

We're on. OK, we're on.

All right. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Martin Leiser. On February 26, 2017 in Boca Raton, Florida. Excuse me.

Yes, you're right.

Is it-- I'm right?

You're right.

OK, I thought I got my date wrong.

No, you're right.

Thank you, Mr. Leiser, for agreeing to meet and speak with us today. You have now heard the testimony from your wife and from your sister-in-law. So you probably know what my first questions are, so I'll go straight to them. And they are, can you tell me what was the date of your birth?

May 27, 1931.

May 27, 19-- and where were you born?

Vienna, Austria.

And what was your name at birth?

Martin Joseph-- Jozi, actually. Martin Jozi Leiser.

So it didn't change. Sometimes, people's names have changed, but yours has stayed the same.

Yes.

OK. Tell me a little bit about your family. Let's start with your siblings. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had two sisters. One was called Rosa.

Rosa?

And the other was called Susie.

Younger or older than you?

They were both older than me because I was a child that was born after my children-- my parents lost a boy of two years old. And my father was beside himself because he always wanted a boy to carry on the Leiser name.

I see.

So after Susie was born, they tried for a boy. And after 13 months, my sister Rose was born. But he didn't give up. So I guess a few years later, I was born in 1931. And they were born-- I think Susie was 11 years older than I was.

Oh, that's quite a bit.

Yeah. And my sister Rose was about 10, I guess-- 10 years older than me.

Oh, so there's really--

Big difference.

--a big difference.

I was born because they lost a child. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here today.

So like your wife, you're the baby of the family.

Yes, I was, and I was treated as such. I mean, as long as I made my father happy, that was the big thing, because my father was so happy with joy, that my sisters told me that he took me and brought me downstairs in front of the house and started to dance with me. "A boy! A boy! I finally got my boy." And that was it. My father was a very religious man.

What was his name?

His name was Benzion-- Benzion.

Like Benjamin or Ben?

No.

No. Ben-- Benzion?

Benzion, yeah.

Your mother's name?

My mother's name was Sarah, but everybody called her Sali. Why, I don't know, but her real name was Sarah.

And her maiden name?

My who?

Her maiden name?

Griffel.

Griffel.

And my father-- if you want me to talk to you about him?

Yes, yes, please do. Tell me about him.

My father was born in Romania. And he also had-- much of brothers, they were scattered somewhere in the United States, and so on. One was very close with him, and he also had almost the same name as my father.

And when the First World War broke out, they were in the Austrian Army. They were drafted. My father's brother, though, was a doctor. And being that they were brothers, and although he was a lieutenant, and my father was just--

A private?

Yes. They stuck-- hung around. And at that time, my father's brother, my uncle, had met a fellow who was in the army a long time-- was a little older than him, had a high rank. He was like a major, I guess-- something like that. But they kept contact. And when they went out, my father was treated like the officers because he was with his brother and another officer that had a higher rank.

When the war was over, and the First World War, they kept track to each other. And of course, there was no thing like telephones at that time, basically. But once in a while, they got together, like once or twice a year. And as things were going on, before Hitler came in, he was in the army, and he had gone to a higher rank also at the time.

--your father or your uncle?

No, my uncle got out of the army. He was drafted, you know? And he went to go private practice, but they were friends. I mean, he-- the other fellow I'm talking about-- he stayed in the army. And by this time, he was already one step below a general. That's how good.

When Hitler came into power, he became a general because he was in the army, Austrian Army, and he was very well-known. He still kept in contact with my father's brother and with my father also, somehow. At least they'd write to each other. I'm telling you this for a reason, not because I'm telling you about-- the reason I tell you this is because of him, lots of good things happened in my family.

Later on?

Later on. And as the years pass through, my father was in the army, and he was on the battlefield.

In World War I.

World War I. He was hit with shrapnel in his back. The shrapnel was very close to the spine. And in those times, those years, they would not operate, because if they would have cut something in his spine, he could have been a cripple for sure. And so my father had to live with the shrapnel, which was very close to his-- body was-- where the--

Sciatic nerve, might be?

No, it was very close to, I think, his kidneys. OK, that's what it was. And he got out of the army. He got into a business. He met my mother. They got married.

Your mother is from Vienna?

No, my mother was born in Poland. She came here with her four sisters and about five brothers. All the families were a lot larger. They didn't have television.

That's one explanation.

Best way I could do it. And so when they went through the war, and my father, when he was-- when my father was-- started getting ill around in 1935, '36, he started getting pain in his back. What he was afraid of-- that it shouldn't hit that part--

That kidney.

Yeah. And what happened right around the time that Hitler came in, he started seeing that the shrapnel had gone very, very close to his kidneys. He started to complain a lot, and my mother had to go out and do the business that he did. My father, by the way was in the business-- I'm sure you want to know-- it's probably-- he went into business by himself.

What he did is he was the kind of guy that came around with a big book. And when people-- the clothing stores,

whatever you want. If you want the clothing, if you wanted to buy a house, if you wanted anything at all, he was the one that got it for you, and he got it for you at a good price. So he would-- somebody would call up and say, I need new shoes. Where's a good place to get it?

And these are people usually they didn't have the full money. That's why they called him. So what he did he, would take them to the store that they needed the shoe. He would introduce them to the place, then he'd wait to see what happens-- if the guy would buy the shoe.

The guy would give, maybe, let's say, like \$10, for example. My father would put out the rest. But he owed my father money with interest, and that's how my father ran his business. Whatever you wanted, if you wanted it, you called him up. He came to your house. What is it that you need? Whether it was a woman, whether they need a curtain, whether they needed-- whatever it was they needed.

I've never heard of that particular job before.

That was his own business, and he did very well with it. He did very nicely because there were a lot of people that didn't earn a big living at that time. That's one of the reasons that Hitler got so big-- because the people that were his followers were complaining that they're not making money.

They're poor.

And so they got behind him. And they said, we have to do something about it. And he took advantage of it. And he said, don't worry. We're going to unite everybody, and we're going to get money. And everybody will have a car by the time I get through. And that's how you got the Volkswagen because Volkswagen means "for the people."

That's right. "The people's car."

Or the people's car, better yet. And he did do that, as you know, eventually. Today, we still have the Volkswagen, but Hitler is no longer around.

That's right.

But nevertheless, this went on. And--

Excuse me, I'm going to interrupt a little bit and go back a bit.

Yes, go.

Your father, then, when you were born, had his own business.

Yes, he did. He had two daughters.

And he had two daughters. And your mother's name was-- once again?

Sarah.

Sarah Griffler.

Griffler, before they got married.

Yeah, Sarah Griffler Leiser. And did she come from a large family?

Yes, there were--

How many sisters were there?

I have pictures of some of them. There were four sisters, and there were five brothers.

That's really large.

I told you, they had no TV. What could they do?

And you say they came from Poland?

They came from Poland, yes.

What part of Poland?

I don't know. I really don't know what part. I never-- you know, I was a little guy, and it was the least thing interesting--

You never went to Poland--

No, I did not. Neither did my sisters, my two sisters.

And was your mother the only one of the family to end up in Vienna? Or were there more?

No, all his-- I have pictures here that I'll show you soon. She had four sisters that were there. One of them was married to also a very religious Jewish guy. That was my Uncle Max. And my father was also very religious. And I mention that for a reason.

And my mother helped my father in the business. When he saw he was getting sick, more and more sick, he said, I don't know how long I'm going to last, so you have to know how to do the business to carry on. He taught her different things so that when he couldn't go anymore, my mother took over his business. And that's what we say.

Now, we lived in a very nice house at 26 Vereinsgasse.

26 Vereinsgasse?

Yes.

That would be V-E-R-E-I-N-S-G-A-S-S-E?

I think so. And we had a nice apartment on the second floor-- one of the better apartments. We were always on the second floor. We had a nice, big veranda. And when it was hot in the summertime--

Excuse me. Sorry. I'm sorry. Was there water or something? OK, sorry. I'm sorry, I thought I heard a noise. So when there was-- in the summertime, you had a veranda?

