

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Steen Metz on September 26, 2016 in Lincolnshire, Illinois. Thank you very, very much, Mr. Metz, for agreeing to speak with us today and to share your story with us.

Glad to do it. I think it's very important.

We much appreciate it. I'm going to start the interview with the most basic questions. We'll talk a lot about prewar life. And from there, I know our story will develop.

So the very first question I have, very simple one. What is the date of your birth?

I was born on May the 5th, 1935.

And what was your name at birth?

Steen. And then I had a middle name, Axel Metz. And it was the tradition within the family. Axel, my middle name, was my father's first name.

I see. So your father's first name was Axel Metz?

That's correct.

And where were you born?

I was born in Denmark. A town I call Odense. And it's spelled O-D-E-N-S-E.

And can you tell me a little bit about how far this town was located from, let's say, Copenhagen, which most people know about?

Right in the middle of the country. It was probably about 130 miles from Copenhagen. In those days, it took about four, four and a half hours by train from Odense to Copenhagen.

Wow.

But now they have a bridge between two islands. And now it takes between an hour and a half and two hours. And of course, the trains run much faster than they used to.

I see. I see.

And how is it that you ended up being born there? Were your parents both from the town?

No, not originally. My entire family was from Copenhagen. When my father got his law degree, he got married to my mother. They had a long engagement, because they didn't want to get married until he got his law degree. And he was an attorney. And then they moved to Odense. And he got a job in Odense. We're the only part of the family living outside of Copenhagen.

I see. I see. And what was your mother's name? First name and maiden name.

Her first name was Magna, M-A-G-N-A. And her maiden name was Hildesheim, H-I-L-D-E-S-H-E-I-M. And I just want to tell you a story that just comes to my mind about Hildesheim.

The other day I saw an exhibit about the Berlin Olympic in 1936. And suddenly, I see a sign about Jewish people not allowed at a certain place-- I can't remember where-- in Hildesheim.

That's right. There's a town in Germany.

Yeah. And that sign was dated 1935. And it is amazing to think about even in '35--

That's right.

--Jewish people were not allowed.

That's right. That's right. Well, Hitler had been in power already a couple of years.

Yes.

And the Olympics were held in the capital. And--

In '36, yes.

Yeah. So was there any connection between your mother's family and the actual German town of Hildesheim?

There may be. We've had never been able to find out. I have some cousins. And we all say, why don't you do the research? And I really don't have time to do it with all my Holocaust services.

Tell me a little bit about the background of your family. How many generations lived in Denmark? How did they come to Denmark? Do you know these things?

I think my father's side originated in the town Metz, M-E-T-Z. And Metz was either French or German, depending on who won the war, so to speak. And I think it originated there. But I've not been able to trace it. And I have not even tried to trace it.

So you're saying that your family would have come from a place called Metz on the French-German border, depending--

I think so.

OK.

My family also-- the early part of family came from another town in Denmark called Randers, R-A-N-D-E-R-S, which is--

Randers, OK.

Randers, which is in Jutland.

OK. And Jutland is--

A western part of Denmark. A peninsula.

Did you know your larger extended family as you were growing up?

Oh, absolutely. I was-- [COUGHS] excuse me. I was the only child in the family, but we made frequent trips to Copenhagen. We would go to Copenhagen-- this sounds strange. My wife, Eileen, always says this was a strange family. But we did celebrate Christmas.

Did you?

Yeah, we did celebrate Christmas. And we would always go to Copenhagen. And I've since found out we were not the only Jewish family celebrating Christmas. So we would always take the train to Copenhagen.

Well, this begs another question that I have. I have heard-- and I don't know if this is true-- that the Jewish community in Denmark had a great desire to assimilate and integrate into Danish society as much as possible. Would you say there's truth to that statement?

Oh, no question about it. I think a big difference-- and I often use that in my talk-- is in Denmark, you're first of all a Dane no matter what color skin you have or what religion you have, whether you're Jewish or Catholic. And my mother was interviewed by two young journalists back '95, which was a year before she died. And she was asked the question, did you feel Jewish, or did you feel Danish? And she said, of course I was Jewish. But first of all, I felt Danish. And I think that tells the story.

And there's no question about what you're talking about. And I think this is happening more and more.

OK. Could that have been a reason why not only your family, but others celebrated Christmas? Or do you think it would be another reason?

It might be. Very few people in our family observed kosher food, as an example. And my father was brought up in the Jewish faith. But I don't know-- his brothers were too. But on my mother's side, they were not brought up in the Jewish faith.

So they were more secular.

Yes, I think that's good description. As an example, when my father and mother got married, they did not get married in the temple or synagogue. They got married in my grandmother-- my mother's apartment.

Oh, really?

Yes.

Tell me--

Which is-- when you think back, it's unusual.

Yeah, I've not heard that before.

No.

I have not heard that. Tell me a little bit about your parents' personalities, about your father. First of all, what are your earliest memories of him? That's one question. And then we'll go to the personality.

Well, one of the earlier-- I can remember, is when I was out-- wait a second. I lost my thought for-- when I learned to bicycle. And in Denmark, you learn at an early age. Because in Denmark you use it as transportation. Not like here, where we use it--

Recreation.

Recreational. And he would run after me. He would have a stick in the visor. And he would almost run. He had asthma. So it was very difficult for him. He had trouble keeping up. [LAUGHS] So that I remember.

I also remember, I was playing with my father. He was a lawyer. And during the fall we would collect chestnuts. And we would tie them together in a string. And my father would become the horse. [LAUGHS] And I would be driving. So those two things--

So he played with you.

Oh, yes. Yeah, I can remember a number of things. We lived in an apartment. We always lived in an apartment. And so we didn't have a garden. So we had an allotment, as we referred to it. And I would grow-- he would help me. We would plant seeds, radishes, flowers, and so on.

And I guess my business career started early, because I went back and collected the flowers and collected the radishes and sold them to my mother.

Did you really?

Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

So that might be when my business career took off.

That's kind of--

So those are somewhat--

That's cute.

So great memories I have.

So garden allotments, for those people who don't know what that is, could you explain--

Yes.

--what it means?

We rented some space in a big garden. And we would get, say, 1/10 of the garden. And we rented it or leased it, whatever you want to call it. And then we were able to use that. And we would water the seeds.

And in those days, you would grow everything from seeds. You would not start it with plants. And in addition to radishes, I think we had lettuce, and we had flowers, and maybe a few other things.

Did you have--

And we would go over there. It was very close to where we lived. But we would go over there maybe one evening, and certainly over the weekend to take care of the garden.

Well, you answered one of the questions that I had, is, how far was this from your home?

It was very close.

OK. And this was typical for people in places where they had a flat, but no single family home?

I don't know how common it was. But we had it and several other people had it also. Of course, especially in those days it was much more common to live in an apartment as opposed to owning a house.

Tell me then about your father's personality. What kind of a person was he, from your memory?

He was very gentle. Had a good sense of humor. He also had a temper.

Did he?

And unfortunately, I have inherited part of that. But he was very, very creative. When we had family gatherings, it was very common in Denmark when you had birthdays-- and they celebrate any kind of birthday. They call them round birthday.

Round birthday?

Birthday. 50, 60, and 80. That's the round birthday. And they celebrate those. And when do you do that, you will sing. So you would have a poem. And my father would do the poem.

Oh, would he?

Yes. He would do the poem.

So he'd make a poem up.

Yeah, based on--

That person.

--the people that were in the room. He would make reference. And he was very good at that.

Was he a jovial person?

Yes. Yes, I think that's a good description.

And as you mentioned before, if he was your horse, then clearly he liked playing with you.

Yes.

What about your mother? Tell me a little bit about your mother.

My mother, as I mentioned, of course, my father also had a long engagement. She was very, very tenacious. Very strong woman. At times, maybe bordering on stubborn.

Was he the gentler of the two?

Yes, no question. No question about it. But as I mentioned, they had known each other for a long, long time. And I would imagine-- I hadn't really thought about it, but at that time I don't think my father would be allowed to marry a non-Jewish person. I doubt that.

Your mother was Jewish as well?

Yes, she was Jewish. I don't think--

OK, so despite assimilationist kind of directions, there was a limit.

In this case, I think there was. And of course, the people that were orthodox-- different there. You couldn't do it-- like, my father's brother, they kept kosher food at home.

Let's talk a little bit about the larger family. Did you know your grandparents on either side?

I only knew the grandmothers.

The grandfathers had passed away?

One had left the country. He was a stockbroker. He went bankrupt. He left the family. I think he went to South Africa, maybe Argentina. I'm not quite sure. I never knew him.

So this was after the 1929 crash? You know, when the--

It was in the '30s.

It was in the '30s.

It was in the-- I can't remember exactly.

Of course.

No, it couldn't be, because-- no, it was earlier. It was before that, because my mother was born in 1906. And I think she was six or seven years old when he left. So it's much, much earlier.

Also it had nothing to do with the crash.

No, nothing, no. You would think it did, but it didn't. It was much, much earlier. And he left the whole family. And my--

That's not nice.

No, it's not. It's not very-- and they had a very nice apartment, a big apartment. And they had nannies. They had help. My grandma had a lot of help. And suddenly, he disappears. And I think it came as a shock to everybody--

Of course.

--that he went bankrupt.

And how many siblings did your mother have?

A total of five.

So where was she?

Mama, she had an older brother, older sister, and two younger sisters.

Was she in the middle?

She was the middle one.

And remind me of her name again? Because I--

M-A-G-N-A. Magna.

Magna. I haven't heard it. This is the first--

No, it's very unusual.

OK. And so you knew your grandmother and these aunts and uncles--

Yes.

--on this side of the family.

And on the other side, my grandfather, my father's father, died well before I was born.

Let's talk about your mother's side of the family. Did you visit your grandmother? Did she still live in Copenhagen?

Yeah, they all stayed in Copenhagen. I would visit my grandmother on my mother's side. I was closer to her than to my father's mother.

And her circumstances, were they very reduced? Did she live very humbly? Because of, you know, having been left?

Yes, she lived in a smaller-- she had to live in a smaller apartment. I think she got some help when her parents were around. I think she got some help from her sister, who inherited a hat business, a wholesale hat business, which was very unusual for a woman--

That's right.

--to run it in those days. And she did quite well. So I think she helped out.

OK. So did you know anybody from that generation besides your grandmother, like your great aunt who had the hat business or others?

Oh, I was very close to her.

As well?

