

My hands are not going to be seen. So I want to-- if I go like this, and I want a break, it's no problem?

Yeah.

You got speed?

Speeding.

All right, we're good to go.

All right. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Julius Wald on October 3, 2015 in Boca Raton, Florida. Thank you, Mr. Wald, for agreeing to meet with us today, to talk with us, to share your story. It's much appreciated.

My privilege. Thank you.

I am going to start our interview with the most basic questions, and from there, the story will develop, and so here we go. So the first question is, can you tell me what was your name at birth?

Julius Wald.

Any middle name?

No, we were too poor, couldn't afford it.

OK. And what was your date of birth?

February 1, 1930.

Where were you born?

In Vienna, Austria.

What were the names of your parents?

My father was Marcus, Marcus Wald, and my mother, her legal name was Helen Wald, but she always used the name Henie.

Henie?

Henie, H-E-N-I-E.

And what was her maiden name?

That's a mouthful, Hasenfratz.

Hosenfrans?

No, I'll spell it. H-A-S-E-N-F-R-A-T-Z.

Oh, Hasenfratz.

Hasenfratz.

Hasenfratz.

If you translate this kind of into an English thing, she would be like a Bugs Bunny cause it's a frivolous--

A bunny.

--bunny.

A bunny.

Right. Fratz.

Yeah, fratz.

Yeah.

Did your brothers and sisters?

Yes, two sisters, older. I was the youngest. My oldest, or the eldest, I should say, was Leonore, whom we called Lily.

OK, and when was she born?

June, oh, my god. She was born in 1925, June 1925. I'm trying to think. I think it was June 6, related to D-Day.

And your second sister?

Mimi. It's Mimi, M-I-M-I. And she was born January 11, 1927.

So it was 25, 27, and 30.

30. Right.

So you were three kids born in the '20s, except for you, and growing up in the '30s.

Pretty much. Pretty much.

Tell me, what did your father do for living?

My father had a business. I don't know how to describe it, not being privy to how it started. But he had concessions throughout Vienna, nightclubs, and a sports stadium. And the concession that he made was candied fruits, things like that, on a stick.

They put it on the tray in which he personally went to nightclubs and sold them. He was quite a guy-- big, big man.

Tell me about him.

Well, excuse me.

It's OK.

To me, he was a very, very loving father. He loved his children. I know it. I know that because he worked, but when he worked at night, he worked the nightclubs and restaurants. And at night, he would pick me up out of my crib.

When you'd come home?

Yeah. You know, the apartment we had was pretty small for the five of us. So we had one large bedroom and a smaller one in between was a kitchen. My crib, which was a crib really, was in their bedroom.

In your parents' bedroom.

In my parents' bedroom, right.

And your sisters had their own bedroom?

My sisters slept in the smaller bedroom. Right. Right.

You anticipated one of my questions, and that was, where did you live? What did your home look like? So tell me more about that.

Well, the large bedroom faced the street, the street level.

Oh, a street level?

Yes, oh, yes.

Ground level.

No, ground level. Ground floor. And in the bedroom, there was, well, I have to describe. Apparently, there was a business or something below in the basement.

So there was an entrance right below our bedroom into this basement, and, apparently, the stairway, which went down, it intruded into our bedroom so that from the window down to the floor, there was wood.

So does this mean this entrance was from the street side?

It was only from the street side--

Street side.

--that you could get down, but when they built the steps going down into the basement, it intruded into the building.

Interesting. Interesting how that would have-- now did the steps, as much as you remember them, go down the side of the building or into the building?

No, the front into the building, the front of the building. If you stood in front of my house and looked out. It was a large apartment house, OK, on the right-hand side was the entrance to the building itself.

And where we were, we had one window into that bedroom. Below that window was the entrance to the basement, much like some of the basements you have like in New York. I don't see any, obviously, down here. But they opened up a flat this way and one this way.

Yeah, OK.

And the steps would go down.

Got it. Got it. Got it. Yes. OK.

And the ceiling of that entrance intruded into our bedroom.

So did you hear people going down the stairs all the time?

Not really. No. As best as I can recollect, maybe my sister can tell you more, with some kind of a manufacturing, it was like a one-man operation, a two-men something, very small.

Was the building a new apartment building or an older one?

No.

19th century built? Well, was it in downtown Vienna, or was it in a residential neighborhood?

Residential. Yeah, in the suburb, if can could call it a suburb. But Vienna was divided into districts, and we lived in the Second District. The Second District was kind of middle class or below economics, that kind of thing, as I remember, and as I was told, mostly occupied by Jewish people. I don't know how true that is or how accurate, not true, but how accurate it is. But, yes.

Do you remember your street address?

Yes.

What was it?

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

OK, let's repeat that-- [SPEAKING GERMAN].

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

Yeah, [SPEAKING GERMAN] It was the building.

So 34.

34.

[SPEAKING GERMAN] was the apartment number.

OK. Did your parents own it? It was rented? OK.

It was a rental. And I'm trying to think now. I'm 95% certain that it was a rental. Again, we can verify that from my sister because she would know more.

During the time that we lived there, we had problems because I wasn't the quietest of children. I was called a Spitzbube, which is--

Translate that for me.

There's no translation, and, hell, before I had thought of a kind of a kid who is a little on the wild side.

Mischievous.

That's the word, mischievous, a mischievous kind of child. The bathroom was not in the apartment. The bathroom was right outside of the kitchen door was a separate bathroom.

On the landing or something?

On the landing, yes. Yes.

Staircase landing, mhm. And in the hallway, there was a fountain. Well, kind of a fountain. It had the basin type and then, on top of it, had a spigot and what have you.

And we didn't have too much money. We didn't have too many toys. But what I did have was a bottle nipple, OK, which had the hole like it's supposed to have.

Somewhere, somehow, I was told if you take-- we had wooden marbles-- if you took a wooden marble and put it inside, I went to that faucet, stuck--

The nipple up there.

Nipple on top of the faucet, filled it up, the marble closed the thing, and that's a water gun because it was filled with water. The marble was the stopper. And you push the marble back, and it would spray.

Only a kid would think of this, only a kid.

I'm sure I didn't invent it.

[LAUGHS]

But you have to try it out.

Oh, yeah, and on the same floor, the very end of that, was the janitor, the woman who-- her name was-- I don't know her first name, but her last name was Fleckel.

Fleckel?

Fleckel.

Frau Fleckel.

Frau Fleckel.

OK, what was she like?

She was like-- I'm looking for an appropriate word, a witch, I guess.

[LAUGHS]

She was nasty, and, of course, we go back to the-- Jews were not particularly welcome. The landlord who lived-- and as I said, there was a central place where you went in. On one side of it was where we lived, on one side of that building. On the other side was where the landlord lived.

Now the landlord's name, as I remember, was Heinrich Muller.

OK, Heinrich Muller.

Heinrich Muller. And Heinrich, it turned out, once the Germans came in and took over, had his Gestapo officer's uniform on.

Oh, my goodness.

He was a bigshot in the Gestapo. The son of Mrs. Frau Fleckel was a Sturmabteilung. He was a brown shirt. And, trust me, they went all out to get to us.

Were you the only Jewish family in the building?

No. There were other Jewish families. Now, I didn't know them, but--

You were very close. In the proximity-wise, you were very close.

In the building, yes.

In the building, yeah.

But that's why I mentioned earlier, these people who now currently, or at least two years ago, lived in our apartment in Vienna who contacted me because they were in the process of making a memorial for all the Jewish people that lived in that building. And it's quite a list.

OK, this was said off camera when you were telling me this. So we're jumping ahead now to just a few years ago, which would be a few years from 2015, which is half a century later, you told me, out of the blue, you get an email one day. Who was the email from?

The names would be on that email because, ultimately, they invited me to come to Vienna to view the dedication of this memorial. The memorial they were putting up was in memory of all the Jewish people who lived in the entire complex.

That apartment complex.

Right.

And you said it was the people who now lived in the same apartment?

As we did. Right.

That had sent you the email.

Right. They wrote in that letter. They explained why they're doing it, who they are, that they came from Italy. They're living here. And they're trying to make a life, and then they learned about the things that happened in that apartment house, and they felt they wanted to do something.

And so they invited us to come to Vienna for the dedication, but I have no reason, no use--

To go?

To go. Yeah.

Let's go back now to your childhood--

My childhood.

--and your environment and where you were growing up. So Frau Fleckel probably was not happy that you would get--

you would do this kind of experimentation.

Yes, I did spray her son a couple of times, and, of course, this time to come reflected in my psyche because when Hitler came, one night, the night they knocked on the door, took my father.

I always felt it was because of me and what I did. My sister says, no, it was just the time. It would have happened one way or the other. Don't feel guilty.

What happened to her?

Well, first, they took them to a concentration camp, Dachau. And then were the letters there to them, I think. Those were the letter that I gave you guys.

To the museum--

To the museum.

--from your father.

Right. Right. So whatever I had at that time, I gave them, and they are in the process of building an album or something.

The exhibit that we're going to have.

Excuse me.

It's OK.

Anyhow, they took him away. They were correspondents, of course, and the correspondence was limited because they blanked anything of importance and so forth.

And subsequent, my mother, god rest her soul, went to Gestapo headquarters, any of those headquarters, almost daily when she had the strength and took me along with her and with hundreds of others who were begging to let their relatives go. And I have a candid kind of recollection of one day that when we're standing in line, at that time, my sisters had already left for the United States.

So this would be in the late '30s.

This would be around March of 1939. No.

Austria has already been taken over.

No, no, not 1930-- oh, yes, I'm sorry. I'm past the--

Yeah, we're going to go back to the early years. But since we started talking about this, I wanted to find out--

This particular--

--what happens, yeah.

Yeah. And we were standing in line, and an SS guy came over and said, spoke to my mother. I have no earthly idea what he said to her. All I remember him saying is, come, come. So he took my mother, and she didn't want to let go of me. He didn't want me to come.

And she said, like, what am I going to do, you know? So he says, OK, take him. So we went into this black limo.

Oh, my goodness.

And I don't know. He took her-- I have no idea, you know, no concept of time. But he took her ride-- it was quite a ride. And we wound up in Dachau.

Oh! You wound up in Dachau from Vienna.

With my mother. And I was sitting in a room with an SS guy sitting behind the desk, Nazi flag and the whole nine yards. The guy took my mother into another room.

I cannot tell you how much time was spent there, no concept at all. But at some point or another, my mother came out, and she had-- you could see that she had been crying. And then they took us back to the Gestapo headquarters--

In Vienna.

In Vienna. And that's how the day ended.

Well, had she seen your father?

Don't know what happened, no clue. You know, as an adult, as an adult, all you can do is speculate on what might have happened. I don't want to think about it.

What was your father's fate?

And, ultimately, they transferred him from Dachau to Buchenwald, which is the other concentration camp [INAUDIBLE]. And then, ultimately, the pleadings or whatever, it worked, and my sister knows a little bit more about it because I'm sure my mother told her some of the details. But they gave my father-- they let him go with the stipulation that he leaves Austria within a given time because at that time, they had not yet started the program of killing, the outright killing.

That's right.

They just wanted to get all the Jews out of Europe. So they gave him this time to get out. And about that time, Mr. Kraus, who's the prime mover of the 50 children, was in Vienna. And that's when they took me to see him.