So my two sisters used to fight who was going to sleep outside on the veranda. And I was a little guy. I was busy throwing things over the [? fence ?] in the backyard.

That's the more important activity.

Right. So I did that. And--

What did the place look like?

What?

Describe it to me. Paint a picture.

First of all, it was on a second floor. My father took an apartment. They only had two of them like that on the same floor. Everybody else did live on the bot-- on the--

The ground floor.

The ground floor or the second floor, even. If they had to go to the bathroom, there was only one bathroom for all the others. The ones that had the bathroom right outside their door-- that was a novelty, and you had to pay extra for it.

But we had a bathroom that we said, wow, we can open the door and open up the next door. It was like home. And the guy, whoever had it, whoever had it at that time, also had that. My father paid for it extra because he wanted his family to have it that much more comfortable, right.

So if I understand rightly, the bathroom was in the hall-- in the corridor.

If this was the door, you turn out to the left, and here was a bathroom.

Got it.

Which was a--

Very close, yeah. Sometimes, bathrooms were-- toilets were, let's say, up a flight of stairs or down a flight of stairs in some buildings, but yours was right there.

They had one on the floor and maybe two. I don't know, maybe-- I was a little kid. Maybe they had two. But it wasn't ours. Whenever we had to go, we had to pull the chain down next door, and that's what it was at the time.

What about indoor plumbing? Did you have running water?

Yeah, we had the sink-- a sink there. And when my mother wanted-- when anybody had to take a bath, they had like-- I think somebody told you here already tonight. They had what they call a [NON-ENGLISH] You ever see the cowboy pictures, where the cowboys would sit in a sitting [INAUDIBLE] That's what we had.

It was hidden in the kitchen underneath the sink. And whenever we wanted to take a bath, they would pull out the thing. My mother would make hot water. And then when it got too hot, she added it just right. And that's how we took a bath in the--

How did you drain it?

Huh?

How did you drain it, that tub--

I don't know. It wasn't my--

That wasn't your job.

It wasn't my job, man. But that's how it was.

Did you have electricity?

What's that?

Did you have electricity?

Electric?

Did you have electricity in your home?

Yes, definitely.

Did you? How did you heat your home?

What did you say? How did we keep it?

Heated.

Heated? We had a [NON-ENGLISH] oven.

OK, so a coal oven.

Right. And that was in the dining room. And we had a very nice dining room. And I really don't know how the other ones were because I was just too little at that time to know. But I know that whenever we needed it, and whenever we had a holiday, or we had people over, everybody would be in that dining room.

Because it was the warmest room?

Right. I'm sorry, I'll let you go on, but just let me get my technical questions out of the way.

Definitely.

So did you have a radio?

Yes, I think there was a radio there.

And a telephone?

No phone.

Did your father have a car?

No car. My father couldn't afford a car.

And did you a mother have help at home, or did she do--

No, my mother did everything on her own. She was a whiz-- whatever. She had two girls, and she had the two girls when she went out and did my father's business. She used to say-- Rosie used to do this and took care of the cooking, or Susie would be a good-- they both learned how to cook and everything else. They would do it, and they would take care of the little guy. And my two sisters were crazy about me because I was something-- you know, small.

You were the youngest one, yeah.

They used to walk me, and they used to-- with a carriage.

They would take you places?

Take good care of me while my mother was out. Not that my mother didn't-- my mother used to come cook. Sometimes the girls would cook. And both my sisters became good cooks because my mother taught them how.

As I've asked many people, tell me, what were your parents' personalities like? What was your mother like? What was your dad like, as far as their characters, their personalities?

My father was a nice man, but he was kind of strict with his daughters. That's the way, at that time, in those years. You got to put your kids in place, so they don't take advantage of you type of thing.

My mother was much easier, though. When my father yelled, my mother said, shh. You know? Leave him alone, or because they'd start crying-- whatever it was. Nobody ever picked on me as far as that's concerned, because if they would, they'd have to contend with my father.

So you were his darling?

Yeah. So what happened is that-- we went on as the years went by. And unfortunately, my father got to the point where he couldn't stand the pain. He was just in-- my mother's brother was a doctor. And she used to say, Ignatz, help him. He's crying.

And he said, what do you want me to do, Sally? Because I have no medicine. It's not for Jews. They won't give it to us. What can I do? So he was ahead, and he used to take the thing that he usually-- that usually puts medicine in to give him an injection.

And the first time my father took it, and then he saw it was-- my father wasn't stupid. He saw that his pain was still there. So he said to him the next time, Ignatz, get away from me with that thing. I know you're pumping water into me. You're hurting me more than I'm hurt. So that took care of Ignatz.

So in other words, he was pumping water into him?

He was. He put water in. It didn't do anything to hurt him, but it didn't do anything to help him, either. So what happened was that my father just had to suffer the pain. It came to a day when my father couldn't do it anymore. He died.

When did he die?

I believe in 1937. And--

And you were seven years old? Six years old?

About six and a half-- about six and a half years old, something like that. So my mother's-- one of my mother's sisters had a husband who was very religious, I told you. And he was called. She got a hold of her sister and said, my father died. My husband died.

And make sure Max comes down and teach him how to say the Kaddish for my father. So she said my father wouldn't rest in peace unless at least his son [INAUDIBLE] So he came down, and was my father was laying there, and everything else. He taught me how to say the Kaddish, which was the prayer for the dead. And I went ahead, and then when they buried him, I was at the grave. And I said it.

That's a lot for a little kid.

Well, my Uncle Max made sure that I did it. And he was so strict, because he was very religious, that he said, you say it that way I tell you, not the way you read it. I said, what do you want? He said, you will say it [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Every word has to be pronounced, or your father wouldn't be happy.

So I did it. And that went on. And then my mother took the business. The girls did what they had to. And a couple of years-- a year or so later, the next thing we heard rumors that something is going to happen to the Jews, that Germany is going to countries, and that they're going to come to Austria next.

So it hadn't been annexed yet.

What's that?

Austria had not been annexed yet.

No, not yet. I think it was 1937 with the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

I thought it was '38.

Oh, '38. It could be '38. I'm not sure. I was a little kid. What happened was that, sure enough, one day-- I think was around November-- all of a sudden, we heard loudspeakers-- trucks that had loudspeakers. And you heard a lot of noise. You heard that there were Nazis there. They said we have taken over Vienna, and Austria is ours.

And, yay! You know-- everything. Our neighbors had come out. Some were wearing the brown uniforms. That was the SR. And the rest were the black uniforms. They were Hitler's men.

And you saw this as a little kid?

And-- wait. And they said, you will now hear from Kurt, Kurt Schuschnigg, your leader. He has to say something to you. Somebody said that. And the next thing we heard was in a very weak voice that Schuschnigg came on.

And he said, my dear fellow people, this is the last time that you will hear from me. As you have heard, Adolf Hitler has come to Austria. He has taken it over. You will be dealing with him. As I speak to you, you will hear our national anthem for the last time. And then I will be taken out and be shot.

He actually said that?

Yes. They told him. And as they told him, that somebody hit him with the butt of a rifle, I understand. And [INAUDIBLE] And right after he said that, they played the last time the Austrian anthem. And after that, what went on was, Deutschland, Deutschland, [SINGING IN GERMAN] And they were all saying, today, we have Austria. And tomorrow, we will have the whole world.

And this was over those loudspeakers?

Yes. This was over the loud-- this was on the radio.

So which way did you hear it, on the radio?

I heard it on the radio, but then I heard it downstairs because they were on our block.

I see.

But I actually heard it on the radio. And after that, the radio cut out. And they continued. And after they sang "Deutschland, Deutschland," [GERMAN] you understand-- over everything. We heard a lot of noise. And they started to go around, and they started-- it must have been Kristallnacht because the next thing you heard was the shattering of windows. And they picked on all the Jewish places because it was marked with a capital J in paint. So everybody knew where the Jews had their businesses.

Excuse me?

Yes?

I think these are two different events-- the takeover of Austria and Kristallnacht. I don't think they occurred on the same day. Kristallnacht was in November.

