Q: Well, let's talk about the relatives who remained. You had a large family, an extended family, even though your own was small for people. You had aunts and uncles in **Germany**, in **Estonia**. What happened to them? Did they survive? Did they die?

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A: Well, th-the – the family, my – my father's sister's family, they all were able to leave in enough time. In – in the fact he was so careful, he had sent his two sons to **London** to open a business, or to start some business, and when he came there was already a – a foot in the door, and he was able to use his business skills to make it into a very prosperous business. I mean, he was a very wealthy man in **London**, as he was in **Berlin**. My father's family just was wiped out, I mean that – that was all he had is his brother, and well, his sister was – went to **London**.

Q: Right.

A: But his brother was – the family was all, except for the children, was gone. And my mother lost her sister, and th-the – th-the – the worst thing is this was a little boy, he must – couldn't have been more than five years old, who was killed in those woods, in –

Q: Yeah.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: What about your grandfather in **Estonia**? What happened to the Estonian branch of the family.

A: Oh, my grandfather in **Estonia** lived to be of old age. Matter of fact, during World War II, much of **Estonia** was evacuated to behind the **Ural** mountains, and he spent some time living there, and then went back to **Estonia**, to his home.

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Tallinn was not damaged to any extent, and it was a – he lived a – quite a normal life til the end of his days. My grandmother, she had cancer, and came to **Berlin** while we were still in – in the middle 30s, or maybe later on, for medical treatment, and she died. And so that left my grandfather and his two sons, and their families. Some of them ended up **Israel**, and in fact, his – one of his sons is in **Israel**.

Q: Was there anybody in the family who stayed in **Berlin** and survived?

A: There – there is no – yes. There was a distant cousin. I can't remember the relationship in [**indecipherable**]. He was a – an academician, a – a – a very selective academician. He studied dead cultures, Egyptian or further removed, even that. He – he was a – a very studious guy. He escaped to **France**, and was sheltered in a Catholic –

Q: Monastery?

A: – monastery, I guess, yes, and converted to Christianity. I mean, he was sort of Jewish all his life, but he actually had the – had two religion, or was religious.

Q: Yeah.

A: And survived there. His future wife was a real survivor. She was in **Berlin**. I don't think they were married at the time. I – I – I am not sure of that specific history, but she told stories that are – are remarkable in their own way. She went into hiding. She took off the yellow star, and she went from home to home. And she

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would find identities, new identities. When buildings were bombed in **Berlin**, she reported to the local Gestapo of whatever housing committee there was, and said that she lost all of her identification in the bombing. And she did this several times, so that she had different identities over a period of time.

Q: So she was hiding in plain sight.

A: She was hiding in plain sight, using – using that technique of finding identities from bombed out homes. My father had a good, close friend who was in the rowing club. The man was a – well, he – he was a World War I officer.

Q: Do you remember his name?

A: His name was well – **George Susskind**(ph), and he had a wife, and a child, a daughter. In fact, she was the one with whom I used to play in the club. And his wife and he were close friends, as all these members were. But during the war, he was a – an officer. I'm not sure what rank he had, but he commanded a unit of men, and they were in the midst of a battle, and they had dug in for the night. And he said, shells are flying overhead, and one of these are going to come down short, and you better move away. And I'm moving wi – myself, and whoever wants to come along, come along with me. And one of the people who came with him was his, sort of – whatever they call these people who – who – who attach themselves to

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lieutenant – to – to officers, to take care of their personal needs. It's of a – person

[indecipherable]

Q: Yeah. Orderlies of some kind.

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Orderlies of some kind.

A: Sort of an orderly, yeah, he was sort of a orderly. Anyhow, he went, and he stuck with his captain, or whatever he was, and they – they found – dug a new hole, and – and stayed there. And sure enough, a bomb came down on the old position, and wiped out the company of men. And the orderly, from that day on, was forever grateful to my friend **George Susskind**(ph) for saving his life, making him turn, go

–

Q: Can you hold on just a second. We have people making noise behind there.

[technical interruption][break]

A: **George Susskind**(ph) had no way to leave **Germany**, he and his family were just unable to find any way, even though he was a prosperous banker, and obviously had good connections, but there was no possible way for him to go out. As soon as – and be-because the orderly was so grateful to **George**, they had an annual meeting in Christmas time, when they had dinner together, I think at **George's** home, because he probably had a very ostentatious home. And when this man, who

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became a policeman – but throughout the Nazi period, they would still have these annual meetings. At one point, when Jews were required to put on the star, the guy said to him, you know what? You better come see me in my office. And **George** went to see him, and from that point on, this guy gave him identification papers of some other name. And throughout the war, he was able to do that periodically, so that he would always be able to move somewhere else, find a place to live, work somewhere. And he was able to get his food stamps, which are needed, and a passport, through this police officer, who by this time became a senior police officer in the German police forces. His wife went – and I'm not sure exactly what the situation was, but he and – she and the daughter went to some family on the farm somewhere, and hid, were in hiding, in fact. And stayed that way throughout the war. Before I go into the after war story, I'd like to talk about the burning of the synagogue. When **Kristallnacht** was the day, or the night during which every Jewish store was not only demolished, but every synagogue was burned. The only exceptions were synagogues that were built within certain apartment blocks, and would have been too dangerous to put them on fire, so they were – one, I think was saved, that's it. Many years after this, my father received a letter from the rabbi of the synagogue, with whom my father had corresponded before, and he sent him the – his own personal observation of the burning of the synagogue.

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Q: The rabbi did?

A: The rabbi. Now this synagogue was a very large – it was fairly new, was built only about five or 10 years before this event.

Q: Do you remember the – the street name where it was on?

A: It was known as **Prince Regettin(ph) Strasse, Prince re – Prince Regettin(ph) Strasse.**

Q: **Prince Regaiten(ph) Strasse?**

A: **Regettin(ph). Prince Regettin(ph) Strasse.**

Q: Okay.

A: A-And that was wa – how we identified the synagogue. I have a picture of that synagogue afterwards, burned. But he described exactly what happened that day. He was called in the middle of the night by the caretaker of building, he was not Jewish, who said, our synagogue is burning. And the rabbi immediately hastened to the site, and stood there while the firemen, who were carefully hosing down all the buildings nearby, so that they would not catch on fire, but left the synagogue burning. It burned into a shell. The walls were still standing, but everything else was gone. It was a beautiful synagogue, and I used to go there and – and look up into the ceiling, which was domed, and there were stars. And I knew that's where God was. That was my connection to the synagogue. It was a very sad experience.

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Martin Swarzenski, the rabbi was one of the great rabbis of the Jewish community. The Jewish community, by the way, in **Germany**, I think to this day, rabbis and church officials are government employees, they get paid by the government, so the community doesn't ever have to worry about paying for their ministers. But h-he was a dedicated rabbi. He was a very courageous man. He insisted on staying be – though he had an opportunity to leave, until they finally arrested him, put him in a concentration camp, and because he had a visa or permit to leave **Germany**, he was eventually let go. He became a rabbi in the **United States**, in **Madison, Wisconsin**. While I was working here at the museum, as a visitor service, a man started talking to me about his community in **Madison, Wisconsin**. And he said he was a member of one of those fraternal brotherhoods, which had an annual dedication, or ceremony when **Swarzenski** died. He was there the rabbi – this man was not Jewish. But this organization honored him for having been outstanding activist in interfaith activities.

Q: Oh my. Oh my.

A: So it was – it was like a – a – a lightning from heaven.

Q: Yeah.

A: I have – haven't heard about **Swarzenski**, except for the letters that I have from him, and all of a sudden this total stranger talks to me about what happened to –

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Q: What happened to him here in the **States**.

A: – what – to – to – to him in the **United States**, he wa – he was just as famous here as he was in **Berlin**. Did fantastic work. Anyhow, that was – the rabbis in **Berlin**, and they – they were well-known, and there were not – they were scholars in their own fields, and – stuck with their congregations. And many of them went to camp, and –

Q: Perished.

