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This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Henry Bloch on May 2, 2017 in Fresh Meadows, New York. Thank you very much, Mr. Bloch, for agreeing to speak with us today, for agreeing to share your experiences and your story. And we will start with the most basic questions. And from there, we'll develop and build your story so that we learn of your experiences.

OK.

My first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

March 11, 1914.

Oh, my. And today is May 2, 2017. So that means you are 103 years old? Just had your 103rd birthday?

Correct.

Congratulations.

Thank you.

And what was your name at birth? Heinz Werner.

Heinz Werner Bloch.

Yes, yes.

OK. And where were you born?

I was born in the city-- I was born during World War I.

Yeah.

And my father was in the army, in the German army. My mother was by. Herself and we were at the time in Duisberg.

Duisberg.

I don't know if you know Duisberg.

Duisberg.

And I was born in Duisberg at that time. But we then later on resettled back further south, if you would call that, and we stayed in Mannheim.

So did you grow up in Mannheim?

Basically.

OK. How is it that your mother gave birth to you in Duisberg and not in Mannheim?

An aunt of her, or rather a sister, an aunt of mine, a sister of her lived in Duisberg or Essen, which is another city nearby. And she wanted to be near the family.

Yeah. This is all North Rhine-Westphalia.

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Correct.

This whole area.

Correct.

OK. But Mannheim is not.

Mannheim is Baden. Baden is the southern part of Germany along the Rhine River across from, call it Alsace-Lorraine, next to France.

Is this wine country, German wine country?

It is not necessarily known for wine, but across the river, which is called the Pfalz-- or Palatia, I think, in English-- there is a lot of wine grown-- I mean, there are a lot of vineyards.

So was your mother originally from Duisberg?

No.

No.

She also was born-- she was born in Germany in a small town. Her family was-- there were seven children. She was one of seven children, who lived in the southern part of Germany.

Do you remember the town that she was from?

It was a small town, which was Meisenheim--

Meisenheim.

--which is not very well known. But maybe the city which is nearby is called Kreuznach.

Kreuznach.

Kreuznach or Munster, which is on the river now, which is not far from Bingen, which is not far from the Rhine River. So that area was her background.

OK. What was your mother's name?

David-- Emma David.

Emma David. And had her family been in this area for a long time?

The family David has been there for many generations.

How did the family make its living? How did they support themselves, her family?

The detailed part, I am not quite so well familiar, but I think most of which they handled grain from the farmers. They purchased the harvest of grain of all sorts, and they sold this to breweries and also similar institutions which would require this sort of item. And that's what was their main business.

OK.

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They had storage warehouses for this grain.

So they're grain merchants.

Yes.

But also grew it.

And they also had a factory where they brewed the grain, which was cooked. I'm not quite sure of the procedures and all this anymore, which was primarily for the brewery. I think it was mostly the grain which they bought was sold to breweries.

So to make beer.

Make beer.

OK. And was it a well-to-do family as far as you knew?

They were considered very much so.

OK.

And your father, what was his first name?

Ludwig.

Ludwig Bloch.

Yeah.

How many brothers and sisters did he have?

He had one brother, and I think five sisters.

Also a large family.

Yeah. Well, in those days, the families, they certainly had many children.

Yeah.

It has changed.

Yes. So seven on one side, seven on the other side.

Something like that.

And you had all-- you had 14 aunts and uncles or something like that, you know. 12 aunts and uncles, if we don't take your parents in there. And where was your father from? What place was he from?

He lived in the city, Baden, in Baden, the state of Baden. The name of the city was Offenburg.

Offenburg. OK.

Yeah. And his father-- I am not definite, but I think he was a butcher.

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OK. Did you know both sets of aunts and uncles and grandparents and so--

We were in touch with them during the year. Traveling was not as popular at the time. But occasionally, a vacation time through the school years, we visited each other one way or another.

OK. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had one older brother.

And what was his name?

Fritz.

Fritz. And when was he born?

He was born-- let me think for a-- in Mannheim.

He was born in Mannheim.

Yeah.

And was he four years, five years older than you?

He was nine years older.

Oh. So he was considerably older.

Yeah. That would have made him-- if he was nine years older, would have been 1904.

Yeah but--

1905.

My mother came-- in Mannheim, then she moved to Meisenheim. That was during the war, during the earlier years. There was a lot of changing positions and locations. And I don't know about the reasons, to be honest.

OK.

You know, parents in those days did not tell the children everything as much as it's more the case nowadays.

OK. It's true. It's true.

They kept a lot of things to themselves. And children just listened.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There are some families where there are storytellers naturally, and there's some families where there's more reserve, and that's just as natural for those families. Did either of your parents talk much about World War I and what that was like?

No. No. I don't know, for some reason or another, I don't remember details. My father came back after the war. I don't know any more details where he-- he was in France. That I know. He was somewhere in those battles or wherever there was.

In trenches probably.

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Yeah. And he came back after the war.

Did he have a certain rank?

I don't remember the rank. I don't remember. I don't really know. There was not much talk about it, at least I was-- I mean, I was 5 years old, 4 or 5 years old. It didn't mean much what he would say to me or so forth. If so, I forgot it.

Yeah. And do you have any earliest memories from your childhood? Even if they're just episodic, do you have any? Do you remember any particular scenes in your mind?

Well, I mean, I cannot think of any specific ones, but the school years, we all-- I mean, we were equal with all the Gentile people. I had very good friends as schoolmates with whom I went to school.

And there was no difference in those days that you would say, oh, my God, you are Jewish, and you are Protestant or Catholic or whatever. You would not associate and would be together with the family as well as with their offspring.

Well, tell me this. Did you grow up in the same place? That is, once your mother came back to Mannheim, did you have the same home that you spent your childhood years in?

No. It was not the same home anymore. That was in-- no, it was not the same home. It was a different apartment.

So did you grow up in one apartment or in several?

It was mostly in one apartment in Mannheim.

And do you remember the address?

[GERMAN]. But I don't know the number, even though I have visited Germany many times after the war, and I visited the area and so forth, I just remember the numbers or things like that. I know where it was, but I don't remember the numbers and things like that.

That's OK.

Do you remember what the apartment looked like?

Not the outlay anymore.

Not the outlay.

I wouldn't remember where the living room was or bedroom was or anything else. I don't remember that.

Do you know how many rooms you had?

But it was a quite accommodating place.

OK.

It was a modern house. There were other people in the same house. It was an apartment house.

OK.

Two, three stories, four?

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About two or three stories, something like that.

Was it in the center of Mannheim?

Well, Mannheim-- I don't know if you know that-- Mannheim is built in such a way that you cannot get a lot of-- it's done with the A, B, C. The streets go from one river-- there is the Rhine River, and the-- now, you see, now I can't think of the other side of the river. It's not the--

Was it the Pfalz?

Heidelberg. Do you know what the river is in Heidelberg?

No. I'm sorry. But it was the same river that goes to Heidelberg?

Right. What the heck is the name of the--

It'll come to you when the cameras are off.

Anyhow, that river was one street, and then also another line from the castle. There was a castle on the other side, to the other end. And in between this, there was everything detailed. You start, on the castle you start A. The next block was B, C, D, E, F, G. Everything like this.

And so you were Louise--

If you were in A, the other way, you go A1, A2, A3, A4. If you're know the ABC, you couldn't get lost.

You could find your way around the city.

You could find your way in-- that was a city which was laid out by whom I don't know but on the basis of alphabet.

And so you're street was L.

Well, we were on the-- there is a ring. The whole thing was around. The whole city was a ring which had different names. And we lived on the Luisen ring, which was not on the inside of the city, but it was the outside of the ring, which had a number, but it didn't have A, B, C number.

Right, right. And was this a residential kind of--

All. Only residential. The whole city, if I remember, was all residential. I mean, the shops and department stores and all this but no industry.

What was the economy of Mannheim?

It was the second largest harbor on the Rhine River.

Really?

Yes. The biggest one was in Duisberg, where ships stopped. And then on the way back to go to Switzerland, Mannheim was the second largest harbor. So there were a lot of ships going up and down the river.

I wouldn't have thought but how interesting.

Yeah.

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I didn't know that about Mannheim. So its economy probably was quite dependent on this kind of trade.

Well, there were a lot of industries on the outskirts. Across from Mannheim was a city called Ludwigshafen.

Ah. OK.

And in Ludwigshafen is a city, which is now still in business-- matter of fact, I visited not too long ago-- BASF.

Oh, that's right. The company BASF. Yeah.

It's one of the biggest in the world.

Yeah. Yeah. It is.

It's bigger than Dupont and any of the other ones. And that is the industry on that side. I mean, it's right across the river.

But when you were a young boy, let's take the year arbitrarily 1920, you're 6 years old. You are growing up in Mannheim.

I went to public school.

And you went to public school. Tell me, what did Mannheim look like? I mean, were there streetcars? Were there many automobiles?

Well, yes. There were definitely streetcars all over going from-- in the city and also going the outskirts. People had cars.

Many?

German cars, I think mostly. French cars. Different makes from Italy, also for Czechs. Not American cars, I don't think. I don't remember that any American cars off hand. Was still a different kind of a car.

You had a start in the front had to turn the handle to get the motor started on the outside. You had clutches. You had shifts. You cannot imagine how difficult it would have been for somebody today to drive those kind of cars.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

But they existed.

And were they a rarity or were they everyday occurrence to see a car down a street?

It was very, very, very much so. It was a very affluent area.

OK. And in your own home, did you have electricity?

Yes.

Did you have indoor plumbing?

Yes.

OK.

All this was there. Yes.

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And how was the home heated? Do you remember?

That I don't know, if that was coal.

You would have coal ovens? You know, those stapel oven?

It was central heating, but I don't know from--

What source.

Yeah, boiler. I don't know how it was heated. I don't know.

Did your family have a radio?

Yes.

Telephone?

Yes.

So this was quite modern.

Yes.

Actually, for the time, it was quite modern--

Yes.

--to have these things.