We're gonna stop right here.

Go back.

Yeah, we're gonna go back. We're gonna go back. We were talking about your apartment building.

Right.

We were talking about the rooms from when I-- the picture in my mind that I have is the ground floor of a building where there's a large bedroom looking out, with a window looking out onto the street--

Right. Correct.

--a kitchen and then another small bedroom where your sisters are.

Right.

Was there a living room? Were there any other rooms?



No.

There were only these three rooms?

That's it, the big bedroom, big in the front with the-- yeah, we called it a rutscher, which is like a slide because, as kids, we slid down that.

Oh, the rutscher, of course. If it was a staircase going down, then it would be a diagonal kind of--

Exactly.

And what is it good for? It's for sliding. Of course.

I did, anyway. So the bedroom then led out into a narrow hallway, and to the left of that hallway, and also behind the bedroom, I mean, I could draw you a diagram, was the small Kabinett, cabinets, a room. And then the entrance to the apartment was at the end where there was a window to the backyard.

OK. So you would enter the apartment from the courtyard.

No, from the hallway, which went into the kitchen. There were no windows in the hallway to the courtyard, but just that one window which I saw the armor.

The iron man.

The iron man.

We'll talk about the iron man in a minute.

Yeah. My sister will tell you she fell out of that window. Below that window were steps going down into the basement.

From the other side?

From the courtyard--

From the courtyard.

--into the basement. And so when you looked out that window, there were the stairs going down, and she leaned out, and she fell out that window, but she'll tell you that story. So going back--

OK, did you have plumbing? You had it in the hallways, you know, when you had the toilet and sort of like the fountain wash basin.

What about inside? Was there indoor plumbing? Did you have a bathroom or the tub or anything?

No, the bathroom was outside, just the toilet. There was no shower or bathtub, nothing.

What about a sink with plumbing in the kitchen? You don't remember? How did you get water, in other words?

You know, as God is my judge, I don't remember. I don't even recall. Asked me about a refrigerator. We don't think we had a refrigerator either.

How did you heat the place?

We had a stove.

Did you have a coal oven?

A belly stove.

A belly stove.

Yeah, that's where she cooked in the belly stove and heated it with a belly stove. I remember that.

And what about in the bedrooms? How were they heated? Was it cold? You don't remember.

Whatever it was, I lived with it. I don't remember ever complaining that I was cold or hot. When you're a kid, at that age--

You don't know.

--you don't really think about these things.

Part of the reason why I'm asking these questions is to get a sense of how much modernity had developed in a residential area of Vienna at that time and what those buildings had and didn't have.

Well, I would say that you might be, not misled, but mistaken in the sense that just because our building was what it was, the other section, the next section, Estern Bezirk, was high class, expensive. There were hotels and parks and things. You know, this was really upscale.

Well, you know, I went to school in Germany in Berlin when I was a teenager and actually lived in an apartment similar to what you're talking about--

Did you?

--where the toilet was still out in the hallway, and it was shared with other apartments. And in such places still existed, you know, at least 30, 40 years ago. And, so, yes, that juxtaposition of dwellings that were more old-fashioned were next to dwellings that were very modern.

Upscale.

Yeah, upscale, and so I take it you must have had electricity, though, in the building?

Yes. There was electricity. I recall that much.

Do you have any earliest memories?

Cameos, I can give you.

Let's have a cameo or two.

Probably, approximately, when I was two or three, a quick cameo, I had diphtheria and my recollection was laying on the floor in the hospital on some kind of blanket, or I don't know what, and I recall one of the nuns-- the nurses were nuns. The hospitals were run by the churches, and standing over me, a weird kind of a one-shot kind of deal, and that's it, period, end of story as far as that is concerned.

Another recollection recollections were when we had scarlet fever. Now we had scarlet fever. I caught it from a neighbor, who came home and had high fever and what have you. And, again, this is told to me.

And then the doctor was called. Anyhow, I gave it to my sisters. So all three of us were hospitalized in one hospital, and it's the first time that we really had a problem because we were all used to kosher food. And we were given schinken and noodles. That's ham and noodles.

And noodles?

A dish. I couldn't eat it.

Aww.

It was just one of those things ingrained into me that you don't need that kind of food. Well, I survived, obviously, so that's behind us. We spent quite a bit of time. And that was another-- see, they are traumatic--

Yes.

--so that you remembered them. And one other incident was probably when I would say maybe seven, I had my tonsils out.

Another hospital.

Barmherzigen Bruder, which is--

What?

Brother. Barm-- I can't spell it because I don't-- I just literally know how to pronounce it. Barmherzigen Bruder.

Barmherzigen Bruder.

Bruder. It's brothers-- some kind of--

Brotherhood of some kind?

Some kind of brothers, a Catholic order, what you would call it?

Monks maybe. Maybe they were monks, Barmherzigen, OK.

Sympathetic. Barmherzigen sounds more like sympathetic kind of brothers-- and waking you up in the middle with the tray under hear--

Oh, dear.

--and the doctor yelling, more anesthetic.

Oh, my goodness.

And they used ether in those days. Eww. I cannot get the smell of ether out of my nostrils.

So there were no secular hospitals, or there were only Catholic hospitals in Vienna at the time? Or that's where you ended up?

That's all I know. Were there others? I imagine there might have been. There probably were, but I have no idea. And the ones that I would have recollection to were those hospitals.

Well, hearing these cameos, where one could make the assumption-- were you a sickly child?

No.

No?

No.

It's just what you remember?

No, that's what I remember. No, other than that, it's a little bit of a, like I said, a Spitzbube, you know, excuse me.

That's OK.

We had that same window with the rutscher there--

That's right.

--also had, when we opened the window, the doorway had like a step, and I would run away from home quite often, you know. That's where I climbed out because my mother had locked the door. She apparently know that I was that kind of a kid.

Did she go to work when she would lock the door and lock you in there?

No, no.

She'd be in another part of the house?

Wherever she was, I don't know, but I managed to sneak out.

So do you have any adventures of the places you went to?

Nothing earth-shaking, nothing there. I remember I went to visit a friend of mine that I went to school with, but that was another traumatic thing that I went to a Jewish school, and I was trying to look up on the Google what that section of Vienna looked like.

I once did it, but not completely. I found where we lived on Google Earth, the street. Now I understand they've improved it three-dimensional. You can see the buildings. I'm sure it doesn't look like it did then too.

But my school was located on an L-shaped street. You went from the main drag and around the corner to the right, an L. And the back of the school back down to a garden-- it's not a garden, garden.

A park type of area. A park type of setting, apparently quite a large one. Now in that park was apparently a camp where they were training for housing the Hitler Youth.

Right next to a Jewish school?

In the back, right. And we had a welcome committee, and the day that we went to school, we had the welcome committee in the front of the school. And that was no fun for anybody.

Well, tell me, what did it consist of. Let's spell it out so people understand what that meant.

Well, I can spell it out. They would push, taunt. Most of it that I remember were taunting. And one of the things they said, you can't get it out of your mind, what they said is [SPEAKING GERMAN]. It's Jew, Jew, spit in the hat. Tell your

mother that it's good.

It really had has no sensible meaning, but it was a little zinger.

Yeah, were these kids your own age, or were they older?

Older. Older. Maybe not a lot older. I would think maybe anywhere from 10 to 12, 13.

And you were still a younger kid at that point, yeah.

I was 8.

8. Mhm. And were there girls in this group?

No.

Always boys?

No, only boys. Only boys.

And would the groups being, like, 10 kids or 15 kids or 6 kids? I know you wouldn't know an exact number. But I'm trying to get a sense of how big a group.

The kids that came out of the school?

No, no, no.

Oh, the Hitler Youth.

The Hitler Youth, mhm.

I'm trying to picture the area was fairly crowded. So I'd say maybe 15, 12, 15.

Kids.

Something, kids, yeah, something like that.

That's a big group. That's a big enough group.

Yeah, well.

It's not one or two, so it gets twice the numbers.

No, no, no, no. This is not one or two, and I am sure, again, there is any doubt that they didn't think of this of themselves. They were like told to go there in such and such and do such and such and whatever, yeah.

Did anybody get beaten up?

Probably. I was not looking at others. I was busy kind of looking out for myself, you know? And, no, I was fortunate enough to get beaten up. I was pushed and shoved. I did shove back, you know?

Maybe I wasn't as lucky that I got away with it. Yeah, that was it. I did do something that I guess I can't be proud of it. But I was told by adults nowadays that I was too smart for my age.

But we had a little charity box where we put money for the poor people, really poor, rather than the rich. But I took some money from there. I went to the local where they had the newspapers, tobacco, and things like that.

Like the kiosk?

It's a store. A store.

OK, a store. And I used to get my father's newspaper and cigarettes there. But they had on the counter that little placard where they sold miniature swastikas and that kind of things. Yours truly, how do I protect myself against this?

I took the money. I bought a miniature swastika, and I put it in here on my shirt on the inside. And so many times that I got stopped on the street by a bunch of kids or something, you know, I was choked up, and I would go like this and show the swastika.

Did it work?

Yes. It worked. There were sometimes few incidents, where there was somebody in the group that doubted-- no, no, no, he's not one of ours, you know? He's a Jew. But the others talked about it. And so I got lucky.

Did your parents know?

Oh, no. Are you kidding? No. No. Well, my father wasn't there, but my mother, no. Even my sisters, I'm not sure that they know today.

I would say whatever helped you survive. You were a little kid. You were a little kid, you know?

Yeah, well, you know, you do what you can do to-- I don't know who once had told me this, boy, that was smart.

There would be many people who would not judge you at all, or if they would, they'd say, gee, I wish I had had that idea.

I don't--

As much as it is.

Look, there were others and older people who did things to survive. You do what you do to survive. With adults, some adults did. And not that I have personal knowledge of it, but the things that I learned later on.

Like?

You know, assimilating with them. There was someone who lived with one of my aunts, who took up with one of the--

Who took up with the SS or some--

Yeah, one of the Nazi something or other. And I know that only because I heard that her being condemned, and I guess I too must've felt the same way as they did. But when you get older, you go to say, hey--

You never would realize until it happens and it develops how these policies that are so impersonal wrench down deep inside a person and put them in positions where they're forced to make choices they never ever normally would have. They're not free to make the kind of choices they want to make.

That type of situation has been perpetuated throughout the centuries. Here you have things where on television, it showed just off the subject where a guy is pointing a gun at a woman, and he wants her brother or husband to do something, and he says, I want you to kill your sister or brother, whatever it is. If not, I'll kill you. That's the kind of

situations that we're in.

Some call this choiceless choices.

Exactly. So as a youngster, I didn't understand. So, psychologically, I went along with these kinds of thoughts, but as you grow older, you realize that's what it is, no choice.

OK, I want to find out about the iron man because we talked about it earlier, but off camera. So tell me who is this iron man who figured in your nightmares and how did he get there?

How he got there, I don't know, but, apparently, they put him in as a decoration, you know, a [SPEAKING GERMAN]. People put in cement statues of some kind. In this particular place between the two buildings in front of my kitchen window, there was--

In the courtyard?

In the courtyard. Right. There was a suit of armor.

A statue? Or just a suit of armor.