Yes.

And the takeover was in March.

Was it?

Excuse me, can we cut just for a second?

Yeah.

Actually, I had a question

OK, we're rolling now.

OK.

OK.

So we got that established that it was March '38 when Austria is annexed, and the following November is Kristallnacht. Well, tell me about Kristallnacht, though-- that I'm sure you remember it.

Well, Kristallnacht-- yes, what happened at Kristallnacht is that they had gone through all the streets. And every time-- every place there was a J written on a property that was owned by Jewish people, that came in. They smashed the glass, which is why they call it Kristallnacht, I guess. And they would go in, and they would raid it, and they would loot it. They would take whatever they wanted-- all the guys with the uniforms.

Did someone come to your apartment?

This was not apartments. I'm talking about businesses, now. In my apartment, I will tell you when they do. And that's-- they took what they wanted. And I believe right after that time, when they did that, they were so upset with whatever they-- they were in such a mood that I think a day or two later, there were a couple of people that knocked on my door-- on our door.

They didn't knock on the door. They pounded on the door. And they would yell, open up. This is the Gestapo. Or if you don't, we will break it down.

Who was at home?

All of us-- my mother, my sisters, and myself. My mother opened the door right away, and they came in. I think it was two SS men and one SR man came in-- about three-- I don't know. It was about three guys. And they said, you are losing this apartment. It is too good for Jews.

We have people that need it that are more patriotic, and they want to have your apartment. You have 10 days to get out. If not, we will have you on the street, which was a nice thing to hear.

And he says, and-- as a bonus what they did was they told my mother, you will come with me to wash the streets with the other old women. And your daughters are going to go to the [NON-ENGLISH] to polish boots for our soldiers. So both my sisters started to cry, you know?

And I started to cry, because I said, who's going to take care of me? I don't want to be alone. Don't take everybody with you, I said to the guy. He said, all right, you-- stay with him. That was my older sister, Sue. And you, you go to the [NON-ENGLISH]. We will take you there. And so my sister Sue went-- my sister Rose went over to [NON-ENGLISH]. My mother went downstairs to start what they wanted her to do. And she was--

Excuse me. I'm sorry.

Tell him to keep quiet and go in another room.

Are we cutting or not?

He should know better. They took my mother and my younger sister, Rose-- took her downstairs. They put her in the car. They took her to [NON-ENGLISH] to do what they wanted. My mother was taken to wash the streets with other older women. My mother was a smart woman. And she said, if they take her to the [NON-ENGLISH], she'll never come out alive. She was only 15 at the time, I think.

Oh, that's a dangerous age.

And she said, I have to do something for my children. And she said, I got it. I'm going to call up so-and-so-- the name of the guy that my father was friendly with.

The general?

Yeah.

The guy who became the general.

And she got a hold of the guy before she started washing the streets. So the guy was like a sergeant there, sergeant. And she said to him, I have something important to talk to you. Where can we talk? She took him aside. He said, what's the matter? You're going to tell me that you can't wash the street?

And she said, no. She said, I'm going to tell you something more important. You know such-and-such? Of course, who doesn't know him? My husband and him were in the war together in the First World War. They are very good friends. If he finds out who put me to do this, and my daughter go to [NON-ENGLISH] to do that, you will go to the Western Front, unless they kill you first.

He said, I don't believe you. This is a test. She said, would I tell you to call up a man like that? He would kill me on the spot. And you wouldn't-- they wouldn't say anything. He said, I will call him, but you better be right. So he went inside.

And this was a sergeant, so he told them, make a telephone call to General So-and-so, whatever it is, and tell him someone important has to talk to him. He didn't talk to my mother, but he asked the guy, what is the name of this woman that you are telling me about? And he told him, Sarah Leiser. He said, Sarah Leiser? What are you doing with her?

He said, she is part of the people that are washing the streets, and her daughter is in the [NON-ENGLISH] shining boots. He said, you get that woman out of there and bring her to our house immediately. But before you do that, you better get her daughter out of the [NON-ENGLISH] And if it isn't done in the next half hour, you will be paid for terrible. Yeah, but I didn't-- you just do it. And he hung up on him.

He went, and the guy immediately took my mother, and with her they went to pick up in a car my sister. And my sister had been shining boots. And my sister is going home in the car with my mother. She says, I don't know how you got me out of here, but I never would have left the place.

And he said, what do you mean? She says, they told me that she was crying, that when I get through shining the boots, they will-- the soldiers will rape me. And they will rape me till I die.

So now, my mother got my sister home. And of course, I was happy to see her. And my sister said after this, I have to get my children out of here before they kill us all. And I don't know how yet, but she did have a brother that went to Palestine before he saw what was going on with Hitler going to all the other countries.

So she said, I wish we could send her to Palestine. So my sister Susie was going with a boy that was crazy about her. She went with him from the time he was 14, he was 16. And she went and said, we have to get you out. And his name was Willie. Willie said, what good timing. She said, what do you mean, what good timing? He was a member of Betar. Have you heard of Betar?

Betar? Tell us, just in short, what is Betar?

Betar was an organization for all Jewish boys, that they would eventually become the soldiers of Israel. And they were sending them out by the boatload. And if they were engaged to somebody, they can take their person with them.

OK, so this was a nascent--

--my mother heard this, she said, answer to my prayers. She went immediately and told him, come on. I'm going to get you married, she said. My sister was 17 at the time. And she said, I'm going to get my daughter married, and then you can take her. And she's not going unless she's married.

So my mother made her a quick wedding. I don't know how she put everything together within a week. There was a wedding for all-- it was only relatives. My sister was now married at 17 to Willie. And the boat took over-- there was a boat that was leaving. They made the boat on time.

Where was the boat leaving from?

From Vienna someplace. I don't know. It went from wherever the closest place was for a boat to be. I don't know that. They got on his boat, wherever it was, and they were on their way to Palestine.

So that left your older sister and you still?

It left my younger sister because this was my older sister. My other younger sister was 16. My older sister was 17 because there was like 13 years--

Right.

So my sister said, I got rid of one, now I have to get the other one out. The only way that she could get us out was by calling a relative in America.

By phone?

What? No, she had to write a letter. We had no phones. We had nothing like that. She sent a letter to a cousin, her aunt's daughter, who happened to be a pharmacist who owned not one, but two pharmacies.

Where?

She had them in New Jersey, right near a beach. I don't know exactly where it was. But she had two of them there, one on each side of the country. And the letter went out as fast as the post could get to it.

And she said, my children are going to get killed unless I get them out of here. Please send affidavits, because the President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, who everybody thought was God's gift, is the biggest bastard in the

world because he will not let anybody go. He will not have any burdens on his country, on his people.

Your mother wrote that in a letter?

No, no, no, no. She told him-- I added on the part of-- you know. If you don't help my children get out, they will die. You know, this is what-- the reason--

What she wrote, yeah.

I mean, she did tell him, the reason being that the President of the United States of America will not let anybody in unless they will-- have to have somebody who will vouch for them that they will be taken care of by someone in the [INAUDIBLE] Well, she was very nice-- the cousin of his. She immediately spent-- she had her husband, also, who had-- in the other store.

So they doubled the [INAUDIBLE]. She immediately got to work on it. And she telegraphed it out within-- she had it within a week, my papers and everything else. Now, my mother was very happy. So we said, why don't you do it? Why aren't you coming with us?

Right.

She said, oh, I will follow you. I will follow you. I have to do some things for my sisters. She was the one, when they had problems, they ran to her. What shall we do? How shall we do it? Meanwhile, while this went on, we had to get out of the apartment.

Apartment, yeah.

So her sister, one of her sisters, which I'll show you a picture of her, was married to this Uncle Max, who was the fella that-- he told me how to say--

The prayer.

--the prayer. And she said, do you know anywhere I can move with my family? I don't care if it's one room, but I have to get out. We'll be in the street. And her sister said, you're very lucky. There's a bakery here across the street from me. And upstairs, they have a vacancy room. They have rooms.