Right. Yes. There was no television yet.

No. No.

And things think that, no.

What was your father's occupation when he came back from the war?

He, together with the family members, they started a company, which made kitchen cabinets.

Oh, OK.

Woodworking.

Woodworking.

Yeah.

And that must have been quite a business.

Well, like everything else, after the war, a lot of things were destroyed--

Yeah.

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--and had to be renovated, had to be done over again or new homes were built. So it was a lucrative business.

Did you ever visit him in his--

I mean, visited the company, the office because my father worked there in the office and so on and so forth. Yes. But I mean, I didn't do anything. I went to school.

Yeah. But did you see the cabinets being made?

Oh, sure. A lot of woods, if I remember. That took a little time. It didn't come right away. That happens later. It was then later imported. Wood came from America.

Oh, really?

Pitch pine, yellow pine, things like that came from America to Europe, and that was very popular in kitchen manufacturing.

And what about European woods? What woods would be natural or native to Germany that were also used?

They don't have that many good trees in Germany. They had oak trees. Well, it's interesting that you bring up the wood. You know, my specialty in my later years and especially here in this country is I was-- I don't want to call an expert-- but I was looking all over the world for exotic and foreign trees.

Oh, wow.

And I selected those trees to be brought here to this country to be processed into lumber and wood, which is then finally used for architectural woodwork.

Oh, wow. Oh, wow. So is this as a result of your father having had such a business?

Right. My brother was in the same-- not actually in the same business-- my brother came to this country also later, much later than I did, and he also was in the wood business.

But he got together with big companies from the West Coast and only handled soft wood lumber like spruce and hemlock and pine and spruce, which is used for construction of homes, which was for outdoors use.

The soft woods are used for outdoor use in the construction of homes? You mean the frames that we see?

The frames, like a 2 by 4 or 3 by-- anything in the construction field is only soft woods.

That doesn't make you feel very confident about the strength of one's house if it's all soft wood.

It is very strong. It's the thickness and the width of the board. I mean, that was the style, and it still was vogue until about a few years ago when things changed here, this country to. Everything here was wooden frames.

Every house was wooden frames. And the outside naturally you had different finishing. But the inside was everything done by 2 by 4s or 2 by 6s or 3 by 10s. The whole house was of wooden frames.

And then later on when the fire department insisted that you have to protect people more, then they changed it. It was that you had to use some fire retardant chemicals on the wood. And last but not least, also you used metal instead of wood. So nowadays in big, big buildings, they will not use wood anymore because they're afraid. They're using steel or metal.

So that would be for large non-residential buildings mostly.

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It depends on the architects.

Well, you know, the interesting thing is that when the people who are familiar with Germany and have visited there often comment on the beauty and the strength of the houses compared to the United States and their construction. There must be some difference in construction process.

Well, the houses in Europe, they were mostly built out of stone. Stone houses or even, if you can afford it, I mean, it's brick.

Right.

Which is definitely much more solid but much more costly.

Yeah.

But it lasts longer.

Your house, was it a stone house? Your apartment?

We didn't have a-- the original houses where we lived, I have no idea how it was built because those houses were-- if you remember, if I should remember, I don't know when they were build. God knows when.

Yeah.

And they were certainly built with wood. There was no other way of doing it because that was the only way they could do it. And only later, when people had maybe chances to get either stone or brick, which would be much more costly, they built houses, and they could naturally afford it also, which were much better and last longer.

Well, so many of the houses in the inner cities of, not only Austria and Germany, but France and Brussels and so on, were stone houses that were-- I'm talking the central cities, where you'd have an apartment building, that could be many stories high, they were stone.

They were brick and stone. They were with the 19th century, if you think of that kind of construction with high ceilings and big windows and verandas and you know. I'm not talking about outer city, you know, where residential areas. And that lasted. It still is.

It lasted. Sure, it lasted because it was easier for them to get the stones. Apparently there were areas where there were stones. You know, Italy is known for that, for marble and all this, to get the material. And I have no idea exactly where the stones or bricks or something were manufactured. But it was there. It came from somewhere.

And in your apartment building, was--

I don't know actually the apartment. They were there, and I just-- I naturally looked underneath. I didn't know.

Of course not. Of course not.

Naturally, I don't know.

Of course not.

But it was definitely solid buildings. Solid building.

Your father, having himself been a butcher's son, how did he come by this trade? How did he come by this particular

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business?

You mean the kitchen manufacturing?

Mm-hmm.

Well, the family, there were two or three other who all-- the money-- I don't know exactly how they came to found the company. They had an idea that this will be a good item to start and would be needed. And the company was founded.

Yeah. It was a family business.

It was a family business.

What was the name of it?

At the moment, I wouldn't know what the name of that anymore.

OK. So it wouldn't have been like [GERMAN] Bloch or something like that.

It could have been, but I don't remember.

And did they have many workers manufacturing the cabinets, making the cabinets?

Naturally, they had people to work there. I don't know how many. But they had people who were qualified. And we had actually cabinet makers. Those people were-- how I should say-- certified. They had an apprenticeship before they could call themselves a cabinet maker.

Here, you can go to a company and it says-- and the man goes and says if you-- I would like a job. So the man says, what can you do? Well, I'm a cabinet maker. You have no proof that he ever was taught or that he knows anything. He doesn't even know how to put things together perhaps.

Yeah. There is a difference. There is a difference.

That's a big-- I mean, apprenticeship.

Yeah. In the sense of artisan craftsmanship, that was their guilds in Germany and so that are part of the quality control as well. Did you have the kitchen cabinets in your own apartment, were they from the company?

No. That apartment was already in existence. We didn't get it. No.

No. OK. But did you find your father's business interesting or not so much?

Well, I mean, not for me personally interesting. Well, I mean, I went to school. I mean, I had to go to school. I had no time to worry about getting a job or something like this.

Oh, no, no, no. That's not what I meant. I meant more like some boys would see something made of a metal, and they're just fascinated. They take their family radio apart. Things like-- I wondered whether that was of interest to you, what you saw there.

In a way, yes. In a way, yes, because it's nice to see that you can manufacture something, and you have a product at the end. It was of interest to me, yes. But it was not for me that I would say I want to get into it. I wanted to finish the school first and see what happens. But well, that is another story.

Yeah. And Fritz, your older brother, what was--

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He was in the company.

He worked there too.

He worked at company, but he also was anxious to get ahead of him. He didn't see any future in this company. He made connections with another company. And he left, and he became quite important for the other company. But it more or less in the same type of business.

Same type of business. OK.

They not only made kitchen cabinets, they made also other furniture.

OK. And we'll keep on going. Did your father have higher education?

No.

OK if I close this door?

OK. And your mother, had she had any?

No.

Any kind of--

They were home keepers.

She was a--

Homemaker.

Homemaker.

Women didn't go to work.

Or they worked at home.

They had no education for business. They were taught have babies and keep a home and cook.

Did she have any help in any of this?

Yes.

Yes?

Yes. We always had some help.

Did your father on an automobile?

No. In the city, we didn't have a garage, and we didn't have an automobile. No.

OK. Was your family religious?

Not that I can say. They were going to the synagogue on holidays but not regularly on the weekends. We believe-- we

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were Jewish, and we had a congregation. And we kept the holidays naturally. But we were not religious. And then naturally the trend started in Germany-- what do you call it now?

Let's cut for a second.

What is that looking for?

Oh, so they were reformed Jews.

Right.

OK. Oh, I just had a thought, and it went in here and out here. Did your-- ah, this was it. Did Mannheim have a large Jewish community?

Yes. There were quite a few synagogues, religious ones were orthodox. And I don't know how many. That I cannot tell you anymore. Big buildings, matter of fact. Also out of stone, which you mentioned earlier.

At the congregational church-- I don't know how many people lived in Mannheim-- they had a very considerable amount of Jewish people living in Mannheim, yes.

And would you say that most of them, like your own family, had been in Germany for generations and generations?

Yes.

Were there any newcomers from the East, for example, from Poland, from other countries further east like Russia?

They used-- well, it used to be that during the year, some people from the eastern part of Europe came to Germany, not necessarily to settle down, but to get help-- money. And it was a general German attitude, we did help them, but we didn't like them. That was a German attitude.

A German-Jewish or German in general?

German-Jewish.

Yeah. Well, I've heard that there has been a certain tension between East European Jews and German Jews.

Exactly. OK.

I mean, the background of German Jews and the background and the upbringing of Eastern educated or born Jews was like-- I don't want to say day and night, but it was a big difference.

Yeah.

We were-- you see, I also when somebody would ask me what are you in Germany, I mean, they would say, what are you? I said, I'm a German. Now, most people would say I'm Jewish.

Jewish is not a nationality. Jewish is a religion. Judaism is a religion. I'm not interested to know your religion. You want to know what part of the country or what part of the land you belong to. I was 100% German.

And your father and your mother?

Same. We had-- I mean, we did not find any problems to live amongst the Gentile people.

You were just as German, and they were just as German as you-- you all were the same.

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I mean, there were incidents maybe when you-- offhand, I cannot give it to you where and when-- where there are some antisemitic incidents, sure. But as a rule, we were accustomed to being equal. We didn't expect to be any different from anybody else.

Matter of fact, our attitude was not that we would take a step back because somebody was at a Gentile person and you were Jewish and says, well, I better don't do it because I'm Jewish.

No. If I feel that I had the proper background, I went ahead with all the other non-Jewish people just the same because I feel I'm just as good or maybe even better. That's the attitude.

It doesn't have the complex that often would accompany someone who felt they had to be more careful.

We lived a very comfortable social life before Hitler.

Were your parents-- were their friends Jewish and non-Jewish?

Yes.

OK. And yours?

Same.

OK. Let's talk about school now because you started talking about school. What were your first years of school? Describe a school room to me from the 1920s. Well, you see, this-- can you imagine how many years?

That's right.

You went to public school. The learning-- the teaching in those days was entirely different. You learned how-- you had to learn how to write. Matter of fact, there's a German style, that is here.