No, a metal suit of armor with the face mask, which, of course, is the scariest part. That's the part that I always look to focus in. And you imagine God knows what's behind that.

That's right.

And my sisters, if I didn't behave or whatever they wanted me to do, they would threaten me.

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

And that meant?

It meant that the iron man is going to get you. It's going to fix you.

[LAUGHS]

And you believed them?

Of course I believed them.

Why would they ever lie?

At night, it's about him coming after me. No.

The things that big, older siblings do.

Some do worse.

Yes, of course. All right, I want to find out a little bit more about your family. Were your parents Viennese for generations? Did their families come from Vienna? Where did they come from?

My father was born in Romania, a little place called Crasna Putnei, which I found on the map still exists, and my mother came from Delatyn in Poland.

What's the place called?

Delatyn. It's a small place near Krakow.

Southern Poland then? Yeah.

Yeah.

Right. How did they end up in Vienna?

I don't really remember how. I heard stories about that. But in Poland, there was a family farm. Excuse me. There was a family farm.

My mother had, let's see, one-- I'm going to try to remember-- one, two three, two, three, that I recall, I believe three sisters. It might have been four, and at least two brothers.

Not a small family.

No, no.

Not small. OK.

No, and this family farm they had in Poland was right across from the Prut River. My uncle, his, I guess, legal name was Joseph, but they called them Yozhi. He ran a taxi, a fiacre, a one-horse thing with it.

I went there with my mother. She took me there in 1936.

Oh, really?

Yes. And I met my aunt, my mother's sister. Her name was Berta. She had been married, and I didn't know what happened. I think my sister said he ran away, but she was left there in the house with three boys.

Her sons.

Her sons. Yeah.

Were your grandparents still alive on your mother's side?

Some maybe told me something about it. I think that my grandmother was alive, but I have zero recollection. Just what I have is some pictures. That's all.

And we spent-- I don't know how much time we really spent. I remember the train rides to Poland.

What was that like?

Very interesting. Well, a little kid looking out the window seeing all these things. The train was, to me, was like fun, kind of, you know, enjoyable.

And then my uncle met us at the railroad station. We got into the fiacre, and he took us there. To me, this is all a whole new world, a whole new world.

So how did it look different from Vienna?

Vienna was an all cement city and urban. This was totally farmland, suburban. My three cousins took me skiing. Across the river, there was a mountain.



Excuse me, can we cut?

Sorry, yeah.

It's that kid outside.

Yeah, I was going to tell you. Cutting.

Rolling.

Speeding.

All right, good to go.

So your cousins took you skiing?

Yes. I knew nothing about skiing at that point. Funny, the skis, we had to tie them to shoes.

I'm sorry. We heard the faucet.

The faucet?

Is that OK?

Let's just start at the beginning.

Let's just start from the beginning, yeah.

Sorry about that. We're ready.

So what are the skis? They took you skiing.

They said, do I want to go skiing. And I didn't even really know what skiing was, and they told me. We went across the little bridge across the river, and they were tearing these long-- this here is what you do now.

I tied the skis on. Now, you got to understand, I didn't even-- I didn't have boots, ski boots, or anything like that, but in those days, as kids, you didn't have low shoes. You had high shoes. The shoes were up to the ankle.

And that's what you used?

And that's what we used. Well, skiing is maybe an overstatement. They took me to little hills. It was, like, a lot of fun--

I can imagine.

--from falling this, and it was a joke. You know, it was kidding around. And then--

So you went in winter? You went to this farm in wintertime?

Must've been winter because there was snow there. Of course, the bridge across was a wooden bridge, and the railing was rope, wood, rope, whatever.

It wasn't very wide because one-- and I fooled around, and I started and I fell off the bridge.

Into what?

Into water. It was a little stream. Then mostly my finger got hurt. That's all, didn't want to tell them about it. And they were laughing, and they were hysterical.

What language did you speak with them?

German.

They spoke German?

Apparently, they were able to understand, you know? That has puzzled me for years. I said, how did we communicate?

Yeah.

And somehow, we made each other-- not that they spoke German, and I certainly didn't speak Polish. I mean, I might have known at that time probably a half a dozen words Polish because my mother would sometimes speak to my father, you know?

In Polish?

In Polish, yeah.

[SPEAKING POLISH]. Shh. You know?

When the kids don't need to understand what you're saying.

Right. Right.

Well, did they speak Yiddish, do you think?

I would think not. I don't remember myself speaking Yiddish as a child.

Did your parents speak Yiddish?

They spoke either Polish-- my father spoke Romanian. So somewhere in between, there was a language that they used called-- they called it Ruthenisch.

OK, Ruthenian. I don't-- yeah, OK.

I don't know even to this day what it was, you know? In fact, not to deviate, but I once wanted to know just exactly what happened to that property. And I went to the editor of the Polish newspaper in New York. I can't think of the name.

And we had a nice conversation. He laughed and says, yes. He says, I have property in the same place, same area. But it's not Poland anymore now. It was Lithuania.

Oh, no, that would be way up north.

Yeah.

I thought you had property near Krakow.

No, no. Somewhere in the vicinity.

Lithuania is at the other end of the country.

I know where Lithuania is, and it would have to be Northern Poland--

That's right.

--to join the border.

But at any rate, he had no news for you about--

No, he was trying to get his property and my property were now part of-- it's the lowest of the Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Which is the lowest one?

Lithuania.

Lithuanian, yeah.

It's the furthest south.

Yeah, furthest south, right. So, yeah, his property was the same. He says, I'm in the same boat as you. Poland doesn't own it anymore, then I'll try and get it back.

So I offered that. I spoke to my sisters at that time. I said, if you'd like to give this property to charity who has attorneys and what have you, they want to fight it out. We'll sign it over to the charity and let them-- that never came to be because I couldn't find the property deed. I think my sister says she had-- my mother had the deed.

OK. But if this is near Krakow, then it probably would have been Czech Republic.

Uh-uh.

No?

No. Forget Krakow. I mean, this is something maybe that was in here. But Delatyn is where her birth certificate says that's where she was born.

And do you know how it's spelled?

D-E-L-Y-- D-E-L-A-T-Y-N. Delatyn.

OK.

You'll find it on a map.

We'll find it.

Google it online.

So this is your first and only kind of acquaintance with your mother's side of the family back in the family farm?

No, that was one sister and one brother. And that was one visit. And that was it for all of my life. I never had any contact before or afterwards.

So you don't know what happened to them? You assume.

You have to. I mean, I know what happened to most of them. My only one sister made it to this country.

One of your aunts?

One of my mother's sisters made it to this country, and they made it because they were in business for themselves, unlike my father's business was totally different, which was like concessions, they had a bakery. And they apparently had money. For whatever it was, they were not the nicest family.

They lived in Poland or in Vienna?

No, this is in Vienna.

So one of your mother's sisters also lived in Vienna?

The two sisters--

I see.

--that lived there, Josephine, which was Pepe and Mina, who came to the United States. She and all her entire family made it. Pepe, on the other hand, they got out. They went to Belgium.

Only one son escaped. He went to Israel. Well, it was Palestine in those days, OK? The rest of the family, which consisted of my mother's sister, her husband, two sons, and one daughter.

Five people. Do you know their fates?

In Belgium.

Oh, they were shot in Belgium?

Killed in Belgium. I don't know how. We know they did not survive. Then there was another brother, my favorite. He was single. He was a playboy. He was a real gigolo.

And he lived in Vienna too?

No, he lived in Czechoslovakia, and he was adopted by an elderly woman.

[LAUGHS]

He was a gigolo, yeah. I see pictures of him in tennis outfits. He was the favorite of all the kids because when he came to visit, he would always bring presents, wonderful little presents.

And he was your mother's brother?

He was my mother's-- he was the youngest, the youngest in the family.

What was his name?

His name was [PERSONAL NAME], or we called them Ziggy.

Ziggy?

Ziggy may have been short for Sigmund, but I never, never heard him referred to as other than Ziggy.

OK. So what happened with Ziggy? What was his fate?

He survived for a while, because he was in touch with my liver letter with my father. I didn't tell you the rest of the story about my father. I have to backtrack now to get that part.

When he went to Buchenwald and the communications between him and my family, my mother. And then I told you they gave him the time to get out.

That's right.

You couldn't get a visa to come to the United States because it was a Romanian quota. They had to quota system, and they enforced it at that time. They really didn't want too many Europeans here in this country. It was a different world.

And he said to my mother, you get out. He had enough money to buy tickets, but they couldn't get out because of the visa. But he wanted my mother. So he sent her off. And having served in the Austrian Army during World War I, he knew the territory between Austria and Yugoslavia.

So he made his way through into Yugoslavia, where, ultimately, as I had heard, he fought with Mikhailovich, with the underground, or whatever. I don't know what his life was like there. But the Red Cross found that he was killed. When the Nazis retreated from Yugoslavia, they killed all the people there.

And while I don't remember at this point, but there is a place in Yugoslavia where they built a memorial for all these people who were killed by the Nazis, a park, a memorial park. It has a name. It has gravestones and what have you.

So your father made his way south, ended up fighting in the underground against the Nazi occupation and was killed in some way that you don't know how?

No, no.

But if it was during the retreat of the Nazis, that meant it was--

They rounded up. They rounded up all the Jews. They got orders to kill as many as they could.

And so then he ended up living there actually for several years because if it's a retreat, that means that it's towards the end of the war, and they're losing. So he ended up, somehow or other, existing, surviving. You don't know. When did you find out about your father, conclusively?

My sister got the information. She dealt with people from the Red Cross. She tried various and sundry agencies, and what have you. Ultimately, she was successful.

So you were already in this country when you found out?

Oh, yes. Yes.

And this would have been after the war?

No, I came in June 3, 1939.

But if it was a German retreat, and she was writing, did she find out this information while the war was going on, or would it have been after the war?

No, I believe during.

During? Oh, even during? OK.

We referred to my mother or my--

Your father. Your father.

No. Did my sister find out about my father?

Yes.

No, that was after the war.

That's what I thought.

After the war was over?

Absolutely.

Oh, yes.

OK. So in telling me about what his further fate was, it was in connection with Ziggy.

Right. I'm sorry. Ziggy corresponded with my father, and the letter that they wrote, I gave--

To the museum?

To the museum.

And Ziggy was where when he corresponded with your father?

I believe he was some place in Czechoslovakia, still in Czechoslovakia, because that's where he lived in Brno.

In Brno.

Brno. Yeah.

And what happened to Ziggy? Also? OK.

We have actually no knowledge, no specific knowledge what happened to him. We have no specific knowledge of what happened to the Meyer family that went to Belgium. We just know that they were gone.

That's your mother's sister?

That's my mother's sister.

Josephine's?

Right. Right. And the same with the people in Poland.

You don't know?

Don't know.

And did your father have family, like, he came from Romania. Did he have brothers and sisters?

OK, my father actually-- well, my sister will tell you that story. He had two-- let's see, two brothers and one sister, OK? One brother and one sister came to the United States long before the war.

The other brother-- no, two brothers, both brothers were here before the war. And the reason one brother, the youngest, was here was because my father-- for the record, he was gay. Nobody ever in the family ever said anything, but he never married. He was a barber and so on and so forth.

He was to be drafted.