How do you know that? Because I'm friendly with the baker, and he said he's trying to rent it. So I will go across the street right now, and I will see that you will get it. My mother was told where it was. It was at number 3 Holland Strasse.

How do you spell it?

Holland Strasse.

Holland Strasse-- like Holland.

Yes.

Holland Strasse.

And it was about a block away from where the Danube was-- went through. It was the sad side of Vienna. It was not the good part. It was the bad part.

Before I forget, what [NON-ENGLISH] did you live in?

I don't know if it was-- I think it was the [NON-ENGLISH] but I'm not sure.

You think it's the second one?

Yes.

You think it was the second district of Vienna?

I think so. So what happened was that my mother knew that they're going to get the children out and so on. Meanwhile, she had other problems, you know? And with her sisters, they needed help. They needed her. And she wasn't busy getting for herself, but she heard that her youngest brother was taken to Dachau concentration camp.

Now, she has to help him. So she went and wrote a letter-- she did-- to the fellow that helped her and her daughter out. She said, please do me a favor. This is my youngest brother. Adolph denied that they have all the people here. His wife is seven months pregnant, and he's in Dachau. Please get him out, because they'll kill him, and she'll commit suicide.

So he immediately came. And he said to her, I release-- oh, no, he didn't come. He sent somebody to tell her that he has been released from Dachau. But I want you to know, if he doesn't leave within the next 10 days, they'll put him back. And I won't be able to get him out.

They said, where shall he go? Let him go to Belgium. It's not that far, and he can get out. They'll even-- there are no Germans there yet. So my mother got him out and told him, you've got to get out of here fast, or you will go back, and I won't be able to help you. So she saved his life.

Now, were you still there in Vienna when she was doing this?

Yes, we were still in Vienna. It didn't go as fast as we thought it would go. The thing was taken to my mother. My mother took it to the place that had all these records and so on and so forth. And she told them, this is for my two children, a boy that's seven and a half years old, and my daughter who is 16 and a half, whatever it is.

You have to get them out of the country. Please, I would beg of you. And the guy was a pretty nice guy. He said, I will do what I can, but this doesn't go so fast. It has to go through different channels.

Was this the Jewish [NON-ENGLISH] or was this a Jewish organization?

No.

Or was this the--

This was the government.

Austria.

He gave an order.

Was this the general that you're about?

Yeah.

OK. Do you remember his name?

No. No. I never knew it. I never cared. I was a little kid. And I'm also telling you something else. I'm saying the general, he might have been the next highest one, but he was up there.

OK, he was when he was governing officials?

He was one of the top guys, that was maybe a bird colonel. I don't know. But [INAUDIBLE] Whatever-- I don't know how the ranks went, but he was up there, and he was with the army already like 30 years or something. So he had power.

And he wasn't really a Nazi. He didn't-- he wasn't-- he was up there saying this, but he meant this. He didn't care. He know he was a bastard. But of course, he had to protect himself and his family, so he played the game.

My mother didn't want to call him anymore because she'd bothered him twice. He saved her brother's life. He saved her daughter's life and hers, possibly. At least she would have-- she didn't want to bother him. But she was going to ask him, can they hurry up with my children's papers? That's really bothering him all ready, you know? So we hung on. We moved out to Holland Strasse, right above the bakery.

OK, above the bakery.

It was a store. It was like an empty store. It was like from the wall to where the chair is or maybe less. No, maybe up to here. There was a spot where there was one-- there was a window there, which was right across the street from my aunt and from my uncle, her husband. They had no children right away.

And they had like from here to where-- right past where my mother is. There was a stove in there, luckily. So my mother was able to cook. I don't know what was there before. And we moved in with whatever we could carry. But my mother asked them where they can get beds.

And the guy downstairs from the bakery-- there were two beds. They were crap beds, but they were beds. I slept in one with my mother. My sister slept in the other one. And she was happy that-- she was just hoping this would come through, just pass it through as soon as possible.

And about a week after we were there, my mother got a telegram. Thank you so much for saving our lives. We're on the boat. We're on our way to Palestine.

That's with your older sister?

My older sister, who was married to the guy from Betar. So thank goodness she was safe. Now, to get my other children out. So my sister Rose and I went up to her and said to her, why don't you come with us to America? Why are you here?

She said, because I have four sisters, and they depend upon me. I can't leave them to die. But I will come to you later. And we said, no, you won't. You won't come to us. I know you. You're going to be with them. And when they die, you're going to die with them.

You would say that?

No. Huh?

You said that, or your sister said that.

Yeah. So my sister said that. I didn't say it. She said, no, no, no. I'll be with you. I'll be with you. Give me six months. I'll be with you. I have to help them out. They had problems. They had children that were sick. They had no doctors-- all kinds of things.

Meanwhile, her uncle called. And I have his picture here. I'll show him to you later. Who said that, I have no place to go. They kicked us out on the street. He had a daughter, a beautiful daughter. And we have no place to go.

I hear you have a room someplace. We won't take up much room. We just need a place to sleep. Well, my mother wasn't

the kind to say no, so she said, come over. So he had to get himself two cots, whatever it is.

My mother meanwhile got somehow together curtains for privacy that she could pull together so that they would be behind this, and they'd have their privacy with house. Meanwhile, what happened is it was Rosh Hashanah. You know Rosh Hashanah is?

Tell us.

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish holiday.

What does it celebrate?

What's that?

What does it commemorate or celebrate?

Rosh Hashanah is the-- it's like for the new year. Better? It's the new year.

And it happens usually in what month?

Usually around September, October-- in that area. And she saw-- we saw him in the window. At night, in the middle of the night, we looked out, and there was Uncle Max, praying by the window to have the light from the moon so that he could pray. He was a very religious man.

And then, all of a sudden, that night, we hear trucks going crazy. It's a lot of traffic for 3 o'clock in the morning. I wondered, what's going on? And the truck stopped in front of his house. And we said, oh, no. They're going after all the men. And we saw him go upstairs with rifles and everything. They knocked on the door with the rifles.

Your door?

No, not us. We were across the street-- my aunt, their apartment. And they knocked on the door. They knew where the Jews were. They had a map. [INAUDIBLE] They knocked on the door.

Excuse me. Excuse me. Can we cut? [INAUDIBLE] OK, we're going to be continuing.

I was at--

Hang on a minute.

We're rolling now.

OK. So we were at the point where you're saying your Uncle Max is saying his prayers by the window.

Yes.

Trucks come by. You see them stop across the street. And then who gets out of those trucks?

Federal Nazis.

Uniforms?

Uniforms. These were one SS man and, I think, two-- two or three of the SR, the ones with the--

Brown?

--with the brown [INAUDIBLE] And they ran into the building. Every one of them carried a rifle.

You saw them-- one of them carried a rifle?

No, all three of them carried a rifle. And they went, and they ran upstairs, shouting things, which I couldn't hear. We didn't open the window. We just looked through the window. It was 3 o'clock in the morning. And all of a sudden, since we saw Uncle Max, we saw them come in. We saw them grab him as he was praying.

So your Uncle Max was across the street praying in the window?

Right. Yes.

I see. Not the one who was with you?

Don't forget, we were upstairs, too. We were one story above the bakery, remember?

Right.

And he was one story up. And they grabbed him. I saw them grab him upstairs. And then the next thing, I saw him being-- with others, they got a hold of them. They put them all in the truck, and they almost had the truck filled. And they said, move in. Move in.

And if didn't move fast enough, they took them by the butt of the rifle, the Jews that were on there, and just pushed them further. They also put my uncle in. And he looked shabby already. I don't know what they had done to him, but that's the last that we had seen of him.

Six weeks later, my aunt comes across the street, tears in her eyes, and holding a little box. She said to my mother-- she started-- this is her sister. You won't believe me if I tell you this. They killed Max. They sent me back a box with his ashes.

And she said, what am I going to do? I don't even have a grave for him. He was such a religious man while he was davening, while he was praying. Now, my mother tried to comfort her and everything. And then she said to me, Martin, and you have to do me a favor. Your uncle helped you to say the prayer for your father. You have to do it for him.