What is it called?

German term for it-- Deutsche schrift.

Deutsche schrift.

Yeah.

OK.

I mean, it's different from what we are using now, which is not the Roman. This is the ABC, the alphabet and all this.

Latin.

What is it called? Well, that's what is now all over the world used similar.

Oh, the Latin alphabet.

Yeah, but we had to learn a different-- learn how to write German schrift, you know?

Well, sometimes one sees old printed matter from Germany, and it's hard to read because it's in this schrift.

If you didn't know the German schrift, you didn't know just-- I mean, we knew it.

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Yeah.

Also, I mean, everything was more geared that you have to do it on your own. Everything was-- it was not-- it was very competitive.

Was it?

Yes.

Was it? And teachers, the teaching method, was it mostly-- well, tell me. What was the teaching method for--

I don't know what do you mean by method. You had respect from the teacher. Did the students, they were not-- how should I say-- revolting or being problems for the teacher.

I mean, God knows, the teacher would take a stick or something and hit you over the head. I mean, that was in the beginning. That also changed gradually in all this. But it was very strict.

So you had some fear of the teacher or just respect that this is someone you don't mess with? This is someone you don't cross.

I mean, you're brought up, and you know that it's your teacher, and you respect him. I mean, it was just natural.

Were their favorite subjects that you had, things that you liked learning more than others?

Well, at the beginning, I mean, I for instance, had to learn the beginning Latin and Greek.

Oh, wow.

Because it was customary that you should learn Latin first because that was the basic of all, later in law or medicine or anywhere, where the Latin basic comes in. And then even later on, they added Greek to our curriculum.

But then I found out-- times also changed. Naturally that was now in the '20s and so forth. I wasn't quite so sure that I would want to be a doctor or whatever would require-- lawyer or something like this. Even so, a lot of young Jewish people, also especially wanted to become doctors and lawyers and things like that.

And I was more geared to one language. I wanted to learn English and French. And then I had to switch to a different department. And I had to catch up in order not to lose another year because I didn't have in the beginning. I had to learn French and English separately in order to catch up with the ones who did learn already that before.

OK. So you had-- can I understand from this that you had an extra load of classes because you had this interest in--

Through the summertime or something because a teacher who helped me to get this part through the six months or a year. But I lost years before to catch up with the others.

Why did you lose the six months?

Because I learned Greek and Latin, and they learned French and English.

Ah, I see what you mean. I see what you mean. Well, it's a good basis to have Greek and Latin, but it's not with children today. It's not.

Well, it's very well learned, and it's good for everything. I mean, you can't go wrong with it. But it depends what your future is or what you want to do with your future.

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Was it an assumption in your home that you and your brother would have higher education? It was the assumption that the children should graduate and finish high school.

Abitur.

Abitur.

OK.

And then-- well, that--

So your father's business took a hit.

Sure.

OK. Did it continue anyway?

Yes, it did. But it was not the same anymore. It became more difficult as time goes on, also because it was Jewish.

Yes.

And people didn't want to buy from Jews. And it became more difficult.

OK.

But I would say they lived on this-- the company lived on for a little while longer. I don't know anymore because then I-- later on I left, and I don't know anymore just how they negotiated or how they liquidated or how the deal was settled. I don't remember the details about.

OK. We'll talk about that part later. Let's still stay in the 1920s and beginning of the '30s. Did your parents have any kind of political interests?

Well, there were-- unfortunately, all were democratic showing the leaders to get the country solidified on that basis, on the democratic base. But it didn't work. It just, there were too many other parties.

There were so many parties. I don't remember how many, maybe 25, 30, or even more parties and not strong enough to work out a Congress or to be able to-- and then also Germany had to pay reparation to the Allies. I mean, it reigned Germany to the last penny to pay them whatever. I don't know how much.

Did you feel that personally? That is, as a family, did you feel the unjust--

I mean, personally, I didn't feel it, but I mean, you are in the environment, you hear what is said. And people naturally talk about it.

As a German, did you feel it-- I don't mean like you had an effect of it, but did you as a German citizen think this is unfair that we should have to pay these reparations?

Well, you feel that it is not right. I mean, you lose, but you-- as a loser, you then would like to lose more.

That's right.

So this is a natural thing. But what choice have you got? If you're a loser, you have no choice.

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That's right, you pay.

They got the upper hand.

Yeah. That's true.

They got the upper hand, and Germany was in very bad shape. That's what happened.

What were you studying at university when you went in?

Actually, I was not really. Really, actually what I was-- that I wanted in architecture, I thought, because it was something in the line of-- what do you call it? Manufacturing furniture and things like that.

I thought that would be nice. But then, I wasn't quite sure if I would be able to get through with it. And then it became so difficult to stay in the university, I had to leave.

And what was the difficulty? How did it express itself?

They made it so difficult for Jewish people to stay up.

Was it through the kinds of courses you were required to take?

No.

Was it the grades?

Political. Political.

OK.

Hitler or socialism, all this was already taking definitely an upper hand.

So was Hitler already elected in '33 when you left Heidelberg University?

Oh, sure.

OK. OK.

I don't know now what year it was, but Hitler became chancellor in '33.

That's right.

Before that, the Nazis were all over the country. I mean, not perhaps as active as where once he was chancellor, but they made it difficult for Jewish people to-- I mean, it was not easy anymore. Then you knew that you were a minority, so to speak. You had not your same rights like the others did.

Can you think of examples of what difficulty meant in your life?

You could not go to certain areas. They would not allow you in. I mean, that was one of them. There are certain functions where they said Jews not allowed. You couldn't go to certain affairs, where they also said Jews not allowed.

So I mean, they made it very clear, in order to protect themselves, not that they thought it was right. But they wanted to be in agreement with the ruling people in order not to lose out on their end to oppose them. Then they would lose even more if they would not go along with the same thought.

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OK. So if I understand this properly-- let me see if I do-- it may not be that everybody was as ideologically convinced as the Nazis were, but because they were fearful of the power of the Nazis, if and when they would get into power, they would acquiesce to their demands and even before they were told to.

And that could have been the university authorities or there could have been some municipal authorities or people who would have been in charge of one or another aspect of German life.

That's right.

Is that correct?

That is correct.

And so this is what you would feel.

Yeah. And then, I connected-- since I mentioned my brother was in a bigger big place, which was woodworking and wood and everything else. I was able to get in this company.

After you left university.

Yeah.

OK.

I was an apprentice. I mean, like everything else, you have to start someplace. I was an apprentice in that woodworking business. And I don't know what year it was. And it lasted maybe, not too long, that they also, the owners, it was-- the funny part is, they were originally Jewish people, but what did I say before it was? What kind of a-- the--

Reformed Jewish?

What did I say? I couldn't think the name before.

Reformed.

The reform. There were all reformed Jewish people. They didn't hold any particular special services or so, but they didn't deny it, couldn't deny it anyway that they were Jews. But that's the way their life was, moderate. And then they began-- they took in partners who were Gentiles. So it was 50-50 Jewish, and 50 were Gentiles.

That lasted for a little while. And then when Hitler already started with this whole thing, they, the Gentiles, became more interested with the political thing and made it uncomfortable in the company too. They then pushed out everybody who was Jewish.

OK.

And I left. Well, I had to leave, not I left.

Yeah.

And Hitler at that time had a ruling that anybody who was born in '14, any Gentile or any German, not Gentile, any German '14 is going to go in the army. And I was in the German army.

You were in the German army?

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I had a rise-- I had [GERMAN] just like any other German.

Were there many other Jewish boys who were in the army?

Any other one who was born in '14 was in the same category.

Oh, my goodness.

We were not active but reserves. But we were in the German so-called army.

So you were drafted.

Drafted.

Can you tell me about that experience of being drafted?

Well, I mean, we did not have much to doing because the Allies also did not want this German, any army or anything like this at the time.

We were just practicing with wooden rifles and with make-believe machinery and tanks. The little things. Not that we have anything officially available, but in that pass which I had, it says Jews in it. It was mentioned that I was Jewish. But I was nevertheless in the German army.

And what year were you drafted?

Right after Hitler got power.

So 1933.

Right.

1933. And that means you're 19 years old. At that time, I applied. Then I said, I'm not going to stay here in this country.

That is pretty early on.

Yeah. So I went to Stuttgart where there was an American Consulate. And I applied for immigration. And naturally, it was extremely difficult to get somebody to sponsor me.

Did you have any relatives in the United States?

Not known. Even so, there were, I was told-- I mean, you hear this always later on more so. There were some Davids who, for what reason I don't know, emigrated to the United States, and lived in Chicago.

And by hook and crook I found out, and I don't know how it went. They finally-- they were nice enough, even they did not want to do it originally. They gave me an affidavit to come, but they did not want me to come to them.

Of course.

They said they had some other relatives who lived here on the coast, near West Point. And when I came finally then to the United States, those people who lived in Newburgh. I don't know if you know where it is.

No. West Point is--

West Point is the army.

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Yeah. Right.

Army, what do you call it? Where the cadets--

Yes.

Army cadets have to graduate from. It's outside from West Point. I went to Newburgh and stayed with them, and I came here. And when I left Germany, I never forget, I was still in the army, the German army. I had to resign by the Office of the Military.

And they made it very firm and told me that as soon as I get off the ship-- I mean, we had to go by ship. There were no planes-- we have to sign up to the German Consulate here in New York to let the consulate know in New York where I am. I said, yes sir, I will do the first thing when I get off the ship, let the German chancellor know where I am. And he's still waiting.

[LAUGHS]

Sometimes the absurdity of those rules and the absurdity, given what we know now about the context in which all of this took place. Let me step back a little bit. Before this all happens, your, quote, "basic training" with wooden rifles and sort of like play equipment, how long did it last, and where did it take place?

In Mannheim.

In Mannheim.

Yeah.

OK.

They had local little department where they had places where you had to assemble every week for a few hours.