I was very close to her. After the war I was probably closer to her than her sister, who was my grandmother. Because she had been in business. And I was one of the few family members that was in business. They were attorneys or engineers. And so I always remember a saying my aunt had. And it was, Steen, you should always do more than expected of you.

And was her hat business a retail one or a whole--

It was a wholesale business.

It was a wholesale business.

But by that time, she had sold the business. Because there was nobody in the family to take it over. By that time, hats-- it was both men's and women's hats. And men didn't wear hats that often anymore.

That's true. And soon after that women stopped wearing hats.

Yes. So it's not a very good business.

Yeah. What was her circumstances during the war? Was she able to continue running this business under the Nazi occupation?

At that time, she didn't run the business anymore. She retired from the business when she was 55 years old.

Oh, OK.

And she managed to escape. The whole family in Copenhagen managed to escape to Sweden, except my father's-- one of his brothers and his wife and his mother and their son. They were caught while they were trying to escape.

We'll talk about these things. OK, so by the time the war occurs, your aunt is no longer involved in the business.

That's correct.

And so she doesn't suffer ill effect from having a business.

No.

OK. Tell me about what it was that made this particular grandmother and this particular aunt closer to you, why you felt closer to them as family members? What did you--

I think it was especially after the war. And it was probably because of my mother being closer to them--

Of course.

--than her mother-in-law. And I think-- I mean--

It wasn't before the war, in other words.

No, no. It was not. And I still remember that Christmas-- here it comes again. After Christmas my father's mother would take me out shopping. And she would always say, what didn't you get at Christmas? I'll get it for you.

And did she?

Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

Was there a great difference between the two families, your mother's and your father's?

Yes, I think there was. I think on my mother's side, certainly until her father left the country, I think they were probably better off financially than on the other side.

But on the other side, your father's side of the family, were they comfortable? Were they middle class?

Yes. They were. No, no, they were comfortable.

OK. And he had how many brothers and sisters?

He had two brothers.

Two brothers.

Yes.

Older or younger?

Younger. They were both younger.

So he was the oldest in the family.

Yes, he was the oldest. My mother was in the middle.

All right. Did all three boys on your father's side get an education, a higher education?

My father did as an attorney. A younger brother was an architect. The third one was in business. He had many different jobs. And he had a grocery store at one time. I don't know exactly what kind of education he had. Certainly wouldn't be comparable to an architect or an attorney.

And did you visit-- before the war, did you visit them, your uncles?

Oh, yes, absolutely. I would visit them in Copenhagen.

And did they have children?

And they didn't have Christmas. So it was my mother's side that had Christmas. So we would go and see the other part of the family either before or afterwards.

OK. Well, it only goes to what you were saying, is that the others were more secular.

Yes.

And your father's side, then, was a little bit more traditional. Your grandmother on your father's side, was she very religious?

I don't believe so. I don't believe so.

But one of her sons kept kosher.

Yes.

Was this the son with the grocery store?

No, it was the one--

The architect.

The architect.

Did you have cousins?

I had a number of cousins. On my father's side, I had two. On the other side, I had five.

And your family's social life--

No, I had three on my father's side. Three on my father's side.

Three on the father's side and five--

Yeah.

--on your mother's. Was your family's social life really-- did it center around the family, around the aunts and the uncles? Or did they have friends outside of this family circle? Because you have more than enough people.

Yeah. No, it was really both. At the holidays, maybe in the summer also we'd go to Copenhagen. And then it would be family oriented. But in Odense it would be friends. And they had a number of friends in Odense.

Was there a large Jewish community in Odense?

No. Very, very small. Very, very small. As a matter of fact-- I mean, there was no synagogue or temple in the town. Very small population.

And who were their friends then, and your friends when you were in Odense?

One family-- he was-- they were Jewish. They studied together. And he was an attorney.

Also?

Yes.

OK, so they had many things in common.

Oh, yes. And from Copenhagen, yes. But he went to Odense also. I think that would be the only Jewish family they associated with. I know they associated with another one. He was a vet.

What about non-Jews? Were they part of your family circle?

Oh, absolutely. I mean, Jewish people that we associated with would be the exception in Odense. I can't think of any other than the attorney family.

OK. And did you have any close friends as a little boy growing up in Odense?

I had a lot of friends. And Eileen, my wife, can't understand when I tell her when it was my birthday I always had two birthdays. Of course, one birthday was for school friends. And the other birthday was from friends in the neighborhood that I played with.

That's nice.

Yes. So that was kind of unusual.

Yeah. Had you started school before the war? Because you were born in '35.

I started school in '41.

So the war was on.

And the war start-- yeah.

When was Denmark occupied by?

In 1940. April the 9th, 1940.

April the 9th, 1940. So it's half a year after they invade Poland. Just about half a year.

Yes.

OK. And before that date, did you take family vacations with your parents to any particular place?

Yeah. Quite often we would go with the family of my mother's older sister and her husband and their two children.

Would that be in Denmark someplace?

Oh, yes. In those days [LAUGHS] you stayed in Denmark. I don't know of anybody who would go abroad, even before the war.

But we also had vacations during the war, beginning of the war.

We'll talk about that. We'll talk about that. I want to find out a little bit about your home in Odense-- right? Is that how I say it?

You're doing well.

OK, thank you. How large was the flat, from your memory?

No, I couldn't tell you in square foot or anything. But we had three bedrooms, I believe. I really don't know why we had three bedrooms. But we did. We had two balconies, which was most unusual.

Must've been pretty.

And then it was up in the third floor.

Was it the top floor?

That's where we-- we didn't move there-- believe it or not, we moved there April the 9th, 1940.

Really?

I'll never forget that. Yeah.

Well, tell me about it. Tell me about the move.

We got a new apartment, much bigger apartment. We lived in a smaller apartment. And my aunt, my mother's sister, came over from Copenhagen to help us. And lo and behold, that was the day we were invaded, and the occupation started in Denmark.

And you remember that? You remember the move?

Yes, absolutely.

How did you move? Was it by a lorry that they moved from one place to the other?

That I cannot--

You don't remember.

I cannot remember that.

Did-- now, these questions are going to be a little bit strange, but I'm going to ask them anyway. How was the apartment heated? Was it coal heating? Was it some other kind of heating? Did you have coal ovens?

I think we had gas?

You had gas even.

I think we had gas.

OK. And you had electricity?

Oh, yes, absolutely.

And indoor plumbing?

Oh, yes.

OK. Not everybody did.

I know, but we did.

Not everybody did, yeah.

I know about the indoor plumbing. I know about the electricity. I'm not quite sure about the gas.

OK. And were there modern conveniences in the home, in the sense that in the kitchen there was a refrigerator?

No, we didn't have a refrigerator.

You didn't have a refrigerator.

No.

OK. Did your parents have an automobile?

Oh, no. No, we didn't--

Everything was bicycle.

Oh, yes. It was bicycle.

Two bicycle--

Or walking. Three bicycles.

Three bicycles, one for each of you.

Yes.

All right. Were you far from the center of town?

We could walk into town. It would probably-- if you walked reasonably fast, half an hour. You could take the bus in. More frequently, you would bicycle.

And the building itself, your apartment building, how many floors did it have?

It had three floors.

Oh, so you were the top floor?

Yeah, we were on the third floor. It was a huge apartment complex, a huge one.

Was it new? Or was--

Yes, it was very new.

For that time.

A couple of years old. I mean, I still remember when they had fields where they built the apartment.

Oh, really?

Yes. And I couldn't tell you exactly how many, but there would be several hundred apartments in it.

OK, so that is huge.

Yes.

That is huge. And I have--

And we had a place where we could play.

I have in my mind, if they're no higher than three floors, then this is a very spread out complex--

Oh, it was, yes.

--if you have several hundred people.

I mean, in those days we didn't build them much higher than that.

Yeah. Thank God. [LAUGHS] And you're on the top floor. And you have two balconies.

Yes.

Which is nice.

Two balconies is very unusual.

Yeah. From the living room and then a kitchen? Or from a bedroom?

Bedroom.

Did you have any pets?

No, no, I never had pets. And today, I'm not too fond of pets.

Did you want them when you were little?

I don't think so.

OK. I, who has many of them, can very well sympathize with you. Because my furniture does not belong to me.

[LAUGHTER]

Let's see. You played with the neighborhood children in this new complex?

Yes. Both girls and boys.

Let's go back to April 9, 1940. How did your family learn that the Germans had invaded, that the Nazis had invaded?

I'm not so sure, exactly-- it's a good question, how we learned about it. But I certainly remember German soldiers walking in the streets. I remember the green uniforms. And I referred to them as the green ugly uniforms. And when I see pictures, I still get chills when I see it.

Later on, I heard, maybe, that they-- we got some bulletin that they threw out from the airplanes that were coming down. And how they were going to save us. They wanted to protect us from the British, because they thought the British would invade Denmark, which, of course, was a big lie, so to speak. Because they were our allies. My father might have heard it on the radio.

You had a radio at home?

Oh, I'm sure we did.

OK. But you don't remember in particular listening to the radio for--

No, I don't. No, I don't. I mean, I remember playing. And I remember going to school. And I don't remember spending a lot of time at home. But I must've spent some time doing my homework.

And another--

I was lucky. I had a lot of friends in the complex.

Another question that I know is strange and unfair, but I need to ask it. And it is, do you remember your parents talking about the political situation? And the reason it's unfair is because you were five years old. And if someone asked me, do I remember my parents talking about politics at five, I wouldn't be able to answer it. But do you remember anything--

No, I don't. I don't remember it at all.

OK. Do you remember your life changing much after the green uniformed soldiers march in?

It didn't change significantly. And Denmark was very, very unique compared to the other occupied countries. As a--

In what way?

As an example, I could continue to go to school. It was not a Jewish school.

It was a public school?

It was a private school.

It was a private school.

My father continued to practice law. It was not--

That is unusual.

It was not a Jewish company. In Poland I don't believe he could have done that. If he had had his own company, he

would have continued to do that.

So it's amazing that it was relatively normal. It was different from just about any other occupied country that I know of.

And why was that?

A couple of reasons for that. And I wasn't aware of that at that time.

Of course.

These are things I learned trying to find out what was going on. I'm not saying we didn't have antisemitism or informers in Denmark. We did. But to a much smaller scale than in Poland or in France.

And in Denmark you're first of all considered a Dane. And then you happen to be Jewish, or you happen to be a Catholic or Lutheran.

And what was the predominant Christian religion?

It was Lutheran.

It was Lutheran.

At that time, it was probably close to 95% of the population were Lutheran, which is very unusual. It's a state religion, which you don't have in many other countries.