Into the Austro-Hungarian--

Into the army in Romania. My father felt bad for him. He says, you go to America. My father was supposed to come.

He says, you go. You take my ticket, and you go. I'll take your place. That's how he got into the army. My father did his time in the army.

Oh, my goodness. Now with these relatives in the United States when it came time to help your father, were they unable to do so, or could--

Unwilling. Well, again, the eldest brother, I think he was the eldest, Harry, had died of a heart attack. Max, who was--

The barber.

Yeah. He got to living with the widow. There's a Jewish law that states you're supposed to marry the widow of your brother, whatever. He never married her, but they lived together.

He supported the family. She had two kids. She had a son and a daughter.

His nieces, nephews.

Right. And he lived with them in the Bronx in New York. When my mother asked for help from them, she was a nasty woman. She didn't want to help because she didn't want to break up her family. They were living in sin.

In those days, that was not looked upon in favor. So they needed \$100, I believe, or something like that, wouldn't sent it. She wouldn't let him send-- and, you know, at the time I met him, when I came to this country, I wasn't aware of this because he came to visit me.

And he was nice enough to me. But had I known, I wouldn't have spit on him. But that's another story.

And those are such--

Yeah, now, a sister, his sister, lived in Hartford, Connecticut, married. She had two sons. I think there was a daughter. I don't remember meeting the daughter.

Again, my sister can elaborate on that because when my sisters came to the States, they came two weeks before I did. They went to live with my aunt in Hartford. I lost track of what I'm saying.

You were talking about your aunt and how-- yeah. And was there any connection with her being able to help in getting your family out, I think?

No. I don't recall ever hearing any conversation about them contacting them for help. Financially, they were fairly well-off. He owned a parking lot in Hartford. One son worked for Vought-Sikorsky. The other one was much younger.

Now the youngest boy just retired. He was a sergeant in the sheriff's department. He just retired. I'm sorry. I apologize.

That was the grandson.

The son was Sidney. Sidney and I got to be friends and my family here. He was such a good guy.

So you did end up having some family here in the United States.

There was some.

There was some.

There was some family here.

That stayed family, that you stayed-- you know, that you chose, you know? You can't choose family. You can choose friends. But here, when you meet family, you can choose to be close to.

Yes, they were very warm people, my aunt, my father's sister. They were all good people. They cared for my sisters, took care of them. No. And we went to see them in Hartford when they lived in New York. After we got married, we kept in touch with them. They're good people.

OK, I think we're going to take a break now. Are we at around 12:30? Yeah?

It's 12:20.

12:20. Let's take a break now.

OK.

Speeding.

OK. So before the break, we were talking about your father's side of the family, his two brothers, his sister, how one of his brothers died of a heart attack in the United States, how the other brother couldn't, wouldn't, was not in a position to be able to help to bring him over and your father's sister, who lived in Hartford.

And I wanted to turn back now a little bit to what your life was. I want to go back and fill in some of the gaps that we didn't before the break.

And one of them was that I got a sense of what your childhood world was when you described the apartment, when you described the street, some of the neighbors, and the staircases and the rutscher, you know, and the thing you played on and the iron man and the school and all of this. And that paints a fairly normal world, you know, one where there isn't any unusual activity aside from what happens when the Nazis come to power.

This is pre-Nazi.

Pre-Nazi time. I want to go back to then and just ask, was your family a very religious family?

Well, my mother was always Orthodox to the Nth degree. My father, by the nature of what he had to do, business, was not. He was religious. He had services in the temple, yes, definitely. I was sent to a religious school, as I mentioned earlier.

And as far as that's concerned, there is a limit to how religious you can be in that kind of a setting, you know, in Europe in those days even. Nowadays, it's not great, but it was a lot worse then.

In Vienna, there was a place called the Prater. The Prater is when you entered it after-- a major circular area where all the major roads came through. It like a recreational thing with long, long street. It wasn't kind of a street.



It was a curved kind of thing, and it had a bridle path for horses on one side. Inside there, they had a place where they rented bicycles. And all the way, halfway there, I guess, was the Prater, which was an amusement park.

It had a Ferris wheel, which was called a Riesenrad. I'm not sure about the circus. They took me to the circus once, at least once. I remember that.

And it was fascinating, I mean, really fascinating what we saw. I don't have to describe what goes on in the circus. But that was fascinating.

And in the Prater, they had all kinds of vendors, chestnuts and things that they sold.

Now did your father have a concession there too?

No, no, no. No. No, that's just stuff that was there. My father was busy working. Usually when they went in these excursions, it was with my mother and her sisters. I don't remember too many-- I don't think I went to maybe more than two or three rides because it was expensive.

And I tried to remember if it was there. No, no. It was my aunt's place. This is a little going away from the Prater. I told you my aunt had a bakery.

Yes.

And that entire family knew--

Mina.

Mina, exactly. And they were not nice people.

You'd mentioned that, and I wondered what did that mean.

It meant simply that having the kind of money they had, they could have done more to help her sister, but didn't. A prime example of that was when a young kid, seven years old or something, comes in, and you have a bakery, what do you look for?

Sweets.

Something sweet, ice cream, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. And I would stand in front of that freezer, nothing. And they wouldn't give me this.

And you're the nephew.

Yes. And, you know, it blows your mind. In those days, I was just like frustrated, but I didn't understand what, why, and where.

My sister tells a different story. She says they gave us something. I don't remember what. You'll find out from her.

But they were not nice people. In fact, many, many years later when after they came to the United States, they bought a resort in the mountains in New York.

Catskills?

In the Catskills, a small resort, and asked me if I wanted to work up there, you know? At that time, I think, I was just in the last year of junior high and was summertime, vacation time.

So my mother said, go, you'll make a few dollars. And I would say abused an appropriate word there, the tips, and were cleaning, washing dishes and glasses. They didn't have electric dishwashers in those days, at least they didn't have them.

But I did my work, and I waited tables and what have you, and at the end of the week, expected a tip. They took the tips. That's our money that's meant for us.

I think I got \$2 from them for a week's work.

Wow.

And the work started at, like, 7:00 in the morning and didn't end till, like, maybe 7, 8 o'clock at night. But her son was out there playing and what have you, and I was in there setting up after dishes washed and dried. Then you set up for breakfast for the next morning.

So you had this kind of really disappointing family relationship?

It was no relationship. It was only by birth. Other than that, no, it was nothing.

Excuse us, please, for a second. What is it?

Is there some air conditioning? I feel like there something running on your--

Too cold?

On me?

Yeah.

Or on him?

On you. It's been running on your microphone.

Well, there is air conditioning hitting here.

Oh, that's what it is. It's, like, hitting the mic.

OK, so should I turn the mic to the side?

Yeah, on that side. Sorry.

OK.

[INAUDIBLE]

See how sensitive the mic-- he will hear things that I don't hear.

Yeah, right. Then also we're getting some of the background rustle from the kitchen.

Would one of you guys go and ask her? Because I'm miked up.

Yeah, no problem. Go ahead.

Babe? Don't do any dishes or something. They volunteered to do the dishes and clean up in there afterwards.

[LAUGHS]

You're right. You're right.

Thank you. Sorry for the interruption.

It's OK. Sorry.

Sorry for interrupting you. All right, you guys are good to go.

Yeah. Whenever.

OK, so going back to your own family in Vienna when we were talking about the Prater and going on the rides and things like that, you'd mentioned at some point that you went to your-- there was an incident where you went to your aunt's bakery. Was there something you wanted to say in particular?

No, that was the incident is when we went-- oh, no, that's not a finished. The Prater is finished, kind of, but going to my aunt's and the bakery and all that. And when she wouldn't give me ice cream or something, I left.

Now, I can't tell you where I went, but the next scenario took place in the local police station. My sister will tell you the story. Apparently, I was wandering the streets, and the police saw me, and they took me to the police station.

Now, going back to the family, they came looking for me. Where is he? Where is he? So they went all over and all over. Then, finally, they wound up going to the police.

Oh, the police officer says, you mean the little blonde boy with the curls and the bah, bah, bah, bah?

[SPIT SOUND]

Yeah. So the story is I'm told, they went in, and the policeman-- in those days, this was pre-war. The police were really actually nice even regardless of the fact whether you were Jewish or not, at least these people were.

And I was sitting on the table. And she said the policemen were all around talking to me. Now, here's the story. The cop told my sister about your brother. They asked me, [SPEAKER GERMAN]? That was the big thing. [SPEAKING GERMAN]?

And I said, [SPEAKING GERMAN].

God.

[LAUGHS]

They cracked up. They cracked up.

What a different atmosphere.

Oh, totally different. That's why I said that this is pre-war.

Yeah. And you say my father is a Jew.

Exactly, and they laughed. They were hysterical.

It was a kind laughter? Yes, you know, they laughed. They thought it was funny. I mean, I'm sure the conversation

wasn't limited to that. But this is what--

Do you remember this incident?

You know, it's funny, I didn't remember it until my sister reminded me of what happened. And then what I do remember it sitting on the table with a lamp hanging overhead in the green shade.

People around.

People around me. How about how old would you have been at that time? 6, 7?

It could have been five. It could have been seven. More than likely, it was five.

Yeah, 1935.

Yeah, because '36 was the year I went to Poland. It wasn't that year. So that was one funny little incident.

So tell me this, did politics ever enter your world, that is, did you ever hear your parents talking about the larger political world outside the house?

We would hear-- not that I could make any sense of it, but we heard Schuschnigg. And we heard about the plebiscite and they were afraid of what may happen, some of those things.

Explain what is Schuschnigg, and what was the plebiscite?

Oh, Schuschnigg was the chancellor of Austria, Kurt Schuschnigg.

And what role-- so how did he figure in this story?

Well, I'm trying to remember exactly how the sequence--

Schuschnigg was out, and there was a guy named Seyss-Inquart. Do you know that name?

He was the Nazi.

OK. I don't know if he's the one that took over after they got rid of Schuschnigg. Yeah, I think that was it. We put Seyss-Inquart, we put a C-H after the S.

[LAUGHS]

So, you know, I don't want to say it for the record's sake.

You don't have to say it for the record. If anyone wants to, they'll figure it out.

Exactly.

But those were the things. And, of course, then, yes, the horrendous thing when the occasion came was March 11th. I believe it was a Friday night, March 11, 1938, after the plebiscite.

Prior to that event, the socialists, I guess they were the socialists, the party that wanted Austria to stay independent, they painted in the streets, as wide as the street was, the Austrian symbol, which was a cross with a bar, a full bar, across it. The swastika was a cross with only a half bar pointing to the right, which a lot of people don't understand it, they painted to the left, to the right just because their rightists.

Wow.

Left is socialist. They pulled my mother and all the Jewish women out into the street with gasoline to scrub them off after the plebiscite.

Really?

Yes, really. And they abused them, the SA, the Brownshirts.

And you saw this?

Of course, I looked out my window. We had a street right down from where my window was, and I saw they came for my mother, pulled her out and a lot of the Jewish women and, you know, scrubbing oil paint off of cement.

Scrubbing Austria's symbol?

The Austrians symbol.

Symbol of independence?

Yes. Yes. It was a horror show. It was a horror show. And the next time I had another traumatic experience, it must have been shortly thereafter, we ran to my aunt's place, the one with the candy store, the bakery. She lived, I don't know the distance. We walked there, of course.