OK. And was it a politicized kind of atmosphere, not just a military one? In other words, were the ideals of national socialism--

Well, more so, it became like this.

OK. More so, but it was actually originally a military draft. For that, he took naturally the--

So what was the point when you said, I'm outta here, I'm leaving?

I was able to get out.

I know. I'm talking about earlier than that. I'm talking when you come to the decision, I'm not staying in this country, was there something that came-- that happened that brought you to that?

I don't know. I saw that-- I mean, by then, I was a grown-up person. I was old enough to understand what's going on. And I saw that Germany was in such dire-- in such a bad shape, and I saw Hitler. And I thought, this is not going to go away. This is not going to help us. And my parents were very much against that I should leave.

Because that is one of my next questions. It's unusual that somebody-- I mean, from the stories that I hear and the people that I talk to, I've interviewed people who left as late as 1940.

And certainly in 1933, there were-- nobody liked what was happening, of the people that I've interviewed, but they

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didn't at that point say it's time to go, you know? They said it was too early at that point. And there always was pressure not to go. So I want to find out how was it for you and your family.

Well, as I said, my parents were definitely saying, this will pass. Like most Jewish people thought, Hitler comes and Hitler goes. But I personally didn't believe that. I just said that is not going to work. And I wanted to get out.

What about Fritz? What did he think?

He didn't go on out. He was married. And he was older, and he had a business. And he-- I don't know. He didn't go.

OK. Did he still live in Mannheim?

Yeah.

OK. And aunts and uncles, and did you have--

Yes.

Did they--

They all stayed.

They all stayed.

But I said, I will-- I'm not going to stay. And it was quite a decision for me to make.

Yes.

And it took two years. I mean, '33 I applied and '35 I only got the visa.

And why two years? Why did it take so long?

Because the United States government did only allow X amount of people from each country to emigrate. And if you had a quota or a number, you had to wait for your number to come up.

And do you remember your number?

No. I have no idea.

Did you, between 1933 and '35, experience any physical danger?

Physically, no. I was never injured or anything. But I was uncomfortable. When you went someplace and everybody said Heil Hitler, and I didn't put my hands up.

Or when you went someplace, they spoke openly about the political thing and what they feel, what they-- and I certainly didn't explain my opinion because they would maybe take an example and maybe start something with me, which I didn't want. So I kept quiet. I mean, physically I was not in any way set up.

Did you lose friends?

Most of my friends in same age wanted to get out too. Some did go out and went-- some friends went to Brazil, was able to take people up and made it maybe easier to get into Brazil than to go to the United States. Some people emigrated to England or some other country. I don't know. But the United States was very difficult.

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Why did you want to go to the United States?

I thought it was my future. I wanted to go to-- I wanted to go to the United States.

Without much thinking, but this is where you felt this--

I felt, I mean, if anything, I always read a lot of books about the United States and about what's going on. And there's no such thing that you are handicapped. You have a free way of doing, and you're not handicapped in any way. You can express yourself. You can leave and go wherever you want.

You can be yourself.

Yeah.

I said that that's where I would like to be. But naturally, it was, like I said, you get an affidavit.

And during those two years, were your parents-- I mean, was that a constant conversation, don't go, don't go?

Well, not constantly, but I'm naturally they knew that that was the ultimate thing would be that I would leave.

OK. Can you describe leaving to me and the detail how you said goodbye? Did you say goodbye to the larger family?

Well, look. I didn't think that I would not see them again. I mean, at the time when I left, I said look, we will see each other somehow. When I get to the United States, I will see that I get an affidavit for you too, saying that maybe I will be able to do this, not knowing anything. I have no idea. As it turned out, things did not go like this.

What happened?

My parents went to the concentration camp.

The relatives?

My brother was able to get out before they were caught after Kristallnacht. He was affected by the Kristallnacht. They came to his apartment, and they demolished the hold damn thing there.

They didn't manage to hold him?

They demolished the whole apartment.

Oh, they damaged the whole apartment.

They smashed everything. So then he realized that it's time to get out. But then it was already late.

Yeah. Yeah.

And I was here in America, and I really tried to get things going. But I had a tough time to get people to help me out because they were not that anxious. People here in America understood, but in order to give an affidavit, they have to show their income, what they owed, what they owned, and everything else. And they didn't want to show the government all this personal stuff. They didn't want to give that information out.

Are you talking mostly American Jews?

Yeah.

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OK.

They didn't want to do it.

OK. It was too much risk for them and too much exposure?

Not so much a risk. They just-- look. There was no income tax or at least that I know there was no income tax. And if you own or if you had X-- I don't know exactly how it was anymore-- you had to pay.

I suppose if you had a certain amount or if you were the owner of buildings or had income-- I don't know the details-- they would have to pay the government something. And if they didn't-- if they don't--

Declare it.

--declare it, they don't owe. And in order to give an affidavit, you will have to declare that you are able to let that person come from Europe, you are financially able to pay for it if anything comes up.

They didn't-- the American government didn't want to have the person who comes from Europe come and is going to be not able to get a job or doesn't know what to do.

And the government has to support him or has to pay for his livelihood. They didn't want that. They want to make sure that the person who sponsored them is financially able to do it. And they did not want to give that information out at first. They did not want to do it.

That was your experience, when you were trying to do this for your family.

Yeah.

OK. So you leave in 1935?

Yeah.

And you live from Mannheim.

Yeah.

By train?

By train to a Hamburg.

And then from Hamburg?

Ship.

OK.

You don't remember the name of the ship.

Columbus.

You do. Columbus. Was it a passenger ship?

Yeah.

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OK. And were there many other people in your situation?

There were a couple of Jewish people, who also were on the same ship, who were fortunate enough also to leave, right.

And how long did the journey last?

A week or more. I don't remember. It was not the fastest.

OK.

We got in August here. We got here in August, and it was a heat wave. It was no air conditioning. So you can imagine for somebody who was not used to this heat, I really didn't like the climate.

Yeah. Yeah. Germany is in a northern parallel, not as far south as here. Did you have anybody meet you at the pier?

Those people who lived in Newburgh, which is outside of West Point, they came. And we had to have somebody. They didn't know me, and they took me in. And they took me up to Newburgh. They were also, from those people from Chicago, relatives.

So this would have been--

Yeah. The owner of those people in Newburgh had a big factory. They made clothing. They made men's suits and men's overcoats and things like that. And they had a lot of people work there. And I was supposed to work there too.

And not having air conditioning in a place like this and the lint when you cut clothing and, like I said, not had machinery to cut the clothing to make suits and overcoats and all this, the lint and perspiration, it stuck to your skin, and it makes it itch.

I didn't like this one bit. And they called me a greenhorn. They says, look at this greenhorn. He's here only a few weeks, already he's complaining. I mean-- I mean--

Did you already speak English because of your English classes?

I spoke English, not American English. English, like in England. You know, the typical English. But you lose that after a while. So they told me I was a greenhorn, you know. So I stayed with them for a little while. I mean, I didn't know the first thing anything about America, but they were-- they actually also lost a fortune during the crash here.

There was a crash here in America. And in '35 when I came here, they were again able to-- they did pretty good. They had a very nice home. They had a car. matter of fact, they had two cars. I learned to live a little bit American style of living and did very good.

And I looked around. I said, I'm not going to stay the company which they had because this making suits over overcoats, it's not for me. And I looked for a place in New York-- in New York City-- and I found a place which had a lumber company. And I moved from Newburgh to New York. And I worked for a lumber company there.

So when you got the affidavit and the visa, you got the right to work. So you were able to-- you know, you had freedom to go and find work anywhere.

I mean, you see, this is the difference. When I came here, naturally so I was not tied down by anything. I had my freedom. And even so, I knew there was problems and my parents and my brother and all this.

And I tried to explain it to those people here. They listened, but they don't act. They listened, but they didn't act. Just like Roosevelt, I don't know. He also had that ship here in the harbor.

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St. Louis.

Yeah. And refused to let the people get off the ship and sent it back. I mean, this is what was the attitude people had here. They didn't understand how serious this Hitler socialism, Nazi antisemitism, all this was already. They thought, oh, it's on the other side of the ocean. We don't want to get involved.

Did you learn of the St. Louis as it was happening?

I read about it, but I mean, what could I do about it?

No, but did you see the ship in the harbor?

No, I didn't see it myself. I saw it on tel-- I don't know if I saw it on television or I saw it in newspaper.

Papers, yeah. yeah. Now, when you came down and looked for a lumber company in New York City, where did you live?

Well, I mean, when I did get a job in New York, I rented a room in the neighborhood where the place was and--

Where was that?

On the West side, on West 72nd Street, somewheres--

Oh, so you were on the Upper West Side. And there was a lumber company that was also--

Well, the lumber company, actually they had two places. There was one on the East side and one on the West side. The East side was where the main office was, and they had one on the West side, which they gave me. They told, you are in charge of that. So I took care of the West side lumber yard.

OK.

But it was nothing to speak-- it was a small lumber yard, not big. We sold whatever in the lumber yard, you know, here to-- same thing like this.

But you had some--

Retail. A retail lumber yard. People come for this or for that, for a piece of plywood, for the [GERMAN], for whatever there is.

Yeah. But it was a foothold. See, this is the interesting-- for me, an interesting point. You had background and some experience from Europe, and it gave you the foothold in New York City to then go for--

I knew something.

Yeah. Yeah. Were there letters back and forth between you and your family?

Yes.

What did the letters from your parents say?

Well, I cannot go-- tell you each--

Of course not.

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--individual letter anymore. But they told us-- told me that things are not going well, and it's getting worse, and so forth. And then finally, I found out that all the Jewish people in that area from Mannheim, all the way down to the Swiss border, which is clear to the bottom, were taken by train one day-- I don't know what day it was, I don't know-- and sent to a concentration camp in France. And it was called Gurs.

Yeah.

You know it?

I've heard of it. I've heard of it.

Actually, they first went to a place called Recebedou, which was during the Franco regime, a Spanish military camp, and then abandoned. And they took over in the Pyrenees. That was in the mountains, in the Pyrenees Mountains, which is between Spain and France. And there were all those Jewish people were in that camp, Gurs.