That's true. So despite it being a state religion, which could then look at all other religions as not quite the same--

Yes.

--it didn't have that kind of effect.

No, it didn't. I don't know if I mentioned earlier-- stop me if I did. My mother was interviewed the year before she died.

What year was this?

This was 1995.

We talked about this off camera, not on camera.

OK.

So let's talk about it on camera.

By a young journalist.

Danish journalist?

Danish journalist. Very young. It was in '95. And that would be 50 year anniversary for the end of the war in Denmark. And she probably opened up more than she'd ever done before. And I'm very fortunate that I have a copy of the CD.

One of the questions would be something along this line. Did you feel Jewish? Or did you feel Danish? And my mother would answer, first of all, I felt Danish. Of course I was Jewish. But I felt Danish first of all.

And you know, the interesting thing and the sad thing is that many people in Germany who were German Jews felt the

same until Hitler came to power.

Yes.

That they were German.

Yes.

They were part of-- many fought in World War I and so on. So your life didn't change all that much.

No. It's amazing. And the more I think about it, the more amazed I am. I have some pictures. We went on vacation.

Where?

In Denmark.

Somewhere around.

Yeah, at the beach. We loved the beach. So we would go. We often went with my mother's sister and her husband and their two children. And we'd go together.

This is after 1940.

Oh, yes. I have a picture. And I show it when I talk about my experiences. I believe it was taken the summer before we were arrested. And you wouldn't know that a year later we would be arrested.

You look happy or carefree or--

Oh, completely. Absolutely.

And I asked this before, but another-- I mean, are there other reasons why you were untouched in the larger society? Things that were going on, things--

There are a few reasons. One being the percentage of the Jewish population was very, very small. At that time there were about four and a half million people. And we had 7,500 Jewish people.

In total? In Denmark?

In total. In total. So the percentage is 0.2 or whatever. In Poland, as I'm sure you know, it was 3 million. So I think it was about 10%. That's one reason.

Another reason was we used to export all the good Danish food to Great Britain. We had a long agreement with them, arrangement. Now, of course, we had to ship it to Germany. And we had to feed the forces, the German forces. And they loved the food. And that was another reason why they were standing by and really--

Not really--

--treating Denmark a little different. The government continued to govern. The king continued to rule. So these were very, very unusual circumstances.

Well, that is interesting. Because that factor of the behavior of the occupying forces towards the local officials, the local governments, the population at large, it was different country to country. And the further east you went, the worse it got.

Yes, absolutely.

But the factor that they liked the food and would then say, OK, let's not break something if it's not-- fix something if it's not broken.

Plus Hitler didn't really want to have any more resources in Denmark than he needed to. Because he was busy on many different fronts. And Denmark-- which I didn't realize at the time, obviously-- was really strategically located as far as Germany was concerned. Because they continued to get iron from Sweden. So it would pass through Denmark and then go into Germany. That is probably another reason for it.

Of course, why did they really need to occupy little Denmark? I mean, Denmark had been neutral in the First World War and really wanted to be neutral in the Second World War. But we didn't get the chance.

Yeah. Not everybody had the luck that Switzerland did, of being able-- not only wanting to, but actually being able to be neutral.

I know, yeah.

Yeah. Did you visit your relatives in Copenhagen still after the--

Yes. It didn't change.

Did life for them change? Did anybody-- no?

Not that I know of. I don't believe so. I think-- all the years, I think we still went over there for Christmas. And at that time we had Christmas at my mother's sister's house.

Did you remember ever on the street being singled out for being Jewish when you were in public places?

No. Do you mean by the Germans?

By anybody.

No.

So not the Germans and not the Danes.

No. I'll talk about it later on, but I didn't know I was Jewish at that time. But I'll talk about it later on.

So you didn't go to synagogue. You didn't go to temple. You didn't--

You couldn't.

Because there wasn't one.

Yes.

OK. And so I'll take it that your parents were also secular, your father as well.

My father was brought up in the Jewish faith. But he couldn't do it while he was in Odense. And we didn't maintain the kosher menu.

Did you hear or did you parents talk about people leaving the country during this time?

Do you mean leaving Denmark? Or-- very few, if any, leaving Denmark at that time. I don't believe most-- there were

very, very few that left Denmark. I don't believe they started leaving until the fall or late summer of '43.

And why would people start leaving at that point?

Now we have to move forward.

Let's do that.

The Danish government was approached by the commandant in Denmark. And they got an ultimatum. And the ultimatum was, the saboteurs, the resistance movement, has to stop. And apparently it was really hurting-- the young people, the underground movement. They were bombing factories. They were bombing rails. They were sinking ships. That were doing a lot of things to make it difficult for the Germans to transport iron from Sweden and through shipping food into Germany. They were doing all the right things. And that's why they gave the Danish government an ultimatum.

And up to then, the Danish government had tried to cooperate with the Germans to the greatest extent possible. And I didn't mention that earlier, but as an example, they would not have any Jewish people in the broadcasting. They didn't want to make it too obvious.

So there were things they agreed to do. But when they got the big ultimatum, they said, no way. And they resigned. And that became, as we referred to it, as the beginning to the Final Solution. And that's when the commandant went to Berlin, got approval to deport the Danish Jews.

What was this commandant's name?

West, W-E-S-T.

Do you know anything about him that you learned of later on? What kind of--

I don't know an awful lot. I think he was very, very ambitious. He wanted to make sure that life was going on as smoothly as it could in Denmark.

Without any of the sabotage.

Yeah. So he would have the trouble with the saboteurs and so on. And that's about all I can really tell you. Werner was his first name, W-E-R-N-E-R.

So Werner West.

Werner West, yeah.

Werner West. And did you, before the Danish government resigned, ever have to wear a star?

No, we never wore-- that was another thing that was different. We never wore a star in Denmark. And there is a myth-- and some people actually think-- like this morning I got the question, which I often get. I understand the Danish king wore a Jewish star. So I said, it's a myth.

And when I tell people it's a myth, they don't like it. Because they think it's a wonderful story, that he would-- he didn't wear a Jewish star. He probably would have worn one, since he was a big supporter of the Jewish people, if the Jewish people had to wear a star. But we didn't.

So where did the myth come from? How did the myth evolve?

I think there was a cartoon in an American newspaper, American magazine, where they showed the star.

On him.

On him, yes.

And what was his role? It was Christian, right? King Christian was his name?

Oh, I'm very impressed.

[LAUGHTER]

King Christian X.

Mm-hmm. And what public role did he play?

He continued to be the king. His queen continued to be queen.

Did he ever make a speech? Was there any speech that he made?

He might have. He was involved in surrendering when we surrendered. It wasn't just the government. The king was involved in the surrender.

So this would have been in the late summer of '43 as well. He would have been--

No, when surrendered that was in April 9, '40.

Oh, 1940.

Yes.

I see. OK.

But he was involved in our surrendering. And that was April the 9th.

That was April the 9th, yeah.

Yeah. He was a big, big supporter of the Jewish people. No question about it.

Do you think that that influenced Danish society, or it would have-- he was just reflecting Danish society?

I think that sentence, reflecting the Danish society, is a good one. I think that's a very good descriptor. When I talk to people and I show them a picture of the king on his horse, and always say, he was writing. He continued to write in defiance of Hitler.

Apparently, Hitler sent him a telegram. Telegrams-- the young generation probably don't know what a telegram is. Sent him a telegram on his birthday, Hitler did.

Oh, really?

Wished him well and a couple other things. And I believe the king-- I don't know if he answered, but if he answered, he just said, thank you, or something like that. And Hitler--

He was dismissive.

Yeah. And Hitler didn't--

Like it.

Hitler didn't like that.

Yeah. Well, it's not everybody he sends telegrams wishing happy birthday too. Other kings and queens, you know.

No. Of course, they had all escaped. They were all in England.

[LAUGHTER]

So how did life change after the government resigned? For--

It changed dramatically. Werner West went to Berlin, got approval. They decided on a date. There was a leading Nazi officer in Denmark.

Dane?

No, German. But he had had ties to Denmark over a number of years. He went to the Danish administration, told them about the date of the final solution, the round up. The rabbi, the chief rabbi, was notified. The Jewish people-- 95% of the Jewish people in Copenhagen and surroundings found out about it.

And during the next two weeks, there was a tremendous job done by everybody. About 7,000 Jewish people managed to escape to Sweden. Sweden was still neutral.

So this is-- the day that the government resigned, do you remember it? Was it late August? Early--

No, it was August 30th.

August 30th.

They resigned August 30th. The date for the final solution was October 2nd, which was Rosh Hashanah. And they had done that on purpose. And they thought they were very smart. Of course, they figured everybody would be home. Fortunately, most--

So this one German, Nazi--

Yes.

--actually saved many people.

Absolutely.

What was his name?

Duckwert.

Duckworth?

I think it was spelled D-U-C-K-W-E-R-T.

Duckwert in German? I mean, if it-- OK.

I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But it's--

It's a very unusual step.

It's very, very unique. It's very, very unusual. There's been a lot of speculation-- and this is a complicated story. But there's a lot of speculation that the commandant, Werner West was involved with it also, that behind the scenes he went to him and said, tell them about it. I don't want to be involved in it. But I don't want to deal with these saboteurs anymore.

So it was really he didn't like the saboteurs, but he didn't want the full-- well, that's the speculation.

Yeah, but--

That's the speculation.

He wanted it to run--

Can we cut for a little bit? We have to adjust the mic.

Pausing.

OK, we had a break just unexpectedly. Do you remember your train of thought? We were talking about Werner West and Duckwert, Mr. Duckwert.

Yes, I remember what we were talking about. I think the commandant wanted everything to run as smoothly-- maybe we were there-- as possible. And he was looking out for his career. And he was afraid if conditions would be too difficult, and the saboteurs would hurt him too much, that that wouldn't be good for his career.

So this is a very unique situation. I don't know if all this is true. I've heard-- it's most unusual for anybody to warn people.

Yeah. Certainly in 1943, when they're really in the middle of it-- you know, I don't know whether or not this was before or after the Battle of Stalingrad, which is when the war turned--

Yes.

--against Germany's forces.

Yes. I can't remember whether it's before or after. But it's an interesting point. I'd like to Google it afterwards. Because I think that is significant.

But what happened is these people left their homes. They went to stay with friends. The ambulance picked them up, and they stayed in hospitals. They entered hospitals under false names. They didn't want to have Jewish names in their hospitals. They were hiding in lofts in the churches, in private homes.

And then they was shipped or transported to Sweden, which was neutral. And if you have Copenhagen here--

That's right.