And she lived on the main thoroughfare between Austria and I don't know if it was Czechoslovakia or whatever.

The highway that goes to a train.

I think that was the high-- I'm not sure. But she lived near a bridge called the Reichsbrücke.

The Reichsbrücke.

Reichsbrücke, yeah. And her apartment, the windows faced the street, which is an extremely wide street. And that was the first encounter we had of German aircraft. They were scaring the hell out of people, again, in retrospect, it was Stukas.

And when the Stuka dove, it made a screeching noise like a banshee. And it would dive down towards the street and then come up again. I gotta tell you I was scared because I heard them talk, the adults were talking, about bombe, bombs. We thought we were going to hear bombs drop. That didn't happen, but the fright was there.

OK, so let's back up a little bit. Tell me about the plebiscite. What was this plebiscite?

Supposedly, do the Austrians want to be a part of Germany or not?

And so this was a vote, a general popular vote?

A vote. And I can only tell you it was obviously a farce. But the Austrian people, the general Austrian people, wanted it. They really wanted it.

Why? OK, ask, what does Osterreich mean? If you translate it, Eastern Reich. Germany was Deutsches Reich. They spoke the same language, maybe a little that different dialect, but East Germany. That's how they referred themselves, Osterreich.

So being one-- now they're going home to their motherland. That's how the Austrians felt. I can't say-- I'm not speaking

for all Austrians, but, in general, that's how it worked. That was the plebiscite.

And so why would these Stukas have been flying down so low?

Just to scare the people, I guess, to show-- a show of power. I have no way of knowing, but, again, we reach adulthood, and we try to reason, like you asked, why would they be doing something like that? Just to show off that they have the power. They can do whatever the hell they want.

OK, was this before you ever saw a German soldier in Austria?

No, I don't know the timeline, whether before or after, but I do remember the German tanks rolling down Reichsbrückenstrasse. That was the street they lived on.

And you were on that street when they rolled down?

Yes. They came across the bridge. I have no idea what was on the other side of the bridge. I don't know now, and I didn't know then certainly. But I do remember them coming from the direction of the bridge going down that street. I remember troops marching, scary, especially for a child, scary, scary.

And in later times, when we would go to towards the Ersten Bezirk, the richer, there was an armory there called the Kaserne. And in front of that, it was like the military training or whatever it was. It's called Kaserne. I'm trying to think in English.

Kaserne is-- yeah, it's barracks.

An armory.

An armory. And front of that thing, they always had two-- I don't know if they were light cannons or machine guns. I was afraid to walk past that, you know?

When the tanks were coming through, what did the streets look like?

Fairly empty. As far as I remember, the streets were empty. I don't think there were any people in the street. This wasn't like the parades which I saw later on. When Hitler came down in Ersten Bezirk, passed the Kaserne, and all the German flags were flying, and people were cheering, Heil Hitler, you know, the whole nine yards.

Do you think that was staged? I mean, of course, part of it was staged with the flags and so on. But do you think it was staged as far as having the populace there, or were people there voluntarily? You wouldn't know.

I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know. I would say probably a little of each, probably. I said earlier that they welcomed. They were so happy to see this guy standing there. Yeah. That was not a pleasant thing.

Now, going down that street was really-- that was where the opera was.

In the Ersten Bezirk?

Ersten Bezirk, yeah.

It's the first district, yeah.

The first section, yeah, first district. I think, I'm not sure, one of the most famous churches was the Stephanskirche. I believe that was located there.

I think it was-- yeah, it was the Prater. It was the most famous park was there that had all the statues of all the Austrian

composers and what have you.

As a matter of fact, there was an incident which was told to me, and I vaguely remember we're sitting on the bench, and a man came over and said to my mother, oh, what a beautiful child. I would like to put him in films.

So for years and years, I told the story. I said, you know, I could have been a movie star. One day as a-- now I'm an adult-- I said, that was a pedophile. I mean, yeah, I came to that conclusion.

I mean, maybe he was, and maybe he wasn't. But just, in my head, I said, yeah, that's how they operate.

You remember?

I could put him in the movies and take you under guide and who knows what.

Yeah, well, it's never a straightforward route, you know? Someone's not going to get a child from its mother by declaring your real intentions.

Of course not.

But that-- funny.

Now after you saw your mother on the street trying to clean off--

Yes.

What happened then? How did these changes impact your life, your parents lives, your family life?

Well, that's when the next day, Mrs. Fleckel's son had on his brown shirt with this armband and the swastika. And he was [GROWL]. Now he can openly parade around and assert himself.

I was still sent to school. So the things that happened to me, have happened in my house, I don't know. But, again, I defer to my sister. She may know me. She also went to school.

Was your father still working?

At that time, I believe he was still working. I don't know for how long. Funny thing is just point of it, my father became a friend, friendly, not a friend, of Otto Preminger. Do you remember Otto Preminger?

A director, film director.

Right. Right. Right. And he met him in a cafe, you know? But I know that they had become very friendly, not friends, you know, different social class. Yeah, that's as much as I know about that. Then not too long after that, so Heinrich Mueller, in his black uniform, the Gestapo uniform.

Your landlord?

Yes, the owner of the building. Although I don't really recall-- he never spoke to me that I recall. Maybe he spoke to my mother. I don't know.

But it wasn't very long after that that they came for my father. And the classic thing that they built, they'd come at night. He kicked in the door, and they take him.

How many people were there? Were you wakened by this?

I heard the noise. I heard my mother screaming. I heard my mother begging. I don't remember words or anything else, but being scared, being afraid a lot. But my mother and my sister, I think, tried to console her.

See, my other sister, the one who passed away, may she rest in peace, she was the oldest. And she was not involved as much as Mimi. Mimi was mama's baby, always, always. And even to the end when we came here to this country, my mother tried living alone. We had an apartment for her and so on and so forth.

But when she could no longer help herself, she went to live with my sister in New Jersey. And my sisters, they had her, I don't know, for how many years, I don't know, 10, 15, 16. I don't know how many years.

But she had the money. Her husband had a bakery. He had the Midas touch. Whatever he touched turned to gold. He knew how to make a buck. He was a Polish refugee.

Don't ask me how he made it over here with diamonds and sterling silverware. And how did he get out of the country then, I don't know unless it's a lot of this.

Let's go back to your father being taken, disappearing from your lives. You don't know at first where he is. You continue going to school, and your mother goes to the Gestapo every single day to try and find out where is he, can he be released?

And she took me with him.

And she would take you with her. You go to Dachau. You have this strange incident. You're sitting in this room. She comes out and she's crying, or you see that she has, and your father is moved to Buchenwald. And at some point, he is released.

Right.

Do you remember how much time elapsed before the time he was arrested and the time he is released from Buchenwald?

Oh, you mean from point A to C?

Yeah.

Well, he was taken in 1938, I would say, maybe March. Let me think. No, no, no. They came in March 11th, so probably April. His birthday around was April 16th. So around that time is when they took him.

And he was released two weeks after my sisters left for the United States. So they never saw him released. I saw him for one week--

Really?

--after he was released. I saw him for one week. He and my mother took me to the railroad station on the way to the United States. I arrived here June 3rd, so it took probably-- I think it was seven or eight days on the ocean.

So sometime in mid-May is when-- mid-May '39? Would that be mid-May in 1939?

Yes. Correct.

So he had been incarcerated over a year, you could say?

Yes.



Had he changed when you saw them again. Had he changed?

Not the same man. My father was a big, tall, strong, strapping man. When he came back, they had shaved his hair, or he lost his-- I don't know. But he was bald. He was bowed. That had done numbers. Yeah.

My sister has a couple of stories that she got from my mother, things that my father told my mother, and she in turn related to my sister. So, again, it wasn't pleasant. I think there was a story something. He saved somebody, or he did something for somebody in the concentration camp because, as I said, when he went in, he was a strong man. And now everybody in the concentration camp was like him. But, yeah, so I saw him for a week.

But I want to stay at that week for right now. He comes back to your home? That is the first time you see him is when he comes back to your apartment?

Yeah, he didn't come back to that apartment.

No, they were backing off a little bit more. Living in Stadtgutgasse, the original place, they threw us out.

Oh, they did? So Mr. Muller finally evicted you?

They threw us out. They took the furniture, put it in the street, and people were helping themselves to the furniture, took wherever they wanted to take, and we were thrown out.

While your father was in prison?

Yes.

Now, where could we go? We went to the Mina. She had the biggest apartment. And for some reason, I guess she did take pity on us.

But it was no picnic living there. She abused my mother. She abused my sisters. I wasn't abused.

By abused, you mean she would yell at them? She would belittle--

She would mistreat them. She treated my mother like a servant, almost like a servant. It was not pleasant. We stayed there for as little as we can. Then we found another apartment also in the same section.

It was much further away. Where Mina lived I think was a little bit more upscale. I don't know. It was still in the same section. We lived near an apartment that was near the Danube, Hollandstrasse. And that is-- I believe that's where my father was released that they came because that was the last apartment that I knew I stayed living in.

And how did you eat during this time? How did you have money to pay for food? What happened?

Food banks. That's another story. We went to the soup kitchen, so to speak. You went there. You took a pot, and they gave you, I don't know what the-- some kind of potato soup or something. There was no meat or anything, but potato soup and stale bread.

And who sponsored such soup kitchens?

I thought it was the government, the Nazis. I guess. I don't know, you know, the people in charge. You would have to ask specifically my sister.

Excuse me. I don't know if it was in every country, but in Vienna, they had what they called the Kultusgemeinde. It's a culture organization. I think they're still in existence, all Jewish people who were registered did with that agency, and that's how the Nazis knew who, where, what, and when.

And to get on the list to go to the United States, like, for me, the Krauses, I think, got in touch with them. And they wanted to interview the parents and whatever to see that they were going to pick and choose. You see that in the film. Did you watch the film at all?

I did. Mhm.

Yeah, well, I have a tape. But they have it all.

So tell me, how did your paths then with the Krauses intersect? What happened that you got to their attention? How did this happen?

Well, that's what I'm saying. How the Kultusgemeinde got the message out to the Jewish people, I don't know. I do know that I was brought there. I do know I was interviewed.

Do you remember it?

No. No. I don't remember it. I myself wondered, and I was told, yeah. I was interviewed, and what they did tell me is that they picked the-- I'm not bragging, but they said they wanted the brightest children and the healthy ones.

One child that had previously been picked was rejected because he got sick. So his brother or sister, or whatever it was, met in that place. And if you look at the pictures, you see from that film, I have a neighbor who's very adapted. He's a techy, like your guys here.

Let's cut for a second.

Sure. OK.

So you have a neighbor who-- what was he able to do? Make you some photos from this film?

Yes.

OK, it was a film about the 50 children.

Exactly. The pictures on the boat, you know, the stuff taken from the 50, the film, the CD, the 50 children. So he made some copies.

So do you remember meeting the Krauses for the first time?

Oh, I remember meeting them, yes, certainly.

What kind of question did you have? What was that like?

Wonderful people.

Yeah?

You know, very kind, wonderful people. There's no way I can thank them enough, but you know that the Kraus's-- the daughter, Kraus's daughter I think it was, married somebody, the guy who made the film.

Cut, please.

Speeding, speeding.