Was this the uncle who taught you the Kaddish?

Yes.

Oh, my.

So I promised her that I would. As long as I am alive, I will do it. Once a year, as [INAUDIBLE] I will remember. And right now, she said, will you do it now for nine months? Or whatever it was. I know you're a little boy, but-- I said, no, I will do it. I promise-- if I can, unless I can't. And I did. I did. I did.

Just to skip a beat, meanwhile, the OK's came through. My sister Sue was on a boat with [INAUDIBLE] her husband. Meanwhile, we-- my mother got the OK for us to go. And she took us to the train station. This happened not much longer after that incident had happened-- maybe a week or so. We got our papers. She took us to the train station in Vienna.

So were you there when your aunt came over with the little box?

Yes.

So that was at least six weeks later because you say six weeks went by.

OK. And when she was crying, and she had the box of ashes, we don't know whose ashes they were. But they gave everybody a box. And we knew that he was dead. He was killed. And I made her a promise. And my mother said that he's a good boy. He'll do it. And my mother took us to the train station. I had a [? cuffer, ?] which was a release. My sister had a [? cuffer. ?] We were put on a train.

And we said goodbye to my mother. I have a picture of her, exactly how she looked in her coat and everything. I was crying. I couldn't stop. I said, you promised that you were going to come, so keep your promise. And she said, yes, yes, don't worry. I have to take care of my sisters, first.

And we said goodbye as the train took off. For three days-- it took us three days to get to Holland, to Rotterdam. And when we got there, there was a Jewish man with a sign with the name that we were supposed to look for. And he put down Leiser.

My sister and I went up to him, and he said, I am Mr. So-and-so. I forgot his name. You will be at my house for the next 10 days, waiting for your ship to come in. And then you will board the ship. I will see to it that you get on the ship. Meanwhile, you'll live with us. And you don't have to worry. Nobody will bother you here, at least not yet. It was Holland.

And they were very nice. They gave my sister and I a room. And we stayed with them for 10 days. I never knew that people could eat herring twice a day, but that's all that they ate-- herring and potatoes. I found out that must be a good dish down there, but that's what we ate. Morning, noon, and night, we ate herring with potatoes. But it was food, and they were nice. And they were not selfish people. They were nice. They did-- you know--

These were Jewish people?

Yes. I asked him, do you do this for a lot of people, or are you just doing this for us? He says, no, we are doing this for any Jewish person that comes and waits for a ship here. We will be happy to do it. That's the best thing that we can do for anybody. And we were very happy.

He was a nice man, nice woman. They were very lovely people. And of course, I did ask him if there was anywhere I could say the Kaddish for my uncle. And he said, I'm sorry, but you'll have to wait till you get on the boat. Then, you'll see a lot of people. I don't want to make any noise and have you look for other people. You will ruin it for the next people that I'm trying to keep.

I understood. So for the 10 days, I just went to the corner. And my sister said, go to the corner. You have the little book. And say it. Face the East and do it. So I did it-- what she said. Although there were no men around. You always need at least 12 men-- or 10 men. 10 men.

To be able to say the Kaddish?

Yes, you need 10 men. That's the [? quorum ?] or whatever it it's called.

A minyan.

Minyan, yeah. So this boat came. It was a beautiful, beautiful ship, which I didn't expect. And we were on the boat, the regular boat that was on. I don't know how she got us tickets on it, but she probably paid for it-- that much-- my father's niece. And we were on our way.

And I believe we landed-- about 10 days later, 11 days later, we landed in Hoboken, New Jersey at a dock there. There, we were met by not the one that was the pharmacist, but her sister and her husband. They came, and they put the [? releases ?] in the car. First time I went in a car like that, my sister and I. And I said, where are we going? I said, are we going to see her? You know, the one? No-- oh, Far Rockaway is where she had it. I just remembered.

Far Rockaway.

Far Rockaway.

All right, not in New Jersey, in New York. Far Rockaway is in New York.

Far Rockaway. She ran one drugstore on one end, and he ran the drugstore on the other end or wherever. They were far apart, so they wouldn't have any competition with one another. So that's where she was. We were going to Passaic, New Jersey to my mother's aunt's house, who had a son. And they had a big grocery store that they worked in Passaic, on Market Street, Passaic, New Jersey.

And then we knew that they had bedrooms. I said to my sister, do we have to sleep in the store? She said to me, no, we have one flight up, and you'll be sleeping. And that's where we stayed at--

So your father's side of the family invited you over and supplied the affidavits, but your mother's side of the family also had relatives in the States. And that's where you went to to stay?

Yes. And that's what happened. And we stayed there. And we found out that the sister that didn't help us wanted a maid for her mother. Well, my sister helped you come here to America, and at least you can do is clean the house twice a week-- things like that. My sister was miserable.

And they had a grocery store, which her son ran. They had chickens there. I had chickens in the backyard. People used to come in for their eggs alone. And they had a coffee machine, by the way, that was from here all the way-- I never saw. It was one coffee machine that they have today-- it was this small-- that they used that was made in 1895 or something. It was one of the first.

So that was an experience. And we stayed there. We lived there for about two years. And then my sister met a boy that she knew when she was little, was also part of the other family. And they got married.

So she married quite young, actually.

Yeah, she married when she was actually 18, I guess.

Let's try to put some dates to this. Do you remember the date that you arrived in the States?

Yes-- January 10, 1940.

January 10, 1940.

Yes. And you know how I remember it? It was my father's birthday, had he been alive.

Do you know the boat that you came over on, what it was called?

It was called [? the Wyndam. ?]

The [? Wyndam? ?]

Yes.

And was it a passenger ship?

It was a passenger ship. Oh, very important-- on the passenger ship, I got busy. And I used to get a hold of-- excuse me, are you Jewish? Excuse me, are you Jewish?

I need a minyan for my uncle, who got killed in a concentration camp. And I was the only one around that she can rely on. Could you please get together at 5:30 with me? And I will say the prayer. And I said prayer. They were very nice. They [INAUDIBLE] They talked all over the boat.

So people who helped you find the minyan?

Yeah. So this went on for the two weeks I think it took to get there, or whatever it was. I did what I promised the first time I could do this. And what happened is I accomplished that. My sister got married.

Oh, my mother did tell my sister, you take care of him like he was yours, because I hope to make it, but what if I don't? And don't leave him anywhere until he's old enough to fend for himself. And my sister kept that promise.

So tell me this-- was there mail coming from your mother to the United States?

Yes. She was able to get mail to people that escaped or something. Whenever she heard somebody was escaping, she would-- for my 10th birthday, my mother was sent to-- oh, by the way, after we left, about a couple of months after, my mother was taken by the Germans.

And they told her that they need her in-- what the heck was the name of it? A place where they had soldiers that had to be taken care of. And let me see if my wife knows? Judy?

She's asleep.

She went to-- I'm trying to think of--

Was it a labor camp? Or was it--

It was a camp, and it was--

Was it Theresienstadt? Was it--

Theresienstadt, that's it. Very good. How did you know?

Well, only because it's close to Vienna. I mean, it's closer to Prague, but it's also close to-- and it used to be an old military garrison. And so when you said soldiers, I thought maybe that's what it was.

You are very smart. Very good. So that's where she was.

So they took her to Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt. And they told her, you will help the nurses here. And you do your job, you keep your nose clean, we will not bother you. That's all she heard. And what happened was that on my 10th birthday, which was about a year and a half or so later after I was there, when I was 10 years old, I received a letter with a picture and a letter from a man.

He wrote on it, this comes to you from your mother. Read the back of it. And she sends her love. I opened up the envelope, and there was a picture of my mother, standing by a bed with somebody that was in a bed, and another nurse was on the other side. And on the back of it, she wrote, I hope this gets to you by your 10th birthday.

My birthday is May 27. And let this be my best present that I can get to you. Unfortunately, I can't be there with you. But this is my birthday present to you, sending you a picture. So you know, I have that picture, but I didn't bring that one, you know.

That was the last picture I got of her, in a white uniform like a nurse and everything else. And how did I get it?