--and you have Sweden just across here, it's just two miles.

Is it really? Just two miles?

Two miles, two and a half. If it narrows, it can be significantly more other places. And most often, they went in fishing

boats.

Well, this is, I think, if anybody knows anything about this part of the history in Denmark, that's what the image in their minds is.

There's no question.

The fishing boats.

Yeah. And it was interesting, because I was talking to somebody. I play duplicate bridge. And one of the players came over, said, oh, all the Danish Jews went in rowing boats to Sweden. So I said, hold, let me explain it to you.

So they were actually hiding in the hold of the fishing boat where they used to have fish. And then they would still put some ice or fish on top. So if ducks came to smell it, it would smell like--

They smell the fish.

They smell the fish. And the children were sedated. Because they wanted to make sure that they wouldn't cry. And I met a lady a couple of years ago. And she was a little girl. And she was sedated at that time.

Really?

And went on her way to Sweden. And some were caught. My uncle, his wife, and my father's mother, and my uncle's son, who was three years younger than me, they were caught. And they eventually ended up in Theresienstadt. But the rest of the family managed to escape to Sweden.

How was it that they were caught? What were their particular circumstances?

I believe they were staying at a pension, as we called it. And--

Like a guest house.

--somebody-- I'm sorry?

A guest house.

Yeah, a guest house. That's good. And I think one of the Nazis heard about it or thought they were taking care of them. And so they were caught. I know there was a family, a husband and wife up the coast. And they were taking in a lot of Jewish people. And they were also building boats, actually, to take them across. And they were found out by Nazis later on. And they were shot, both of them.

Ah, the family that was building the boats.

Yeah. They were shot. And they are part of the Righteous Avenue. It's not called avenue. It is in Yad Vashem. But here in Skokie at the museum there.

So it's most likely an informer that led to the arrest.

It could be, yeah. I mean, there were informers. There's no question about it. My cousin and his mother and father-- she had remarried. And the father was Christian. And they were hiding on a loft in the church. Informer-- they said it was a girlfriend of a Nazi officer, informed them. And they were later on taken to a camp in Denmark.

But they didn't go to a concentration camp, because her husband was not Jewish. And my cousin's father was not Jewish.

So it was a mixed--

It was a different definition. The Nazis had a different definition. Both parents had to be Jewish. The normal definition is, if the mother's Jewish, then you're automatic Jewish. So that was different. So yes, there were some informers. There's no question about it.

Well, the children of mixed marriages were in danger, but only at the end of the war. Certainly in Germany there would be somebody who would be half-half. And I've conducted interviews with those who said, we were on the lists. But the lists were not-- they survived because the war ended.

They were not high priority.

Yeah, they were not high priority. Let's go back then. So of your family-- I'm just going to repeat it, besides your own situation, which we'll come to-- there was, on your father's side, his brother. The architect or the grocer?

Architect.

The architect. His wife and his son and your grandmother who were caught while they're in a pension, a guest house. And most likely an informer. And then arrested and eventually sent to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia.

Another cousin from your mother's side-- would be her sister and her Christian husband?

Yes.

And a daughter were in the loft of a church.

Yes.

And because the husband-- they were caught as well, most likely the girlfriend of a Danish Nazi who informs. But they're sent to--

Could have been a Germany actually. I think it was.

Could have been a German Nazi.

Could have been a German Nazi.

OK. They're caught, but they're sent to an internal camp in Denmark--

Yes.

--rather than outside of the country.

And they were released. There was a lawyer that helped them release. And they were driven in a truck. And then the truck stopped. And they left the truck. And the Nazis said to them, if you look around, if you look back, we're going to shoot you. And they went to Sweden.

And they went to Sweden.

They didn't want to take any chances.

So in September 1943, after the government collapses-- resigns-- was your family, your mother, your father, yourself, back in Odense? Or were--

Yes, were in Odense.

OK. And so what happened to you? What happened to your family?

This is the \$64,000 question. My mother in her interview says they had not been warned. When they got arrested, they were shocked. She says they had talked the night before with the other lawyer, a Jewish person. And it was his brother who was well-connected. And he said, don't do anything until I connect--

Get in touch with you.

Unless I connect with you. I've been writing in my book, A Danish Boy in Theresienstadt, several pages wondering what really happened. I realized that communications were quite different in those days. When I talk to people, they don't understand that my parents hadn't known what happened in Norway. In Norway, one of our neighbors, the Jewish people-- half of them escaped to Sweden. The other half went to concentration camps. It happened a year earlier.

Did they not know what was going on in Germany? Did they not know what was going on in Poland? And of course, communications was so different. I always tell people. Today, if there is a bomb in Lisbon, Portugal, a second later the rest of the world knows about it. So all I can say is, when I talk to people, I always say-- because I cannot explain it in detail. I say, to my knowledge, my parents had not been warned.

But I am wondering what happened. A family member has told me that there was somebody that warned my father. But they didn't think it was serious. The conclusion I have come to is that I don't think-- nothing happened after three and a half years. So why should something happen now? And maybe they didn't think it was serious.

Well, a few--

So very strange.

Yeah. A few thoughts come to my mind. Again, they're suppositions, but they're the questions that come to my mind. And one would be, if you really have very few Jewish families in Odense, then they're very easy to find. This is not Copenhagen. This is not a network. And I don't know whether there is a process of people registering with the police every time they move and have an address. But in some European countries, that was the case. So it's easy to go and find where everybody lives.

And it was even easier for the Nazis, because-- this is amazing. My family was a member of the Jewish Society--

Well, there you go.

--at the synagogue in Copenhagen. And they had the names and addresses and I think phone numbers there. And a couple Nazis broke into that office and took the lists.

Of course.

They took the list. That's how they got it. I thought-- there were a couple of Germans nearby. And for years, I thought that one of the Germans was an informant and that he had told them about us. But they--

Do you still think that?

No, no, no, no. Now I know they had the list. But I didn't know that until years later.

I see. OK. OK. And you answered one question I don't think I had asked, whether or not you had a telephone at home.

We had a telephone.

And so one thing that would be surprising, why wouldn't have relatives from Copenhagen phoned you and just said, this is what's happening here.

I wonder about that. They do say that the Nazis were listening in--

That's true.

--on the phone. And at one time, I think they went to the phone company. And there was no phone service. And I don't know exactly when that happened.

Well, do you remember the moment of arrest itself?

Yes. Unfortunately, I do.

Can you tell me what happened?

There was a pounding on the door.

On your third floor--

On the third floor apartment. It was early in the morning.

Was it dawn already?

Yeah, 6 or 7 o'clock. And it was on October 2nd, as we talked about earlier. And my father answered. And later on I found out what was going on. And as I mentioned earlier, I didn't know why we were different. Because I didn't know that I was Jewish. I had not been brought up in the Jewish faith.

And when I talk to students, especially-- because I think that's very important-- I always say something along these lines. Is it a crime to be Jewish? Is it a crime to be a Catholic? Is it a crime to be a Lutheran? Of course it's not a crime. But in the evil mind of Hitler, it was a crime. And I knew about being occupied, because I would bicycle to school every day into town. And I would see the soldiers stamping their feet, stamping their boots.

So my mother asked if she and I could go down to the baker on the ground floor. I played with his daughter. We knew him. And we went down there, got a big sack Danish bread, rolls, pastry.

And what's amazing-- and I didn't know that until I listened to my mother's interview. Apparently, the baker offered to try and help my mother and I escape. Technically, it might have been possible, because there was a basement, and there was a corridor. And we could have maybe gotten to the other side of the building eventually and disappeared. Of course, my mother couldn't accept it, because my father was up in the apartment. And he would probably have been shot. The baker could also have been shot.

So we went back up. And then we were transported into the middle of-- the center of town.

In a lorry?

Yes.

Were there other people in the lorry?

No.

You were the only ones?

Yes.

Were you able to take anything else with you besides the bread and the pastries?

Yeah, we took some clothes, took some clothes. And of course, like they tell every inmate, make sure you bring money. You would have chances to spend the money. And jewelry and so on. And they tell that to everybody.

And what did the soldiers look like when they came into your apartment?

All I can remember is the green uniforms.

Had you ever interacted in those three years with any of the soldiers?

No, no.

Never.

I mean, if I was walking, and there was a soldier there, I would cross. I would cross over. No, I never had-- I mean, I'd seen them on the street.

And when you say that you didn't know you were Jewish, is that metaphorically, in the sense that, you knew that you're Jewish, but you didn't know that being Jewish--

No, I did not know I was Jewish.

You mean you really didn't know you were Jewish?

No, no. I didn't know I was Jewish.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. So you could have been easily-- if somebody could have told you you were a Lutheran, you said OK? I didn't know that before.

Yeah, it sounds strange. But yeah.

Well, I can't imagine what kind of a shock that was.

I mean, if I was older, I know my father would have found a way-- a bar mitzvah.

So you must have been completely stunned as to why you're arrested?

Yes.

And who then told you?

I think my mother.

On the lorry as you're being taken away?

I think in the house when we were arrested.

And then did you have an idea of what it meant to be Jewish?

No.

Had you ever talked about-- was there any talk about Jews in your family before, that you knew there were such a people?

I don't think-- I don't remember it. I don't think so.

You know, this is the first time I'm interviewing somebody who didn't know he was Jewish--

This is a very unique situation.

--until the date that he's arrested. Wow.

Yeah. I didn't know.

I can't imagine for a young boy what this all is. It's surreal. One minute, you're safe in your bed. You're sleeping. And the next minute, you're on a truck. And you're told the reason why is because you're something you never knew you were.

Do you remember your reactions? Do you remember--

No, not really. Because I think I was in total shock.

What about your father and your mother? Do you remember how they were?

No, but I think they were in total shock. And I think I mentioned before, my mother said, we didn't think it was serious. We didn't think it would happen. She said it was a total shock.

And when you--

It is a very-- I mean--

Yeah.

It's very unusual.

Yeah. When you get to the center of town, what do you remember happened next?

A lot of shouting. The Germans were shouting and shouting.

Were there more people?

Counting and counting. There were about 60. It was kind of a hut maybe, a sample of about 60 people. I have a picture of it.

Oh, you do.

Which is most-- it's a very unique artifact. It's supposed to be the only picture of Jewish people being arrested in Denmark. And there's 60 people standing in the schoolyard in the center of town.

Maybe we'll film it later if you have it.

That's great, yes.

Then what happened?