So you say they were wonderful people. How did that show itself when you met?

Well, my major contact with them was not in Vienna per se. It was on the ship coming over. It came over on the SS President Harding, and on that ship is where we had-- you know, we met them. They spoke with us.

They had a doctor with them that also was very kind, very good and, essentially, an uneventful thing, voyage. We came here. We went through Ellis Island.

And then we got on a bus, and they took us to a camp in Pennsylvania called Brith Sholomville. I'm trying to think of the name of the town near it, but it was magnificent, beautiful camp. And we were 25 boys, 25 girls. And the camp was-- they must have picked it out way beforehand because the way it was laid out was exactly like an H.

One wing was for the girls. One wing was for the boys. In the center was the recreation hall-- the kitchen, the dining room, and everything else.

So that is your first place in American.

In the United States, right.

We're going to go back because I'm not through with Vienna yet.

OK.

When we talked about, you know, that through the Kultusgemeinde, the Jewish people get to know that there is this couple called the Krauses and that you were brought for an interview. Do you remember-- was it your mother who brought you, both of your parents at that point? OK.

Zero recollection.

OK.

Your father, these discussions about you going with the Krauses start-- who has the idea? Who brings it up within your family that maybe this is something that's necessary for you? You don't know?

I don't know.

OK.

In retrospect, of course, all I know about it is that they wanted to be sure that I was safe, even if they couldn't make it, they wanted their children to be safe.

Your parents? Yes. So how is it that your sisters were able to leave two weeks earlier, and were they part of the 50 children? No.

No, no. I believe my aunt from Hartford was largely responsible for that. Again, being the youngest, I was really not-- I was not a homeboy, so to speak. I told you that. I was always--

Yeah, out.

--all over the place and hardly paid too much attention to what was going on. But to the best of my knowledge, it was the people at Hartford who, otherwise, how else would they ever come out here? They get off the boat, and then they go to Connecticut. So, logically, it could have been those people that brought them.

So they extended an invitation to your sisters?

Yes.

--to come over.

And they lived with them.

And they lived with them, but they weren't part of the 50 children. They weren't--

No, no. It had nothing to do with the 50 children.

OK. And was your father returned only after your sisters had left.

Correct.

So in essence, the night that he was arrested was the last time that they had ever seen him?

That's correct. That's correct.

And when you see him again, he is not the same man that he was before?

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Emotionally, I mean, his love for me, so no question about that. But, physically, he was not the same man. Inside, I mean, not that his personality or anything had changed, not that I could see, certainly not, but they broke him physically.

He must have aged.

Oh, my mother had a picture of him right after he got out. And I have been looking for that picture for the longest time. I saw it here. Maybe my sister has it. I asked her once, and she said, I must have it somewhere. And we'll show you pictures of what he was like beforehand.

Does he look like an old man?

Yes. Yes.

So did your parents talk to you? Did you want to leave Vienna? Did you want to leave them?

No. See, well, I knew the Nazis were bad people. But the population prior to the Nazis were not that kind to me and to us anyway, just these people were openly.

Previously, it was, you know, you knew that they didn't like you. They had dislikes because of your religion, but these people, it was open. There's no ifs, ands, or buts.

Now, did I want to leave my parents? I was thinking about Vienna and leaving Vienna. I don't care if I was in Istanbul or whatever. I didn't want to leave my parents.

Did you protest?

Of course. But they said, you know, when you get things straightened out here, we'll come. We'll come to America. So, meanwhile, you'll be OK. They'll take care of you till we come to see you. And, of course, you believe them.

And so you leave in late May. Is that correct?

1939.

Mid-May.

Mid-May?

Mid-May, towards the end, because like I said, it took seven, eight days, something like that on the ocean. And my parents took me to the train station.

Do you remember all that?

Yes, I remember my father-- I don't know where he got the money from-- bought me a little silver race car with real rubber wheels. He gave me a fountain pen. It must have been his fountain pen.

And on the train, we left from Hamburg. And on the train, somebody stole it. Yeah.

Oh, one more thing, I had a stamp collection. I did collect stamps. Now, in Europe, they were much-- in those days, when you collected stamps, they had to be perfect, no perforation, could be anything. The Germans took that stamp collection.

I mean, what could it have been worth? They took it, boarded the train. They checked whatever you have. Oh, they're sharing-- and the guy turned to his buddy. You want this? Yeah, my child [? died. ?]

Oh, dear.

A way of life. Anyhow, we got on a train. We went to Hamburg, then off the train. I don't know how we got from the train. I have no recollection from the train to the ship. I do remember seeing the first time I saw that ship, you know, awesome, I mean, awesome. And ships in those days weren't anything like what they have today.

Did you know any of the other kids who were on this ship?

Well, we kind of got to know on the way on the train, we got to know. One young man a young man, he was older than I, had a brother. He would stay with his brother. And I could show you on the picture because every picture that there is, almost every picture, he's right next to me.

He was like my guardian. I wasn't aware that he took any kind of specialty. But I see in the pictures, he's always there, and he had a little brother who is about my age. Yeah, I made friendly with him, and there was a guy named Freddy that I was a little friendly with him.

And the funny thing is, as God is my judge, I don't remember who was in the cabin with me. And that's something I can't, for the life of me, why I don't remember.

Now did you have any kind of thoughts or emotions about the whole prospect of coming to the United States?

Well, my parents told me that my uncle is here. I have an uncle and an aunt here that I'll be seeing. So I felt comfortable in the sense that I was going to be with them. I had no idea that I was going to be in the camp before that. But the trip was fairly uneventful, and then I got seasick.

And the doctor they had with me saw me, treated me. I had to go up to first class from the steerage.

That's not bad.

Yeah, you know, it was, like, oh, wow.

[LAUGHS]

Now did your parents show emotion at the train station?

We all cried. My father, in retrospect, I guess he must have been crying too. He turned his head several times, so I can understand that was he happy.

No. I'm sure they weren't happy, and I'm sure they were, at that point, weren't even sure that they were ever going to see me again.

And what about you? Did you have any such thoughts going through your mind?

No, because they told me-- I believed what they said. We'll see you. We'll see you. You go. And then you'll get out, and we'll come and get you.

So you end up in this camp in Pennsylvania.

Right.

What was the name of it?

Brith Sholomville.

You told me.

Yes.

And the name of the ship. Do you remember the name of the ship?

The SS President Harding.

The SS President Harding.

I heard later that it was used as a troop ship and sunk-- whatever.

So what kind of routine and why were you part to this camp?

It was a holding stage. We were kept there waiting for, not foster parents. I guess that's foster parents. You know--

Guardians of some kind?

Come and live with them until your parents came, see? Now myself and another man, young man, were selected to go with these people, and we lived in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Now going back as a child in Europe, we had stories we heard about the United States. There are things that we believed. Oh, the streets are paved with gold. It was not an exaggeration that we believed to be an exaggeration.

Here people drove a car. If the car broke down, you left it in the street, and you went and got another one. You lived in an apartment. You pushed buttons, and the rooms changed from one kind of room to another kind of room.

That was normal for American, in other words.

That's what we were told. This is what it is. Well, when we came to this camp, it was fantastic, a beautiful fieldstone camp. Oh, really, it was-- people were wonderful. The food, oh, my god. We had never eaten like that in our lives, you know, at least my family didn't. I don't know about other people.

And I stayed. I can't remember how long I stayed there. We got there, like you said, in June. And I think some time, probably September, it wasn't that long afterwards, that these folks from Allentown, Pennsylvania came and picked me up.

And what was their name?

Their name was Leonard. Joseph and Rose Leonard. I have a book of their son. Their son, the youngest son, was 16, and I was nine. And he was a photographer even then. And I was interested in photography.

So he kind of adopted me and took me down to the basement. He taught me about developing films and all that. We became good friends, as good friends as 70 years difference can make.

At that age, then it makes a difference.

I have a book here. He became a world-famous photographer.

Wow.

Herman Leonard. His pictures are in museums.

Wow. So tell me, in the camp you were in before you joined the family, did you have any activities? Were you taking any classes, or what kind of routine did they have?

Breakfast, exercises, games--

Any schooling?

I don't recall schooling. I honestly don't recall schooling. I would have-- if we had, I probably would have remembered it.

Did you have language lessons?

No, we'll talk about language lessons. I picked up a few words here and a few words there. Now across, just as an aside, across from our camp was an American camp with American kids. The only thing separating us were bushes.

And they used to kick-- a football came on our side, and we would ask ourselves, what is this? And somebody said, it's a fussball. So you tried kicking it. You can't kick an American football like a soccer ball.

Different shape.

Different shape. And one of the words we learned, I learned, and some others was scram.

[LAUGHS]

So they came to us, and they yelled across something, but, I mean, you don't have to be stupid. They want their ball back. And they yelled at them, scram.

[LAUGHS]

It wasn't very nice.

[LAUGHS]

We didn't really know what we were saying. It could have been worse. But, no, actually, we never interchanged in any way, but, yeah, it was a beautiful camp, beautiful camp. Everything about it was-- in fact, I saved the brochure from that camp.

I took my kids-- we took our kids back there many, many years--

Later.

--later. And we showed them the place.

How long did you stay there? Were you one of the first kids who was taken?

I'm sorry. Can I stop you for one second? Sorry to interrupt. Can you move to your right a little bit? Because your position, your body position, is slowly angling towards me. There you go.

OK, so should it be like that?

That's enough.

OK, that's fine. Oh, that's great.

Yeah, let me just--

Adjust it a little bit. OK.

Just a little bit, and you guys are good.

OK. So what was I asking you--

You were asking me about was I one of the--

First, yeah.

--first. The young man that had been my guardian, so to speak, and his brother, I do remember them leaving, and I remember the people, they went to Oklahoma.

Oh, my goodness, so far away.

I don't know why that stuck in my head. But he went to Oklahoma. Now one of the girls was taken to Florida. But Florida's all I knew. I found out later I met her at the presentation when they showed the film at the temple here.

And that's just recently in the last year or two?

That's correct. That was the first time. It's not like she remembered me and I remembered her, and I was trying to put her together with the pictures that we have in the boat, not possible.

You know, it's very hard to recognize myself on that.

And in truth, if you didn't know each other before, and you meet for the first time on this journey out of Austria, and I think there were some kids from Germany too included on this, or was it all Austrian?

As far as I know, they were all Austrian.

All Austrian, OK. So, you know, it's the first time you see each other. You're together for a truly limited amount of time,



not very, very long in the grand scheme of things.

It's the ship, and the ship, you don't really see each other because the cabins, the location, but at the camp, yeah, they had soirees and the picture with the girls. The girls had classes because they showed something dancing and what have you. The guys were out in the field. They gave them a ball and played, you know?

That was the kind of contact you had. You made friends, or you didn't make friends. The staff was there just to see if everything was safe, but I have no recollection of the staff, you know, who, what, where?

Were they long enough to be able to write to your sisters and to get close to them?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In fact, the uncle that I talked to about, Max, the one who my father took this place, came to visit me.

Oh, did he?

Yes.

Did he? And you met him then for the first time?

Yes.

And did he look like your father at all? Like, did you see features that you could recognize from the family?

No, I recognized only from-- I have a picture of him, and he and I. But I had pictures of him that had been exchanged. So I knew who he was.