And was this after Kristallnacht?

Yes.

You think they were taken?

Yes.

OK.

My brother was able to leave Germany-- Mannheim. Actually, I wanted him to come to New York before, but it didn't work. I wanted him to go to l, to go to China, and come over the East Coast to the United States. Didn't work.

Somehow neither did-- it was extremely difficult. But he was able to get out of Mannheim. He was able to go to Portugal somehow, and I got him a crossing from Lisbon to New York. And in I would say about '40, 1940.

What about his wife?

She with him as well.

With him, both of them.

Did they have children?

No.

OK. It was the two of them.

So they came on one of the large ships, which actually left Lisbon or Portugal. He came to New York. And when he settled actually with me because he had no place to go. He had no place to go.

He and his wife settled with me. I made arrangements that he could stay with somebody in my neighborhood. And I took care of them until he was able to find also something in his line in the wood business in Washington, DC.

I see.

And he moved to Washington, DC, and he actually was in Chevy Chase for the rest of his life.

And did you then provide the affidavit for him and his wife?

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I was able, together-- somebody else, with mine together-- to get him out. Yeah.

OK. And for your parents? Had they been taken? What happened?

That is a story by itself. My parents were in the Gurs. And there is no way of escaping it. They were all booked to go by one of the trains to get to the--

Auschwitz?

Auschwitz or someplace. And I knew a senator-- no, I didn't know-- the person I lived with in Newburgh was a very strong Republican political influence, knew a senator, who was a Republican senator, in his area.

So in New York-- nevertheless, in New York or Maryland.

And he lived right next to Franklin Roosevelt.

Yeah.

And he took me one day to this senator, who lived not far from us, from Newburgh, was a half an hour by car. And the senator was nice enough to listen to my story. Long and so behold, he arranged, that senator-- his name was Howard Lufisch, a very old English immigrant family who was already for three generations at least-- very strong Republicans.

He arranged to get Marseilles consul to get to the government-- of the French government of something in Gurs, get my parents out of this Gurs. And we were-- and he arranged it. I don't know exactly how it went.

And they went from Gurs to Marseilles, went over to Africa to Casablanca, and stayed in Casablanca 'til I was able to get a ship for them from Casablanca to come to New York.

Hah, so you saved your parents.

Right.

Oh, my goodness.

My parents came here in '44-- '43. I was in the army already. I was already in the American army, ready to go to Europe.

Congratulations. Congratulations. The youngest child gets everybody out.

And my parents lived here in New York, Washington Heights, where most of the German people live. And they died, and my father died first, and my mother followed 10 years later.

Did they tell you of what had happened since you had left?

Well, the detail part I don't want to hear anymore. But all of my uncles and aunts who were in that same camp, I couldn't get them out. I could not get them out. They all died.

They all were killed.

They all were killed. Yeah.

It had been almost-- when they finally arrived in 1944, it had been almost 10 years since you-- nine years, eight years-- since you had left Germany. Did they look different to you?

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Well, they didn't have much to eat. They look-- you know, they lost weight, lost-- and aged in something fierce. But somehow they didn't actually have any physical problems later on here. And things worked out pretty good.

Did they ever--

I was fortunate enough to get them-- with this help of the senator, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to get them out. But it took a lot of doing to do all this.

What was the name of the man who owned the factory up in Newburgh? Do you remember?

Scott, his last name. The name of the company-- that I never forget-- it was LBS, Lehman, Berkowitz, and Scott. They had a very big company. I mean, it was big in clothing. They had at least maybe 100 or more people working there. Very big company.

And his name was--

And they made men's suits an overcoats.

And his name was Scott, Mr. Scott.

Yeah. Now, he never told me that he was-- he never said he was Jewish. And he never told me where he came from. And he never told me where his family was from. Somehow or another, people here in this-- it's the funniest thing-- somehow people, somehow, if they didn't want to tell you, they didn't tell you.

I have not-- I mean, maybe his name was Schott in Germany, but he was here, and he says his-- sometimes he told me once he is Italian. He comes from an Italian family.

And because he told me once, this lady or this family, which was they were Italians. They are relatives of mine. So I said, how come they're Italians? Well, I don't know how he explained it.

And yet, you saw-- you knew that it was some sort of family connection between them and the Davids in Chicago.

Well, his wife was a David. His wife was David, who married a Scott.

I see. I see. Wow. Wow. Let's at this point take a break. All right.

OK. So let's focus now a little bit on your life in the United States, starting with the small lumber yard retail that you're working at on the Upper West Side, and you rent a room in an apartment close by, you said?

Mm-hmm.

How long did this particular job last?

Until I was inducted in the army.

Oh, so a good number of years.

Yes.

Well, can you tell me about how many years that would have been?

Five years. Wait a minute. I got the army in '42-- '43. Five, six years.

OK.

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That was-- no, I changed once. That place was so small, it didn't give me much of a challenge, and I didn't see a future in it. And I didn't make enough money. And I want to make more money.

And I wanted to be developing and things. So I went with a bigger company in Brooklyn. And I naturally also had to move in a different place in Brooklyn. But they were much, much bigger. And it helped me.

OK. What neighborhood in Brooklyn was this?

The name, I think it was Lutz.

The name of the company.

Yeah.

Lutz. OK. And was this Bensonhurst, Brooklyn Heights?

No, it was in Williamsburg.

In Williamsburg. OK. And you lived then close by? I lived-- I don't know know anything about a street, unfortunately. Also I stayed nearby, right.

OK. Did you have your own apartment or did you still rent a room?

No, I had a little apartment.

And can you describe it for me a bit?

I don't know how I would describe a little apartment. It was not much to talk about.

Was it a one bedroom, studio?

One room studio, I would call it nowadays. Right.

OK. But it was self-contained.

Yeah.

OK.

And I had and that already then at that time some of the boys, who I know from Mannheim, came here. And naturally, we got together on weekends and so forth, which was very nice. And we went in many, many times here and there and so forth. It became a little club like.

You know, you anticipated my next question because since you came over and you were truly alone, you know, without close family by and without a community, I wondered what kind of social life you were able to develop.

How should I say? In Newburgh was very similar. They had a daughter, marriage in age, and they had ideas that maybe I would be interested. I mean, she still was in college. And she came home for whatever. They had vacation or whatever. But I was not interested. Not that she was not nice and all this, but I just couldn't--

That was not your life at that point.

No. Actually, I wasn't ready to marry.

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You were already married?

I was not married.

No, no, no. You said-- you said, actually I was already-- something. And I thought you said married.

I wasn't interested.

OK.

So anyhow, when we met with the other young people who came from Mannheim too, we met here on weekends and so forth, we met other girls. And we joined and did go on excursion and so forth. So we had a nice social life, very nice.

Did you join any kind of community? Did you--

No. We did not join any Jewish congregation or nothing.

OK.

No. You see, I don't know what it is. Even today, I'm not a-- I mean, I don't deny that I'm Jewish, and I pay my dues and I pay the congregation, whatever is coming up. But I don't like-- they are conservatives. And I don't particularly care for the services and especially I didn't even care for the rabbi. So I just--

You don't have a connection.

No. I just never feel like it. And I know it's maybe unfortunate, but that's the way it is.

That's OK. Every individual has that right to know their own soul and know what fits with them and what doesn't.

I mean, this reform movement became very popular. And I know more people who are thinking similar what I do than I ever had before. So they just don't do more than just what is necessary, so to speak.

Did you meet your wife at this time?

I met her before I went overseas. I was married in '43, and I went overseas a few months later to Europe.

Tell me how you met.

Blind date.

Really?

Like I said, we met, and those people who came from the other side had always friends and so on and so forth. And on weekends, we met here and so forth and so on. And one day, I was introduced to her. And she seems to be very nice. I thought to myself, very nice young lady. And we stuck together.

And did she tell you much of her story?

She lost her whole parents.

She lost them all.

All.

How is it that she ended up in the United?

She went under Kindertransport. She left Cologne with-- you know what a Kindertransport is?

Tell us.

Sure.

Tell us.

She went to England and was on a Kindertransport also. Her parents said, you've got to get out. You have to get out because it's not good for you to stay here. And they let her go on the Kindertransport. And she went to England, and she worked as a governess or kinder or what do you call it?

A nanny?

Nanny for some English family someplace-- I forgot where-- until she got her visa, which also took a long time. And then she emigrated to New York. I think she came in 1940 or '41 to New York.

And what was her first name and maiden name?

Her first name was Hilda, last name Katzenberg

Katzenberg and then Bloch.

Well, came Bloch.

You know, Katzenberg is that, you ever heard of Jeffrey Katzenberg?

Yeah, I have. But I don't--

It's that movie--

That's right.

--mogul who has the-- well, there are three guys together now. It's the Disney on the thing. He is one of them. And we found out indirectly there is a little bit stretched this cousin of what her name was.

OK. Of Hilda. And when was she born? Do you know?

1920.

OK. So she was six years younger than you?

Yeah.

And she passed away.

In '14, 2014.

2014.

She also came here, and she also took an apprenticeship in Germany before she left. She had an affidavit in the booklet

and everything else, where she was qualified as a-- not as a tailor. What do you call it?

Seamstress?

No, not a seamstress.

She could make the clothing. And when she came here, I don't know what the heck is the name. It's not clothing. It's a-- she was a certified-- I can't think of the name what she was. Anyhow, she came here to the country.

She went to Bergdorf Goodman. She showed this letter to the owner. They hired her to be there. She was in charge of made-to-order dresses for all the well-to-do people who came the Bergdorf Goodman.

Custom.

Custom.

Custom clothing.

Custom-made clothing.

Bespoke is, I think, the way the British would say. Bespoke clothing. Bespoke suits. Bespoke.

She worked for Bergdorf Goodman. God, that was so long.

OK.

It was a very good job for her.

OK. So when you-- your work life was at this Lutz company--

That was before the war.