Then the truck took us to the peninsula, Jutland Peninsula, western part of Denmark. And there we were herded into-- I call it a cattle car. I think technically it's a boxcar, rail car. But I think most survivors called it a cattle car. And we were in that cattle car for three days and three nights.

And as you know, it was completely dark. And there were no benches. There was no blankets. We got no food. We shared the Danish rolls, the Danish pastry, with everybody. We got nothing to drink, other than what other people have brought, some drinks and other food. We shared it all.

And I was frightened. I think most of the adults were frightened. Atmosphere, I describe it as being very, very tense. And--

Did you know any of the people in the car?

No, no. Most of them were young people who had escaped Czechoslovakia or Germany earlier. And they were working on farmland in Denmark to learn Danish agriculture. And we were quite advanced. And then eventually, they would go to Palestine. And there were 16, 17, 18 years old. And I didn't know most of them were there.

There was one family from another town that I didn't know, a judge and his sister. But most of them were from the farms.

I see.

And I have to tell you a story which is incredible. In Odense, the lawyer, the friend of my father-- they studied together-- they were also pounded on their door early morning. They didn't hear the pounding. A couple hours after the Germans had left the neighbor came in and said, you'd better get out of here. You'd better escape. They escaped to Sweden.

Much later, when I did research for my book, I found out that the Nazis had instruction not to break down a door. I'm not saying they didn't do it, but their instruction was, don't break down a door, which sounds incredible. And I've read it in some books.

I know of another family in Copenhagen. Unfortunately, they were caught later on. So they managed to get to Sweden.

So we made one stop in the cattle car. We got some fresh air. We got some-- to drink.

Was there-- pardon me for saying. Were there toilet facilities?

No, I was just going-- I forgot that. There were no toilet facilities. We used buckets. So you can imagine the smell was absolutely awful. There was actually-- in another cattle car from Copenhagen, somebody committed suicide. And I didn't realize it until doing a lot of research. There were actually 15 Jewish people in Denmark that committed suicide rather than being arrested. Which is very, very sad. But you can understand it.

So we ended up in Terezin.

Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt, yeah. I use both words.

The Czech word as well as the--

Yes.

So what is your first image when the doors open and there you are? Do you remember what you saw?

I saw soldiers with guns. And they always seemed to be shouting. And of course, I couldn't understand German. So I didn't know exactly what was going on.

And then we had to walk. There was no train station in Terezin at that time. So we had to walk from another station, I think about a mile, a mile and a half. Then we came in to town and had to empty our pockets.

Of the money and the jewelry.

Money and valuables that they had encouraged us to bring. They checked the luggage, if there was any jewelry in there. And then people always think-- the perception is, and I'm sure you heard, that every survivor has a number on their underarm.

But as far as I-- I don't. As far as I know and I can determine, I think it's only the ones-- "only" in quote-- from Auschwitz-Birkenau that has a number. And some of them don't have a number.

And some of them don't. Yes, that's true too.

Yeah, I know a couple that don't have a number. And then we were split up.

So you weren't with your parents after that?

I don't know how my mother was able to persuade the soldiers. She was quite tenacious. And she managed to-- I stayed with my mother for the next 18 months, which was amazing.

And your father was separated from you?

Father was separate. My grandmother was separate.

So when you were on your way to Theresienstadt, did you know about your uncle and his family having been arrested? Did you find them once you were in Terezin?

No, we found out later about them. But we didn't know.

And did you see them in Terezin?

Yes, we saw them. They arrived the day after. They came from Copenhagen. And then they went to the southern part of Denmark. And then they took a ship to Germany. And then they went by cattle car the rest of the way.

About how many-- from your research later on, about how many people from Denmark--

472.

--were deported. So you were--

We're among the 5%.

You were amongst these few, few people.

Yes.

472.

That's right.

So when you are separated from your father, were you able to go and see him? Or was he behind the barbed wire that you couldn't have crossed?

No, I saw him. I saw him a couple-- not very often. But I saw him sometime.

Describe to me how people then were housed, if one could use that term. Where did you and your mother go? Where did some of the others go?

In barracks. And we were in a loft. And in my PowerPoint I have a copy of the loft. And I think there were probably about 80, 90 people in the lofts. And we stayed. We had bunk beds, wooden bunk beds.

It was very hard, because while we had mattresses, there was hardly any straw. We were basically lying directly on the wood. And of course, there was fleas and lice. And I didn't quite understand. Apparently I asked my mother what-- why am I--

Itchy.

I never had this before. Yeah.

What was her manner like during this time? Was she more tenacious than usual? Or was she less so? She's your protector at this moment.

Yeah. I don't know exactly how to answer that. I think she was always tenacious. I don't know that it was more or less. But I think she was always tenacious.

And of course, she worked, so I didn't see her an awful lot.

Oh, so you were alone in-- also--

No, I also worked. But I didn't have to work.

Tell me about that. Tell me about--

It was volunteer. I did some volunteer work. My mother didn't like it at first, but then she thought this would be great. Because time would fly a little faster. So I worked about an hour in the morning, about an hour in the afternoon. And I would be going from one Nazi office to the other with messages and documents and passing them along.

Did you get any more food for this or any other kind of benefit for it?

Yes. I'm glad you asked. I'd almost forgotten. And I didn't realize at the time. This is from my mother's interview. I'm so lucky to have that interview. I think I got two or three extra slices of bread. And my mother said I was very proud to get that.

So when you were in these barracks, you're kind of squished with other human beings in these barracks. And she then has to go to work. What kind of work did she do?

She had a couple of different jobs. She worked with a mineral called mica. And mica is a mineral that comes from the mountains in the Czech Republic.

Mica.

M-I-C-A. Two C's-- no, M-I-C-A. You may know the other name, glimmer? G-L-I-M-M-E-R-- no. But anyway, I didn't know about it either. But it's a metal. And it's used as insulation material for their warplanes. And there were about 250 women on the floor. They would sit at work benches. And they would slice it up in thin layers. And then it would be

sorted out. And then eventually sent to the factory where they put the insulation material into the planes.

So this would be minerals that had already been mined from the quarry--

Yes.

--of some kind, brought to this facility. And they would do the rendering of it into--

Yep.

OK, OK. Did you ever see her at this work? Did you ever go there?

No, I never-- no. The description I have and what she was doing I have that-- she told me some of it. And some of it from the interview.

And what kind of place was your father taken to? Do you know?

Yes. I mean, he was in a loft similar to where my mother and I were staying.

Only men?

In a different barracks. And then he had some very hard work to do. And it was getting cold, because it was the beginning of the winter.

What was his work? Do you know?

It was roadwork. He was digging ditches. And he had a very hard time, because it was cold. And he wasn't used to it. He would normally sit in his office, or he would go to the courthouse. But here he had to dig ditches.

And I'm very fortunate that there's a person that I met from Denmark. She lives outside Paris now. But she's doing as her thesis a report on Danes in Theresienstadt. And she's talked to a number of survivors like myself.

And she talked to one person who happened to be working with my father. And he says-- he was younger. He was one of the ones that came from Czechoslovakia or came from Germany to escape the Nazi regime. And he said that when the guards weren't looking he would dig for my father. Because he was used to that kind of work.

He also said that my father suffered a great deal. He had trouble with the work. And consequently, he was whipped and kicked. And he had a winter overcoat on. And apparently a guard came by and tore it off him and said, you don't wear that when you work.

And my mother tells me that he lost about 50% of his body weight and ended up in-- I don't know whether it's a hospital, but I call it infirmary. And he was there for several months. And they had great doctors, other inmates. But they didn't have the medical supplies. And they didn't have the tools. So he died of starvation. It was after less than six months in camp.

How did you learn of this? My mother told me.

While you were still in the camp yourselves?

Oh, yes.

How did she learn of it?

I don't know who told her. I don't know. But I know-- and she took me with her-- that she was asked to come and

identify my father's body. And we went many different places before she identified his body.

Did you see him?

Yes, unfortunately, yes.

Again, I can't imagine what that's like. I can't imagine what that was like for a young boy.

No, it's tough.

Yeah. When was the time-- do you remember now then when the last time was that you saw him still alive? Did you ever see him in the infirmary? Were you allowed to go to visit him there?

In the infirmary, I don't believe-- I don't remember being in the infirmary. I'm not saying I wasn't, but I don't remember it. But I do remember visiting him in the barracks. Which wouldn't be very long because, A, he worked these long hours. And B, I think there was curfew starting at 7:00 or maybe 8:00.

Were these wooden barracks? Were these--

No, some of them they had to add. Because originally, there was only room for about 6,000 people. And we were 60,000-plus. So they had to build temporary huts, I believe they're called. And they were wooden huts.

And that's where you were with your mother, or where he was?

No, no, no. We were in a barrack.

So within six months of having come to Terezin, your father's gone.

Yes.

That would have been about mid 1944?

It was March the 13th.

March the 13th. Even less time. Even less time.

Yes.

Very soon. And he would have been working in the winter months.

Yes.

There were 51 Danish Jews that died in camp, 41 of them within the first six months.

This you learned later?

Yes. A lot of it I learned later on. I mean, I've done a lot of research. So I want to know-- I mean, there was a time when my mother and I hardly spoke about it, which is very typical. And now I cannot read enough, or I cannot talk enough. Because it's changed completely.

What happened to yourself and your mother after that, after you saw your father? Excuse me, I'm going to back up a bit. Was there any possibility of burying your father? Was there any funeral? Was there any cemetery? Was there-- do you know what happened?

At that time, they had built a crematorium, not as a gas chamber, but to cremate all the bodies. Because they ran out of space in burying the bodies. So he was cremated and put in a paper cardboard box.

Were you able to keep that box?

No. We-- it's very strange. The kids were ordered to form a human chain later on from the crematorium to a river. And apparently close to 25,000 cardboard boxes were handed from one person to the other and eventually thrown into the river. And we're all kids doing that. And they all had a name and number on it.

And there was a boy-- and I learned that later on-- three years older than me. He knew that my father's name could suddenly show up, or his number. So he turned the box before it got to me. Which I happened to read about it. Somebody sent me Swedish newspaper. That's how I heard about it.

So you were on that line?

Yeah, I was on that line.

And were you thinking to yourself, my father's box is going to come by? I'm going to be handling it?

I don't know exactly what my thoughts were. Of course, it was just awful. I mean, to have children do that, it's just awful, when you think about it. Have adults do it. They shouldn't have children do it.

Because it is their parents.

Yeah.

For them, it is their--

Yeah.

So this is a person who knew you, knew your father's name, and turned the box around so you wouldn't see it.

Yeah.

Did you ever make contact with the person who saw your father on the road working and who helped him work through the woman who is doing this research?