Look, he was good to me. He was very good to me. So what can I say?

Did he come alone? When he came to visit you, did he come alone?

Yes, he came alone. He came alone.

And how was he good to you? In what way?

He was nice to me. Let me put it that way. I think he slipped me a dollar or two, or something. I don't-- something. Look, I liked him. I'm just trying to think where-- I may be confusing myself now at this point because-- I'd have to ask the consultants.

I remember going to his-- no, no. Oh, god, can we cut this for a second?

Sure.

Speed, roll.

OK, so Uncle Max did visit you at camp?

Yes. He visited at camp, gave me a buck or whatever it was. He was nice to me.

Did you see him again?

No.

You only saw him the one time?

That's it.

Wow. And how did that happen that you never saw him after that? No contact, no anything.

We spoke. Oh, wait, no, that too. No, when I went to the Bronx, after I left camp, this is way down the road now. There's a lot of time in between. I've got to go to Allentown. That comes first.

That's right. That's right.

We left the camp.

To go to Allentown.

To Allentown, where I was picked up by Mrs. Leonard. She was the lady who ran the show. She was like a society lady-- wonderful, perfect woman. You couldn't ask for somebody better-- finer, refined, generous.

And her son took after her. That's Herman. And her husband, they owned a company called the Charis Corporation, which one of these-- they manufactured corsets, and they fitted these things. They went all over.

They were millionaires back in '38, '39. I wasn't shocked because this is America. This is what I was told. We came in, and the Cadillac-- had a Cadillac limo and another Cadillac, I don't remember the name of that. They had a LaSalle--

Oh, my, goodness.

--the house. They had a two-car garage, and I think that was a two-car garage. Now, in that house, they had a chauffeur, butler, maid, cook.

Oh, my goodness.

Foreign help. Dining there was formal. You dressed tie and all. You sat there, all silverware.

I mean, but this was perfectly ordinary to me for the United States. It was culture shock, of course. But this is what we were told as children. So, fine, I didn't expect it.

So in other words, they were right. Whoever told us this, it was true.

Accepted it for a fact. Didn't question it. Didn't question it and had my own room upstairs, and outside the hall, they had a laundry chute that went right down to the basement in which I took a few rides. I opened up the chute and dropped down into the basement.

[LAUGHS]

I remember they admonished the first time that I should not do that because you don't know if it's full. Yes.

Well, you needed to find out.

Yeah, well, I was fortunate in it. And, yeah, but the one who adopted me, kind of, was Herman. And she had one, two-- two sons and a daughter, the eldest son, Ira, and the daughter was Frances. Frances.

You know the song, "Those Were the Days My Friend"?

Yes. Frances's husband wrote that song, Eugene Raskin.

No kidding?

Yeah.

No kidding? It's a lovely song.

Yeah. That family, they were good people and successful.

So when you went to them, was this with the thinking that this is where you're staying until your own parents come over?

Correct.

OK, was there any correspondence between you and your parents?

Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely. I wrote them, and he wrote me back. Mrs. Leonard was very good to me. Yeah.

To your parents, even.

To my parents, yeah.

By taking care of you.

Yes, by taking care of me. When I got married, she sent us an Irish linen tablecloth set at home. It's still in the attic in New York, never used.

Oh, my. That nice, you know?

Now the fact that my kids were, I don't know, three years. But they were about five and eight, something like that, whatever, I took them back to Allentown to meet her. By that time, her husband had passed. She had sold the house.

The house was a big mansion. And it was taken over by Muhlenberg, the university, which was two blocks away. The president of the university took that house. And, yeah, she was-- I'm sorry, a great lady. Yeah.

How long did you live there? My mother came to the States in sometime, 1940. Till she came, I can't remember times, but it was sometime in 1940 that my mother was able to get out.

And, meanwhile, I told you, my father had made his way back into Yugoslavia because he had to get out. In fact, from the story I'm told, is that when the 90 days had actually had passed, my father hadn't gotten out.

They came back to check on him, and he still hadn't left, and they threatened. My mother said, we're gonna take him now, and my mother got on her knees. I didn't see this one. The story was related by my sister to beg them.

And the guy relented. Somehow, he was-- they had come with chains to take him back to chains. They said, we are coming back for whatever short period of time, and then we take him back. And I guess that was the time he left.

So he had very little time.

Very little time. Yeah.

Very little time.

But you being now in the United States didn't know any of this at the time?

No.

No? When your mother arrived, you were in Allentown, Pennsylvania?

Yes.

Did she come to Allentown to see you, or did you go to New York to see her?

No. I came to-- Mrs. Leonard asked her to come to Allentown to stay there. She was going to fix her up. And I got to be truthful. I was resentful of my mother, because she did not come.

My mother chose to stay in Brooklyn, New York with Tunta Mina, her sister.

The mean sister.

The mean sister. My sister, excuse her. Well, she wasn't so mean. She was this and that. I don't know. My perception, from what I observed, they were not nice people.

So she stayed there?

So she stayed there. And she turned down an opportunity. Now my roommate, so to speak, the one, Kurt, who lived in the same house with me and both his parents, his father and his mother, made it.

They stayed in Allentown. They put him through college. He had a nice life. He's still living in Pennsylvania, as far as I know.

And I went to Brooklyn. Now you talk about culture shock. I can't really describe something that you would know, but talking about coming from where I was with the chauffeur, the whole ball of wax. Of course, I knew that was not normal because I made friends in the neighborhood, other.

I went to school there. I made third, fourth, and fifth grade in one year, or less than a year, because I didn't belong in-- age-wise, I didn't belong in third grade, but it's the process of learning English. So I know what other people were like, and I went to their house Christmastime. I loved it there.

And then when I came to Brooklyn, oh, god, I mean, eventually you accept what it is I didn't expect ever to live up to the Leonards, that style.

What did you find? Paint me a picture of what you saw in Brooklyn.

What did I mean? Not exactly, I wouldn't say, slums, but I was the object of abuse. Hey, maki, you like this country? Stay another few days.

That was at school. That's the kind of abuse. And I said, I thought I left this in Austria, that this is--

What did they call you?

A maki is a foreign who-- you know, the Irish were called-- they called different names for people that came over, different nationalities.

What part of Brooklyn is this?

East New York.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness. OK.

So it was a middle class neighborhood. It was a very mixed neighborhood. We had all nationalities, all races, all colors, whatever it was. And when I went to school, it was it was a minority of people who were abusive. But it's not something that I expected.

Going from being a celebrity in Allentown, why was I a celebrity-- there were two schools. There was Muhlenberg and Jackson. And the dividing line was a block away from where we lived, OK?

So I had friends that went to. I went to Muhlenberg, and I had friends who went to Jackson. When we played in the schoolyard, they both wanted me on their team. Why? Because I was a good kicker. I was a soccer player. So I could take kick them.

In those days, you didn't have a tee. When you kicked the extra points or something, you didn't have a tee to hold it. You had to dropkick. I don't know if you guys saw what dropkicking is. You held the ball in front of you. You dropped it and--

And you kicked it.

--had to kick it simultaneously. And I was good at it. And both sides had-- to keep the peace in mind, I played one half here and one half there.

It's a nice problem to have.

Oh, I had great friends there. My closest friends there were the Rader brothers, three brothers, nice people. We spent Christmas over there.

So you get to East New York, and it's a different world, and your mother is living with Mina and her family. Is that right?

No, she wasn't living with Mina. She got her own apartment.

Apartment. OK. But she moved there because Mina lived in that area. But Mina had money. So Mina had bought a house. So she'd lived up to her name, Mean Mina. Sorry for the pun.

So you go to see your mom, and do you ask about how come dad isn't here?

I must have. I'm sure I did. And at that time, one of the first [INAUDIBLE], she wanted me to stay. I said, no. Come to Allentown. Mrs. Leonard will fix you up, you know? No.

She wanted to stay there.

She wanted to stay there. She said that she had a job there. She was working in the sweatshops, you know, that was prevalent then, still prevalent today, just different people do it now.

At that time, that was a visit. The very first time was a visit. I went back to Allentown to finish--

The school year?

--the school, the school year. In Allentown, they had a school year, not half years, not semesters. And in New York, they had half years.

That's right.

So I went back to Allentown, and after I don't know how long I stayed there after, they wanted to send me back. I said, I don't want to go. I did not want to go back there. I think that anybody who lived like that would not want to go back to

this. But, you know, I had to.

Mr. Leonard, was, I guess, the classical CEO or something. He was always nice, polite, but always laid back. It was old money. And I remember him sitting in the living room smoking his cigar, pipe, and reading.

And it sounds like the soul of the family was Mrs. Leonard.

She was the anchor. She was the anchor.

So when you do go back to Brooklyn, you live with your mother--

Sure.

--in her apartment? What was that apartment like?

Well, the first apartment, I'm trying to remember because she didn't stay there all that long. I remember the street. I remember the entrance. I remember the apartment itself. It was the top floor.

I guess I wasn't the quietest kid still. I wasn't the quietest kid, so the landlady's daughter, landlord, whatever, wasn't too thrilled with me because I wasn't probably talking too nicely to her.

And from there, we moved near about maybe a mile to another apartment. This was an apartment house now, top floor near the high school. And we lived there, you know? Amazing, the street I lived on was a block from a Russian Orthodox church.

Really?

Right. It turns out that a guy that lives on the other side of this community went to that church, lived a block from where we lived.

Where you live today here in Florida?

He's still living here on the other side of this development.

The funny things--

Ernie Irenski. And I don't know how we got to talking about East New York. Yeah, I came from East New York, the town where I lived. He says, you're kidding? He says, I went to church across the street from where you lived. It's small.

So were you unhappy with your mom? I mean, it makes it sound as if you were unhappy at this place, or did that change?

Of course it changed. It had to change.

Excuse me. You don't have a choice. You have to adapt. I probably gave her a hard time for a long time why she didn't. I kept saying, let's go back. Let's go to Allentown, you know. He said, well, you know, that was not going to happen, not going to happen.

So you move to another place, and did you have any place that was permanent, became a permanent home?

You know, years ago, people did a lot of moving. I can't tell you why. We moved from Blake Avenue which was in Pennsylvania. It's a very busy neighborhood. We moved about, let's see, about 10 blocks away, 10, 12 blocks away, into a private house and also the top floor, always the top floor.

And my mother, look, she did the best she could. I mean, what she went through, I don't wish it on anybody. And she always working in sweat shops, always doing that, and I don't know if you know anything about sweatshops.

Not easy work, not easy work.

Not only that it's not easy work, but the people who ran these sweatshops, I mean, you worked piecework by the bundle. You made a bundle, and they would take the bundles then came payday. They would say, oh, you did fewer bundles. They would cheat them like crazy.

And that still goes on today, the sweat-- you know, now it's run-- I think the sweatshops have been not-- the same kind of people run it, but now it's either Koreans-- it used to be Chinese. Now it's probably Koreans or Vietnamese or whatever. They always find refugees who come here, immigrants who come here, who need the money, who don't speak English and have no choice. So this is what it is.

Did your sisters come to live with you too?

Eventually, they came from Hartford. They came up, you know? They also would have liked to stay with my aunt.