That's right. In Brooklyn. In Brooklyn. And when the war starts, do you remember? Oh, let me-- before we start the war, were you reading newspapers about what was going on in Germany during your time here?

Sure.

Which newspapers would you read?

Well, I don't know. The Times mostly.

So English language newspapers.

I always was very much a Times reader.

OK. So you were all-- was it that you were following the news of what was going on in Germany in an active way? That's really my question.

Yeah.

All right. And the source of this was mostly The Times.

Well, I mean, you hear from other people too. But mostly The Times or radio. Now, radio was already available.

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OK. There were a couple of very famous American journalists who were in Germany during those years, William Shiver was there. Did you hear his broadcasts?

Sure.

OK. And then, of course, after the war, it was-- his name escapes me now, but he had that very famous report from Buchenwald.

He's on 20 minutes.

Murrow? Was it--

Ed Murrow.

Ed Murrow.

Right.

Yeah. Yeah. Did you read German language newspapers?

No.

OK.

You know, it's a funny thing. We never spoke German in our household. Even though my parents-- I had to speak somehow-- my daughter, she can understand and speaks haltingly German.

Our son can understand it but not speak it, no. Now, I not only spoke French and English, but the army made me learn Russian. I went to the-- when I came here-- before I went overseas, I should say, they drafted me and made me go to the University of Pittsburgh.

Oh, really?

And I went to University of Pittsburgh for nine months. And there were a lot of Russian immigrants, teachers, and so forth. And I had to learn Russian from morning to night.

Oh, my.

And when I was finished, I could-- I should say not really speak it, but I made myself understood in Russian. I don't know why of all-- I had with me a lot of young boys who came from Yugoslavia.

That's right.

Who came from, maybe from Hungary or from Poland or from someplace in the eastern part of Europe, who had the alphabet, the Russian alphabet, and also their language is a little bit better than German or English or French. They had it a lot easier to learn it. For me, it was a tough, tough thing to learn.

It is a different sensibility. Learning Russian--

You spoke Russian.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN] He speaks Russian.

Oh, yeah?

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Yeah. Our videographer speaks Russian.

[PHONE RINGING]

Let's cut the camera. OK. Let's step back a bit. Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

I was drafted because I-- actually, I could have volunteered, but I had at this time all the work to do for my parents. And I couldn't go in the army and do this from the army.

And my brother and all the same kind of thing while I was still able to do it on my own. Once in the army, you have to do what the army tells you. And I couldn't do this anymore.

So you were drafted.

I was drafted in '43.

So '43 means that you were then 30 years old? 29, 30 years old?

Right. Right.

OK.

And I was-- not only was-- once I was finished with the Russian business, then they pulled me over to Ritchie.

OK. Tell us what is Ritchie.

Ritchie is outside of Washington.

OK. And what was it?

It was a camp, just like any other camp is, where I think there were 2,000. I read it some someplace lately. All together, 2,000 immigrants from Europe, mostly Germans and other countries as well.

So young men.

Yeah. All young men. And we were taught the German regulations and the German Army's insignia and whatever we to know and to learn to identify and to keep information because once we were overseas, we were always with the troops right in front in order to capture somebody from the Germans, who we could interrogate and give that information to our headquarters so they know what they have to face.

So you were intelligence.

Yes. Did they know that you had been drafted into the German Army?

I don't know if I told them or not. I don't know.

Because I find that really-- I just find that so unique, that here you start with this and then you end up in the American Army.

Right.

There aren't many stories like that.

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Right.

So what was the training course? How long did it last at Ritchie-- Camp Ritchie?

I think about three months.

OK. So you were inducted or you're drafted in what month of 1943?

Now, the month I don't remember.

Don't remember. OK. But at any rate, nine months Pittsburgh, three months Camp Ritchie. And then what happens?

Then, I think in '44, we-- I don't know what year, but a month and a half before the invasion, we went to England.

OK. So the invasion was June 6, 1944.

What was it, '44?

'44. June 1944. So that would have been about April.

Yeah.

Sometime in April '44, you were sent to England.

Right.

On a troop ship?

Yes.

OK.

It was a convoy. It was a bit convoy.

And where did you land?

That is a good question. I don't know where in England we landed. I have no idea anymore where we land.

Somewheres on the South Coast. I don't know.

OK. And did you stay on the South Coast?

We stayed near-- not in London. We stayed in a city near London. All of us, we were in a city near London.

Did you already belong to a certain unit or division?

Oh, sure we were. At that time, we were six people. We were a team. I think our team was number 17. There was two captains-- no two lieutenants, myself is three, and three other fellows, who also were with us. We had two Jeeps. And that was it, two Jeeps, and a little wagon behind it. And we were a separate unit by itself.

And all of you had been emigres, refugees from Germany?

All of those people had been with German background.

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Did you have a rank? Did you have a rank? Were you were a soldier, a sergeant, a private, a--

Yeah, my-- that's interesting too. At one time, they offered it to me when I was in the army. They offered to me to become an officer. And they said I should go-- I should apply for it because I have the qualifications to become an officer.

So I said to myself, if I become an officer, I will end up as a lieutenant. And a lieutenant, first lieutenant, or a second lieutenant, and then maybe a captain, and so forth, they are the lowest of all the ranking officers.

They all have to do what the others tell them to do. I became a master sergeant. That's the highest rank in the non-commissioned rank. I mean, you cannot get higher, is a master sergeant. And I was able to tell others what to do. And I didn't have to do it.

So I said, I'm not going to become an officer. I am going to be a master sergeant, and nobody is going to tell me what to do. If something comes up, I tell them, the next one is sergeant or the corporal or the private to do this and this and this because I know how it works. So I--

Smart.

I refuse to become a lieutenant.

OK.

That's why I did never become OCS.

OK. So you were a master sergeant.

Master sergeant.

OK. Now, the six of you--

And we split up.

OK.

There were three-- there was one of-- there were two officers. One officer went with three and another of with three.

OK. How long did you stay in Britain?

Not long. We were in a movie, and they showed all kinds of German equipment which we had to identify in order to know what it means and what they're doing with it. And the movies was going on. And all of a sudden the movie stopped, and the lights go on in the movie house.

And here they call out a few names, and amongst them also my name. That means we had to be ready to go, and within the next two hours, we were shipped to the port. And within the next few hours, we were already on a ship to Normandy.

Had the invasion started?

The invasion had just started a week ago.

So you were--

And no sooner we got over there, no sooner we got over there, we didn't know anybody. We didn't know-- you don't

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know anything. So we were told that we were assigned to the French Army. There was an army, which called the Second French Armored Division, which was we had to be liaison between the Americans and the French, and since we were able to speak French and so forth.

So we were with the French all the time. And whatever was going on, we had to tell them in American at the same time so they knew was it coordinated. And we went with the French army for Normandy 'til it ended up in Strasbourg at the end of the war.

So you were in France.

I was in France.

OK.

And we were with the French Army all the time. The name of this General Leclerc. I don't know if you ever heard of him.

I've heard of him. I've heard of him.

He was-- I mean, he was just like-- he was sitting down with you, it didn't matter that he was the high general. He was down to earth fellow. And he also had-- he had troubles before with de Gaulle and all this kind of stuff. But he was really down to earth fellow. And we got along very well. But came lunchtime, between 12:00 and 2:00, there was no war.

This is the French army.

Between 12:00 and 2:00, he had dinner. No matter where the battle was on, he says, that is dinner time. I mean, it was-- I mean, it was a wonderful guy, a wonderful guy. But when it was serious, he was really there. And we went with him through the whole campaign. We were the ones who entered Paris with him.

We were the only-- the Americans allowed the French to liberate Paris, even so the Americans were ahead of us. But they said, we don't want to do it. Let the French come into Paris first. So we went with them into Paris.

What was that like?

Oh, that was liberation. You should see all the women coming. It was something. Anyhow, well, one of the things-- I know you told them that I was at the-- one of the consuls here now want to give me a decoration.

That's right. So what is it? The French Legion of Honor? Is this it?

I don't know what-- I don't even know what kind of a decoration he wants to give me.

But it is as a result of serving with--

It was while we were serving with the French, the Second French Armored Division, through all the campaign, from the Normandy 'til Strasbourg.

So tell me, in this campaign, what did you do, and what kind of experiences did you have in your role?

Each day, they sent out with a Jeep and so forth, armored vehicles ahead of us. I mean, we had to make progress. We had to get ahead of us. We had to get ahead of the areas and had to find the enemy, where we have to get through.

We had to find German officers or whoever was caught. And we had to interrogate them. And we knew how to do it because even so sometimes they didn't want to cooperate, but we know how to do it.

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And we were able to tell them what equipment they had and who was in charge, where they were located, and all this. So we could tell them behind so they know where to send artillery where they would bomb and all this kind of stuff. We were on the front lines every day.

So you were in a danger zone.

Most of the time.

So when you would capture someone, and you say they didn't want to tell you, how did you-- how were you able to get information from them?

Some of them-- I tell you, some of them were glad to-- I mean for them, the war was over. Once they were captured, they were not sent back to the Germans anymore. They were sent back to a prison camp. And they didn't have it so bad. Sometimes I told them, you can go to a nice camp or you can go to a difficult camp.

And once we-- even I had once a fellow that was in the Austrian area-- I mean, that was already later after France, when we were over on the other side of the river-- of the Rhine River, we called some German major or colonel or whatever he was. I forgot.

He wouldn't budge. He says-- you know, he joked in German-- he says, according to the German Geneva Convention, I'm only obliged to give you my name, rank, and that's all.

You know, according to Geneva Convention, all he is obliged to tell me his name and his rank and his number. I said give me your Soldbuch. You know, that's his book. Everybody had a Soldbuch. And once I looked at this, I know exactly what was going on because I know the Germans are very, very accurate.

I knew everything I needed to know, but I want him to tell me. I said you want to talk or you don't want to talk. He wouldn't want to talk. I said, listen. If you don't want to talk, I'll send you out to the Russians. The Russians were coming from the other side.