A: – perished there.

Q: But this also means that probably the synagogue burned down while you were still in **Berlin**, is that right?

A: Since it burned down **Kristallnacht**, yes, but I was not aware of that, until –

Q: I see.

A: – I mean, I knew it had burned, because every other synagogue had burned too, and we had no longer – could no longer go to synagogue. I mean, my mother, at this point was so involved with trying to get us out –

Q: Yeah.

A: – that going to the synagogue was – and – and I guess maybe it was – she was fearful. But the synagogues were crowded. I mean, if they're – if – if – if the Jews were not particularly observant in **Berlin**, al-all of a sudden, synagogues were filled

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to the last seat, especially high holidays. I mean, there was a sense of community all of a sudden, where people felt that somehow there was greater safety in being part of a community than being by yourself.

Q: Could also be appeal to God.

A: Yeah, well –

Q: You know?

A: It – it was a – a change in the – I mean, Jews were being accused of integrating, and not living a good, religious life. But if anything turned the Jewish community, it was this experience.

Q: Yeah. What was the date that you left **Germany**, do you remember?

A: Yeah, it was late December. Was after Christmas – I believe it was after Christmas, 1938.

Q: Okay.

A: And we went to **England**.

Q: You saw your father again?

A: My father was there, and he had an apartment. It was not big enough for all of us, so I was chosen to be given away. The Jewish community in **London** was very helpful. They not only provided us with clothing, but also found a family with which I could live, which was a very Orthodox Jewish family, and for the first time

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in my life, I was exposed to very Orthodox. In fact, they were very good. I mean, the sacrifices these people made, you know, you could only understand that when you put yourself in that situation, how many people would you take into your home

—

Q: Yeah.

A: — who have come from nowhere, and you have actually no idea who they were. But they insisted that I have my **Bar Mitzvah** in **London**, because they were certain that they don't know how to do **Bar Mitzvah** in the **United States**. Which is, of course, very funny. But they insisted I do that, and I had an awful hard time, because all I needed to do was learn the blessing with the Torah, and that was about as much as I could manage. And I finally did get that out of me. And that was the entire ceremony.

Q: Oh my.

A: Little did they know what it was required to become **Bar Mitzvahed** here, and I wa — guess I was thankful that I had it over, and — and took care of in **London**. We stayed in **London** for one month. Yeah, about — about — well, we left in f — end of January, so it was about a month and a half.

Q: Well, how was it — let's come to this part of the story, then. How is it that you are able to leave? Up til now the **United States** has said no, no, no.

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A: Oh, thank you for asking that. My – again my – my mother, and it would have to be my mother because she was the only one who could actually speak English, went to the **U.S.** embassy, and again started pleading, and all of a sudden they accepted both of these applic – affidavits.

Q: The original, and the second?

A: The original, and the – supported by the other one, they felt that this was – which it should be a normal thing, I mean, if the – if the uncle provides an affidavit, you would expect that he would then also accept the family, and that the supporting affidavit was there for financial reasons, if it ever came to that. We did go – we left in late January, on the **Aquitania**, which was a ship that looked exactly like the **Titanic**. It was a four-stacker, and i-it – I have a little model at home on my nightstand, so I shouldn't forget how I got here. It looks like the – but it was a very pleasant journey. We were in tourist class, my father did have those tickets. And we were allowed to have a certain part of the ship to ourselves, and people traveled in those days very dressed up. I mean, it was not like today when you can look like you just came off the beach. But this time you really had to be well-dressed, and we were all – made it just perfectly.

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Q: Well, what was the atmosphere like in yo – within your family? Was some of the tension gone, or was it replaced by new tension of, we don't know what we're getting into?

A: Well, it was a different kind of tension. This was – excuse me – this was no longer a fear.

Q: Yeah.

A: Now it was the uncertainty of what – what lies ahead. And that permeated all of us. I remember we had one incident – we had a couple of incidences on the ship I – I just want to mention, because they – the – I – I – I did love to be on the ship. I mean, I could tell because of my early years on boats, I loved the water. I became a sailor eventually, but this was the early initiation to the season, I loved it. I used to be on the fantail, which was the – one of the places we were permitted to go. In those days these classes were very much separated, and you couldn't just walk in anywhere you want to. So I went up to a little – a boy who was my age, and we start talking. My English by this time must have been good enough to ask for – a few questions. And so I ask him where he was from, and he said to me, **D.C.** And I said, what's the city called? He said, **D.C.** I said, where is it? **D.C.** And by this time I walked away from him, because I didn't figure he had it all, I mean. And of course, that's where we ended up, in **D.C.**

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Q: Yeah. And where the museum is, **D.C.**

A: **D.C.**

Q: Yeah.

A: We had one more horrible exciting moment. We were passing the Statue of Liberty, we were all on deck, looking out at this wonderful monument, when the captain, or someone said – meet the captain at some point in the show. I mean, this was over the loudspeaker, everybody knew our name. My mother almost fainted, she knew this was going to be the end of her –

Q: So your name was called out over the loudspeaker?

A: The whole family was called up to go up there, to the captain's whatever it was.

Q: There must have been thousands of people on this ship.

A: Oh, there were thousands of people, and – and my – but of all of them, my mother was the one who – who – so we got there, and there was **David Miller**.

Q: Your cousin?

A: He – he was a politician by this time, who had all kinds of connections, including, apparently, somehow the Coast Guard, or somebody. He got on the pilot's boat, the boat that piloted the ship into the harbor, and he persuaded the guy to let him get on the ship. So he actually got on the boat to welcome us.

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Q: Ohh. Well, that's a very nice, sort of auspicious [**indecipherable**] into the **United States**.

A: It certainly was, because he not only saw that we got off the ship quickly, but that we got past customs quickly. He had a car for us, and he took us to a family that – in – in **New York**, where we spend the night. And then the next day we went to **Scranton**.

Q: I'd like to wrap up, except for one thing, before lunch, about your first impressions of **New York City** when you came. And then after that, we'll probably finish this and go to lunch. [**technical interruption, break**]

Q: Okay. So on a new disk, in a new country, and the first day in **New York**, what were your first [**indecipherable**] and sights?

A: Well, I tell you, at this point, the talk was only what can I – what am I going to do, how am I going to make a living in the **United States**? I mean, this was talk number one in my family. My father, who as I say could barely speak English, had – I don't think he had many ideas of what to do. My mother couldn't think of anything to do. But I looked out the car window, and I saw these kids shining shoes. I said, I can do that. And my first thought was, I would become a good shoe shiner. I mean, I'll be a good shoe shiner, but I'll be a shoe shiner. That's as far as my – we moved into – shall we go into that now, or –

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Q: Oh no, let's stay – if we have more to talk about **New York**, did you have any impressions of the city? Was it very different –

A: It was overwhelming. I mean, I – as I say, I focused on the kids shining shoes –

Q: Yeah.

A: – cause I probably couldn't get enough of those big buildings, and the masses of people. Cause I'd lived in a big city, so I was not totally overwhelmed by it. But there was a – a very exciting moment. I mean, a-at this point there was only happiness in the whole family.

Q: Yeah.

A: Tension was only in terms of what are you going to do, how are you going to live here?

Q: Yeah.

A: But that was not my concern, because I already had my job.

Q: You knew your career path.

A: I knew my career path was very good there.

Q: Yeah. Well, I think that we should break, so that when we get to **Scranton** – or – or we can, I mean, if you – if you are willing to talk for another 10 - 15 minutes?

A: Yeah, sure.

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Q: We can do that, and then we'll go for lunch at 12:30, or something, and eat quickly and get back. **[technical interruption]** All right, so let's talk a little bit about **Scranton**. You're in **New York** for one night.

A: For one night, in –

Q: And what – and the next day, what happens?

A: Well, we were in **Scranton**, and the mil – the **Millers** were living – **Scranton**, of course, is a totally different city. We've never been in a city like that. It was small, people lived in home and houses, although we did not, but there were these –

Q: Single family houses.