My cousin, the one I told you, Sidney, he had a brother. The brother, I told you, was the one who worked in the aircraft factory-- Sikorsky Aircraft. He died at a young age of a heart condition. Apparently, there was somebody in the family cause he died and that woman, Mimi in the Bronx, her son died on his honeymoon.

Oh, my goodness. Mimi being your older uncle's widow--

Correct.

--who then took care of Max.

Right.

Or the way around.

Correct. No, no. No. Mutual enough.

But, yes, that was it. He went, and he got married. We couldn't get to the wedding because she had just given birth. The baby was colicky, whatever. So we sent our regrets and whatever.

And he died on his honeymoon, which was about the time that she was home from the hospital. And then we heard that he passed. So we called to find out how, where, and when.

She cursed me. She cursed me that you couldn't come to the wedding, but to the funeral, you want to come. That was the end of that.

I want to go back to a broader picture of political life. When you got to the states, you're nine years old.

Right.

By the time 1945 rolls around, you're already a teenager, you know, 15 years old.

I was already in the army.

Were you? How did that happen?

Well, I had a vendetta against the Germans. So you can't volunteer because you need paperwork. I went back to

Allentown. I got a room at the Y, the YMJA, Jewish, went down to the draft board, came in. I said, I'm here to register. I'm 18 today.

And you're two years younger, three years younger.

Yeah. Fine. No questions asked. Sign here, blah, blah, blah. A waiting period? No, no, waiting period. I want in. And a few days later, I'm on my way into the US Army.

Did you ever see action?

Yeah, I saw action.

Action, you know what I mean, action.

[LAUGHTER]

Were you shipped to Europe?

No. No. I wanted to go. I spoke German. I was trained to be the interpreter, and, in fact--

Did you go to Camp Ritchie?

In Maryland?

Yes.

Yeah.

So you went to Camp Ritchie?

Yes, but when I went, changed an address that I gave my aunt. I didn't want to give mine because my family didn't know. I ran away from home. They didn't know, but then I said to myself, you know, I'm going here, and then I'm going to be going overseas.

So if something happens, hey, somebody's got to know what. I figured, oh, I'll give my aunt's address. Nobody is going to know. Well, evidently that didn't work that way because they sent some kind of notification to my aunt, told my mother, and my mother got in touch with the authorities. And then I got called in to the captain's, company commander.

And I walked in-- oh, the sergeant called me in. He had kind of a smile on his face. He says, oh, he says, you're in trouble. You're in big trouble.

And I said, what the hell did I do now? I said, I remember doing something stupid. I had an affair briefly with a female. I had sunstroke. So I met a nurse, a lieutenant in that hospital.

Oh, come on. The public has a right.

Speaking.

So, anyways, you had an indiscretion.

Yes.

And so you wondered--



I thought that was what I was being called in for. And he said, I don't know if you're going to get a general court martial or this, and I'm saying, oh, god, what, what, what, what.

And I go-- and the captain, the lieutenant, the lieutenant, not the captain didn't take this, the lieutenant sitting there, and he's got a grin on his face ear to ear. I said, what the hell is he laughing about?

Anyhow, then he starts asking me all kind of questions. He says, chief, then he shows me fax or whatever. It wasn't a fax.

A telegram or something?

A teletype. Teletype that he got from Washington or someplace. He says, what the hell are you? Crazy? Well, they found out. Obviously, they found out how old I was.

And he says, OK, he says, you're going home to mama.

Oh.

And I'll never forget. This guy, his name is Ralph Raperdo. He was a lieutenant, and he came from Rockville Center, New York.

And you weren't able to stay and--

No. Oh, I did have some practice session with some POWs. Yes. A couple of practice sessions, and the guy who was running it, I don't remember. Was he a corporal or a sergeant? He was a tech, maybe a tech, corporal. I don't remember it exactly.

But he says, the way we do it is, especially he says in the wintertime, we stand them in a bucket of water. Maybe you don't want this in there either.

You tell me.

Well, no, I don't think that should be part of it. They were standing them in a bucket of water. We make them talk, period, end of story.

OK. All right, let's cut the tape.

Speeding.

OK, so the lieutenant grins from ear to ear, and says, you're going home to mama. And did he put you on a train, or how'd you get back home to mama?

By train. So that's the only way that they didn't have aircraft commuter kind of thing.

Did they trust that you do it, that you'd actually go home, or was there somebody helping you there?

No, they put me on the train. And that was the end of their responsibility, I guess.

OK. And so you got home to Brooklyn.

And I go home to Brooklyn. I go back to high school. And now we have a few more problems. I am neither fish nor fowl. And what I mean is, I'm neither a child, but I'm not a man. I don't have the maturity of a man. And I'm going back to high school to finish high school.

So you had dropped out of high school?

Sure, I left high school the first year.

So you hadn't even finished freshman year of high school?

No.

Oh, my gosh.

It was, like, either I finished, or it was in the middle of the term. Whatever it was. I just couldn't take it anymore.

But I'm going back to school. And now I'm a big shot because I've been in the Army. I had these bunch of kids. What do they know, you know?

So I guess I kind of couldn't-- I was in between the students, the kids, and the adult teachers. And maybe I didn't respect-- I'm sorry. Back that up. One teacher, my sister went to the same school, Mimi, and she was a brain. She got all the awards and everything else.

So when I came to school, there was one teacher there, Mrs.-- I don't want to mispronounce her name. But she was an Irish teacher. She took me under her wing because of my sister.

And she'd say, oh, come on, Julius, you can do better. You can do better. Mehan, Mrs. Mehan. And I wasn't the best behaved, and I would talk back to some of the teachers when I thought they were wrong or something.

Then they had the guidance counselor, Mr. Yuman, called me into his office. And he was giving me a lecture. And I wasn't taking any of that. And I told him where to get off.

Were you an angry young man?

No, not really angry, no. No. I really didn't know what I was. As I said earlier, I didn't know am I fish, or am I fowl.

You're still a Spitzbube, just in the teenage sense of it.

Pretty much, pretty much. And that's so--

What did your mother have any words with you when you came back?

Oh, of course. We had a lot of discussions. Well, why did you do that? Why didn't you come and talk?

My mother was a wonderful lady, but she couldn't control-- really control me, you know? With me and myself, I had my way, and my ally was the eldest sister, Leonore. She was my savior.

And without deviating too much, the thing is we were on welfare because, like, the old welfare that they had. It's not like today. They told me, when I was going to school, I had to get a job. 12 and 1/2 years, I have to get a job? Well, there's jobs after school.

So I went to work in the drugstore and the cleaning this-- when they compound it, the chemicals and all the cleaning and washing and washing the floor and that for which I got paid a great \$3 a week.

I got out of school at 3:00. I got to the drugstore at 3:30, and I worked until 5:00, 5:00, something like that. And Saturday morning, I went in because he wanted me in.

Then my mother said, no, he can't work on Saturday. He can't work on Saturday. He can't have the job So that was that.

I am going to change track a little bit. Did you ever keep in touch with the Krauses or the Leonards?

I kept in touch with the Leonards as much as we could. You know, the daughter got married, had children. She moved to New York. She lived in Washington Square Park. That's the husband who wrote that song.

Ira, he was not a family-oriented-- we never actually saw him I think in the half a dozen times in all the times that I was at the Leonards. And he was building-- when I left, he was building a house next door because they owned a huge piece of property, and that's where we used to play ball. So he had the property. He built the house there.

Herman, I kept in touch with for quite a long time. But he was a world traveler. I could show you the book. I didn't see it. I'm looking there. I see the camera seems to be-- the screen is facing another way. Yeah.

But with the Krauses, no?

No. No. I actually didn't know at that time-- I knew they came from Philadelphia. They were a Philadelphia family. I always felt bad that I didn't because I owed them my life. And, yeah, it's my bad.

And what about any of the other kids? Did you ever get close enough to any of the others to maintain contact afterwards?

No. Actually, no. The only one that I knew where he was was the guy who stayed with me with the Leonards, but we didn't like each other.

And you said that you didn't learn about what your father's fate was until many, many years later. Can you tell me what year you finally did learn? Do you know?

Well, we knew that he went to Yugoslavia.

No trace after that?

No. As far as I know, trying to think if anybody ever said anything about my father other than that he was in Yugoslavia-- where, what, when. I think they did say something about Nice. And I think they may have learned that from my uncle Ziggy. I believe that. Again, I have to rely on the oracle in New Jersey.

Your sister. Your sister.

Right.

And but it's only, like, when we were having our break you showed me a letter that it was only four or five years ago?

Well, that's where she got specific information. Prior to that, we had heard, I don't know the source, but that he had been killed by the Nazis on the retreat and that he was buried in a mass grave, which may be partially true because this that I showed you, this cemetery that they built the memorial there is that's what it is.

So in other words, you did learn that he was amongs the Jews--

Yes.

--who were murdered between 1942 and '44.

On the German retreat, yes.

On the German retreat, in Yugoslavia.

But did we know positively? There was no proof. It stands to reason, you know, it's, like, you know, in the building that gets blown up, you pretty much know the fate of the people inside.

Yeah, even if you don't have documentary evidence.

Exactly. Exactly.

Yes. What would you want people to know about about your experience, about the significance of that you are here and not-- I mean, so many of your family members didn't make it, the ones who were in Belgium, the ones who were in Poland, even the one who was in Czechoslovakia. How do you think about all of this that you have told me today?

You know, sometimes you let your mind wander. And I don't know the appropriate term of what to-- you say, well, what would you do? And you always wind up-- it's like a bad dream. You wake up because you realize the saying of quote, the more things change, the more they stay the same, unquote.

Nothing really has changed, just the names of the players have changed. The world hasn't changed, vis-a-vis what you see, Cambodia, Pol Pot, killing a million of his own people, Assad in Syria what he's doing to his own people, same thing his father did. This is something you learn from your father? What kind of humans are they?

And I say to myself, I'm glad I'm gonna leave this world. I pray for my kids, all the kids that have to grow up with this, kids shooting others for no reason, people running to Syria-- Americans running to Syria to join a bunch of the worst kind-- they're like Ghengis Khan. You kill for no reason?

Ukraine, doing it in the name of religion? Your religion doesn't teach that. I've read things about Muslim, and while, even in the Jewish Bible, they talk about killing and things like that, hey, a lot of that stuff is fiction.

The Bible, that God himself, or herself, would come down from God and write this? I mean, this is my belief, anyway. No. It was written by someone who was a humanist, who believed in people being people. It was written.

But how many hundreds of thousands were editing it along the way. Every time it was rewritten, you rewrite and change one word, one verb, from shall-- thou shalt not kill to thou must kill, one word, all the difference in the world.

That's a sad--

I'll get off my soapbox.

[LAUGHS]

That's what you think.

It's what I think. Would I like the world to be? I'd like people to be forgetting that the personal, the religious part. I'd like people to be like the Pope, like he's a humanist, interacting with one another, that kind of thing.

You mean the current Pope Francis?

Yes, of course. Of course. Of course.

Mr. Wald, thank you very much. Thank you very, very much.

Well, I thank you. I hope and pray that somewhere someone will see this and maybe it will help to change how they look at things. If one person changes--

A powerful, powerful testimony. Thank you. I hope that too.

Thank you.

And with that, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's interview with Mr. Julius Walt October 3, 2015 in Boca Raton, Florida.

And I think you.

You're welcome.