You know, he wouldn't budge. He was so stubborn. I said, look. You can go to the American prison camp or you can go to the Russian. You know how they'll treat you. He didn't care. He doesn't care. So stubborn.

Wow. But you had the information from his--

I got it all.

Did you catch anybody who-- so most of the intelligence was of a military nature.

All was.

That is, what is it that you're bombing and what kind of equipment do they have, and the strength of that particular--

Right.

OK. And were you in Strasbourg when the war ended?

We were in Strasbourg where the SS was there two hours before. We got in the building where the SS was two hours before. The meals-- all the food was still on the table. And they fled across the Rhine River to go on the other side of the river while we came in.

Wow. Wow. Really fast on their heels.

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Yeah.

OK. And did you go beyond Strasbourg?

Sure. We went up to Vienna.

With the French.

No. The French stopped.

OK.

Once Strasbourg was taken, the French Army, this General Leclerc said, they are going to rest now. So we-- as we were three and the other three, we were then naturally assigned again to get back to the American troops.

And we went back to-- what is his name? What was this guy who was killed-- General Patton. General Patton. Then we were with Patton 'til the end of the war.

OK. And what month did you get to Strasbourg? Do you remember?

No. I don't know anymore. Well--

Was it fall? Was it--

It was-- let me see. The war was over-- when was it over?

May '45.

In May. So Strasbourg, it must have been in the fall. Oh, we were in Belgium before what, the Bulge.

You were the Battle of the Bulge?

Yeah, sure.

That must have been tough.

We were-- oh, I tell you. I had my share.

Tell me about that.

I had my share. I mean, we were not expecting the German to break through. And the Americans were not prepared for it. And we didn't have the equipment to hold them back. So everybody, even cooks, who were not supposed to fight or anybody who was not able to do any artillery or any tank or so, but everybody was drafted to hold back the Germans who were coming.

And the weather was bad, was visibly bitter cold snow. Then finally, two or three days later, the wagons were able to come from the other side and were able to break who and captured us and could get us out because we were surrounded l

And this is when you're still part of General Leclerc's--

[PHONE RINGING]

Let's cut. So you were still part of the French forces during the Battle of the Bulge? And it's the American--

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No. That was already after it. That was with-- what's his name?

Patton.

Patton.

OK. So you were part of the American forces but surrounded.

Yeah. And then the Americans break through. I got a piece of news in my ear that I should ask you about a particular instance which sounds very, very unique. Were you involved in protecting the royal family in some way in Belgium?

Well, of course, nothing unique. Like I told you, we always for some reason or other, we had a fellow-- I mean, that lieutenant, my age, a daredevil, if you can call him. He didn't care about the regulations, about what is supposed to be and on. He says, this is war, and I keep it my way.

And he always wanted to be there ahead of everybody and see when they can get. I mean, souvenirs of all kinds of things. So we are all of a sudden in-- that was in somewheres in Austria. I forgot exactly where it was. We come to area, there is a Nazi soldier standing in front of some kind of a gate.

We come up there. And naturally, he right away puts his hand up when he saw Americans coming. He didn't want to go on to it. So he was captured. So we ask about, what are you standing here for? What's the thing?

So he told us that there were some important people in that castle. It was a castle, which he protected the entrance for. So we didn't know. So we just drove in in that castle, and here was the King Leopold and his wife and family from Belgium kept prisoners by the Germans all this time.

Oh, my gosh.

And we just came in there, and we told them, what's-- what's-- he says, well, we were not able to get out. He says, now you can get out. Now you get out. And he later on gave us a decoration of Fourragere.

I mean, we were just always ahead of everything. And at one time, unfortunately, this is what I just can-- if I can remember-- there were certain things in Austria, mines-- I don't know exactly what kind of mines.

I should know, and I can't think of the name-- where the Germans had taken jewelry of people who they killed or they had accumulated somehow, from where, I have no idea. Now, if I can tell you, the room is not big enough. There were bar-- you know, barrels full of diamonds and jewel-- and valuable things.

So in these mines.

In the mines. So we're not talking about mines that explode. We're talking about mines that are underground.

Right. I think it was-- what was it? It was for reasons, those mines. They kept food in those mines. They keep it for coolness, for the temperature there. I forgot the name of it anymore.

And also, they had Germans guarding it that all the time. We come up there, and we both, we jumped out. This German-- those German soldiers, they were all glad it was over. They gave up you said to hell with it.

We went inside. I cannot even explain to you. This whole area full of barrels and barrels and barrels and barrels of nothing but jewelry and diamonds and so forth, where the Germans had hidden for whatever reason, for future, get it into money or to sell it or something. I don't know.

Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh. And then once you see this, did the US Army take it over?

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We immediately put soldiers-- American soldiers there-- and tell them, you got it. You don't let anybody go in.

Yeah.

And we had naturally right away reported back to our headquarters, and they came up. And then I don't know exactly what later on happened. But just--

That's amazing.

--things like that, you didn't expect.

Did you know by that point about-- did you have news of what had happened to the Jews?

In Auschwitz?

Mm-hmm.

Oh, sure. We went to--

Dachau?

Dachau. And we liberated the people. We were actually in Dachau.

Tell me about that.

Well, what can I tell you? To get to Dachau and saw the barracks and those people which are practically skeleton, more to speak of, and we come in there and tell them you are now no longer prisoner, they were emotionally, you know, so taken that they couldn't explain-- they couldn't even say anything. That was not easy. It was terrible. It was terrible.

But you spoke German, and maybe not all of them spoke German, but you'd have more ability to communicate than most of the others.

We all knew German.

OK.

We, all of us, knew German. The cap-- I mean, the fellow with me and everybody spoke German.

Yes. But I mean, the regular US soldiers who were liberated.

The regular US soldiers didn't speak German.

No. No. So you could communicate with the prisoners.

Oh, sure. Well, what shall I-- should I ask them how do you feel? I mean--

No, of course not.

Silly to ask. I mean, there were some so weak, they couldn't even get out of the bed anymore. Some died even before they were able to be liberated or taken back in the hospital or someplace where they would take them. There were hundreds of them, hundreds of them. Terrible situation, but--

Do you remember how you arrived at Dachau? Was it also ahead of the Army in a Jeep? Was it-- the circumstances of

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how you got there.

Well, we asked some people. We knew about it. Only we didn't know exactly where, but then we found somebody in that village or nearby the village. And we just took them along, and he showed us which way to go. So we know which way to go.

OK.

I mean, we had to be aggressive too. We couldn't be timid about it. You do what we tell you or else.

Yeah. Yeah. And did you encounter resistance?

Not really. Not really.

And you said that that lieutenant was not a rule-book kind of person. Was he with you at this point?

Yes.

And were you a head of the army when you entered Dachau or were there Americans already there?

I mean, he was with me. He was with me. Look. You spread out, you know. I mean, only with three people, one went this way, one this way or this way. Different directions, but all over they see the same thing.

There's very little you can do as a person. But they knew-- I mean, we told them in German-- that we told them that no longer any Germans anymore around them. We are hear, Americans now, and that you no longer be afraid.

It was-- I tell you something. Somehow, when you come now, since you bring it back more so than I ever would have done otherwise, it will fade. It will fade. All this will not longer be so much on your mind anymore as time goes on.

Is that a good thing?

It's a normal thing. If it's a good thing, I don't know. But it's normal.

Are you saying that because in some ways you're not as affected by it as you might have been?

Look. I tell you something. There were wars, when you go back to the Romans or by the Greeks or by any other wars, whatever happened in the world, there were terrible things happening in those places. And it's history. It's written down someplace, and you read about it, and you take a notice.

Things which happened the last 10 years in Afghanistan or in Iraq or in other places all over the East there, still not very, very well known to everybody. But surely, not very pleasant to hear about it. But in time, all this will dis-- not disappear, but it will not have the same effect anymore as now.

This also, it will be history in another 50 years or 100 years, that the Holocaust or the Kristallnacht or Hitler itself was this and this and so forth. And you will read it in the history. And that is it. It will not change anything. It will not change anything.

That's kind of fatalistic.

I'm just-- I'm just responding. I mean, I'm not challenging or anything like that. But it's-- but a lot of people say the sort of activity that we do is in the effort so that it will never happen again. And from hearing you say this, I get the sense that you're saying it'll all happen again.

It will. And not in the same way. I tell you something. When we fought the war, every soldier had a uniform on. The

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German were the German uniform, the American uniform, the English and so forth. You knew your enemy when you saw them.

You either took them or you killed them or whatever you did. That was war. The war is no longer like this anymore. Nobody's dressed in uniform. The enemy can be dressed as you and I am now and are very seriously our enemy or opponent or God knows what we can call it.

Just as much as if they had another uniform.

Right. Yeah.

This is not the same kind of a war anymore like it used to be. But it will happen in a different way, I'm sure. Things, people, will not change. And you will see it. You see it now over there. And I'll tell this right now-- and you know what is the cause of it?

What?

Religion. Religion has caused more of this than everything else. If you're a different religion, they kill you because they don't believe that you are of the same kind, and they say you have to be killed because you are not the same as we are. Well ISIS or whatever is this name group?

ISIS.

They openly say, you are not one of us, and the-- what do you call it? Not the-- what is their religion?

Islam.

Islam says you should be killed.

Well, many people who are Muslim say that that is a bastardization of Islam, that they are really just thugs. And many of the victims that ISIS has controlled have been Muslim, other Islam, other Muslims. It gets complicated like that.

But I don't-- I'm not arguing with your point. I think that sometimes we don't have that perspective that we should, that there has been war. There is war, and there will be war. It will change in its manifestations, but we will not do away with war.

We don't even know. I mean, you read and you turn the page. You know, for instance, in Chad in--

Africa.

--in Africa, it's-- I mean, you cannot imagine how big it is. It's bigger than Texas or even. I don't even know. And certain sections which is South and North, I don't know exactly, they kill those people every day. What do we do?