No, I didn't. And I really wish I had. I don't think he lives anymore. I don't think he's alive anymore. But I don't know why I didn't make contact with him as soon as I heard about it. It's a good question. I don't know why I didn't.

Well--

Maybe I didn't want to hear anymore. I don't--

Maybe.

Yeah.

Maybe.

Subconsciously, I'd heard enough. But I'm glad I heard about it. Because it certainly confirms what you hear from other people the way the Jews were treated. So it's not a surprise.

No, but the sort of precious few sentences that a person can learn about someone who was their loved one, it's-- and

sometimes it's all somebody has to go on. Sometimes they don't even have that.

That's right.

So how did life continue for you and your mother at the camp?

My mother worked. There was one job she had. Another job was she was cleaning floors. And you can imagine that the Nazis didn't mark my father's death certificate dying of starvation or hunger. They put on pneumonia.

My mother was working in the factory. One day, an officer came in and asked her how she was feeling. She said, not very well. I lost my husband a couple of weeks ago. How did you lose your husband? And she said, he died of hunger or starvation, whatever she said.

He left. And the women on the floor all went around my mother and said, you could have been shot. This could have been serious for you. She said, that was the truth.

So the next seven days, the same officer came around. And he asked the same question. Now my mother had to say, pneumonia. And it's so hard for me to understand how anybody can be so cruel. But they're really trying to set an example, dehumanize us, and take all our dignity away. And they did that in many different ways.

Were you ever part or experienced any part of the Red Cross visit to Terezin where they were shown a model camp with-- did you experience that at all?

Yes.

How did that happen?

There's things I can remember. There's things I cannot remember, but I can tell you about, because I know quite a bit about it. The Danish administration wanted to see how the Danes were treated. At first, the Nazis didn't want to have them visited. But then they thought, we can use this to our advantage.

The propaganda machine went to work. They beautified the town.

You saw this?

Some of it I saw. Some of it I can remember. Some of it I heard later. So it's a--

It's a mix of all of it.

Yeah. The buildings were certainly-- they were washed. They were painted. They didn't look like a camp. They had a music pavilion. Had nice benches. They had fake store fronts with clothes in the stores. They had a cafe. They had a bank. In the back, they had nice looking new sinks. The problem was, if you turned the sinks on, nothing happened, because there was no plumbing.

They transported some young French children who looked healthy and who had nice clothes. They were playing. The visit was delayed three times, because they wanted to make sure that they were ready.

There was some music at Wunderbar played there. Children were playing. We had been told not to talk to the delegation. It was a delegation of two people from Denmark, one representing the Red Cross. Then there was a doctor from Switzerland. And then I believe there were a couple of Germans there also. And they were from the Red Cross.

I believe they spent four to six hours in camp. Had a Gestapo officer with them the whole time. They had to walk a certain way. Had a nice lunch there also. But there was a certain path they had to take, so they didn't see the bad things in camp.

We had been transferred from our loft to smaller but nicer apartments with more space. As soon as they left, we were moved back to the loft.

Did you get anything to eat during these four, six hours that was better than what you normally--

If we did, I can't--

You don't remember.

Yeah.

But you were there. It wasn't that you were behind the scenes. You actually were there--

I will say my mother was not there. And there were certain people they were afraid would talk to the delegation and tell them what was going on. And I guess my mother was one of them, because she had said he died of starvation.

Because she's tenacious, yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

And so she was escorted with some other people way, way out. And it's amazing. I got a book. It's in Danish. The chief rabbi, who was also in camp, wrote the book. And he mentions that example. And he writes my mother's name in the margin.

Oh my goodness.

Which, when I got the book, I couldn't believe it.

Oh my goodness.

Yes.

So you see this. And you're at that point 11 years old, something like that?

Almost 10.

Almost 10. Almost 10. That's right, excuse me. I mixed up the dates.

Don't get me too old.

Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

I mixed it up. Wow. Are there other instances that stick in your mind of unusual things that happened?

Yeah, there are a couple. And I think both of them I have from my mother. But I think they're a good example. I was growing, and I had outgrown my shoes. And my mother needed some shoes. So she bartered with a Czech lady. And the Czech lady got some Danish food. And my mother got used shoes for me.

Did we talk about food at all?

No. You said-- only when I asked about being a messenger did you get any extra rations.

Yeah, that's right. I should tell you a little bit about food.

Do tell us.

It doesn't take long. We got some substitute coffee, ersatz coffee for breakfast, with some bread. And then at lunch we would stand in line. And we would get soup. Most days it was called potato soup. It was really boiled water with potato peel. And maybe they got the meat of the potato. And then we got that at dinner also. And then we would sometimes get a pasta.

Some sort of little pasta in there.

Yeah, pasta. Dumplings, dumplings. Typical German dish. But we were very lucky. After six months, we started getting packages from Denmark and Sweden.

That's what I was going to ask, yeah.

And much of the literature will tell you it was only the Danes that got packages. That's not true. All nationalities were able to get packages. We probably got more than anybody else because there was probably more support behind--

That's right.

--behind us. And even though the food was rationed. So we started getting packages. Unfortunately, too late to save my father. When you read literature, and most of it is in Danish, the historians always tell you that Danes got packages. But they never tell you that it wasn't until six months later. And this is why I mentioned earlier 41 of the 51 deaths were in the first six months, obviously, before we got packages.

There's even one Danish historian who I had some email exchanges with-- I'm also tenacious like my mother. And he wrote a book and said in his book that there wasn't a single Dane that died in Terezin from starvation or hunger. They died from the hardship. Most of them were old people. And they just couldn't handle it.

So that I had a big problem--

Yeah, of course.

--a big problem with. And I'm not the only one. But we were fortunate to get all the packages.

By the way, how old was your father when he died?

He was 40 years young.

He was 40 years.

Yeah. And I always say, 40 years young.

A young man in his prime.

He was 40 years old in October 11, 1943.

Just turned 40.

And we talked about round birthdays. Normally, he would have had a birthday party. But obviously, he didn't have that.

But those cruel guards, they took some of the food packages. One that was addressed to my mother was very heavy

when she opened it up. And she couldn't understand why it was so heavy. And normally, the packages had food, vitamins, and clothing. And she couldn't find any of it. It was stones. Stones. Those guards had replaced it with stones.

And I always get very upset when I talk about it, because just keep the package. Don't put stones in instead. That's even worse.

Yeah. It's ridiculing the person.

Yes.

So people got packages addressed to them individually.

I have even through the help of somebody else found out who sent those packages.

Did you?

Yeah, which is amazing.

Well, who was it?

It was friends. It was family. My aunt in Copenhagen, my grandmother's sister, lived in a nice apartment. And she was single all her life. She had a housekeeper.

This is the one with the hats?

Yes. She just mentioned the hats. And she had a Christian housekeeper. And she sent us packages. And she maintained the apartment while she was gone.

What was your grandmother's name-- your grand aunt's name, the one who had the hat business?

Gerda, G-E-R-D-A, Michelson.

Gerda Michelson.

Yes.

OK. And do you remember the name of her housekeeper?

Oh, yes.

What was that?

Alla, A-L-L-A, Hoegdahl, H-O-E-G-D-A-H-L.

Thank you. Thank you.

Oh, yeah. I remember. She and I were friends. And I treated her as a member of the family, which everybody didn't do. And I loved food. And I would go down to her when I was hungry. [LAUGHS] And she would always help me.

And she would end up sending you packages.

And she sent us packages. And then after the war, I would go down-- she was at the end-- and get food there.

So the--

And I would borrow-- I would go out to the cemetery, because they have a plaque for all the Danish Jews that died in Theresienstadt. And my father's name is on. And I would go out there quite often when I was in Copenhagen.

And I would borrow her bicycle. And of course, I didn't own a hat, but I had to wear-- so I'd borrow a hat of hers.
[LAUGHS]

I still have that image of the line of children that you told me about, and those boxes.

Yes.

What did they look like, those boxes?

Cardboard.

What color?

They were square.

OK. About how big? If you--

About that.

OK. What color was the cardboard?

Neutral color.

Brownish, maybe? Or gray? If you remember.

More brownish than gray.

Did they have the top? Did they have a top? Or were they--

Yeah, there was a top. Oh, yeah. There was a top on it.

So you could take the top off and look at the ashes inside if you wanted to.

Yeah, yeah. But you didn't have time, because you had to pass it.

Were they heavy?

They were not very heavy. I mean, I didn't know there were 20-- that there were-- oh, did this fall off again?

OK, let's cut.

I'm sorry.

So one question I wanted to ask, when you were in Terezin, did you meet people who were from all over Europe? Or did you kind of stick with those who were from Denmark? How was the interaction between the prisoners?

I would actually play more with Czech children than with Danish children.

How did that come about?

I don't know how it started. Number one, there were more inmates from Czechoslovakia than from any other country. So that might have had something. The odds were that you would meet some Czech-- and we would play. But we also played soccer. And we found a gravel field where we could play. And we didn't have a real soccer ball. It shouldn't be a surprise they didn't give us that.

Of course.

But the mothers put together rags, clothing, tied them together. And we would kick it around. And I actually learned to speak the Czech language while I was there.

I would think, you know.

Phonetically, I learned it. And I told my mother I could speak the Czech language. And she didn't believe me. So I was tested by a Czech lady. And I passed the test, [LAUGHTER] which I think is quite funny.

I wish I could remember some of it later on. But you know, you forget it as fast as you learn it. So that I remember quite clearly. I also remember one time these children, boys, didn't show up to play soccer. And I went back to the barrack and told my mother about it when she got back. And she said, don't worry about it. They were probably just ill, or they couldn't make it. They'll be back in a few days.

What probably happened to those boys-- and my mother never shared that with me, because she was shielding her 9-year-old boy at that time-- they were deported to an extermination camp. And later on I found out there were 90,000 inmates out of 140,000 that passed through Terezin. It was almost like a hub. 90,000 deported to Auschwitz or other extermination camps. And 40,000 died-- starvation, illnesses, could be typhus or whatever.

So while Terezin was not known as a death camp, it really was a death camp when you think about all the people that lost their lives.

Yeah. I went to Terezin in the late '90s when it was all-- when the Czech Republic had already split from Slovakia, and when the country had regained its independence and so. And it had become a memorial site.

What I remember is this feeling of a very soulless garrison town. And the parts-- and not just the camp, but the town. Can you describe a little bit the geography of it, how it looked? Because some of the buildings seemed to be 19th century buildings. Did you have--

I was there in 2009. And it hadn't changed very much from the time we were there as I remember it. It was a garrison town, originally. It was a fortress. And it's very ironic. It was built originally to keep the Germans out.