A: – single family houses. It was beautiful city. I mean, **Scranton** is located near the mountains and lakes, and – and i-i-it was – my mother has a letter there which she just sort of gloats over living in – in **Scranton**.

Q: So they didn't feel like they were ending up in the middle of nowhere?

A: No, no, no, no, this was a very happy time.

Q: Okay.

A: Living at the **Miller's** home was not – I – I didn't consider that much of a burden. And **Morris(ph) Miller** did take me to his store, and I remember we were sitting on a bus, or a streetcar, I'm not sure which it was, that took us to downtown **Scranton**. The – we were – the whole city sits on a hill. Things go up, we went

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down, downhill. And he took me to the store, and as I say, I remember the smell [indecipherable]. But he wanted to teach me something about the **United States**, something about English. And in this streetcar, which was not full, he pointed to one man who was sitting way down on the other end, he said, that's a bum. And that's how he introduced me to the different kinds of people I'm expected to, I guess, stay away from, and – and others who were [indecipherable]

Q: Did you remember what that bum look liked?

A: I have no i –

Q: Any idea, okay.

A: But I guess at that time I did have a picture of what – well, bum you do not –

Q: Constitutes a bum.

A: – you do not – you do not go to bums.

Q: Yeah. Did you work in his store?

A: No. School for me was itse – itself a – a – a new – a new adventure. I was 13 years old, I was tall, lanky, and I was – I – I think they sent me to school immediately. I was in school not far from where we lived, and they put me in the second grade.

Q: At a 13 year old?

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A: Thirteen year old. They wanted to put me in first grade, but probably didn't have a seat big enough, so here I was, the tallest kid in school, and I was sitting in a seat that would – barely accommodated me, with all the little kids of second graders.

And I had to turn – learn English. There was no English for foreign language speakers, that didn't exist. I was lucky only in that the teacher was Jewish, and she spoke a little Yiddish. And Yiddish is so much like German that every once in a while she'll sidle up to me and she tells me what was going on. And in that way I had somewhat of a notion what was going on. But I learned, I learned English. I soon was immediately transported two grades further up the line, and I made it til I was with my classmates in eighth grade.

Q: How long did that take?

A: Oh, now you ask me some very difficult questions.

Q: Well, was it the same school year?

A: Oh yeah, same – same school, same – i-it was within one year, yes, because I was 13. At 14, I was supposed to be in high school.

Q: Yeah.

A: And by the end of the year I was in eighth grade, and I was competing with the rest of the students. And –

Q: How were your grades?

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A: Hm?

Q: How were your grades?

A: I – I suddenly became a real scholar. I – I can't believe that this happened to the kid who couldn't sit still in class, was told by teachers he – just about the only thing good about me was my behavior, and here I was, all of a sudden ala – ev-evolved into something much more. I wa – I – I tell you what one of the advantages was that I had; I had to speak English. I would not speak German at home, I would not speak to my parents in German. And my two best friends, also from **Germany**, we would never speak German with each other.

Q: And that was because?

A: We just would not. I mean, **Germany** became a country we just would not have anything to do with.

Q: And your parents – I was go – I wanted to ask this question earlier. At – at some point, when they were in the **United States**, to one another, did they continue speaking in German, or did they also go into English?

A: They spoke German, yes, they spoke German, because my father just couldn't communicate in any other language. My mother, by the way, was almost fluent in English. And so I had no problem communicating with them, but I would not speak German. And – and that was obviously to my advantage.

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Q: Yes.

A: That I had no other way to express myself with either my friends, or with my – and the kids we played with, I – I remember the difficulties I had understanding things like baseball and football. And i-it – it was never clear to me exactly what it was all about. And since I was not much of a sportsman, it was not a subject I was particularly interested in.

Q: Yeah.

A: We did a lot of reading. Books were important to me, and it was always eclectic, anything that –

Q: Did you ever feel lonely and out of place –

A: No,

Q: – that first year?

A: No, I never did, I – even the second grade, I've – I can't remember feeling bad, except that I couldn't understand much of what was going on. But eventually I had – I had no problems at all.

Q: What about your father and mother?

A: Sorry?

Q: What about your father and mother?

A: My father eventually became a salesman. He was a door to door salesman.

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Q: That's a tough job.

A: He had a suitcase, and he was selling, I have no idea what, but things that poor families might buy. And that's what –

Q: It's also hard if you don't speak English.

A: He couldn't speak English, and he was working in a Polish district. So they couldn't speak English either. And how they communicated with one another is a mystery to me. But he was good at it, because he – he said – and he told me this in confidence, he had some holy pictures too, and he even had some water that – a-and I didn't want to hear any more, this was – this was going over the line. But he somehow managed – he did not make much money. My mother, meanwhile, became a very successful piano teacher. She had never been to school to become a teacher, but she was gifted, and she knew how. In fact, she used the typical European methods, which meant mostly yelling at the kids, curve your fingers, and being about as nasty as you can be. And mothers seemed to go for that. I mean, they thought that children need a little discipline, and here was **Lola** doing all this, and they learned to play piano.

Q: By the way, did you learn to play piano?

A: No, she never could teach me how to play the piano, and I'm sorry to this day that I was so un – so – so in – inept at playing.

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Q: What about your sister?

A: Well, she got a little bit better, but she never was a pianist either. I guess to us, the methods didn't work too well.

Q: So, did your mother become the major breadwinner, because her – she was well –

A: I – I would say yes, for a while. And then my father came up with the idea that why not become a window trimmer.

Q: Again.

A: Again. And he did that until he died at age 75. In fact, he worked the day he died, in a window. Came home, went to a concert at night, and that night – that night went to bed, never – and died in his sleep. Was a heart attack.

Q: Wow.

A: But he was a very good decorator. I – if I say my mother was a breadwinner, I – I'm not sure that she was much of a contributor of money. I think she hoarded her money, which was – the whole thing was very difficult for my father, because German men are supposed to be the breadwinners, and they're not supposed to be told by their wives what money there is, or how to spend it. And – and this was obviously not the – the case here. And so I think he had, from that point on, a different kind of relationship with his wife. He was still very much in love with his

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wife. I mean, there was no – I never saw any real hostility between them. But you could tell there was a difference here. My father was quite successful as a window dresser.

Q: Was that still in **Scranton**? He started – did he still start doing that in **Scranton**?

A: He started in **Scranton**. I must say the Jewish store owners were very helpful. I think they tended to hire him, and – and that was helpful. And he was talented, and people really stopped to look at his windows, as they were – they were outstanding.

Q: What did he think of all of the windows that are done in **New York City**, you know, for those special holidays, or –

A: Oh, well, he – he was a-aware of that. He – he – he – he did buy his supplies, I think, in **New York**, and then eventually, I – I – I – I think he did find them, he – he did work very hard, he was very ambitious, in terms of what he had to do. He was a careful craftsman, and there was never any complaint about what he was doing.

And like my mother, who was in her way, very successful. I –

Q: So –

A: Go ahead.

Q: Was there something you wanted to say –

A: No, no.

Q: Okay. So I think at this point, let's take a break for lunch. You can – **[break]**

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Q: Well, you know, only in **America**. Only in **America**.

A: I mean, I cannot stand – to me, a – a wedding, the bride is supposed to be the most beautiful.

Q: Exactly, exactly.

A: You – you don't try to –

Q: It's not a movie production.

A: – compete with her.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: She's supposed to be it. **[break]**

Q: Okay, so let's talk about high school. What was high school like in **Scranton, Pennsylvania**?

A: Well, I have to say that I was dedicated to going to technical high schools. I knew my family couldn't afford to send me to college. I never talked about college. College was not a subject in my family. So I went to technical high school, I got to learn everything that you can possibly learn. I knew electrical work, and I did machine shop work, I even did some welding. And I enjoyed all of this. I was not particularly good in these fields, I must say, but I enjoyed doing that.