According to the way a man-- the man said in writing-- I escaped from there.

From Theresienstadt?

But I knew that you had a mother there. And I told your mother, because they said if anybody would spread the word, if they would go to-- I don't know why my wife is sleeping. Either way. They knew that she needed to get this picture out, and the back of the picture.

So the guy said, I went to your mother-- I wrote. She wrote. I went to your mother because I heard she needed to send you something, and I'm sending you it for you, for her. And I received that at the address that he had because my mother had our address. We kept sending to him. And that was it. That--

Was that the last time you got something from her?

The last time I got something from her? Yes. And I have pictures of her.

Do you know what happened to her?

I got different-- we couldn't hear anything from the-- the Red Cross couldn't help us. And then we called up the-- what is it called? The Jewish organization that helps the Jews.

HIAS? Was it HIAS, or was it--

Yeah, HIAS. That was one. There were two. HIAS was one, and there was another one. And we wrote them that we have no word from my mother. And we want to know if she is alive. Please let us know, and if so, where, when, whatever.

We sent out the letters. My sisters sent out the letters. After I was older, I sent out the letters, had nothing. I was told that the Germans keep the best records. According to that, we found out later, and years later, after sending different letters to different organizations, they had a Sally Leiser that was buried. One was in Theresienstadt.

Another one that she-- how did she die? She got sick, and she died. I wonder if "sick" was a bullet, a couple of bullets, but we don't-- we never knew. I have a letter that said that. We found that out maybe four or five years later.

So we knew that she died, and we knew that-- we didn't know if she died in Theresienstadt, or if she died in another place. And I don't know. One said that she's buried in number-- like five letters-- five numbers, and so on, at that place. And that was it. That was the understanding.

I went on, then. I lived with my sister and my brother-in-law in their house. And, god, I was about 18, and then I had-- when I was 16, I got a job as a paper boy. And I started making a little bit of money. I used to--

Were you still in New Jersey?

This was in Passaic, New Jersey. I lived in the Passaic Park, New Jersey, 110 Kensington Terrace.

110 Kensington Terrace.

Yes. And we lived there, my sister with her brother-in-law. She had two children of her own, a boy and a girl, meanwhile. I was called-- I got the medal of the year from the Herald News, which is the newspaper. That here, it showed a boy with a sack of papers. We congratulate Martin Leiser for bringing in more new--

Subscribers?

Customers, yeah. I have that picture at home. And he bought in more than anybody else that works for us. And then I

had other jobs. I worked as a busboy and so on and so forth. And then I had graduated high school. And they had asked me-- they asked everybody as they were graduating, what do you intend to do with your life?

And I said, what I want to do is go to college at night because I can't afford to do it during the day. And what I want to do is learn business. I want anything to do with business because my father and my mother were in business and so on and so forth. And while I did that, he said to me, I have the perfect thing for you. And I said, what's that? He said, there are people-- there's a new company called Robert Hall Clothes.

What kind? Rob--

Robert Hall Clothes. Have you heard of it?

I have, actually.

Yeah, they were all over the country. They had 518 stores when I left them. He said there was very nice Italian man there by the name of-- and he gave me the Italian name. And you should see him. And he will tell you that you have a future with the company, because we're going to tell him that you seem like a nice fellow, and your marks are pretty good.

So who was the one who recommended this to you? Who was that person?

That was a fellow that people used to go to. He was a counselor that would take-- they would come to him, and he would say, what do you intend to do? I would go to college.

Was this like in high school or something?

Well, I went to college in the evening. I went to-- now it's a big college. It was a big college in New Jersey. I forgot right now.

It's OK.

It's so many years.

So it was a counselor at the college.

I went to school at night. And I worked at the Robert Hall during the day. I worked, when I took the job, with the understanding that I would not remain where I moved, but I would be trained to become, eventually, one of their managers or top men. And they told me that-- they promised me, this is what the manager said. If you do the job, fine. And they said-- they took me.

They taught me what to do from the bottom up. And after one year that I was with them, they-- there was a district supervisor there, and he liked me very much. He told me that you're manager material. You're going to become an assistant manager now. You don't need any more training. I understand-- I did good things.

Oh, Rob-- Mr. Branca was my manager. He says that he trusts you with everything. And whatever the situation is, he's better than the assistant managers that he has. So I said, great. So this fellow liked me so much, at that time, Robert Hall opened up about five, six new stores.

He says, come on. I'm going to teach you what we're going to do, how we open up stores. And you'll help, of course. And I said, of course. And they opened up Plainfield, New Jersey. He had Clifton, New Jersey, because I lived in New Jersey. I helped them open six stores.

How long did you stay with them?

Well, I was with them until I got drafted by the Army.

Until Korea, huh?

Yeah, until I was drafted by Army. I got greetings. I was only with-- I was with them about a year and a half, and then another half year, opening all these stores. Matter of fact, I made an enemy. There was a district manager there. There were district managers that had to take part in opening these stores.

But this guy liked me so much, after a second store, he says, you know what to do. We're opening up in East Orange, now. You got it? I said, I got it. He says, start to take care of the men's section. Got it. Went ahead, set up the men's section.

And I had a guy who was a district manager came up to me and said to me, what do you think you're doing? I said, I'm setting up a store. He says, really? And who told you that you could do that? I said, well, I certainly wouldn't do it on my own. And I told him who told me.

And he said to me, well, that doesn't make sense. I'm the district supervisor. I said, well, what do you want me to do about it? He said to me, don't get wise. I said, I'm not getting wise. I said, what do you want me to do about it? I was given by so and so.

He said, well, I'm going to check up on you. I said, I hope you do. And I went ahead about my work. And he went to my supervisor. And this guy was very well-liked. He went on to become a regional manager. He went out to where all the cars are made, out in--

In Detroit?

Detroit. And anyway, I became a manager in New York, in Brooklyn, New York, in Brooklyn. They made me manager of the Brooklyn store. And I had gotten married, by the way, in between.

Oh, I was going--

I married Judy. I met her. That's another story that's good.

That's what I wanted to find out about.

And he came in. Well, he came back to me. He said to me, oh, he told me that you know you're doing. You helped open up five stores with him. I said, yes, I did. This is number six. He says, well, you're doing a good job. Keep up the good work. I said, oh, thanks.

Well, then he doesn't sound like he was much of an enemy. He turned into one.

Watch what happened. I think he was-- his thing was hurt. And what happened is I was called into the office. You've been promoted to general manager. Where would you like to go? I said, you mean you're giving me a choice?

He said, well, you know the right people, and they want you. And I understand that you're living in Brooklyn. I said, yes, I just got married. He says, good, you got the Kings Highway store. And they gave me the store, and I was manager. And guess who walks in to become my district manager?

He does?

The guy that gave me a hard time. I said, oh, boy, you're my district manager? I said, oh, I'm going to have a rough time. He says, don't be ridiculous. You have a very good reputation. I know you'll run the store, and you'll do a good job for me. Just do for me what you did for him. And I said, fine.

And that went on for a year. And then there was the Jewish holidays. And then shit hit the fan. He came in, and he was also Jewish. And he came to me. He says, what holiday are you not going to be here, the first one or the second one? He says, you know, you got to give your assistant manager a break, too.

I said, I'm not going to be here for either one. And he said to me, what do you mean? You have to work one day. I said to him, I have never worked on a holiday. And I take both holidays off. And I'm sure that this company will understand it, and I hope you do. He says, I'm Jewish, too, and I'm working on a holiday. So that's your prerogative, but anyway.

Anyway, I'm going to stop from that and tell you a story where-- how I got married because--

Yes, I'd like to hear about that.

OK, now you remember the fact that I told you that when I was on the boat, I used to get a minyan together every night. And they knew 5:30. Marty, I'm here. Marty.

Oh, so it wasn't just one time you said Kaddish. It was every--

Every day that I was there. And I met a lot of people. They liked me. You know, you're a good boy. You're doing it. You're a nice boy. You're this, this, this. And I got out of the Army. Right away, when I got out of the army at that time, before I told you the other thing, I was sent to-- I went to medical school from the army.