[LAUGHTER]

And there were brick walls around. There were barbed wire. They had watchtowers around it. So that's how it was built originally. And maybe we talked about it earlier, to hold about 5,000 or 6,000 people.

No, we hadn't mentioned that.

Oh, it was built to hold 5,000 to 6,000 people. And we had up to 60,000-plus. Sometimes I think it went to 70,000. And of course, when the number went too high, then more and more people would be deported.

And Terezin-- of course, it was both-- I don't know if we mentioned that. It was both a concentration camp and a ghetto, because it was a town. And the museum was built exactly-- there was one museum that was built exactly where the children's barracks used to be. And you saw some of the museum. And I think they became free in '90-- it was in 1990. And then they built the museum.

So I think they probably had most of it--

That's right.

--when you were there. And they sure had it when I was there.

When you went there in 2009, was that the first time you had been back?

Yes.

Then that must have been quite a trip.

Yeah, we were on a trip in Europe. We were on a river cruise. And it ended in-- I forget where. It ended in Nuremberg. And I wanted to go in and see where they had the Nuremberg trial. Unfortunately, it was closed for whatever reason. And we went to Prague.

Not that far away.

Spent a couple of days in Prague. I told the museum I was a survivor. And they had somebody take me around and spent, I think, almost all day there. We just took a bus from Prague to the museum. It takes less than an hour. And then we walked around.

Eileen didn't want to see it as much as I did. It's hard on her. Eileen, my wife. And I saw quite a bit. And I'm glad I did. I even went to the archives, got some certificates from each person in the family.

Did anybody else in your family, your uncle or his side, did they survive it? Yes, my father was the only one that passed away.

Even your grandmother, your maternal grandmother--

My father's grandmother.

Paternal. Paternal grandmother, yeah.

She survived. And my father's name was Axel. And I still remember her saying more than once, it should have been me. She was 64. It shouldn't have been Axel. I mean, there's nothing worse than losing your child.

That's right.

So I'm glad I went back. Eileen was concerned that it would come back, the nightmares. But I'm glad I saw it for myself. I'm glad I did some research. And it was very, very helpful.

You mentioned--

I heard in my mother's-- I'm sorry. In my mother's CD she was asked, did you ever go back to Theresienstadt? And she answered in a very stern, really my mother's typical-- oh no. Once is more than enough. And I could just hear her say it again.

You mentioned nightmares. Did you have them after the war?

No, no. I was very lucky. I had and have some abandonment issues. Right after the war, my mother and I went back to the town where I was born, Odense. And without my father, I was afraid something would happen to my mother. So apparently I was hanging onto her skirt. And I still have some of those abandonment issues. But all in all, I've been very, very fortunate.

I mean, I don't know that I could have talked to you 10 or 15 years ago or 20 years ago. I don't think I could have talked to students 15 or 20 years ago. But now I'm on a mission. And it's very important for me.

What changed? What changed, yeah?

I think the book changed.

When you were doing your book.

When the book--

When you were researching and writing your book.

That changed a lot. What really changed it was, after I'd written my book, my oldest daughter had a son in middle school. And she went to the teacher. And they thought I should talk to the students.

And I didn't know how they would behave. Would they play around with their phones all the time? But I said, OK, I'll go. Didn't do a lot of preparation. Read some passages from my book and talked, but completely different to what I'm doing now.

I couldn't believe all the students that came in. There were over 100 students in the library. They started asking questions. My grandson, who at that time was quite introvert, asked questions. Afterwards, my daughter thought it was terrific. My grandson came back to me and said one of his friends said, your grandpa was awesome. [LAUGHS] And maybe that clinched it. But that became what I call the beginning of a new career.

I'm sorry if I jumped to the after--

No, no, no, that's OK.

--before we're finished.

That's OK. We'll go back. We'll go back. I led you there. I wanted to know. We started with nightmares. Because your wife had been concerned that you might have some.

Yes.

And many people who went through such things did have them.

Oh, yes. And there's some that don't want to talk about it.

That's right.

And I respect that.

Now, your children, did you tell them as they were growing up? Or was it part of you that they didn't know anything about?

No, they knew I had been in camp. They didn't know an awful lot, but they knew I had been in camp. And obviously they knew I was Jewish. They were--

Because you knew at this point.

Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

And Eileen and I, my wife-- they were brought up in the Christian faith. And that was something we had decided when we got married or before we got married. Probably before we got married. And there was no disagreement on that. So they knew about it.

But there was a lot they didn't know. And when the books came out, I made them read it. And they learned something new. There was no question about it.

As a matter of fact, the way the book came out was I wrote--

This was in 2011 that it came--

Yeah, April of 2011. So a little over five years ago. I wrote a memoir for my family. It was more than 300 pages. I can't imagine. I couldn't do it today, but I did anyway. And it was important for me.

And then I took-- somebody suggested, take all the chapters about the Holocaust and put it in a separate book. And I did that. I put them in separate book, A Danish Boy in Theresienstadt. But when I started the book, I didn't think about the war. I didn't think about the Holocaust. I just took year by year and worked myself through it. And then, of course, I came to the war years. And then I did some research and wrote down what I could remember.

I was very lucky. I got the interview my mother. And I got a couple of other things that have helped me a great deal.

And was this, then, the first time you had really revisited--

Yes.

--everything?

Yeah.

And that would have been 60 years after the war end?

Yes.

Something like that.

At least. At least. So October 2011, that's when I talk to my grandson's class. And that gave me inspiration, because they were so well behaved. They were so attentive. I just couldn't believe it.

They weren't fiddling on their phone.

No, no, they were not. They were amazing. And they told the teacher. And then we split our time between Florida and here, Chicago area. And then I started talking in Florida. And they were just as attentive.

And now what a lot of teachers are saying-- this is very important for you, talking to the students. Because you will be the last generation that will hear directly from the survivor.

That's true.

Yeah.

It's true. And has this helped you?

Oh, I think it's helped me a great deal. I could not imagine going to the grave without knowing what I know now. And I know so much more, not only from writing the book, but since then I've done more research. I've read books. I've talked to people. And you learn things all the time. So it's helped me greatly.

This has become a passion of mine. I mean, I don't understand why I can't talk to every school around here.

But it was the time-- I mean, that's such a dramatic change.

Oh, very much so. I mean, Eileen would probably-- if she was here, she'd probably say that I spend too much time in front of the computer and about this. But she understands. And she's very supportive.

And I mean, I cannot imagine this happening some years ago, but I've been invited to Springdale, Arkansas to talk at the end of October, and be there for three days. And I've been invited to my hometown to speak in November. They also--

In Denmark?

In Odense, yeah, in Odense. Invited there. And I wrote a long, long article for them in Danish and sent them pictures.

Has your book been translated into Danish?

My book has not been translated into Danish, no. No.

But they know of it.

Yes, they know of it. But this article was in Danish. And it took me twice as long as if it was in English. But I wrote it. And then I'm going to make a presentation, several presentations in my hometown-- also to the schools where I used to go. And those presentations will be in Danish. And when I walk in the morning I'm practicing. [LAUGHS]

And then in April next year, after Florida, I've been invited to Colorado, Greeley, Colorado.

Wow.

So it has mushroomed. It's just amazing.

Did you ever, after the war and in the decades since, have conversations in your head with your father and what you would have liked him to know about how life went on for you?

No. No, I didn't. That's an interesting question though.

Well, if you were to talk to him now, what would be the most important thing you think you'd want to tell him?

Oh, the most important thing that I want to tell my father is that, in your memory and knowing your memory and the six million other Jewish people that were perished, I'm doing this.

Let's go back now.

OK.

Let's go back to Terezin. And the last thing I remember asking you was about who are some of the other people in the camp and the nationalities. And you said you played mostly with the Czech children.

Yes. There were also, obviously, Danish children. There were German children. There were Dutch children.

Were there any non-Jews?

No, they were all Jewish. They were all Jewish. Except-- and I don't know if you remember it from your trip there. There was something called little fortress. That was political prisoners.

So you continue for about another year? When was Terezin liberated?

Let's go back to the Red Cross visits, maybe, to put it in perspective. That was June--

'44?

--23rd of '44. Terezin was liberated by the Russians on May the 8th.

'45.

'45. The Danes gained something unique. We were liberated by the White Buses. Have you heard about the White Buses?

No. Tell us about the White Buses.

Coming from Sweden, Sweden being a neutral country. And the White Buses managed to liberate over 15,000 inmates from many different camps, including Ravensbruck, where there were a lot of women in Ravensbruck. And they liberated-- at that time there were 421 Danish Jews left. And we were liberated. It was a convoy of about 20 buses.

And you were still in Terezin?

We were still in Terezin. And we couldn't believe it when we were told about it, because we had been there for 18 months. And now suddenly we would be liberated. So we didn't believe it until the buses arrived.

So how did this happen that the Swedish buses come before the Soviet troops?

What happened was the Danish administration not only wanted to inspect to see how we lived, but they still wanted to get the Danes out early. So there's a Swedish diplomat, being neutral, contacting the Nazis. And I believe they talked to Himmler and his staff.

At that time-- say, it was in February of '45, which is probably about the right time. At that time, I'm sure Himmler knew that the Germans were going to lose the war. He wanted to save his skin. He wanted to save his reputation. And he thought he would be treated differently. So he wanted a direct pipeline, a direct line to the Allies.

So they agreed to have the buses come into different camps and liberate not only the Danish Jews, but inmates from many other camps. We were one of the last buses that went through Germany.

So this was before May 8th?

Oh, yes. It was April-- I'm sorry if I didn't mention it. It was April the 15th.

So you never saw a Soviet soldier.

No, I never did.

And when--

April the 15th. It took us three days to come back. And we had to stop on the way. There was heavy bombardment, I think, on Potsdam, I think it was.

It would be. It would be. So did you look out the windows as you were driving through all these territories? Do you remember things?

I wasn't supposed to, but I did. I just glanced out. And I saw the youngest soldiers that I ever remember. They were in their teens.

German soldiers.

Yes. And our buses were white. They had Swedish flags on them and Red Cross on all sides. And of course, they were not supposed to shoot at us. And I heard later on that some of the Germans painted their trucks white so they wouldn't shoot at them.

[LAUGHTER]

Well, there's a logic to that.

Yes.

And it was probably the first decent food you had in over two years.

Oh, yeah. We got sandwiches. And we got hot chocolate. We got chocolate. The adults got tobacco.