Yeah.

It's going on. For what reasons do they get killed? Because the other ones don't agree that they are the same kind what we are. And therefore, we have to get rid of them. It's the way people live, the way things go.

Well, then how do you go forward? With that kind of knowledge, how do you go forward?

I don't think we ever-- well, what can I say? I'm not a-- I have no way of explaining it or even give you an answer to this, which is almost impossible. It's the nature in a person that does this. I don't know.

Did you feel that kind of anger too?

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Not at any time that I would somebody-- that I would say I would kill somebody.

When you crossed from France into Germany, as part of the American Army, was it a different feeling from you coming back into the environment that had been your home?

No. You know, boundaries, like you had mentioned as Germany or France, you don't see it physically.

No.

You go across an area, and you say now you're in France or you're in someplace else. This is man-made comment, which you either accept or don't.

But I'm talking the first time you come into a village that is German, a town that is German, a place where you were in danger, and your family was certainly in danger, and most of it didn't survive, did that have a different response from you than when you were with General Leclerc through France?

You are-- how should I-- how should-- I don't know how to put it. You are maybe a little bit more on guard. You're more-- consider the situation and give it maybe some-- before you were nonchalant. You didn't think of it. Now, you are aware of it, and you said, I'd better be careful or I have to be more guarded or something maybe. Maybe.

I don't know if that's the right answer or not. You could say that, yes, what you say now is true. You could say that. But not-- I mean, I have been back in Germany many times. And I spoke to people who I know they were Nazis. I mean, call them Nazis. They were sympathizers.

And all of them, they were Christian. And I ask them, don't tell me you didn't care for Hitler and all this other thing. Well, in one way, you have to have the mentality of the German now. Germany, was down and finished. He came along and brought it up. And he unified it.

And he'd succeeded in some way, hook or crook, to get more out of the other allies. And he did more and more for Germans. And they naturally lived through this, and they saw what he's doing. They wouldn't say we didn't love him. But we respect him because he was their leader. And they got along.

When I would ask them, what about the Jewish people who lived there? Would you-- what you have-- they'd say, well, look. We know his-- what do you call his--

Policies?

Policies.

His ideology.

And that he hated the Jews and wanted to get rid of it. And we had to abide by it because if we would have done sympathizing with the Jews, they would have killed us. They would. They would have killed them because they were nice to the Jews. So they were not sympathetic one way and not helpful on the other way either.

Did those answers satisfy you?

Now, you have to be objective. Put yourself in their shoes. I don't know. There was a-- what do you call it-- television program not too long ago in Nuremberg. I don't know if you saw it or not.

About Nuremberg?

Yeah. The trial of Nuremberg or something. And you'll see the scenes, which this was an old movie, I guess. You see

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the scenes, which Tracy-- what his name? Actor Tracy was the judge.

Oh, Spencer Tracy.

Spencer Tracy.

Oh, yeah. Judgment at Nuremberg. There is that film. I knew that film.

Right. You saw it?

Mm-hmm. Years ago.

OK.

Now, those Germans explain to them exactly what I said just now. You have to put yourself in their shoes and think, what would you have done? That's the way it looks. They wouldn't have helped the Jews, it's true. But that's the way it is.

And your point of view is one that I would say not many share who were direct victims. Some do.

I mean, take for instance, it's very hard for me to get this across. There were people were told shoot this guy. He's a commanding officer. You are the soldier. There is the person. I tell you, you shoot this guy.

If you say, why should I shoot this guy? He didn't do-- you know what I mean? You don't want to do it. If you don't want to do it, he said, well, I will shoot you because you refused his orders. What would you do?

Yeah.

You have to be sometimes saying, what would I do under the circumstances? That was the answer the Germans gave the Allies. We didn't want this. We didn't want to have the pogroms.

We didn't want to have all this Holocaust business or we didn't want to have everybody killed. But we had no choice. If we wouldn't have done it, we would have been killed. He-- or the Nazis or whoever told us you go ahead and do this and that, et cetera.

This makes sense to you, this point of view, this explanation. I'm just asking. I'm not challenging it or anything like that. I'm just asking because many people wouldn't accept it. Many people wouldn't accept that explanation.

Well, tell me why. I mean, if you're are sensible and you have to be able to put yourself in somebody else's shoes in that same setup, what would you do? You have no choice. And that is exactly why a lot of those people, when I went back to a small village and it told them how could you be a Nazi?

How could you have done this and this and so forth? They said, listen. If we wouldn't have said everything yes, OK, they would have ruined our business. That would have destroyed our home or whatever they could have done physically to me or my wife or to the children. Simple.

So we just said, we didn't say no. We didn't say yes. We just said OK or we said nothing even. But in their own heart, if you can say it, I don't know if they were Nazis or not. But openly, you would consider them, yes, they were all Nazis.

You know, people who grow up in societies that have freedom of expression often don't realize the pressure that people who grew up in societies where their freedom of-- there's no freedom of expression--

Exactly.

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--what compromises you make, what kind of such choices you have to make.

Exactly.

And that is-- I've often heard Europeans say about Americans that you don't know what war is.

You see, I don't know if you understand me. I am very much like that.

Yeah.

I can see what they tell me, and I understand it. I don't always agree with everything, but I can also feel why they did this. I mean, there were people-- I mean, there was a fellow who went to school with me. We sit on the same rank next to each other. We copy things of every-- I mean, we did whatever normal people do.

Never was there anything said about religion or so that we had. But later, he became a big shot in the Nazis. Why? Because somebody higher told him, look. From now on, you are going to be the police officer of this town. And you have the qualifications, and you have to do such and such and such.

So now think about it. They come up and says, look. Tomorrow, you arrest this Jew over there. He knows that this Jew didn't-- this fellow didn't do anything to him. And why should he arrest him? But he is told we want him arrested for whatever reasons they have.

And these are policeman. He has no choice. If he says, I'm not going to do it, they said why? He has to say, I'm not going to do it. Why are you not? Because I-- he can't say he's my friend.

But he can say, why should I? He didn't do anything. But the other one says, I am telling you you'll do it. Will you do it? Good. If you don't do it, they give him whatever they will do with him. What are you going to say?

Do you think that as time goes on, each generation understands this less and less, this kind of situation? Because you're one of the people who was an adult already before the war started. And I wonder whether-- you know, you have the perspective to see how people talked about it right after the war, how they talked about it in the '60s, the '80s, and so on.

I can tell you that in 100 years from now, there will be very few people alive, who lived through this Holocaust.

Oh, of course.

And the people who hear about the Holocaust, oh, they say, oh, we heard about it. And we read about it. And we know about it. But it will go in one ear and out the other and nothing more. And they couldn't care less.

And you're saying that's the way of the world.

And that's the way it will be.

You went back to Mannheim?

Yes.

Right as a-- while you were still in the military?

No.

When did you go back?

A civilian.

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As a civilian.

I was there many times.

OK.

I have some friends there, Germans. Matter of fact, they're big shots with BASF. I go to Ludwigshafen and Mannheim very often because they are big shots.

They work for BASF, and they have something to show for. Anyhow, they tell me the same thing. I know they're not Nazis. They tell me openly now, we are not Nazis. But they explained it to me just like I explained it to you. What would you have done if your--

Yeah.

I mean, that's the way of life. Things go on and pass. It will go on, and yes, the combat will just be history.

Is there-- I feel like we've come to the end of our interview. Is there something I haven't asked you about that you think is important that we should-- because what you just told me, I think is something that's very important, what we've just talked about. Is there something else that you would like to share?

Well, I mean to help the Jewish people in a way like we are doing-- I don't know-- here in this country or overseas is commendable. I mean, it's very nice to help out and all these other things. But in many cases, in many cases, I sometimes also blame the Jewish people themselves.

For what?

That sometimes they are taking a viewpoint or they express themselves in such a way that is offending others. It's sometimes not appropriate. I mean, I tell-- I don't know how much this would--

Well, do you have an example to illustrate?

You know Mr. Bloomberg.

Mm-hmm.

The former mayor.

He used to be mayor. He's a billionaire, whatever he is. He doesn't need the money. He could have been, if he wanted to, president. And he declined. He said-- he's Jewish, not-- I mean, he's made these assurances, or maybe less. He doesn't show it or he doesn't say anything about it. It would be catastrophe for a Jewish person to be president.

He said that?

Indirectly, he said it, yes. I would never hope that a country like the United States will have a Jewish president. God forbid. That would be the worst thing that Jews could expect.

And why?

Because if things are not going good, it's the Jews' fault. They're scapegoat. If it is-- why? Don't we-- I don't understand. The Jewish people are a minority in the world.

I don't know how many is the percentage, but what it is. We are a minority. And we have to somehow say to ourselves

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we cannot be-- tell other people how to run themselves or do other things which we tell them.

We have to be considering also their viewpoint more so than ours. I think that's very much what we have to be aware of. You cannot do it. I don't think it would be a good idea that ever-- you would have, God forbid, a Jewish president.

Because if-- and being president is often things are out of your control, you know, whether you're coming in at good times or bad times.

Look, I don't know if it ever would come to something like this, which I doubt. But I hope never that America would vote or would select a person who is a Jewish to run this country. God forbid. Things would not go just the way it should be or something goes wrong, it would be the Jews. That's exactly what they need, a scapegoat.

Mr. Bloch, thank you. Thank you very much for what you've shared today. I appreciate your honesty. I appreciate your forthrightness. I am awed that at 103 you are as with it as anybody half your age and sometimes even more. I hope that you're-- you're a hope for all of us. Thank you very much for this interview.

Well let me, on the other hand, also thank you, and your help too, for coming and interviewing me and give me the opportunity to talk about what is done, very easily to be done and common and appreciated, that you took it on notice that will be on the record even--

It will be on record.

Of what value, I have no idea, but certainly it was so good and especially appreciate it.

Thank you. Thank you very much. And I will say that with this, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Henry Bloch on May 2, 2017 in Fresh Meadows, New York. Thanks again.

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