Q: So this wasn't college prep, the –

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A: This was not college prep, not in the least. And after three years, my father saw an ad in the “**New York Times**,” for a position in window dressing for a store in **New London, Connecticut**. My father went to **New London**, took one look at the beach, and said, that’s where I want to live for the rest of my life. Said, I don’t care what kind of work it is. And he did, he moved. And my mother immediately started a studio, and she was again very successful. And we lived in a – very modestly, but very comfortably, because we had – couldn’t ask for more. We had a beautiful beach, and we spent a good bit of time on the summer there.

Q: I’d like to interrupt, at that moment.

A: Yes, please.

Q: I take it this must have been during the war years? The war has already –

A: The war had started. I was, by this time, when **Pearl Harbor – Pearl Harbor**, I was still in **Scranton**. And I had only one year in **New London** for high school.

Q: Excuse me, before we go on there again, I – the reason why I ask about the war years is, how did your family react, how did your parents react when they – when the **U.S.** – when the war started in **Europe**? That is, the **U.S.** hadn’t entered the war yet, but **Germany** attacked **Poland**. And what was the discussions like in your house at that time?

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A: Well, it was a subject of intense interest. I mean, I saved the newspaper clippings, and I had stacks of stuff all about the war. The war was a center of our interest. We – we knew a great deal about it. I'm not sure whether I was aware that I would become a part of the war, but even though I didn't know anyb – think about it, the war was of – of major interest to – to all of us.

Q: Your parents, had they felt like they adjusted well in the **United States**?

A: My – my mother certainly did. My father, because of his language difficulties, and his strong attachment to **Germany** did interfere with his full satisfaction with living in the **United States**. But he adjusted. He continued the stamp collection, and he was very happy in **New London**. So I – I can't say that he was unhappy at li – at least. I don't think he'd move ever again, if he had the opportunity, because this was about as nice as it could get, both for him and for my – my mother. So it was very nice.

Q: So you were finishing your last year of high school in **New London**?

A: I went again to a technical high school, and this time th-the princi – principal insisted that we have at least some college preparation. I didn't have to worry about a second language, but I did have several courses that sort of led to college, if that ever came up. In other words, this school was not so totally dedicated as the first one, to purely technical subjects. I became a good student. I was always near the top

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of my class. I was selected to be one of the class speakers. And since was the beginning of the war, we all knew we were going to be drafted. My topic was one of great patriotism, and support of the [indecipherable]. I was drafted, and within a week or so after I graduated, before I even had a chance to take my girlfriend, who I met on the beach –

Q: Well, tell us about that.

A: – the year before, but she actually met me. There's still an argument going on as to who did what to whom. But she – w-we became good friends, and dated. It was not – it – it was a very nice [indecipherable] because her father owned a motor boat, and again I had my chance to be on a boat, which helped a good deal. She knew a great deal about boating, and we – we were very nicely matched. So I was drafted, and I found myself in the infantry. And my – I was trained in – in Camp **Blanding**, which is the –

Q: Where is that?

A: **Blanding** is the **Connecticut** state camp for training their **Connecticut** – what do they call them?

Q: Draftees?

A: Hm?

Q: For training **Connecticut** draftees?

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A: Well, it became that, among other things, yes. It was a big camp. It was unbelievably hot, this was in the middle of summer. We came by train. I couldn't believe that any human being could exist in such heat. Like some old man walking across – but I thought he was in the air because the heat comes – coming up from the asphalt, and made like he was walking on air. It – i-it all was just an unbelievable situation. But I got used to it, and I was trained to be a machine-gunner, which kind of ironic, since my father had the same profession – m-military profession. And I was a – I mean, I survived very neatly, and I mean, I did not have any problems.

Q: Were your parents concerned about you being in the army?

A: Well, my father probably more so than my mother, I'm not sure, but both were concerned, of course they were. Cause there wa – this was a time of great casualties.

D-Day was a landing of the beaches in **France** was about that time, and we had enormous casualties then. And we – I finished my basic training the end of the summer, and was then shipped out to southern **Italy**. By this time it got to be very cold, and **Italy** was the coldest place on earth, as far as I could tell. The army didn't think so either, because they gave us all summer uniforms, and no blankets, no sweaters, and we were just freezing all the time. It was the coldest I've ever – I

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think it was one of the coldest winters **Europe** had ever experienced, and even southern **Italy** was not at all what they thought it would be.

Q: Would this have been '45?

A: This was '44.

Q: Forty-four, the winter of '44.

A: Forty-four. Winter of '44 - '45, yes. We marched constantly back and forth, in the lil – waiting for someone to – I guess I – waiting for a machine-gunner to die. And I was already told that when your machine-gunner opens up fire, he has about 30 seconds to live. It was one of those deadly weapons that everyone will focus on to get out of the way. So m-my future was not looking very bright, but I was a very happy young guy, and I wasn't being bothered by such silly things.

Q: So you hadn't seen battle though?

A: I wa –

Q: You hadn't seen battle?

A: No, I hadn't seen battle, no, this was all me –

Q: What did **Italy** look like?

A: Hm?

Q: What did **Italy** look like?

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A: Well, **Italy** was p-par – you know, we – we were in the southern part, and there were little villages, and most I can remember about them was they smelled God awful. They were making wine, and they were pouring wine down the gutters that wasn't used, or couldn't be used, and that in cou – in addition to whatever cows left behind, was a combination that was hard to beat. You could smell these villages a mile away. And we were just trudging with our guns, and machine guns, and I – mortar was the other weapon I was trained on. And I was just waiting for the day that they would say, okay, you're – you're up next. One day I was called out of my tent. We were sleeping in eight men tent, 10 man tents, and they were drafty and cold and it was terrible. I was called out, I was told to put on my uniform. In those days we had uniforms, we were not walking around in fatigues, as the army does today. We had nice uniforms, we put them on. I was taken to **Caserta**, which was this little town south of **Naples** – north of **Naples**. And a guy came up to me and says, do you want to jump out of an airplane and kill Germans behind the lines? Now mathematically I was no genius, but I figured out it takes longer to jump down from an airplane than it does – than 30 seconds, which I had on the other job. So, I was able to multiply my life expectancy by a good bit. I'd never been in an airplane before. The idea of jumping out of an airplane was so horrible, that I never even

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give second thoughts to it. I guess they'll have to push me out if – if it comes to that.

Q: So that you had a minute to live, rather than 30 seconds.

A: Exactly. We had this – it's all figured out.

Q: Yeah.

A: Before I knew it, I was moved from a tent, which was drafty, and dirty and poor, to a villa on the **Adriatic**, with maids to make beds, and a chef to do fabulous cooking. I thought at that point that I must have died and gone to heaven. We – we spent a good bit of time on the beach. The training was sort of – I would say it was sort of mundane. They were not really eager to make feisty guys out of us, and I would think that I should have been better trained to do the kind of job they wanted me to do. They did teach me how to jump out of an airplane by putting me on top of a treehouse that the guy who owned the building, the villa, must have built for his kids, and it was just high enough to make it a little bit of a challenge, but not too much of a challenge to jump down.

Q: And that was the training?

A: That, and they told me how to use knives. And I found out that when you get in a knife fight, the best thing to do is turn around as fast as you can, get away from

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there, cause that's not a good – good thing to do. And all kinds of other methods which the **OSS** had devised to – to eliminate people.

Q: So you ended up in the **OSS**?

A: It turned out to be the **OSS**, yes.

Q: When did you find out?

A: They didn't tell me that at the beginning –

Q: Okay.

A: – but eventually it came to me. But what I was most impressed by was the people who were there, at least for now, for the first time in my life that I came across real college graduates. I mean, these are people who had gone to five schools. They talked differently. They didn't use the same language they did in my tent. Some of the adv – adverbs and adjectives never even existed in their language. And I found them reading books, and I was – became quite enchanted with this whole gang. Actually, this unit I was in, which was called the **Austria** unit, had a fabulous operation, which is maybe a subject by itself, but they did –

Q: What did they do? Tell me.