But interesting about the Russian coming to camp. I didn't realize it until I started. May the 8th, they arrived. There were 17,000 prisoners left. There were some prisoners coming in from other camps. They couldn't leave for two or three weeks, because there was typhus. So they couldn't leave.

And I also talked to another survivor from Terezin. She was Czech. She lives five minutes from here. And I like to talk to other people. I learn something all the time. I'd heard rumors they were building a gas chamber in Terezin. She confirmed on Hitler's order-- his order was destroy all the Jews. Because he knew that the war was lost. And they were building the gas chambers. She confirmed it.

And they were starting building them in April. They were supposed to be operational the third week of May.

Oh my goodness.

And the camp was liberated May the 8th. And we were liberated April the 15th. It's very, very, eerie. Very.

Yeah. OK, when you get back to Denmark, do you go back to your hometown?

Yes.

Do you stay in Copenhagen? What happens?

We spent a couple of days in Copenhagen with family. The entire family expected us to move to Copenhagen because my father wasn't alive anymore. My mother wanted to go back to Odense. She liked it. She had met some nice friends. And we went back.

Our apartment had been rented out, which was very common because of a short of apartments. Contrary to what happened in many other occupied countries, the legal firm where my father worked had stored all our belongings for us. And apparently, this was done in many other Danish homes in Copenhagen. Sometimes I think the government had done that. And in many other countries, they were stealing left and right.

Of course.

So there are an awful lot of things that are unique to Denmark.

Now, when you had moved into this apartment, was it as owners or as renters?

It was a rental.

It was a rental.

It was a rental apartment.

So did you find another one?

Yes, my mother-- and I didn't think about it at the time. But it was apparent my mother got it very fast. Normally, you have to wait a long time. She got help, I think. The legal company may have helped her get the apartment. It was much smaller, but it was in the same complex.

And you stayed there? That is, you and your mother stayed at this apartment?

Yeah, we stayed there until my mother got married again.

Oh, she did?

No, actually, before she got married again we moved to a bigger apartment in a house, but still very close to the apartment complex.

And when did that happen, the second marriage?

'51.

And you were at this time, then, 16 years old?

Your math is good.

[LAUGHTER]

Was that, let's say, one of the more significant events in your post-war life?

Depends whether it's good or bad. But--

Well, I wanted to be neutral in asking it.

It was not one of my happier moments. Apparently, I said to my mother, don't marry for my sake. And it was a difficult situation, which it often is, yes. I mean, we had been the two of us for a long time.

And how many more years did you live with your mother and your stepfather?

I lived there until '53 when I graduated from high school. And then I moved to a smaller town. I was there for a couple of years. That was really the last time I lived there, what I will call permanently. Later on I had to join the armed forces. And I was really upset, because I shouldn't join the armed forces. I had been in camp for 18 months.

And there was nobody really-- I think my father would have fought for me. But my stepfather was not interested in doing that. And I felt sorry for myself.

And then I had some other jobs. And then-- but it was the last time I really lived there for-- part of my time in the armed

forces, I stayed there. And then I joined a Danish food company. And I joined them because I wanted to see part of the world. Denmark was a small country. And most of their business was abroad.

So I went to England. And it turned out that Eileen, my future wife, so to speak, and I lived in the same area. I think we talked about it off--

Off camera.

--off camera. In Notting Hill Gate. And we probably went to the same grocery stores, maybe the same movies.

Did you see each other there?

No, no.

Oh, you didn't meet each other there?

No, we didn't meet at all. And then I was sent to Canada. And we met in Canada.

Where?

At a party. I was doing for the company, food exhibition for Plumrose, the Danish company. And a Dane that I didn't know came up, talked to me, and said, we're having a party on Saturday. Would you like to come? And it was still the beginning, almost, of my time in Canada. I didn't know that many people.

Where were you based? Where was this--

In Toronto.

In Toronto, OK.

We had a small office in Toronto. So I went there. Turned out to be a surprise party for Eileen. It was her birthday. It was the evening of September 30. Her birthday is October 1. Next Saturday. And we met there. And I guess the rest is history.

How lovely. How lovely. I think we're kind of close to the end of our interview.

OK.

Is there anything I haven't asked that you think we've missed that is important, that you would like people to know about?

Yeah, a couple of things. We talked about my passion for talking especially to students. And in those five years-- it's really almost to the date five years since I started-- I've covered about 30,000 people, mostly students.

That's amazing.

And probably about 260 groups. I keep track of every one of them. Typical ex-business person. And I know I've exceeded 30,000. I don't know when, but I started talking to the people how important it is that we never forget the Holocaust. And it's becoming increasingly more important, because there are more and more people that are denying that it took place, especially in Europe. And there's also anti-Semitism going on. And I want to make sure that everybody hears it directly from me.

So I'm asking each person to share with at least four people. And if each person does that, that adds up to 120,000, if my math is right. So that's become very important to me.

And I actually-- I wish-- a lot of people think I just sit at the phone waiting for some-- or email for somebody to say, I want a presentation. But I have to work at it.

I can imagine. I can imagine.

I have to use some of my old salesmanship. So I think that's very significant.

It is.

And it's very significant-- and I think we might have talked about it before-- that I've changed completely from not really talking about it. Now I cannot talk enough about it, cannot read enough about it.

I want to add one thing, which is important. And I think it's important for a couple of reasons. At the museum--

Which--

--in Washington D.C.--

That's right.

You have some big-- what do you call them-- not statue, but-- where you write about events. Like in Theresienstadt, you wrote about what happened in Theresienstadt, what happened to the Danes and so on in big-- not tapers. I'm sorry. I can't remember the word.

Oh, you mean-- that's part of the exhibition?

Yeah, it's part of the exhibition.

OK. On some panels or some--

Panels. Thank you. I think you call them panels. And some time ago I found out some of the information I didn't think was correct. And I know how important it is for the museum to--

Be accurate.

--transfer the right information. And I was out at a school. And some of them talked about what they had read in the document. This also happens to be on the tape. So I worked with the museum. And they're going to change the panels.

And I realized it takes some time. And I'm not always the most patient person in this world.

[LAUGHTER]

But it has to go-- take the right steps. But within the next couple of weeks I believe the new panels will be on display in the museum.

Well, congratulations.

And it's very gratifying. Because-- also to the museum. Because I know they want the museum to be correct.

Of course they do. And thank you for your efforts. It's through such efforts that we can be more precise and we can be more accurate.

Mr. Steen, thank you so much. I shouldn't say Mr. Steen. Steen. [LAUGHS] Thank you so much for talking to us today,

for sharing your story, for sharing also the hard parts of it, and letting us have a view of what your experience was.

I will say that, for now, this will conclude the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum effort-- you want to say something else?

Yeah, may I?

OK, sure, go right ahead.

Yeah. Thank you very much for conducting this in such a professional way, and your knowledge. And I'm glad to do it. And I really want the world to know what the Holocaust was like.

Well, your voice will be able to be heard by anybody who clicks on the website. And that is one of the purposes of this museum. So thanks.

Thank you.

OK. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Steen Metz on September 26, 2016. And what we're going to do now is film some of your photographs. So let's cut now.

And rolling.

OK, so Steen, tell me, who is in this photograph?

This is my father, Axel Metz. I don't know exactly when it was taken. But obviously, it was taken before we were arrested in '43. So I would guess it might have been taken in '40 or '41.

At that time, my father would have been about 38 years old. And I think he looks a lot older than 38. But they do dress differently.

Well, he does also seem like a young man, though, a very--

Thank you, yes.

--a young man who-- and a gentle man. OK, thank you very much. And--

OK, and tell me who is?

This my mother, Magna. And she was married again, but I'll call her Magna Metz, because I like that name the best. And I believe she was about 85 years old when the picture was taken. It was taken during the summer when Eileen and I, my wife, we were in Odense, my hometown. And it's one of my favorite pictures.

And she died five years later. She was 90 years old when she died. And she was amazed that she lived so long. And she said that in the interview, especially after what she went through. And I like to think that I got some of her good genes, so I continue to talk to students for a while longer.

OK, thank you. Thank you very much. OK, tell us about this photograph.

This is a very unique photograph, which I found on the internet some years ago, before I issued my book or published my book. This is the only photo taken of the arrest of Jewish people in Denmark. It was actually taken by a person from a balcony right opposite. And it shows 60 Jewish people being assembled in a schoolyard in the center of Odense.

And you can see the truck in the picture. And we were driven there on the truck. And later on, we were taking the same truck to the western part of Denmark and then herded into a cattle car on our way to Terezin.

So you're one of those 60 people.

Yes, and I've looked with magnifying glass and everything, and I can't find it. Interestingly enough, the person that took the picture put it away. And his son found it.

That happens sometimes.

Yes, it does.

Thank you very much. OK, so tell me what it is that you have in your hand.

Last year when we were in Florida, I talked to a sixth grade school. The name of the school was St. Andrew Catholic School in Cape Coral Florida, just outside Fort Myers, Florida.

These students were as attentive and as interested as anybody. And they tried the website of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, because they thought I would be on the website. I will be from now on.

That's right.

But they were very dear. And after the presentation, they wrote me a long, long poem. And I'd like to-- I'll never forget it. I had tears in my eyes when I read it the first time. And it's amazing the things they remember from my presentation.

So share some of that with us, could you?

You're Steen Metz, a Holocaust survivor. You were born May the 5th, 1935 in Odense, Denmark. You were a happy boy who loved ice cream. You saw Nazi soldiers on every street corner, starting in April, 1940.

You still enjoyed a vacation with your family. Your terror began the day the Nazis pounded on your apartment door. You had 30 minutes to gather your valuables. You wondered why only some families were taken by the Gestapo. You were afraid riding in the crammed cattle cars for three days and three nights as some died.

And then the last one. We are sixth graders at St. Andrew Catholic School in Cape Coral, Florida. We love that you came to speak at our school. We believe that you're a lantern shining the light of truth that was the Holocaust. We are thankful for your book to read more of your story. We understand your idea to be an upstander, instead of a bystander. We say, we accept your challenge to be ambassadors to tell the truth of the Holocaust. We will never forget you, Steen Metz.

That's lovely.

Yeah, it is lovely. And they refer to upstander because in some of my talks, I use the word upstander. There were too many people that were standing by during the war. And we need more upstanders. And if you can have bystanders in the dictionary, you can have upstanders also.

Absolutely. Thank you very much.

And they actually gave me a lantern. Yeah.

Thank you very much. And that's what some of the poems are. And we can pan from top to bottom.