They sent me to medical school for four or five months in Texas. And I learned a lot. My job was going to be to hand the right instrument to the doctor. Before that, I worked at Walter Reed Hospital. At that time, the president, President-- what was his name? The one that became--

Truman or Eisenhower?

Eisenhower was there. I met him. He was there. He had a heart attack. And I was going through this-- I was standing next to a nurse. And after I got out of school, I know what instruments to do whatever what. I did my job in Walter Reed.

And then they said, you have two weeks' vacation. Here are your papers. You're going to Korea after this. I said, I thought I was doing such a good job here. He goes, oh, you were. That's why we let you go home every-- we gave you-- this is the closest thing to your home. We don't do that to anybody unless they have high marks. So--

Were you married by then?

No. No, I was not married. I wasn't married to her. This is like going backward. And I got the orders to report. And they gave me two weeks at home, you know? And then I went to Korea. While when I got to Korea, where do they send me? They send me all the way up to the 38th parallel. There was a place called Indian Village, the area [INAUDIBLE] that was a neutral land between the United States and between North Korea.

So South Korea and North Korea?

Yeah.

It was the no-man's--

So I went to South Korea. Right at the border, the Indians were the ones--

[RINGING SOUND]

Sorry. Let's finish up with Korea a little bit. You were caught in that no-man's land region, up there between North and South Korea.

Right.

And you were working in a MASH unit?

Yes, I was in a MASH unit.

And is that what your job was, to hand the instruments?

My job was what I was trained for. That's what I went to medical school for, what it's all about. I saw almost every operation when I was in Walter Reed, which helped me. I saw operations in general at some of the other places that I was in. I got to Korea.

And the first week, I settled down there. I didn't do anything. [INAUDIBLE] I was invited to come over to see the operating end of it, and I did. I went there and met the doctors and so on. Well, the guy that was there doing the job, handing the instruments to the doctor was leaving. He had had his tour, and I watched him for a few days, got a little friendly with

Him. And then he left. And they said, OK, big boy. It's yours. You're the one now to replace him. That's why you're here. Now imagine, we're right at the 38th parallel. There were some hedges. And when I put my hand over it, I was in North Korea.

That's how close you were.

And the reason that there were no fires, no gunplay, is because it was a neutral zone that the Indians from India ran. They were responsible. It was neutral ground.

I never knew that.

So now you know. So I was in there. We slept in tents. In the wintertime, we froze our you know off. And in the summertime, it was so hot that we went crazy. Anyway, I worked with these doctors. They were wonderful people. They were guys like everyday people. They weren't really Army men. They were people that were drafted like anybody else. And they did almost every type of operation.

That must've been tough. It sounds like it could have been a meat market.

Well, it was tough sometimes because sometimes, they operated-- they did what they called exploratory operations. They did that to people that we captured that were in there to save their lives. The soldiers would bring them in.

And they would feel, well, if there's something that has to be done, we'll do it. But we'll do an exploratory to see what's what. So when we get back home, it's not exploratory. We know it worked, or it didn't work, or we shouldn't do it. These were all doctors basically from the New York area.

So what had happened was that I continued doing whatever I had to do. I became very friendly with them. They were very nice people. They didn't want me to call them lieutenant or captain or whatever they were. We call you Marty. You call me Jake. You call him Irwin. You call him this. I say, well, you're my officers. He says, we're not regular Army. We don't need to hear those things. We are all good friends here. Got it? OK.

So they made it very nicely for me. As a matter of fact, I was the guy that had to give the shots when the shots came out because I was the only one that was-- knew how to give shots, they said. Not even the doctors gave good shots. They just push it together and then do it.

They used to put it in like that. Everything was done. We had one operation that was unusual, and that was when they had-- one of the Chinese "Gooks," that they called them, had a big belly-- like more [INAUDIBLE] there was a 28-

pound--

Tumor?

What's that?

Was there a tumor in that--

Yes. 38-- So they told me, Marty-- I always had a camera with me. I did a lot of pictures. They said, tomorrow, you'll be our photographer. I said, why? Who's going to take my place? One of us will take the place. We're doing a very important operation. What is that?

We have one of the Gooks that we caught. He's got a tremendous tumor, whatever it is. We're going to find out how it is. And sure enough, I was up there-- ding, ding, ding. I have slides of it at home and whatever. And it had success. It was a 28-pound tumor, which probably made history if they had advertised it.

How long were you in this unit? How long were you there?

A year and a half.

And then you came back to the--

And then I came back. Let's go from there. When I came back, I had been friendly with a fellow that lived in Brooklyn-- very nice fellow, who I met when I was in basic training. And we went to school together.

In New Jersey?

No, we went to school together in the Army in the Army school. We were in Texas. He went to become a fellow who took the X-rays because he wanted to continue that when he was home. I didn't want that. As far as I was concerned, I wasn't going to have anything to do with this. I'm going to go and do what I started out to do and do something as far as working for a big company, which was, I knew, was waiting for me.

But meanwhile, we were very good friends. And he lived in Brooklyn, as I said. And I lived in Passaic. And one day, he said to me when I came back, when I had just gotten back, he said to me, have you got a date that you're going out with anybody? And I said, no, not yet. I went out with a couple of girls, but I'm not very crazy about them.

He said, well, he says, my girlfriend has a friend. We'll fix you up with somebody. So I met him at the Port Authority, New York. And he came around at a certain time that we had made up-- 8:30, or whatever it was. He came over and introduced me to a date that he had for me-- for-- that his girlfriend had.

And I look in the back of the car, and I see this beautiful, beautiful girl-- red hair, lipstick, everything made up like a movie star, with a white, frilly blouse and expensive jacket and whatever she had. I don't know. And she's sitting next to some bald guy that looks like he could be her father. And I'm keeping my eye on her. And he wants me to keep my eye on her. And I was sitting in the front.

And when we got out of the car where we were going to go for a meal or something, I gave him hell. Why didn't I get to meet this nice girl? What's her name? And says, well, because my girlfriend fixed her up with this guy. And she said, well, I don't think she's happy. And I don't know if he's happy. He hasn't opened up his mouth since we were there.

I want to meet her. And he said, well, I don't know what's what-- if I can do that. I said, well, I'll take care of it myself. And then when we got there, and we went upstairs, and we all sat at a table-- a couple of [INAUDIBLE]. And I had my eye on her. And I said to her, I'm going to ask her for a dance. She said, you can't do that.

The guy she's with is here. I said, well, he's not even sitting next to her, and she could care less. So he says to me, well, I

can't do that. I said, you know what you're going to do? You're going to go to the men's room right now, and you're going to take this jerk with you. And if not, you're not my friend.

He said to me, I don't have to go. I said, yes, you do. He says-- no, he didn't say it. He went to the guy and said to him, come on with me. His name was Courty. Court was his name. He says, what do you want? He says, come with me. He says, where are you going? I'm going to the bathroom.

He says, you need me to go to the bathroom? He says, yeah, I need company. Come on. Let's go. And he got him, and he went with him, and I got-- right across from her. And I walk up to her, and I say, excuse me, can I have this dance?

And she says to me, it wouldn't be proper for me to go and dance with you when I'm with another guy. I said, well, I guess he can't dance. He hasn't asked you for the last three dances, and I want to dance with you. She says, I can't do that. It's not right. What do you mean, it's not right? I said, I'm not going-- I said, I just want to dance.

I'm not asking you to go to bed with me. What's the matter with you? She said to me, but it wouldn't be right for the guy. I said, do you like this guy? she said, no. And I said, so what are you worried about? She says, when I get my girlfriend, I'll kill her. I said, good. Then let's dance.

So I got on the floor, and I started dancing with her. And I started to ask her name. And she told me her name. And I said, where do you live? And she said, right here in Brooklyn. And where do you live? And I told her New Jersey. She said, New Jersey? Wow, you've come a long way.