A: Well, they – they did – a matter of fact, there were a good number of refugees like myself, who spoke fluent German, and who could mingle with the population and get away with it, and who went up behind the lines. Many of those operations

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ended up in a mountain and buried in snow, and nobody ever got any further than that. But in one case, one of the people who were in my unit was dispatched, long before I joined the unit – the unit, to a location in **Austria**, and he was able to communicate with the air force through a device they gave you, a big piece of equipment that – with which you can contact headquarters of – to – to direct the air force to bomb German supply trains, which came through the **Brenner Pass** to **Italy**, where the fighting was still going very heavy. And he was able to tell them where the trains were, because there was no other way to find this out, and when they would come out of the tunnel. It was a great piece of work. He was event –

Q: And so it was successful. They –

A: Very successful. And he was eventually captured. He was sorely beaten by the Gestapo. This all from the report which the captor, the **SS** guard reported when we took over **Austria**, and interrogated him on what he was doing to our man. And so we have it from him, and we have it from the man himself. Terribly beatings. Tied him to chairs and beat and beat him and he wouldn't give up his team – his teammates were still hiding somewhere – until he was sure that they could be – could have found another location to hide. He was then put into a concentration camp, and he talked his way out of the concentration – and this is all close to the end of the war. **Patton**, with his tanks, was not far away. And I could see it was

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possible to convince some people that they might be better off if they help, instead of continue this practice of killing people. He was let go, and he made his way to **Innsbruck**, which was actually his hometown, I believe, somewhere in there **[indecipherable]**. He met with the mayor of the town, and convinced him not to fight the army – the u – in other words, to give himself up, as a city. To – to open the city. To make a city an open city. And he succeeded.

Q: Well, that's almost like a one man – you know, one man show.

A: A – one man captured the entire town of **Innsbruck**.

Q: What was his name, do you remember?

A: **Mayer**(ph). His name was **Mayer**(ph). Can't remember his first name. He became a good – became a good friend of **Dollards**(ph), who at that time was chief of station in **Bern**. And he became, I guess – I'm not sure he went any further than that in – in the intelligence business. But he was – he was a real – in – in other words, the unit that I was in actually did conduct some very successful operations. But as luck would have it, when I was ready to be dispatched, the ger – the war was over. And we went on jee – in the **Jeep** to **Austria**. And from then on I was simply doing intelligence work in **Austria**, which was really not terribly spectacular.

Q: Well, I want to step back a bit, because all of this sounds, in light of what you had said before, and talking about your life before, it sounds a little bit fantastic,

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you know? That one is plucked from a regular army unit, into another one, which doesn't reveal itself –

A: Yes.

Q: – originally, that has a rather nice life, you know. If you have somebody making great meals and maids making your beds and being able to be on the beach, and training is from – jumping from a treehouse, a-and so on. How did they find you?

Wa – how – who made the connection?

A: Well, it was clear that I had a dossier, I had file in which my language qualifications were clearly spelled out, and I did speak native German, even though it wasn't Austrian, and anyone would have known where I came from, because –

Q: Did you have a **Berlin** accent?

A: – **Berlin** was now a specific accent. They were known as **piefk**es(ph), which was not an endearing term, and – and I was just one of those. But they – they felt I could – you know, that I – I was for – trained for the job. I had weapons train in **England**, I had all kinds of other training.

Q: Did anyone ever explain it to you, that this is why we found you, and this is why we chose you?

A: No, no, there was no explanation given. I was simply a – a – I didn't ask any questions, and they didn't give me much information. I-It certainly was a different

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world, and from then on I was working in **Austria**, and w-we ended up in **Vienna**, we opened up the station in **Vienna**, and my boss was **Al Armand**(ph), and these were – this was not a regular army at all, we call each other by first name. He was a commanding commander in the navy. We had these odd people in – in the **OSS**. And yet, nobody would ever call him anything, or salute, it was just, you know, I mean, we were – we were – our quarters were in a hotel. And again we had these maids and cooks, and – and we lived a very – I must say, **Vienna** at that time was a very sad place. I mean, the – the Jewish population in **Vienna** consisted mainly of whoever escaped, and was able to get out of **Germany**, and out of Austrian Gestapo camps. I remember being at a service for – not sure, probably a Seder. And there were these people who, you know, wore old clothes that were given to them by people that no longer could use these clothes, and – and it was a very sad looking people. The – the Viennese themselves had little food. I remember some person who was grateful to me for – an elderly woman who – whom I gave I don't know what to. I had all this – all these cigarettes and all this liquor, and I just gave it away, and – to whoever I thought might be able to make something out of it. And she made me a chocolate pudding made out of beans. I never to this day could figure out exactly how she made that, but Viennese are cooks.

Q: Had you ever been to **Austria** before –

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A: No –

Q: – when you were –

A: – no, I'd never been –

Q: Oh, so this was new –

A: – no –

Q: – it was German speaking, but it was new.

A: Was all new to me. **Vienna** was still an exciting city. We went to – the Soviets occupied one-quarter of the city, and we a – occupied a third. The French had a section, the British had a section, the Americans had a section, and the fourth quarter was for the Soviets, they had most of it. And when – in this – they insisted that the Austrians start their cultural programs, they insisted the – that the symphony would play again. And I was there when it opened up, and it was a very festive occasion, and the Russians were honored for having been so a-active in – in getting the culture of the city moving. Students had gone back to school, and they had their stu – student balls and festivals, which I also was invited to attend. So it was a city that was just coming out of – of a very difficult time.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about some of the intelligence work that you did at that mom – you know, in those times?

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A: Well, that moment we were interested in what, you know, the – **Russia** was doing, you know, they – we had no idea, there were no –

Q: So that was the focus?

A: That was more just the focus, we want to figure out what, you know, how dangerous was it, this Cold War.

Q: Was there any interest in finding any ex-Nazis?

A: In what?

Q: In – in hun – was there any interest in finding ex-Nazis, and the enemy that had just recently been defeated?

A: We – we – that was another section. My – my section was just concerned with that, and m – you know, there was a tremendous fear, actually, in the – at first, as to why do they have all these Soviet troops? They never did go – they never went home, they never were demobilized, rather. I mean, the Americans couldn't demobilize us fast enough –

Q: Yeah.

A: – to get out of the army. And here were the Soviets full companies, and still exercising. I mean, it became clear eventually, the reason they had them there, because they had no jobs for them back in **Russia**. And obviously it was safer to keep them a-at bay in – in **Austria** and **Germany**, than to bring them home. That

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was probably one of the main reasons they were there. They might have had other ideas too, but the fact that they'd start another war seemed most unlikely. And was a very – I mean, it was a very easy job, it was one that I enjoyed thoroughly because I, for the first time had my – my eyes opened to – to the things which I – which wa – I would never find anywhere else. We went to numerous theaters, and concerts, and re-really took full advantage of whatever there was in – in – in **Austria** at the time.

Q: But were there any – as you – before you got to **Vienna**, were there any places that, when you were coming into **Austria**, where you did have to interrogate, let's say, any former Nazis, or any former enemy, any combatants or – or you know, people of that kind.

A: The one of our dues – before I came to **Vienna**, we were involved with what was actually an army project, but we were there assisting, I guess, which was to collect scientists. I mean, the army immediately began looking – I mean, as soon as they hit **Germany**, there was a special detachment of the army which started looking for any scientist who had anything to do atomic work.

Q: Okay.

A: And there's a book written about that, which was quite interesting, the extent to which these people had to dig to find people, and to uncover the stolen and hidden

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art pieces, and other jewelry and – and – and – and mal – any – anything of value that **Hitler**, in particular **Göring** had stashed away in various caves in **Germany**.

That was a special unit that just did that. But we were looking for scientists, and – and we didn't have to look hard, we simply said, we're looking for scientists, and they came from all corners of **Germany**.

Q: They came to find you?

A: Oh yes. The idea that they might go to the **United States** was enough of an attraction to – we – we practically had to shoo them away, and eventually we had so many people who claimed to be scientists and had really nothing to offer. But I did have one case, which I think was quite interesting. It's the – a – a – a woman appeared, who was a very small – she was small stature, and her name was **Hanna Reitsch**.

Q: Who was she?

A: She was a topmost German test pilot. She actually flew their latest developments in jet aircraft, and was obviously very valuable to our – our people. And for some reason she came to me, or I was assigned to talk to her. And it was not an interrogation, these were discussions we had with people, because there was neither the time, nor the facilities for doing anything more than that. And as I was talking to her, she pulls out of her handbag, whatever she had, a huge medal, which was a

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swastika surrounded by diamonds. There was a whole ring of diamonds, around a huge swastika, which itself was made of diamonds. It was just unbelievably heavy. She gave it to me, and I held it and I looked at it, I said, I don't want anything to do with this sort of stuff. I gave it back to her, and to this day I wonder what she ever did with it, because she took it, I'm sure, back. She ended up in the **United States**, and she became a citizen, and I think a good citizen, and obviously was helpful to the aircraft people here in the **States**.

Q: But how did you feel when – when it sounds as if, from your telling, that there was no punitive interest at all, in – from the **U.S.** military side, and the **OSS**, at least the arm that you were involved in, or the unit you were involved in, in catching anybody who would have – the word is war criminal, but who would have been involved in, let's say the persecution of – of – of Jews, of civilians, or anything like that?

A: No, you know, that-that's an interesting question, because I – I could never find the answer to that. They – there were obviously teams doing that, I mean, the army had far more facilities and personnel to do that kind of work than we did. I mean, our work was so specifically targeted against information that we needed, that the idea that these might be people who would be of interest for other reasons, or Nazis of **[indecipherable]**. Not in my unit. I – I do – I don't speak for the **OSS**, because it

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was just too diverse, and there were too many different people doing too many different things, for me to say what **OSS** was doing. I can only say my unit had this one task, which was to interrogate, or at least to – to get to know a scientist well enough to make a judgment whether it's worthwhile to send him onto somebody more technically competent to do the interrogation. And she obviously was one of those people.

Q: You didn't feel an internal tension though, because of this?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: You didn't feel an internal tension because of this?

A: Not at all, no, no, I mean, these were people, and – and – and we treat them as people, as – you know, whatever value they had was because of their skills, or their profession, whatever they could offer us. And th-there was never really any feeling of vengeance, in th – any of – certainly not with me. I mean, I had no –

Q: Had you known by this time what had happened to some of your family?

A: We knew very little. I mean, we really didn't know anything about concentration camps –

Q: Or Uncle **Max**, or –

A: We had no idea. I mean, I didn't. I don't think my unit did. This was something we didn't get into. I – I – I knew there were people who were obviously in – in – in

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concentration camps, because I met them at – if no place else, in **Vienna**. But I could not relate and – I mean, I couldn't go much further than that.

Q: Okay. Did you get back to **Berlin**?

A: I did go back to **Berlin**. My – the leader of my unit, the head of it, called me one day and said, you must have family in **Berlin**, or do you have friends? Yes, I do, I believe I do. I s – I sent my father a letter, as a matter of fact, I said, is anyone still alive? And as it was, he had found in a German-Jewish newspaper – what was it called? “**Aufbau**.” “**Aufbau**.” Which was read by every Jewish refugee in **Germany**, because it had, among other things, people searching for contacts, relatives. And among them was a **Susskind**(ph), the man that I described before.

Q: Who was saved by that policeman, who had been his orderly.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and he was looking for my father, who was his close friend. And then my father sent me the address, in **Berlin**, so I had a place to go to. And I was given – I – I – I got to **Berlin**, they – they made me a courier, and I was officially flying on the – those planes which had no seats, they're buckets, you had to sit on the side, and –

Q: The kind that you can get pushed out of.

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A: Yes, you could pushed out. And I – I – that was my first airplane ride. I – I was sure I wasn't going to like it, but I enjoyed that too. It was – I came to **Berlin**, which – I – I was devastated. I mean, th-th-the city was in to-total rubble.

Q: Could you recognize it?

A: You could recognize it only because the facades were still there, but everything else had sort of fallen apart. And I did find the address, so it was possible to drive through the city, and find a place, because I did find them. They were living in what was then still east **Berlin**, but the – the lines were not fixed as they – they are now – or were then, not now –

Q: Yeah, yeah, afterwards, mm-hm.

A: You know. Now they're fine.

Q: Yeah.

A: No lines. But the borders were not tightly controlled. And I met the same – I – I met **George**, and his family, which had now come together. They were living in a house, very nicely. I bought him his first box of cigars. And his daughter was sure that I came to marry her. Now, how she got this idea, I don't know. I certainly never communicated with her. But my showing up, and her being there, I guess put two - two together and she had this – but I – first of all, I had a girlfriend in the **States**, and I was very faithful to her. And I didn't have any interest any more in marrying

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anybody anyhow. I knew that I had more to do to get myself educated, if nothing else. So –

Q: What circumstances did you find him in, though? Did he have a job? Did he have some way of –

A: I – I don't know.

Q: You don't know.

A: I – I think he became quite active – he be – I know that he became quite active in the Jewish community.

Q: Did he stay in the eastern section of **Berlin**?

A: He probably stayed there until he f – eventually moved out, because I met him again many years later, some years later. And he – he did move out of there, but I don't know when. He probably stayed there for a long time, because that – that was a very comfortable place to be, I could tell that.

Q: Did you remember anything of the conversation you had with him? Did he talk about what had happened in **Berlin**, after your family had left?

A: I'm sorry, I don't know. I – I'm not sure I talked with him about that. It was such a – you know, e-emotional meeting, that – that we simply wanted to be sure that we are okay, and that he is okay. That was – that was the main purpose of my going there, just to –

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Q: Yeah.

A: – make sure that they were taken care of, and they were being taken care of. In some fashion, they lived fine. Given where they were before, in hiding –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and then, obviously it would have been better. But they were li – living a – what – what I could see was a fairly normal life.

Q: Do you – did you ever find out what happened to the orderly, who became the policeman, who became his protector?

A: I am sure they still me – as a matter of fact, he was mentioned. He was – he was – he – **Susskind**(ph), who, as I said, was a fairly – very active member of the Jewish community, had certain positions in that community, which was just beginning to find its life, recommended him to be one of the – they call it Christian – can't remember – I'm sorry, words escape me. They – there was a special memorial set aside in **Yad Vashem** in **Israel**, to remember the Christians who help Jews. There's a term for that, I can't remember.

Q: Oh, you mean the Righteous Amongst Nations.

A: Righteous – the Righteous, yes.

Q: Okay.

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A: And, the policeman was one of them. He did get him into that category of people who actively helped, certainly kept **George** alive. He may have done more.

Q: Okay, okay. What else did you – did you find your old home address?

A: Well, I did that. I did two things. I went back to the neighborhood in which I lived last. I went to both neighborhoods. The first one, where I was born, was only exterior damage. People were living in the street – i-in the buildings, but they were all pockmarked with shells, old shells. The neighborhood to which I moved in **Elssho** – in **Haberland Strasse**, the **Bayerischer Platz** neighborhood, was totally damaged. I mean, the – the house had fallen into what looked like a personnel carrier, which seemed to have gotten its way into the entryway. The building had collapsed on top of it. It was as badly damaged as anything could be. Then I went to see the synagogue, which was still the same as it was when it was burned. I had not seen it then, but I saw it this time, and I could see this was not a picture of that, it's a shell. But every house in the neighborhood was bombed. It was like somebody must have watched this synagogue being burned, and all these houses next to them being saved, that a stick of bombs must have hit that whole neighborhood. That was my main experience, that the –

Q: Was your feeling any different than in **Austria**? You know, **Austria** still was a new territory for you –

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A: Oh, **Austria** was practically undamaged.