I said, yes. I said, but maybe you're worth it. And you know, I think it made an impression upon her. But she said to me-- I said, can you give me your phone number, so I can call you for next week? She says, I don't think that would be proper. I said, oh, don't give me the proper stuff. She says, well, I'm a very proper person. I was brought up that way, and that's not right.

So I said, look, I'd like to have your phone number. I'd like I have you out. I'll go out with you, and let's see what happens. PS, I didn't get her phone number for a few weeks. But then, I told my friend, I said to him, Bob, if you don't get me her phone number, I said, you're not my friend. You're not my friend. I said, you know, I'll be mad at you.

So I said, I don't care what you have with your girlfriend, whatever it is. I want to meet this girl. And I think she likes me. So sure enough, next thing I know is that he gave me the number, and I called her. And I told her who I was. And I told her that I've been trying to see you for four weeks, whatever it is, and haven't been able get in touch with you. Do you mind seeing me this coming Saturday night?

And she said to me, what about so-and-so? She's going to be mad about the-- I said, what do you mean mad at you? He wanted you to go out with him to ask you to marry me. I ask you to go out on a date. And she agreed. So she met me outside, holding up the Port Authority when I met her. And I got-- came there with my car and everything. And we went out.

We got to know each other. And one thing led to another, and she asked me where I'm from. And I told her where I'm from. And she's, oh, you're from Vienna? I said, yes, I am. And she said, well, we're from Vienna also. And she said to me, how long are you here? And I told her.

And she told me, my parents-- you know, she came with the Kindertransport here, so, as you know. My parents came from Vienna also. When did you come? I said, I came January 10, 1940. She says, I don't know. It sounds very familiar to me. My parents came at the same time. I said, I really couldn't tell you. So I don't know.

She spoke to her father that night. We had a date. It was nice, you know? And spent time talking to each other about each other. And, well, she went home, and she told her father, guess what? I met a very nice boy. And guess what? He's from Vienna, and he came here in 1940. When did you come here?

And he told her, January 10th. And she said, well, that's the day he came there. You must have been on the same boat

with him. So he said something about, I don't know. It could be. A lot of people on the boat. And I don't know. I must have told her that I had said this Kaddish for my--

Uncle Max.

Uncle Max. He said to me, he said, was it a boy that had-- brought a minyan together and everything? And she said, yes. I think so. He says, I was in that minyan. He says, a couple of times. And she said, really? He said, I want to meet him. So she took me to meet her father in Brooklyn.

And I met him, and he was a very nice gentleman. We sat down, and we talked. And he asked me questions, and I told him about my background. And I told him that I came on the [? Wyndom. ?] And he said, so did I. And then he said, when did you leave? I said, I left Holland. He says, Rotterdam? I said, yes. He said, so did I.

And the whole thing-- and she says, were you the little boy that said-- I said, yes. He said, just a minute. He ran upstairs to her mother and said, you wouldn't believe this. You know who's downstairs? Remember I told you about the little boy that the ship was talking about? He said Kaddish for his uncle, who got killed in a concentration camp and everything else.

And she said, what do you want from me? I spent the whole time you know being upset with an upset stomach in the boat, but I do remember you telling me something like that. I don't know. She came downstairs, and she met me.

And she was a very nice lady. And next thing you know is I made a wonderful strudel. Come in here and sit down. You want coffee? I never had coffee. That was my first cup of coffee. I had never liked coffee. And after I had the first cup of coffee, that's when I started drinking coffee. She gave me the stuff that she made. She was an unbelievable bakeress and cooking and everything else. And she became my--

She became your mother.

My mother-in-law. They were always nice. I haven't got one bad word to say about them. They were wonderful people. Her father was a-- as you heard from the daughter, a very, very wonderful person and a nice man.

But what a coincidence.

What a coincidence.

What a coincidence.

I lived in the Passaic Park, New Jersey, and this girl's in Brooklyn, but how faith ties together. And we got married, and we have two children.

What are their names?

What are their names? One is right here. That's Bennett. He was named after my father. And the other one is Sherry, who was named Sarah after my mother was Sarah.

Well, thank you. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?

You want us to be here till midnight?

No.

No, really, that was basically the important thing. I wanted to show--

We'll do that.

--to anybody that wants to see what it looks like. I don't know if these people that might see this would know this or not. I have two Reispases, which are the--

You know what we usually do is we conclude the formal part of the interview, and then we just tape those. So I will say the conclusion, and then we'll tape-- we'll film--

--my wife's and mine.

Yeah, and then we'll take some pictures, too.

--some pictures that--

We'll show those, too. So at this point, I'll say this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Martin Leiser on February 26, 2017 in Boca Raton, Florida. Thank you. And then when he turns it on, I'll say what is-- OK, tell me what is this?

This is my passport that I got from Vienna, Austria after the Germans had taken over. And this is what I needed in order to leave the country. And my picture is in here.

Did you have to have a marking on the passport that you were Jewish? Yes, of course.

Let's take a look on the first page. I wonder if that-- yeah.

And you notice the J on there?

Yeah.

The J is the meaning for them that I was Jewish. That was their way of telling. I also have my wife's, here.

Let's take a look at that the same way. Wait a second. Let's hold it first like this.

Yeah.

Can you--

Doesn't it also say Israel in there next to everybody's name?

What's that?

It says Israel on everybody's name.

Yes. They have Israel in here. Everyone that signed a name has to have Israel.

Are we rolling or not?

Yeah, we're rolling.

So this is Mrs. Leiser's passport. And it says, Gertrude Krause, Gertrude Krause.

Well, at that time, that was her name.

That was her--

Maiden name.

Hers says Israel on it.

Yeah, my name is also Israel [INAUDIBLE]

And let's take a look at her picture.

This is her picture, what she looked like when--

Thank you. And now, we're going to show some photographs. We can cut in the meantime. [INAUDIBLE]

Rolling now.

Tell me, who is this picture of?

This is the picture of my mother. This is exactly how she was clothed in her coat. This is what I saw her like when I left her to say goodbye forever, when she left us at the train station to go to Holland when we were leaving Austria.

And who is this picture of?

This is a picture of my father that I had with me all the time. And he's the one that died in 1938, the one I told you about earlier.

Right. And his name was Ben Zion?

His name was Ben Zion. Actually, he was called-- in Hebrew, he was called Benzion.

Benzion.

Yes.

Leiser.

And my son is named after him.

And this picture?

And this picture is a picture of me when I left Austria-- Vienna.

And you were then seven or eight years old?

Something like that, yeah.

Let's cut.

OK.

And now--

Rolling.

So who is this?

This is my sister and myself. When we first came to the United States, they took pictures of us.

What's her name again?

Rose.

This is Rose.

Yes.

And she was your younger sister?

She was the one that actually raised me to what I am because I left my mother when I was seven years, seven and a half years old.

That's a big job, to raise a kid. Thank you. And--

The woman in the corner I have my finger on is my mother.

You know, I'm getting a lot of reflection because he moves--

OK.

It needs to be held steady.

It has to-- steady. OK.

OK, the woman in the corner is my mother.

Sally.

This is a niece of hers.

And what is her name, the one next to her?

--name was Minny.

Minny. Who is standing next to her?

That's her father--

Who is in the middle, and what was--

--who was in the middle.

What was his name?

They called him Uncle Yittel. That's all I know.

Uncle Yittel?

Yittel, yeah, his name was Yittel. Yeah.

Wasn't that Minny and Yittel came to your home?

Well, that was his daughter.

Who came to your home and asked for shelter?

Yeah-- yes, OK. Now, that was the oldest sister of my-- from my mother.

Was next to Yittel?

Yes. And the last one is-- her name is Yetti. Her husband is the one that I was saying Kaddish for.

Max.

Max, who was killed in concentration camp, in Buchenwald.

And on the first row?

And first row is the-- my mother in the middle, next to the man. There is his-- that's his wife. That's her younger sisters-- her younger sister of all the sisters. Next to her is her husband, and on each side were their two children. One was Klara, and one was Bruni. Klara was the younger one. Bruni was the older one. They all died in concentration camp.

In the Holocaust.

In the Holocaust, yeah.

Thank you very much.

You did say--

Thank you.