Q: Yeah. But **Berlin**, going to **Berlin**, was there – was your feeling different when you were in **Berlin** than when you had come to **Austria**? Because **Berlin** is home. **Berlin** is where you came from.

A: I did not have a home-like attachment to **Germany**.

Q: Okay.

A: **Germany** was a phase in my life that I guess I just subjected.

Q: You didn't meet any former neighbors, or anybody like that?

A: No, nothing. I mean, there was nobody there. People wouldn't live in the neighborhoods any more. They couldn't live in those neighborhoods, cause it was too dangerous. These houses were falling all the time. I-It was a – I had absolutely no feelings of anything about this.

Q: So it – it's – it's unusual. I guess I'm going after this because it's an unusual circumstance, that somebody who was born there, raised there, lived there until their 13th year, is more or less booted out, or el – you know, the – your choices at age 13 had been, if I stay I probably don't survive, and if I go, they're going to make sure that they get everything, you know, you go out with only a few marks, and un – you know, surprisingly, we got our furniture. But, you know, that's it. And then you come back as part of the winners, of the – the – the winning force, and an

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elite unit of the winning force. That's a juxtaposition, you know, leaving in one way, and returning in another.

A: Well, I was certainly ga – I – I had no feeling of being under – in any danger at all, except when I went to the Jewish cemetery. I bumped into a Soviet soldier in uniform. I was in uniform too, so was no mistaking me.

Q: Was the cemetery in the Soviet sector?

A: In the Soviet sector, the Jewish community, that whole area that east **Berlin** was in the Soviet sector. He actually took his gun off his shoulder, point it at me and says, come. And I simply acted like I didn't understand the term, and I walked away. And to this day I wonder why he didn't shoot me. Cause he seemed to be ready to do so, and somehow good conscience must have set in. But that was the closest I ever came to being in actual danger. To this day, I remember. I was a lucky guy. The girl f – the girl was with me, her name was **Ava, Ava Susskind**(ph).

Q: Aha, who –

A: She eventually –

Q: – who thought that you were going to be her –

A: Yeah, she thought I was going to marry her, but she married a guy who took her to the **States** actually, somewhere in the – the **Washington - Oregon** area. She disliked it immediately, and went back to **Berlin**. And I may have known this, but I

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certainly must have felt it, that she was very close to her parents, that she was never leave – would never leave her parents, and that – this idea that she would come to the **States** may – would never wor – and it didn't work out, I mean, she was just – she stayed there until her husband died, and – she married twice actually, second husband died. So it was – i-i-it was a very interesting – I – I don't remember any real emotional consequences from this. It – it certainly was, in some fashion, to see your old neighborhood again, to be able to recognize it. And – and – but, if I did this several times, I went back to **Berlin** a number of times. Last time I took the whole family, all my kids, and grandchildren. And I wanted to show them where I lived, and by this time **Berlin**, cause was perfectly rebuilt. They rebuilt my street, **Haberland Strasse** to where it be – was exactly as it was before. They used the same plans. The number on my – on the house where I lived, 30, was the same as it was when I lived in it. Every inch of it looked exactly the same way as it did when I lived there. And so much of **Berlin** is actually been rebuilt that way, so the city still looks like an old, well-kept – now well-kept city. The neighborhood where I was born, where I played in the [indecipherable] the – the garden is still the pl – the little plaza, is still there, the justice building is still there. It became the headquarters of the four power allied conference. They had their meetings in that place, it was a – a very stately building, and certainly suitable for that purpose. And there it was,

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right in my neighborhood, and that's where I saw the Jewish la – the Jewish lawyers being whisked away, somewhere.

Q: In that same building?

A: Hm?

Q: In that same building?

A: In that same building, yes, that was exactly the same building. It was never really much destroyed, because the allied moved into it as soon as they had got themselves organized, because that became the headquarters. So it couldn't have been bombed very badly. As a matter of – my whole street, where I was born, was not that badly bombed.

Q: That's your first home, in **Elssholz** –

A: That's my – my – **Elssholzstrasse**, the hou –

Q: What is the name of the park that was next to your –

A: **Kleist Park**.

Q: **Kleist Park**, okay.

A: **Kleist Park**. And when – what is interesting is, when we lived there, it was sort of a lower middle class neighborhood. We had – most attractive place in it was the beer – the **bierstube** on the corner. It was just a real workmen's district. When we went back, was about two years ago, three years ago, with my family.

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Q: You mean 2009, or 2010?

A: And 10, yeah, I guess we went back there.

Q: Yeah.

A: The street had become the other side of middle class. Now it became more like a wealthy city – wealthy state. Houses were repainted, they looked gorgeous. I'm sure they put elevators in all of the buildings. And when I looked at the placards outside the building, they now were doctors and lawyers, and professionals of all sorts, living in buildings that were really not suitable for that kind of clientele.

Q: When you were there the first time, so that's at the end of the war. That still would have been in 1945?

A: Yes, I – I was – about 1946, actually, '45 - '46.

Q: Forty-five - '46. During that stint, when you still were working with the **OSS** in **Austria**, did you go back many times, or was the many times you referred to throughout the whole postwar years?

A: No, there are no – for once, the – **Vienna** was my last stop in – in the **OSS**.

Q: Okay, and so your trip to **Berlin** while you were in the **OSS** was the – only the one time.

A: That's only one time.

Q: Okay.

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A: And everything I told you is more or less what happened during that time.

Q: Right.

A: I don't remember anything much more interesting than that.

Q: Did you have any feeling about the Germans, even though you might not have met any former neighbors?

A: You know, I've been asked that question, and I never have a good answer for that, because I cannot really say honestly, that I hated people. My father and my mother were totally different. They visited us eventually in **Berlin**, when I was stationed there, but they felt that every person of a certain age was a Nazi, and couldn't get out of their heads that – that there was anybody else in **Germany**. I didn't have that experience. My –

Q: Do you feel defensive about that?

A: Hm?

Q: Do you feel defensive about that? That you don't have such a feeling?

A: Well, I don't feel necessarily defensive, I –

Q: Or uncomfortable?

A: – it – it may be a normal experience for people. I mean, y-you don't go into a **huntry** – country you hate. There are refugees, or survivors, who would never go back to **Germany**. And there were the Jews who don't ever go to **Germany**, either.

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Q: That's right.

A: Even though they had no experience whatsoever. And I can understand that, too.

I mean, I would never say oh, that's a silly thing to do. But the Jewish community in **Berlin** now is tremendous. I mean, I think probably larger than it was when – when we left there. It – the synagogues are flourishing. I attended services there with my wife, and with – every seat was taken. The only thing that was different, I looked at my neighbor's prayer book, and it was in Russian.

Q: Well, that's what I was going to ask you, is that it sounds to – it seems to me that postwar **Berlin** Jewish community is basically not from **Berlin**.

A: Not from **Berlin**, no, no –

Q: Yeah.

A: – this is a whole new generation of people who are doing well. But they're mostly refugees from **Russia**. They were supposed to go from **Russia** to **Vienna**, and **Vienna** to **Israel**, and instead of going to **Israel** –

Q: We're talking now the 1970s.

A: – they went to **Berlin**.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: So it – it was a whole different scenario. But they're doing well, and – and it looks like they're flourishing, as they had before.

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Q: So tell us a little bit. You went back to **Austria**. Aside from the time when you were looking for scientists earlier, with the **OSS**, your focus now was on what were the Soviets doing when you were in **Vienna**.

A: Well, it – it was a mixed bag, yes. We were [**indecipherable**] that too. But my time was coming to an end. I went to **Al Armand**(ph). I said to him, you know, I'm going back to the **States**, what do you think I should do? I had reached the – the fabulous grade of Buck Sergeant, which is about as low as you can get in the sergeant business, and I thought I was doing pretty good. He looked at me and he said, why don't you get yourself an education? Go to **Princeton**. I said, sure. I never heard of **Princeton**, I never knew what he was talking about until I came home and I said to my girlfriend – same girlfriend I had before.

Q: The one from the beach.

A: The one from the beach. He said –

Q: What was her name, by the way?

A: Pardon me?

Q: What was her name, by the way?

A: Her name is still **Vivian**.

Q: It was, and it remains, yeah? What was her last name?

A: **Shepardton**(ph).

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Q: **Shepardton**(ph).

A: **Shepardton**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: She – she said, why go to **Princeton**? That's in **New Jersey**. We got a school in **New Haven**. And I said, okay, what school is that? And then she told me it was **Yale**. So we went to **Yale**. And nobody wants to believe this story, because it was so odd. I took a test or two, talked to somebody, and next thing I knew, I was at **Yale**, and I spent four years there.

Q: What did you study?

A: I studied, of all things, history and Russian. And Russian kind of escaped – even though I went home every weekend – hitchhiked, re – I became a very – a very good hitchhiker. I **hitched-hike** home, and when I didn't recheck home, **Vivian** would come to – to new – to **New Haven** to wait, and we had a – it was a wonderful time at **Yale**. But I spoke Russian with my mother, I thought I could –

Q: I wondered. I wondered how you'd do that, yeah.

A: – lear – yes, I did. She helped me, and it did help me, but it never really stuck long.

Q: So you – would you call yourself a Russian speaker now?

A: No, not at all. I mean, I can understand a little bit, and that's about it.

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Q: Okay.

A: I was just not very good about learning languages. I did all right at **Yale**, I graduate with honors. And next thing I did was applied to the **OSS** successor, the **CIA**, and since I had a history with them, I was able to get in there. And I found there also, everybody went to **Princeton**.

Q: Not **Yale**.

A: Well, eventually a few **Yalies** came in, but –

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: – it was just a – a whole new world.

Q: And so, is that what brought you to **D.C.**, the city that, you know, you've – you've lived in?

A: Well, we moved to, actually moved to – to **Arlington**, and we've lived there ever since.

Q: And can you tell us – you know, did you go back to **Europe** at all?

A: To what?

Q: Did you go back to **Europe** afterwards?

A: I was stationed in **Europe**, yes, and it was a totally different situation, I had my whole family with me. By that time we had two children. I remember leaving. It was middle of January, I had to get there, and when I did, you had to fly. But the

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planes were very slow. My – my wife was breastfeeding the boy, who was by that time about two week – three weeks old, or – he was really a baby. But she was a good soldier, she – same girl that was on the beach.

Q: Same girl. So you eventually married her.

A: Yes, I did marry her.

Q: Okay.

A: And we had one daughter, who was about four – three. About three when she – when he was born, yeah. And w – we been – we lived in **Europe** for a number of years, went back to **Berlin** again.

Q: Did you live in **Berlin** again?

A: Lived in **Berlin**, and had a – and that was interesting, because by this time now, I knew **Berlin**, and **Berlin** had changed enough so that –

Q: Was it already stra – was it already split east - west?

A: Oh yes, it was, it was very much so. The border at first was not that heavily guarded, but eventually it became very heavily guarded.

Q: And was it already –

A: And in 1960 they put up the wall –

Q: Yeah.

A: By that time I had left **Berlin**, so –

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Q: Okay.

A: – I didn't really experience the worst part of the thing.

Q: Well, if you were to – if this – if – here we're standing on stage at the **Rubinstein** auditorium, but let's say the audience here would be – these seats would be filled with people who had come from **Germany**, Jewish refugees, their children, their grandchildren. And this audience in particular wouldn't have ever gone back to **Germany**. But they ask you, what was it like? What can you tell us about the Germans in the 1950s? What should we know, what should we understand about them? What would you say?

A: First of all, we were – the American community was a very tightly knit community. We had our own schools, we had the **PX**, we had our own movie theater, and we could live totally in isolation from the German people.

Q: Did you?

A: Well, we almost did.

Q: Okay.

A: Certainly my wife, who was at that time – she wasn't teaching, because we had all these little children. I even had a daughter born in **Berlin**, and in **Berlin** Jewish – I guess in the la – army hospital. But our lives were separate. Our neighbors were Americans, our kids played with American children. Our contact with Germans was

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minimal, and unless you went out of your way to go shopping in [indecipherable] or elsewhere, it was a – a different life. And we were the occupation.

Q: That's makes a difference.

A: It makes a difference. I don't fi – I never really have felt any real animosity to Germans. I mean, I – I have – I have the philosophy that people are people, and that you can take any group of people, and make anything you want out of them, if you have the right tools for it. And **Goebbels** was actually the master of that genre. He was able to persuade the German people that there was indeed a danger, that Jews had to be eliminated, and most Germans seemed to believe that. And unfortunately, you could do that anywhere. I mean, you – we've seen this every day in our own history, and we see it today in – in – in o – our efforts overseas, to create some kind of order. People can be made to believe anything. We are a very unfinished specie of animal. We still have a long ways to go.

Q: Well then, when you look back at the various parts of your life, is that one of the lessons that you draw from your experiences, and from what has happened to you? Are there other things that you think people need to understand about the Holocaust aspect, and about what came later?

A: The Holocaust is simply an example of how easy it is to mislead people into believing something. I mean, I must give credit to **Goebbels**, he did this with a

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tactful – with a – with a tactics that were exceedingly professional. He made people believe the Jews were no longer human beings. That you could do anything you want to with them, because they were not like us. They had different blood, they had different – you – you see upstairs, when you go through the mi – exhibits, they measured heads of people to show how different our Aryans are from say non-Aryans. Certainly different from people of different colors. You could measure that, you can look at that from various aspects, and sure enough, they're not the same people as pure blooded Aryans. And that was believed. This blood theory went a long way towards making Germans believe that they are supermen, that they had some powers other do not have. They deserve what was coming to them, one way or another. Today **Germany** has probably the most progressive education on the Holocaust. I mean, I was in **Berlin**, went to the Jewish museum, and they had exhibited pictures of department stores which belonged to Jews. And most of the big department stores were owned by Jews. And the people were surprised, you know, they had no idea that this was actually the case. The museum also had to teach the German people what Jews were. All of a sudden, you walk in, the first – and they change exhibits periodically, but when I went there for the first time, first thing you came across was the **mikveh**, to show people what ritual bath was like, why it was there. And then from there and so **progressingly**, here's what Judaism's

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all about. And it's being taught. I've seen their schoolbooks, their curriculums, and they are very careful to teach this, the Holocaust. So you can turn people from one direction to another.

Q: Your own direction – and now I want to talk in more religious terms. You said that you weren't outside religion when you were growing up, but in postwar years, here in the **United States**, did you become more religious, did you join a synagogue, did you participate?

A: Yes, my family always was members of – and mine – my – my parents were, and so was my family, yes, we – we have been very active in – in Jewish life. I was president of my congregation, and my wife was president also. So we – we were very much involved. Am I a religious person? I am not sure. Not sure.

Q: Okay.

A: But I – I – I've – I've a feeling I belong to these people, this is my tribe. And that's where I have to be. I mean, all this – you have no choice, you're born into this, and then you're it, and you better make the most of it.

Q: Well, is there anything else you would like to say that you would want – is there anything else you would like to say that you would want people to understand, either about what your experiences were, or some thought that you'd want to leave people with, or that you'd want your children to remember?

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A: I – I’m not very good about the idea of changing people, or that people are changeable. People are born with certain ideas, principles, and conduct, which is theirs for life. And I’m always surprised at people being able to move from one religion to another, or act in various capacities that they would normally not act. But I do believe that the Jews kind of formed very early in life, and that you stick with those ways because they seem comfortable to you, and you feel secure in that environment.

Q: Yeah. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

Q: Mr. **Liebenau**. I really appreciate that you’ve talked with us today.

A: Thank you for th –

Q: And this now concludes our **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Gerald Liebenau**, September 12th, 2012, here at the **U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum**.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview