

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview conducted with Dr. Edward Darell on June 20, 2017, by audio between Washington, DC, and New York City. Thank you so much, Dr. Darell, for agreeing to speak with us today. I am very eager to be able to learn more about your story and the story of your parents.

What we are going to do is start from the very basic questions and develop everything from there. So my very first question to you is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

Yes. January 5, 1946.

OK. And what was your name at birth?

At birth my name was Edward Wolf, as in the animal, Emmanuel E-M-M-A-N-U-E-L.

OK.

It's pronounced Dombrowski, but it's written Dabrowski. D-A-B-R-O-W-S-K-I.

OK. You were Edward Wolf Emmanuel Dabrowski. Is that correct?

Yes, correct.

And where were you born?

Munich, Germany.

OK. And when you say, excuse me, can you repeat, was this 1946 or--

Yes, 1946.

January 5, 1946. Were you born in a DP camp?

No.

OK. Just wanted to know. What is your father's name?

My father's name at birth was Moishe, M-O-I-S-H-E Lejb L-E-J-B Katz K-A-T-Z.

Wow. How did you get Dabrowski from Katz?

Well, that's a major point in my family story, which is that my father made the decision to stay in Warsaw with my mother and hide in plain sight, essentially, because he was not likely to be taken for Jew unless he had to drop his pants and be seen that he was circumcised. So he, through my mother, he managed to obtain the forged birth certificate of a Gentile pole.

And that person's name, last name, was Dobrowski?

Yes.

Got it. OK. We can talk about the details of this later, at the point where your father did this. But for right now, to establish everybody's identity, that explains it.

Right.

Can you tell me your mother's name, please? Including maiden name.

And what? I'm sorry.

Including her maiden name.

Her maiden, OK. Her name-- well, if you want her birth name, or do you want her birth name, or--

Yes, birth name.

It was Hedwig, that's H-E-D-W-I-G.

OK, Hedwig.

Günther. G-Ü-N-T-H-E-R.

Günther was her last name?

Günther was the last name, that's correct.

And when she married your father, did it become Katz?

They were married very shortly before the Germans invaded Poland, and I don't have the exact chronology. But to my knowledge, they were married-- she was married as Jadwiga Katz. J-A-D-W-I-G-A.

Well, Jadwiga sounds like the Polish version of Hedwig.

She used the Polish version, because they were living in Łódź or Lodz.

We'll start from each parent, but tell me a little bit about their backgrounds. And let's start with your mother. What nationality was your mother?

My mother was a Polish citizen.

Always?

No.

OK, where was she born?

Well, I guess I'll try to just say it very simply. While living in Poland, she-- OK, to backtrack, Lodz, her birthplace and my father's, after the Germans invaded, was made part of the Reich.

I'm going well before that. Something I didn't explain at the very beginning is, one are the things that I try to establish before we talk about the war years is what was a person's pre-war life like. In this case, since you were born after the war, that's not as relevant. But what still is relevant is the background of your parents. So long before the war starts, when we think of her childhood and her family of origin, that's what I'm interested in finding out.

OK.

Was she born in Lodz or was she from someplace else?

Yes, she was born in Lodz.

OK.

As a German?

As an ethnic German. That's correct.

She was of French Huguenot descent, going back 300 years.

Wow. OK.

She had a sister and a brother, both older than her. Her mother was basically a housewife.

OK.

Her father was in some form of business. So I don't know exactly what. He-- I don't know if this is the right time to say, but he passed away in about 1945 before I was born.

OK, that's fine. No, this is OK. What I'm interested is to find out what kind of a childhood your mother had and what kind of a home she grew up in. What language did they speak? What were their identities?

I really very rarely talked to somebody whose family was ethnic German from Poland, which there are many people who were. And after the war, there was a great repatriation and sometimes revenge taken on Germans in Poland. So do you know how her family got to Poland, how many generations they had been there?

I would say, probably, I can't count it in generations, but I would say about 300 years.

That's a long time.

Mhm.

OK. So in other words, they maintained a German identity within let's say a Polish geography. Would that be correct?

That's correct.

OK.

That's correct. My mother went to a German school in Lodz from grade school through high school. At the time that she was in that same high school, which had a very significant percentage of ethnic Germans, can't tell you exactly at that time. But over the preceding century is as high as 60%.

That's a lot.

Yeah. It sure is. So she, to my knowledge, had a very happy childhood. She loved her father and continued to mourn him up until her own death. She would cry whenever she thought about him.

What was his name, by the way?

I'm sorry?

What was his name?

His name was Adolf Günther.

OK. And do you know the names of your aunt and uncle? The sister and brother?

Yes. The sister Anne, A-N-N-E, like Anne, and the brother was Hans.

Did you know?

H-A-N-S.

OK. And what about your grandmother? What was her name?

Her name was-- prior to marriage was Cervcka. C-E-R-V-C-K-A.

That doesn't sound very German. That sounds more Polish.

No, it was a modification, apparently, of the Huguenot name which is sort of in dispute in the family. But she says it was Cersy, C-E-R-C-Y. Which is a very common Huguenot name.

Highly interest.

And that became Ceretsky. Because you may know that in Polish, women, an A is at the end when it's -ky, so she was -ka.

Of course. Of course. What was her first name?

Wanda.

Wanda.

W-A-N-D-A.

So did you know her as well as your aunt and uncle?

Yes, very well.

So it was only your grandfather who passed away before you were born.

Yes.

And do you know if he died of natural causes?

Apparently, he had some kind of chronic illness and died, I believe, of a heart attack.

OK. OK, so it's not as a result of the war. Well, a heart attack could happen, but--

I mean, the problem is that I really don't know much about his life during the war.

Got it.

Up until about 1945 when he died.

Did your mother ever talk about it?

No. She never talked about it. As I mentioned, the only thing I knew was that she was very devoted to him. And I never asked those questions because my mother didn't bring it up and it just didn't happen. So that's kind of a lacuna in my knowledge of the family. It's about that, my maternal grandfather.

And what about the other members of her family, her aunt, your aunt, your uncle, your grandmother? Were they storytellers? Did they ever talk about their own lives, or the lives of the family, or any stories of the family?

You know, I would say that they seemed-- and bear in mind that my contacts with them ceased when I was about maybe 13.

OK.

Because I used to go to Germany to visit them on my summer vacation. So they were not storytellers and they did not share anything with me. about the history.

What kind of feelings did you have about them until you were 13?

I liked them very, very much. I have extremely happy memories of my trips to Germany. Sometimes I would stay for several months. And my aunt was a very kindly woman, a little rigid, and a little especially rigid about table manners, which mine weren't always that great. But in general, she was a wonderful woman.

Most children aren't.

I mean, up until I was in my 30s, which is kind of around the time, you know, she died, she made some comment about my table manners. So what I remember is having a wonderful time, her being very kind. She would buy me, on alternate days, a sausage-- those German sausages, or whipped cream in a cone.

Oh my.

Sort of alternated.

Talk about an indulgence. Whipped cream and a cone. Wow.

And I still love whipped cream, and my family laughs about it.

And did you have contact with your uncle?

My uncle is deceased. And he died somewhere around 1970.

OK.

So oh, and one last, a factual question on this. Where in Germany would you visit them when you were growing up?

They lived in a small town called Bad B-A-D like that Soden, S-O-D-E-N.

Could you repeat the second one? Bad Soden you said?

Yes. So it's pronounced Oden, but it's like Soden. S-O-D-E-N.

OK, was that in Bavaria?

I'm sorry?

What part of Germany was that in?

Oh, very close to Frankfurt.

OK, all right.

Frankfurt am Maim, because there are two Frankfurts. Yes.

And when you would visit, again, up until the time you were 13, did they ever talk, if not about their own selves and about the family, did they talk about the war? Did they talk about their own-- about what they thought of the war, or issues that resulted as the war?

Absolutely not.

Interesting.

Yeah.

So it was sort of like stunden null. It's all, it's everything that happens beforehand is just not mentioned.

Right, that's how it was.

Do you ever remember them saying anything about Jews?

Let's see. I was-- no, I don't, I do not.

OK. OK. And let me catch my thought for a minute. Oh, and can you tell me then, when you say contact ceased, that sounds like a decision was made at some point, and a conscious decision. Is that the case?

Now, could you refresh my memory on the context in which I said that?

You said that your contact to them ceased when you were 13.

Oh, that was only because we had emigrated to the US when I was 12 and 1/2.

I see.

So it was a geographical thing. I couldn't really afford to visit anymore.

OK, but it wasn't-- it was not like a rupture in the family.

Oh, not at all.

OK. So there were letters still back and forth. And did you ever see them after you were 13, after you came to the US?

After I came to the US, I saw my aunt Anna, who came to my medical school graduation.

Ah, OK.

But I didn't see my uncle Hans after that.

OK. But for them, if we fill in a little bit of that blank, is that after having lived as a family for 300 years in Lodz, in Poland, they move to a place called Bad Soden near Frankfurt, which is a new place for them after the war. Do you know why they moved there?

Yes. I have a letter that my cousin Hans, who was their son--

Whose-- which one son?

Oh, Anna and Hans senior, let's say.

OK.

In other words, yeah.

She married someone named Hans?

She married someone named Hans. Then the son was named Hans. And I saw a lot of them during my visits to Germany. He is about five years older than me.

OK. OK.

And anyway, perhaps it's-- I don't know if it's relevant, but I did want to mention that my aunt and uncle that we're talking about were first cousins.

Really? You mean so you're saying that there was-- your mother had a brother Hans and a sister Anna, and her sister Anna marries--

No no, I'm sorry, my mother's brother was named Oskar O-S-K-A-R Eugen like Eugene without the g, E-U-G-E-N Günther.

Oh, I see, Hans was your--

The husband of-- my mother's sister's husband.

OK. So there was only two Hanses in the family, that is, Anna's husband and Anna's son.

That's correct.

OK. OK. And Oskar Eugen, did you ever see him?

Yes. OK. I saw him probably twice during my visits to Germany.

OK, so not such a close contact.

No.

OK.

And I saw him considerably later. I saw him at a time when, at age 21, I kind of did a grand tour of Europe and visited the family, a number of members of the family. So actually, it's not exactly accurate that I lost complete contact with my aunt and uncle and the family. There was that one contact at age 21 that was brief.

OK. So you were saying that your cousin, who was about five years older than you, Hans junior, I take it.

Wasn't designated that way, but I just said it for clarification.

OK. OK. So he would have been born in 1941?

Yes.

All right. And he's the one who explained to you how they got to Bad Soden?

That's correct. Yes.

And what was the reason? How did they get there? Or why did they go there rather than somewhere else?

OK. I'll summarize it for you. In January of 1945, the Soviet army started bombing Lodz. The windows of their apartment were destroyed, and so they moved to a village. They had a country house in the Polish village about 15 kilometers from Lodz.

And what was the name of the village? I'm sorry I interrupt with such questions.

Oh no, I, absolutely. There's no-- I want to give you as much information as you wish. Yeah, the village was called-- I got to spell it. It's called Babiczai.

Babiczai. OK.

Yes B-A-B-I-C-Z-A-I. And again, 15 kilometers or so from the center of Lodz.

OK.

All right? So they had to go on foot to that place because there were Russian troops present who were very hostile to ethnic Germans. ,

Yes

And anybody who seemed to be fleeing or whatever. And, in fact, my uncle, my aunt, and Hans were shot at by a Russian tank, which missed them.

Wow. Wow.

So they sought sh--

As they were on the road?

As they were on the foot-- on the road, yes. But the tank missed, and they sought shelter in a farmhouse. Then they left the farmhouse, and a tank shot off the farmhouse's roof.

Oh, wow.

[CHUCKLES] So they had a close call. So they lived in [? Babice ?] uncertain about their fate, as Hans put it. And they were somehow driven out of their house in-- let's see, in the second half of February of--

'45?

--'45. Uh-huh. Now, my cousin refers to his uncle-- oh, I'm sorry, to his father. Hans, in his instance, was short for Johann. So perhaps it would be better to designate him as Johann Günther though he was called Hans a lot.

So you're talking about the father or the son here?

Hans's father.

OK, so Johann would have been the husband of Anna.

Yes.

OK, got it.

Right. So my cousin says that, even though Polish neighbors had attested that he had always had a positive attitude towards the Polish people in general, the family was, as I mentioned, driven out. And Johann was taken to a Soviet military internment camp in a town called Sikawa-- which was Sikawa, S-I-K-A-W-A, near Lodz.

OK.

And the rest of the family was sent to another camp. And they had to work on Polish farms and such. Well, I don't know if it was forced labor, but I don't think they had much choice.

Hans-- excuse me, Johann knew Russian, so he was a secretary and interpreter at the internment camp where he was alone, as far as family's concerned. And, apparently, he had a good relationship with the

commanding officer of that internment camp. And that officer allowed him to leave from time to time because he needed to see a doctor. He was released from the camp on May 15, 1945.

Wow.

And that-- yes. And that saved his life because all the other internees were sent into deepest Russia--

Yeah.

--and never heard from again, sadly.

Yeah.

OK, so--

Do you know-- I mean, did your cousin ever tell you who the other internees might have been? Were they other ethnic Germans from Poland, or were they military type of people? Or you just don't know? He didn't say?

I don't know. He never specified.

OK.

Though I don't think they were militar-- they were prisoners of war. I believe they were--

Civilians?

Ethnic German civilians that got caught up in the net of-- I don't know the-- that was there after the war.

OK. But your uncle and your aunt and-- so they never told you this. It was only their son who told you this.

That's correct.

OK.

And he only told me recently-- relatively recently as I was composing this material. And I sent him an email asking him. He was kind enough to give me a summary of the Günther family and what happened in 1945--

So--

--but only of part of the family.

--when you're talking about recently, would you say this year, 2017? Last year, two years a--

2000-- I would say late 2016 is when I got this information that I'm giving you at this time.

OK, so until then it was a blank, huh?

Yes. It was. It was never talked about, and I couldn't ask. I didn't feel comfortable asking. And I, frankly, at that time didn't have as much interest in knowing this stuff. But, anyway, as I mentioned, the entire family was very closed-mouthed except for my cousin Hans, who did tell me certain things about the family.

Did he have his own-- I mean, he would have been a four-year-old, five-year-old boy. And some children remember, and some don't. Did he have any direct memories himself of--

I don't believe so.

OK.

I believe that this material about 1945, right after the war, was collected later in life. He doesn't-- I don't believe he remembers anything about that, or very little.

Yeah. Can you hold just for a second?

Sure.

Just for a second. Are we-- we're running? OK. Sorry for that interruption.

Oh, no problem.

I mean, some of the reasons I ask for dates is that it's part of the story as to when you find things out.

Yes.

And what you find out. And what does it--

Um--

--what does it do, or what kind of effect that might have. Is Hans, your cousin, a person who's more talkative, a person who's more--

Yes, because-- yes, he is because he's come to the US several times. We were-- even though we had an age difference, we were good friends. When I was 12 or so and he was 16, we did a lot of stuff together. And he visited London, where we were living up until I was 12. And I visited Germany and saw him.

And we never discussed the war at that time. We're talking about the late '50s. But since then he's come to the US at least twice. Visited, stayed with us, and he has told me certain things about the family that I didn't know.

So, once Johann was released from the camp, what happened to the family then? Did he go back to join everybody?

Yes.

OK.

He found his family. And, on November 7, 1945, some authorities in Lodz allowed the family, including Johann's mother, who I knew nothing about, to leave Poland. It says that Johann bribed Soviet soldiers to take the family on a military truck hidden among gasoline drums--

Wow.

--to [? Stetten ?], which is [? Chechen ?] in Polish, as you probably know. And then they continued in a wagon designed for cattle. And this is a trivial thing, but Hans's grandmother got lost when she lost the train because she had to relieve herself. But they found her eventually.

Well--

[INAUDIBLE]

--you know, moments like that are actually very frightening--

Yes.

--because lots of people lost family members if they're on a train and one of them gets off to get food, to get milk--

Sure.

--to take care of these human needs. And sometimes it can be months or years or even never that they meet up again.

Yes, definitely.

Such things-- yeah. And so they were on the train after having been on a truck filled with gas cans. And that train--

On a cattle truck.

On a cattle truck.

[INAUDIBLE].

And that takes them into West Germany, or into Germany proper?

Yeah. Well, I can tell you exactly that, on November 29, 1945, they got to Berlin--

OK.

--where they were thoroughly checked medically and deloused.

Oh, god. Yeah.

Yeah. And then, in the beginning of December in 1945, they crossed the border of the American zone of Berlin and went to Frankfurt am Main.

OK.

The reason they went to Frankfurt is that Johann's brother was living there, but his apartment was you know bombed out. And so they couldn't stay with him. And somehow they ended up in Bad Soden.

And I don't know why, but that was close, as I mentioned, to Frankfurt. And it's a spa town, nice place. And the-- says, on the day before Christmas there, that's when they arrived in Bad Soden. And the family lived there from that time on.

Wow. OK, I didn't think that I would really hear so much detail, but this is wonderful, just from asking how did they end up in Bad Soden?

Right.

It's just-- if it had been a big city, it wouldn't have struck me as unusual. But why there? And this really does-- it does illustrate what happened to a lot of people moving westwards. I mean, a lot of people who were trying to leave the Soviet zones into the Western zones, how they got there, how-- what kind of treatment ethnic Germans had in Poland when the war turns, when the Soviets liberate Poland, and then how they behave to them and so on.

Yes.

Did Hans ever mention any fear that the women might have had?

No.

OK. That was not part of this story?

He didn't go into that much detail. And, no, he's-- I'm 71, and he's about 76. And his hearing and his faculties are not as good as they were. And it's not that easy for him to communicate. But we communicate by email occasionally, and then he's able to get things like this write-up together. He was fluent in English for a long time, so--

What about your mother? Was she a storyteller, or not?

In a way, she was. But she didn't-- I can give you little examples. She liked to talk about the family.

It was only when prompted by me that she would talk about the war in a specific way. And I can give you an example, which is that, quite a few years ago-- she died in 1995-- I had read a book with the German title, [SPEAKING GERMAN], which means "red flares," but I wasn't sure what [SPEAKING GERMAN] meant. I thought it might be something else.

So I asked my mother, and she briefly said, oh, yes, it's-- they're flares. And I remember, in Warsaw, during the uprising in 1944 by the Polish home army, that she saw red flares and could hear the rumble of artillery and such. And she said that these flares were used for the fighting men to communicate.

Wow.

So--

So-- but tidbits like that.

Yeah. Other than that, if I can mention, she never expressed any antisemitic feelings. And I remember her saying to me that-- and I'm quoting-- boys on both sides with whom I had danced were killed--

Oh.

--so-- as soldiers.

Yeah.

So she was somewhat torn between her Polish identity and her German identity. Well, that's interesting. Did she see herself as a Pole?

To a significant degree, yes. I would say more as a Pole than as a German.

That is interesting. Do you know what language she spoke at home? I'm talking about family of origin.

German.

OK, but was she equally fluent in Polish?

Absolutely. She was fluent in Polish. So they were living in the Polish city even though they were in kind of a sub-part of it that was Germanized. And my mother had extremely good linguistic abilities. And she spoke not only Polish and German, but she spoke English fluently and Italian fluently.

Those latter two languages, did she have them when she was in Poland or acquired them after she left and went westwards?

Well, all languages were acquired in Poland because she-- not because, but in connection with it, she worked as a journalist.

Wow.

And had a lot of contact with people in other countries.

So this is before--

And was always interested in other cultures and nations and such.

So this was before the war.

Yes, that was her job.

Was she a radio journalist, a print journalist?

Print.

Do you know the name of the newspaper or magazine?

Unfortunately not, but I do know that it was a German paper in Lodz.

Oh. Oh, so, I mean, it was a German paper, so it would have been before the invasion. So it wouldn't have necessarily had any kind of political overtones, though it might have.

No, I never got the sense that it did. I possess some of her writings.

Mm-hmm.

And there's never any reference to anything dodgy or anything strange. They're mostly stories written for children that she was hoping to have published.

Mm-hmm.

I have other things that she wrote that I referred to in my write-up where she wrote about incidents that happened during the war. But, anyway, so yeah.

You-- in the-- I don't know if I have that. What I have is your email that you wrote to Sara Bloomfield.

Yeah.

And, in there, I wanted to ask you, still focusing on your mother's side that you had-- your mother's side, you have a first cousin who was a Hitler Youth--

Yes.

--a second cousin who was in the Waffen-SS-- Yes.

--and an uncle who worked as an historian for the commission appointed by Himmler to decide what should be done with the civilian Russian population in advance of the German invasion of Russia.

Yes.

So can you tell me about these people and who they-- what their names were and how you found out about this?

OK, certainly. I'll start-- OK, so, just to clarify, we're talking-- right now, I'm focusing on Oskar Eugen Günther.

OK, so your uncle.

Yes, my mother's brother.

OK.

He, not surprisingly, based on who he worked for and the purpose of the job, was a right-wing person.

So--

Not the Nazi--

Oskar Eugen was the one who worked for the commission.

Yes.

For-- by Heimler Himmler. That's quite-- I wouldn't say high position, but it requires someone who's educated.

Well, he was a PhD in history. And he was a expert on Russia.

No kidding.

Uh-huh.

So your mother's family, even though you don't know what your grandfather did, it sound-- I mean, if she's a journalist and he's a PhD in history, we're not talking about a family that was uneducated.

Not at all.

Yeah, we're talking about-- the word well-to-do, but that doesn't mean well-to-do. It just means people who have sent their kids to school in Poland were not of-- they were upper class, even if they may not have had the money.

Mm-hmm. Yeah, I would describe them as, in the current terminology-- well, I don't--

Use your terminology. Pardon?

I'm sorry?

Use your own terminology. I don't want to--

Upper middle class is what I would call them.

OK.

And my mother's family, especially my grandmother and my mother's mother, were convinced that they were actually some kind of minor Protestant nobility.

Mm-hmm.

And I have a copy of a coat of arms that I do not-- I have never had authenticated. I made a few little-- anyway, but yeah, that's the essence of it.

So he had a PhD in New Russia.

Right.

OK.

So I want to tell you a quick anecdote that says something about Oskar Eugen's attitudes.

Yes, please.

Not towards the Jews, but when I-- as I mentioned, when I was 21 and I took that trip around Europe, and I visited Oskar Eugen, his wife, and my cousin Hans happened to be there also.

OK.

So we sat in the living room. I had just arrived. And I have to say this in a German accent-- [CHUCKLES]

Please go right ahead. [CHUCKLES]

--because Oskar Eugen asked me in English, so what do you think should be done about this problem with the Blacks?

Oh, good god. [LAUGHS] OK.

That was my introduction. [LAUGHS]

OK.

Ah, well, this is the mid-'60s, and we have race riots in the United States and--

Exactly.

--and so on. That's the context. All right.

Right.

OK.

And I do need to mention that Hans, my first cousin, who was present, as I mentioned-- I don't think he batted an eyelash. But he became an academic and also an expert on Russia and a PhD in Russia. But, at that time, he was probably still a graduate student. And he had his nose in a book almost 90% of the time, even when he was with company.

So I don't know if he even heard what Oskar Eugen had said. But their history has been stormy throughout the time that I knew them, because, as I mentioned, Oskar Eugen was very right-wing and Hans was a socialist. But-- yeah--

Ah.

--he was a socialist. So they clashed a lot.

Yeah.

And Hans-- I tried to get some information about Oskar Eugen from Hans, but he just ignored my request.

Well, I mean, as I say, it is a not inconsequential position to have on such a commission. And so I'm assuming, but you can tell me, did you ever learn any details of what he did on that commission and what kind of questions he had to deal with and what was his job there?

Yes. This is secondhand from my father, who told me that Oskar Eugen work involved assisting in making

decisions about exactly how the Russian population should be treated. He, according to Hans also, by the way, who knows about this. And Hans actually done quite a bit about-- Hans told me, essentially, plus what my dad said, what Oskar Eugen was up to. But my dad said that his job was kind of, as I mentioned, to decide on-- could you-- would we stop for a minute?

Yes, we can stop. Sure.

Yeah, I have to say something to the [INAUDIBLE] gotten from my cousin, Hans--

Yes.

--and my father which was consistent.

Yes, OK. So it was your uncle's role in this commission. And you were starting to explain it in some detail.

Yes. Himmler's view, not surprisingly, was that they-- the population should just be exterminated and the land taken over by German, Germans--

Lebensraum.

--immigrants. Yes, exactly. According to Hans, my cousin, Oskar Eugen took a more moderate view. I don't remember if he said whether it was that they should be turned into forced labor or what, but he did not feel that they should be killed.

OK.

But he was-- his opinion, I mean, he wasn't-- I'm not trying to portray him as a major decider, but he had some kind of vote. But his opinion, in other words, noone, not death, was overruled by Himmler.

I see. And was he a party member, a Nazi party member?

No, he wasn't. He sounds like the kind of person who might have gravitated to that, but I'm certain, really, that he was not a member.

Well, just bec-- virtue of the position, that sometimes people weren't even looked at if they weren't party members or considered for such positions.

Yeah, I can't really address that. The only theory I have is that, if you were an academic among many academics working on this project, that as long as you sort of toed the party line, that doesn't-- I never heard anything about him being pressured to be a party member. And--

Let's--

--I don't know the percentages of--

Yeah.

--of people who were sympathetic to the regime who actually became members.

Well, that's, of course-- one of the larger aspects of this story is that you didn't necessarily have to be. Let's turn now to some of the other relatives. You said there was a first cousin who was in the Hitler-Jugend and a second cousin who was in the Waffen-SS.

Yes.

Who would these have been?

Who they were?

Yeah, what were their names?

Oh, OK. There's some construction work going-- if you-- do you hear a chainsaw-like sound?

I do hear a little sound, but not--

Somebody's--

--but not much.

OK. Yeah, it's--

Is it something that's very troublesome that you're hearing?

It's bothering-- I can just go a little bit further away, like into a bathroom or something, and avoid, you know?

Yeah.

The noise.

Yeah, is--

So can we stop for a minute?

Of course, we can stop.

And I'll move.

We can stop.

Yeah.

He has some construction noise in his--

OK, so we were talking about the cousin who was in the Hitler Youth and the second cousin who was Waffen-SS.

Yes. The cousin who was in the Hitler Youth was named Alfart-- that's A-L, as in Lance, F-A-R-T.

Alfart. I never heard that name before.

[INAUDIBLE].

OK.

There might-- wait a minute. Sorry, I believe it was A-L-F-H-A-R-T.

OK.

Like Alf Hart.

Yeah. All right.

Alfhart Günther.

Günther. All right.

Right, and he was Oskar Eugen son.

Ah, OK. By the way, what is the married name of your aunt Anna, which would also be Johann's and Hans's last name?

Well, it so happens that, because they were first cousins, they were both Günthers.

Ah, OK. OK, fine. So everybody's Günther. So Oskar Eugen's son.

Right, Alfhart Günther.

Alfhart was in the Hitler-Jugend, or was in the Waffen-S--

Yes, he was in the Hitler-Jugend.

All right. Did you know him?

Yes. I knew him well. He came to my wedding, and I saw him several times during my childhood and also when I visited at age 21.

But were-- if I were to ask about your relation to him versus your relation to Hans, would you have been closer to Hans than to himself? Or--

Much.

--does that no bearing here on the story?

Very little bearing. I was much closer to Hans. Alfhart was extremely pedantic to the point that it was a family joke between me and my parents when he came to visit, because he'd flown over from Germany and he'd give a five-minute discourse about the altitude at which the plane flew, and I'm not joking.

[LAUGHS] Good god.

He was a stereotypic German in that way and kind of stiff, but extremely intelligent. He was an electrical engineer for Siemens and actually patented a few things. Very smart, but very science--

Scientific.

--scientific, and not a guy you might want to have a beer with. But Hans was.

OK.

Yeah. So they're very different. And I never really developed any sort of friendship-like relationship with Alfhart as I did with Hans.

Did he talk at all about his experience being in the Hitler Youth?

Absolutely not. The only way I found out was through-- I believe through Hans.

OK.

Or my father, one or the other.

OK, and then let's turn to the second cousin in the Waffen-SS.

OK. I knew a woman who was German. She was a member-- she was like a second cousin or something or third. I never figured out the relationship because, frankly, I didn't like her very much. And she was part of the Günther side of the family, married to a German lawyer. And they lived-- they came to the US at some point, but I never had any kind of friendly relationship with her.

She-- my mother tended to kowtow to people, even when she didn't like them or she-- I don't know whether she saw the bright side of things, the glass half full or whatever metaphor expression. But there were things about this cousin, whose name was, or is, Krista, K-R-I-S-T-A, and the last name is Stahlmann, steel man, S-T-A-H-L-M-A-N-N.

I will state that one of the reasons that I couldn't stand being around her was that we would often be forced by my father to go to the house of an elderly lady who was also a Volksdeutsche, but a friend, not a relative. And all of us would be crammed into this tiny living room, boring the hell out of each other while the TV blared.

Oh, gosh.

And Krista just had an unpleasant aura about her. And sometime after I got married-- my wife's name is Joan. Krista sent some kind of card or something to us for some occasion that was addressed to Edward and Nancy, with Nancy, question mark--

Oh, good god.

--which became a big family joke.

[LAUGHS] Yeah.

That, I think, says a lot as, as-- says how I thought about her. So the bottom line is, to get to the question at hand, is that I only know through my mother about this SS business. And I don't even know--

She was the one.

Yeah, Krista's father.

Ah, so Krista's father was the one who was in the Waffen-SS.

Right, exactly.

OK. And do we know what kind of role he had, what he was doing, what he was--

Absolutely nothing. I don't know anything. It was never discussed.

OK.

It was just mentioned in passing somehow.

And did-- were there any other relatives who were in some way part of the regime in small ways, cogs or involved in some sort of organizations or activities that you know of?

No, I only know of the two we've been talking about.

And do you recall anybody on your mother's side of the family ever talking about the Jews at all?

Never. It so happens that my grandmother on my mother's side, [PERSONAL NAME], really liked my dad. And there are other people in the family who also liked my dad. And no Günther that I have ever spoken with ever gave me a hint of anything disparaging towards the Jews.

OK. OK. These are the sorts of stories when you go down into, in a detail, into an example with a person who has this individual person with this name and so on, it sometimes disproves all the arcs and all the stereotypes that people would have.

Uh-huh.

And that brings me to your mother, who I haven't asked you as much about. But she sounds like she was quite extraordinary in-- when you say that she was someone who would say my-- ones that I danced with and others that I danced with, they didn't survive, it sounds that, from that, I get the sense of somebody who doesn't look at a person's ethnic background or religious background.

There I have to interject something that does not apply to the Jews but does apply to Black people.

OK.

My mother expressed on several occasions-- and I'll going into them in a minute-- a very strong prejudice towards Black people. I'll give you some examples. And one--

What about your father?

My father was uncomfortable with Black people because he grew up-- well, this is true of my mother too, but my father grew up in, as did my mother, an environment where there were-- if a Black person walked down the street in Lodz, every head would turn.

Of course. Of course. That's Eastern Europe. That's Europe at that time, aside from France, perhaps.

Right. But I think that-- I have to tell you something about my dad which relates to that, which is in words that I frequently hear myself saying, he was an equal opportunity bigot or hater.

[CHUCKLES] Oh gosh.

He had something negative to say about every nationality. And I'll give you examples in a little bit. The French didn't wash their feet, the British wore dirty raincoats, the Yugoslavs were conceited asses, et cetera.

Et cetera.

So his attitude towards Blacks was that when we lived in Germany and England, which is-- totaled 12 years of my life, he didn't have that much contact with Black people. But once we got to New York, well, I don't-- let me put it this way. Compared to my mother, whom I'll describe in detail why I'm saying this-- compared to my mother, and even not in a comparative way but a general way, I would say that my father, even though he had these stereotypes about various European countries, he didn't have that about Black people.

OK.

He didn't like Puerto Ricans because, when we came to New York, there had been a very large immigration, and the neighborhood we lived in when we first got to New York was pretty lousy. We would hear bottles smashing in the courtyard all night and loud Spanish music. And so that kind of made all of us not too happy with that particular group.

But, anyway, my dad-- it wasn't at all extreme, but with my mom it was more extreme. When I was 12 and, as I mentioned, we came to the US and settled in New York, I started to make friends and I made friends, among others, with a Black boy. And I asked my mother if he could come up to our apartment, and she absolutely said no. She would not allow him in there.

Oh.

Yeah. And then, there's worse to come. When I was about 23, I was in a relationship with a Cajun woman from Louisiana, who was what they call a mulatto down there.

Yes.

And she had basically Caucasian features, but there was enough Black genes to make her somewhat distinctive. But, anyway, to make it brief, my mother could not accept that I was dating this woman, and she called me a n***** lover.

Oh, dear.

Yeah.

Oh, dear.

That was my reaction.

Yeah.

So I would have to say-- well, I would have to say, as I mentioned, that in many ways, and this is an example, because my mother professed in general not to be a prejudiced person and always said, oh, you know, let them--

For example, I'll give you an example of gays. She always said, oh, you know, I have nothing against gay people except they get so much flak and right now and people don't accept them and this-- but I think that, in reality, she was-- I have to use the expression-- kind of two-faced. And--

There's nothing like a child to be able to see sometimes the-- hypocrisy might be a bit of a strong term, but parents have their own self-image. And it's the children who often can see through that and see what holes there are in those self-images.

Yeah.

When I was talking, I was thinking more of that European environment before. You are speaking of your experience of them in another place, in another country and other populations, other people. And, circumstantially, the impression I got is that it's unusual for an ethnic German girl who feels herself more Polish to marry somebody who was Jewish in the 1930s--

[? Correct. ?]

--or early 1940s at that time and stick with them.

Yes, definitely.

So that makes an impression. And I wonder what is her story? What is she like? Was she a bit of a rebel in her family? That's what I'd like to flesh out with you.

Right. I am thinking that there was not a-- let me put it this way. She wasn't, to my knowledge, highly rebellious, but I believe that, compared to her sister, who was extremely conventional, you know, the one with the table manners--

Oh, that's right. Mm-hmm.

--that my mother, and this will emerge-- if we end up touching on other areas of their biography and the war, this will emerge later-- but I think that she was very courageous, and part of her courage had something in common with some degree of rebelliousness, yes--

OK.

--because she took on things that most people wouldn't.

And do you know of how your parents met?

Yes. They both worked in a bank. And they basically fell head over heels in love.

Oh, my. Oh, my. Do you know the name of the bank?

No, all I know is it was in Lodz.

Have you ever been there?

Yes, and my father and I took a trip together to Poland so he could kind of show me some of the highlights, which included a couple of his war experiences. And so I visited Lodz and visited Warsaw and other major cities of interest in Poland with my dad.

Did you visit any of the concentration camps?

Yes, when I was in Warsaw I visited Auschwitz.

OK. With him or alone?

With him.

With him. I've consciously wanted to talk about your parents each separately. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to know about your mother's side of the family and your mother as a person before we turn now to your dad?

Yes, I mean, I think that I would want to say that she was quite the intellectual.

She was a housewife, and my dad didn't do very much. I mean, he was working, so she was somehow able to take care of the home and also read a lot of French literature and poetry. And she would write it down, and she was very erudite in those areas. So I would say that she was a significantly intellectual person.

That's impressive.

Yeah.

And did she ever talk about the war years and about her feelings about Poles and about what happened to the Jews of Europe? Did you hear that from her? If there was a wall of silence from the others, was that different with her or not?

I would say not. I would say that almost 100% of what I learned and now know about my parents' experiences during the war came from my father in unguarded moments, because he generally didn't like to talk about it.

I see.

But he would sometimes, as I mentioned in my write-up, he would just think of something and start crying and have to tell us what it was.

Oh, dear. Oh, dear.

Yeah.

And-- oh, I had a question, but it escaped me. If it comes back, I will ask you.

All right.

Let's turn now to your father. And tell me a little bit about his personality.

Well, do you have about a day?

[LAUGHS] I know, it's not easy. It's not easy.

No, and also, my dad was and still remains an enigma. And it's even hard for me to say where to start. But I'll tell you one thing. Is it OK if I talk about his childhood first [INAUDIBLE]?

That's exactly what I wanted. This is exactly what I wanted. It is-- when I talked about personality, I'm reverting back to-- excuse me, when I'm interviewing somebody direct-- who has direct witness. And so it's part of that "what is your family background?" question. And so, yes, please do talk about his childhood and about his family of origin and anything that you know about that.

Right. Sure. And I know quite a bit. And--

OK.

--he-- his father was a grain merchant, which he, my grandfather, my dad's dad, apparently committed suicide in the early '20s, and that fact was only revealed to me about two or three years ago by a cousin--

On the other side, on your father's side.

On my father's side. I was extremely shocked, because my father, among many other untruths, told me that his father had died of influenza at the time. He--

Let me interject here--

--said that--

--for a moment.

Yeah, sure.

Do you think he might not have even known? Sometimes suicides at that time were masked for children, depending on how old they were at the time that it happens.

My gut reaction, first reaction, is that my dad told me so many lies over the years about his past that I think he knew and just elected not to tell me.

I see.

And it's not clear to me, because there are things that my parents did-- there are quite a few things that my parents didn't tell me that I discovered later through other people. I'm not sure whether it was to protect me from hearing this kind of sad family news. I don't know. I don't know.

But what I think-- what I suspect is that he did know because when he described the consequences of his father's death through the glasses of someone who died of the flu, even, that my father was extremely traumatized by his father's death because it occurred at a time when he was a teenager--

Oh, OK.

And a very bad time and he gave me the strong impression-- and I'll be glad to talk about this at any time

you like-- he gave me the strong impression that his mother, even when he was young, was a very difficult woman to deal with and that their relationship was stormy. So had he actually attended a yeshiva.

Mm-hmm. Did he have brothers and sisters?

He was an only child.

Oh. And was his family very religious?

I have to modify that. His mother remarried not too long before the war--

World War II?

--World War II-- and had a daughter. So he had a half-sister, but he had no relationship with her to speak of. But the half-sister only came around years later, 10 years after my father's death or 15.

Wow.

So she survived, in other words.

I'm not-- No. No, she died in a concentration camp like the majority of my family. But, anyway, what I was saying is that, so, speaking chronologically, I get the impression that my dad was-- always seemed to me to be very intelligent. And I got the impression that he was a very good student, because he always spoke contemptuously of other students that were slow learners. My dad was athletic, and he was a starter on the basketball team. And he had some well-off and influential friends.

And, as I mentioned in my write-up, he was friends with a man who was a boy at the time whose family owned a theater that Yiddish plays were put on, and my dad would see them. But at some point-- and this is a big blank in terms of what I know-- at some point, even though he came from an Orthodox family, as I mentioned, and went to yeshiva and everything, at some point in his 20s onward, I think that he kind of renounced his religion. But I don't know for sure. But I got the impression over the years that there was no devotion to the Jewish religion, but there remained a strong cultural attachment.

Tell me whether my impression is right or wrong. But, when you say that his mother remarried shortly before World War II--

Yes.

--does that mean that he stayed in touch with her or was kind of estranged from her, because you mentioned also that he didn't have relations with his half-sister?

Right.

Did he kind of fall out from--

Well, I think that-- because this wasn't-- this was not too long before the war, once my father got married, not too long after that, they had to leave Lodz and go to Warsaw.

That's talking about your mother and your father.

Yes.

I'm talking about your grandmother.

Oh, yeah. No, oh, yeah. I understand. But in terms of-- you're talking about his mother and the second marriage. I know next to nothing. I know that the second husband's last name was Szejman, S-J---

Uh-huh.

S-J-E-J-M-A-N.

OK.

But I know very little. But what I believe happened is that there may have been a mixture of circumstances, but a rift, maybe. But I don't know anything about it, because my father really never talked about his half-sister.

OK.

And he never talked about Mr. Szejman, and I think that always kind of happened around the time that my parents and my grandmother ended up in Warsaw. What I believe is that my father-- I have a document that was tracing my father's movements. The Germans were documenting his movements.

And it's noted in that document, which dates from 1940 and a little before, it says that, around 1940, there was no further record of his living in Lodz. And that was probably around the time that my parents went to Warsaw because my dad could be sort of more anonymous there--

Yeah.

--while in Lodz--

I want to step back for a minute and ask two factual questions.

Oh, sure.

One of them-- they're all dates. Your father's date of birth, your mother's date of birth, and it can be just the year, but I want to get an orientation about how old they were at that time.

Well, since I prepared a piece of paper with those dates, I mean--

You can just read it off.

[INAUDIBLE] exactly. Yeah, hang on.

We can stop for a second.

What I actually have is my parents' dates of death. But since you're asking about dates of birth, as far as my father goes, he had about three or four dates of birth because--

No kidding. [CHUCKLES]

Yeah, they have to do with the fact that he wanted to try to avoid being drafted. And I don't know if there was a lottery system similar to ours in the Vietnam era. But, somehow, you know his official birthday was May 29, 1912.

OK, that's his official birthday, but then there are others.

Right. There are about three others, which have to do, probably, with him assuming a false identity of [? Konstanty ?] [? Dombrowski ?] and having to have that as his official birthdate and such other ways to kind of game the system so he could survive. As for my mother, I basically don't know her birthdate, but the year was 1912, as I mentioned.

As well-- That's for your father, as your mother as well?

Well, both of them were born in 1912.

Got it. All right.

My mother was slightly younger, just maybe a couple months younger.

OK, and the date that they married-- do you know that?

I can only give you the year. They were married in 1939.

Oh, so they were married-- do you think they were married before September? Yes.

Because that's when the Germans invaded.

Yes, they were.

OK, so they really marry at the very beginning of everything.

Yes.

And so let's take the story then further, unless there are other things from your father's background that we should talk about now, let's go to the war years when they're in Warsaw. Is there something else we should know before we go there?

Let's see. I don't think so. As I mentioned, the 10 or 20 years before the war kind of a blank in terms of what I knew.

OK. Was your father--

One thing--

Mm-hmm. Go ahead.

One thing that I did want to mention is that my father told me that he got out of military service because he was the sole financial support of my mother, but-- oh, my grandmother, sorry. His mother.

OK.

But, when my father passed away, we, of course, got a lot of his belongings, which included a box that had a lot of his mother's memorabilia.

Oh, wow.

Yeah, and that box has been very helpful to reconstruct some of this. And, in that box, there's a photograph of my father in what is without doubt a Polish military uniform.

Hmm, that's interesting, given that you're saying he made efforts to be able to avoid a draft.

Right, and it's possible that he was in uniform and then got a discharge. So I can't say that's-- I was surprised to see that.

Well, there could have been also a draft of two years. I mean, if he's born in 1912, most young men are drafted age 18, 19. So that would have made it early '30s, Polish army, two years, and, yes, you're discharged, and then you're not a member of the military when actually the war starts.

Right, but my father, among many untruths that he told me, when I was about 12, I asked him, you know, Dad, did you fight in the war? And he said, yes. And I asked him, did you kill anybody? And he said, no, I

don't know, they were too far away. But, subsequent to that, it appeared that he actually was never in the army, because he got this deferment or discharge, whatever it was.

OK, so these are holes, in other words, where you really don't know what that photograph means.

Right, exactly.

OK, That's all part of the story, though.

Yeah.

And as many people say when you talk about market research surveys, when you get an answer back and it says don't know, don't know also says something.

Sure.

OK, when they went to Warsaw, was it your maternal or paternal grandmother that went with them?

My paternal grandmother went, not with them, but I believe followed after my parents went.

OK, and she was in the Warsaw ghetto.

That's right, yeah.

Along with the half-sister.

Yes.

And her husband.

Yes, everybody at that time that lived in Warsaw went to Treblinka.

So that's where they were deported?

Yes.

OK. Let's talk about your own father and how did he-- tell me about how he survives.

Sure.

What are those four years like?

OK. What happened was that, at some point after they got to Warsaw, my dad with my mother's help, as I mentioned earlier, took somebody's identity.

Mm-hmm. [? Dombrowski. ?]

[? Konstanty ?] [? Dombrowski. ?] And my mother was out in the open and also, but she professed to be a Volksdeutsche ethnic German. And she actually worked as like an assistant to the director of the German Chamber of Commerce in Warsaw. So--

I'm not surprised, because they needed trusted Volksdeutsche to be able to man certain positions--

Right.

--at the time. So that was-- you anticipated a question that I had.

Oh.

So she went as Mrs. [? Dombrowska. ?]

Yes.

OK. [? Jadviga ?] [? Dombrowska, ?] and she worked--

Well, let me put it this way. That's a lacuna in the story. And, actually, your asking this made me realize that given how many omissions and untruths are part of the way my parents related their war experience, I now suspect that my mother did not acknowledge being married to my father but probably remained a Günther, as far as the German authorities were concerned.

Oh.

But I don't have any I don't have any documentation at all during the war years in Warsaw of my mother's name or anything. But I have documentation that my father remained [? Konstanty ?] [? Dombrowski ?] throughout the war.

Got it.

Did they live together?

So-- from what I understand, they lived together. They-- I mean, I'll give you a sketch of what I understand were some of the factors that led to their survival.

First of all, in terms of my father's personality, one very significant aspect was that he was not only very bright in an intellectual way, although I don't think he went that far beyond high school, but he always came across as someone who had gone to college. And he knew an awful lot about certain areas. But the point is that-- now I've lost my train [LAUGHING]--

It happens. Don't worry. It happens.

Yes.

What is something about how your father survived it.

Oh, how he survived, yeah.

So, from what I understand, they-- as I documented in my write-up-- they had enough money because my dad sold dental equipment, drill bits and things like that, on the black market, and god knows what else. And they had enough money to rent these extremely cheap apartments that had been occupied by Jews that were thrown out and also many Poles were thrown out of their apartments, too--

That's right.

--and occupied by the Germans, as you probably know. So they seemed to-- I don't get the impression that they were starving. I don't think their-- their life was very hard, because my dad was constantly on his guard, afraid he's going to reveal his Jewishness some way.

Did he look Jewish?

They had-- huh? Sorry?

Let me-- I mean, it's a blunt question, but did he look Jewish? Did he look like he could pass--

Oh, no. Not in-- no. That, I think was a very major factor in his survival, is that he looked not in the least

Jewish, not even-- nobody would look at this photograph and say, this guy looks Jewish.

Ah, I see.

He was extremely good-looking, but in a-- he could have been French, German, Polish, but not-- nothing suggested any Jewish genetic traits and reflected in his looks. So that was a big thing. Another factor was that my father-- and I believe this has to do with what I mentioned about some kind of alienation from Judaism that happened must have happened for some time-- because I don't know if you're aware, but most Polish Jews had a very distinct strong accent when they spoke Polish, even if they were fluent.

That happens, yeah. Yeah. That is across Eastern Europe. Mm-hmm.

Right. My father had absolutely no accent for some reason.

Do you speak Polish?

Because I think he had-- I'm sorry?

Do you speak Polish?

I speak poorly, very poorly. I can probably make myself understood-- understandable if I need to go to the bathroom in Poland, but-- stuff like that. I can read it, though. But I don't understand most of what I'm reading.

But you're describing two key things, really, that help towards survival is the ability to blend in and hide in plain sight. Neither your speech gives you away nor your looks give you away.

Right, and there were other things-- and this reflects my dad's common sense and resourcefulness and inventiveness-- is that he developed a certain tact-- certain persona, not a persona in terms of personality but in terms of his physical presentation. He was not a tall man. He was 5' 8". But he would walk very str-- with a very erect, almost military, posture, even into old age and always walked fast. He was always ahead of us when we went somewhere.

And he decided that it was to his benefit to make eye contact with no one. So he disciplined himself to make eye contact with no one to minimize the chances of being recognized or something coming to somebody's mind that passed him on the street. And there are probably other things, but those are the salient things. Those are-- were things he told me about that he used sort of as a survival tactic.

How is it that your grandmother ends up in the ghetto and your father does not end up in the ghetto? I know we've just talked about what helps him hide in plain sight, but when she follows your parents to Warsaw, does she live with them at any time and then is rounded up? Do you know how that happens?

No, I don't know how it happened. In fact, as I mentioned a little earlier, I'm not sure how my parents presented their relationship to the world at that time, i.e. did they deny being married or keep different names? But I believe that one reason is, for certain, that my mother was willing to take the risk, meaning if it were found out that she were married to a Jew, she would be shot on the spot and my father too, basically. Not even-- they wouldn't even bother with a camp.

Yeah.

Under those circumstances, it was just cut and dried. So what I believe is that my mother played a very significant role, as having taken on a German identity, in my father's survival some way or other.

I see.

But my grandmother looked very Jewish and spoke with a very strong Jewish accent, so it's not surprising to me that she ended up in the ghetto--

I see.

--whether somebody gave the game away because there were blackmailers everywhere looking for Jews that they could turn in for money, et cetera, et cetera, because, as you're probably aware, there was a lot of hostility towards the Jews in Poland even before the war--

Yes.

--just over hundreds of years. So, anyway, let's see. Do you want me to continue-- so--

Yes.

OK, so basically, as I mentioned, they were able to afford several apartments, and, from what my father told me, the German tactic was-- let's say Joe Blow is listening to Churchill on the radio and somebody turns him in. The Germans would come, and they wouldn't bother with just taking Joe Blow to a camp. They'd take the whole-- every inhabitant of the building--

Right.

--you know, guilt by association. But my parents were fortunate that whenever the buildings they were living in were raided, they weren't home. They were in one of their other apartments.

OK, so they had multiple at the same time, or more than one at the same time.

Yes, they did. And they just shuttled from one to the other to avoid being discovered.

Now, did your mother ever talk about this, or was it through your father that you learned these things about the Warsaw years?

This is all through my father. And let's see, my-- I have a second cousin, the one that told me about my grandfather's suicide, who had told me a few things I didn't know. He was another source.

And also, I have a second cousin who lives in Israel with whom I have been in touch because the three of us, meaning the male second whatever cousin, the woman in Israel, we all are in the process of finalizing becoming inheritors of land that was purchased before the war by my great-uncle on my father's side, who was murdered at Treblinka. And we're the heirs to some land in Israel.

Oh, wow. So he had immigrated to Israel and purchased land--

No, he was planning to. See, this purchase of the land happened in the '30s, before the war. He was planning to retire to Israel.

Oh, and then the war took, over and he would go into--

Everything went to hell, yeah.

Yeah. Now, in your letter, you mention that over 50 members of your family on your father's side were murdered by the Nazis.

Yes.

And yet, in our description here today, it really has a sense of a small family, if talking about nuclear family, your father, his father who is dead by that point, a grandmother, and no siblings, except for the half-sister.

Right.

Who would the other people have been?

OK, yeah, I can certainly address that. The cousin that I referred to, male cousin, I think maybe you might want his name so you can keep track of all these-- his name currently is Jacques-- as written in French, J-A-C-Q-U-E-S-- Luben. L as in Larry, U as in under, B as in boy, E as in Edward, N as in Nancy.

Got it.

Jacques Luben.

Jacques Luben, cousin in Israel.

No, no, no.

Oh.

Jacques Luben lives in Delaware.

[LAUGHTER]

Oh, OK.

He used to live in New York.

OK.

I babysat him when he was-- he's about five years or six years younger than me. I babysat him when we first came to the US. There's a whole-- I want, for your sake, to give you a coherent narrative. But there's a huge side story to the relationship between Jacques's father and my father and how it impacted on my father's mother and things like that. But that seems to me something that is really kind of encapsulated and maybe doesn't fit with what you want to know right now. I don't know. [INAUDIBLE]

Well, it's hard to s-- yeah, it's hard to say without knowing the story.

OK.

But--

Could I just-- I'm sorry.

Sure, go ahead.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but--

Go ahead.

I was leading-- I was leading up to answering your question about how come 50 people, but--

Yeah, who are the 50 people?

[INAUDIBLE] family.

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

OK, I think that my father extended the scope of the people who had died to cousins and second cousins--

That's fine. It's--

--to make 50. And Jacques Luben's father, and I think perhaps it would be helpful to you to record the name that-- he became Michael Luben--

OK.

--when he came to the US, which was--

That is the father.

This is Jacques's father.

Yeah.

And Jacques and his wife and Jacques's mother all immigrated to the US and settled in New York. And all this happened about five or six or more years before we got to New York. So--

Post-war, in any words-- in other words, they survived World War II.

Yes, Jacques's mother was, significantly, I guess-- Jacques's father and mother didn't meet until after the war. So it wasn't like they survived together, like my parents. They didn't even know each other. Michael Luben, whose other names I'll tell you because this is parallel with my dad and his names-- Michael Luben was fortunate enough to be sent to live in Switzerland just before the war broke out.

OK.

But he eventually returned to Poland and also lived in plain sight under circumstances that I know very little about because there was a rift between that part of the family and mine.

OK. What was the relation between-- cousin relation between your father and Michael Luben? Were they second cousins? Were they--

They were first cousins.

They were first cousins.

Yes.

OK. So--

And--

Mm-hmm.

I don't know how Michael felt about my dad, but my dad, for a number of reasons, strongly disliked Michael.

OK.

And the dislike grew over the years due to certain circumstances that I think probably-- I think they're a little delicate, but--

You know what we-- I'm looking right now. Let's-- in order to streamline this a little bit, let's talk-- we have until 3 o'clock. And then--

Oh, I didn't realize that.

Yeah.

Yeah, that's right.

Because we have a space that we reserve so that we can actually record audio.

Right. Sure.

And I would suggest what we do-- I mean, by saying this and interrupting, I'm not saying these other things are irrelevant, but I'm saying let's get the major part of the story down.

OK.

And, in some ways, this is my fault because I ask certain details, and then we go off on that tangent.

Right.

So I asked about the 50 people and how would they have been-- but the real issue that-- or the real experiences that we need to get down are what are the-- as many details of that your parents told you or your father told you about his hiding in plain sight experiences during the war?

Oh, absolutely.

And how he gets-- what is his relationship to his mother? Does he know what happens to her? Does he find-- does he ever go into the ghetto himself? Things like that.

Sure. I can address all that in great detail.

OK, let's talk about that.

OK, so if I talk too much, just shut me up.

No, no, no, you're fine. You're fine.

I tend to be very precise. Maybe it's the German part--

[LAUGHS] No--

--if you don't mind me speaking in stereotypes.

No, no, no, no, no. And the issue is that we can-- the next time we have a reservation for a space like this is in a month. So we can always come back and expand on things at another point.

Right.

But for the next 40-- to use up the other time, let's get most of the skel-- the spine of the story down. I wanted to say skeleton--

Absolutely.

But the spine is really what I mean. And then--

OK.

OK, so your father-- and he sells dental equipment-- who knows what else he sells.

Right.

They move between apartment and apartment. It's not clear whether or not officially they're married. Your mother protects him, but her own official sort of face is one that she goes by her name Günther, as far as you understand.

Right.

OK.

One thing that I did want to mention that I believe is important is that my cousin in Israel says that she and her family, when my parents visited Israel, were told that my mother converted to Judaism after the war, which I believe is a complete untruth.

Really.

That was one thing. I think that this was part of my parents' way that I mentioned of wanting to, on the surface, gratify other people's needs and please them.

I see.

And I believe they told this lie to the Israeli part of the family because of many factors, including my father's guilt about being Jewish and hiding that fact. And that was one place where he could tell the truth.

OK.

But that I don't believe was the truth.

I see.

So, anyway, let me get to what you're asking for, because I have a very definite experience that my father and mother related, my father, verbally, and my mother documented it in writing.

OK.

There was-- my father made periodic trips into the ghetto. As long as you wore the proper armband-- if you-- or not Jewish, obviously, because you'd already be in the ghetto-- if you were a Gentile Pole, like my father was passing himself-- if you wore a certain band around your arm, you could enter the ghetto. You were screened by a policeman, a Polish policeman, a German policeman, then you could go in.

So what happened was that my dad went in one time, and he-- wearing his armband. And he wanted to visit his mother. So he visited. And, at that time, his mother and the second husband were-- the second husband was still alive. He visited the both of them and his stepfather, I guess, was insisting that he give my father a fur coat that he owned.

And my father fought-- you know, I don't want it, blah blah blah. It'll make me look weird when I leave with two coats, and blah blah. But he ended up being convinced to put it on.

So what happened is that he started to walk out of the ghetto. He got about, I'd say, 20 feet past the gates where the Polish policeman came running after him and said, the German gendarme-- you know, it's a combination policemen and a military person-- wants to talk to you. So my father had to go back.

Right.

And, at that point, the fur was discovered. And my father was arrested and taken to a police station with a whole bunch of other people. But, from what he told me, there was a long line of people who were being processed who were under arrest. And he just kept going to the back of the line until, finally, the German officers that were screening these people, I think they got tired and some of them left.

And, anyway, to make a long story short, my father was able to persuade somebody to act as an interpreter for him with the Germans. And my father concocted a story that was a complete lie that made it look as if the German policeman-- gendarme-- had been negligent in not checking his identity papers or his having an armband.

Ah. OK.

And as a side story, there were blackmailers at the ghetto gates who would look for people who looked Jewish, which my dad of course didn't, and didn't have their armband and then would say, we're going to turn you in if you don't--

Hmm. Yeah, pay up.

--give us money.

Yeah.

So, again, so my father went to the back of the line. He told a cockamamie story to the German authorities through the interpreter. So, basically, the interpreter told the authorities, of course, what my dad concocted, and they bought it.

And they let him go.

And they let him go, yeah.

That was a close call.

It was a very close call, and he had one-- he had maybe, yeah, a couple of close calls. The only one I know in detail is very simple. And he showed me the spot where it happened. Towards the end of the war, a sniper shot at him and missed his head by a couple inches or something, and the bullet ended up in a pile of coal next to him. And he showed me exactly that spot.

But there was that and then also he was arrested for something else and ended up with being interrogated by a German officer who referred to him as a dog and ended up being killed by the Russians shortly after, and my father actually saw his dead body in the street lying dead.

Wow. Same guy?

Yeah, the same guy. And my dad also-- this is one instance where-- he told this story more than once, whether to us, and sometimes to people we were having-- company, basically. And that was a story where he burst out crying. And we'd ask him what was wrong.

And he would say that he heard a Pole being beaten to death. Not clear if it was by Germans or other Poles, but he was being beaten to death, apparently, because my father-- my mother saw the body later and was yelling for help. And my father felt helpless, because he couldn't do anything to assist.

So he's hearing these screams, then.

Yeah. And feeling this tremendous guilt--

Yeah.

--which was probably part of his general survivor guilt, to lump into a phrase, for being with my mother, for being with the Germans, for being all these things.

You think that was a big thing for him? I mean, was this something that you saw as a young child growing up with him?

The survivor guilt aspect, right?

Yeah.

Yeah, [INAUDIBLE]. Well, I can't say that it was the kind of why did I survive and, you know, the stereotype, and everybody else died? It wasn't anything like that.

It was more what I saw particularly in my dad's behavior and personality as it was reflected through that was that he was always very, very ambivalent about his identity. In fact, he said to me once, I don't have a good sense of identity. And what he meant, by tying it together with other things, is that my father, in his heart of hearts, wanted, to a significant degree, to be a Gentile Pole.

Hmm.

I don't know where that came from.

He would have been assimilated had there been no war. Are you saying he would have been an assimilated Pole?

I think that he became an assimilated Pole in terms of language and those things I mentioned quite a bit earlier. It must have taken many years. I don't know if-- I don't know when it started. But I imagine that, since my grandmother spoke a lot of Yiddish, that my father probably, up until some age, past his teens, probably had a Jewish accent, everything, and had a yarmulke and went to yeshiva.

And that's what I was talking about, the fact that I don't have-- I only have an inkling but no details about the feeling that somehow his identification with Poles-- and, interestingly enough, as a bundle with Catholicism-- that he had, I don't know where that comes from. I could think about it for hours. But, he, I believe, as I mentioned, not only did he have some kind of yearning to be accepted as a Pole, but also maybe as part of renouncing his Jewish religious affiliation.

He didn't, to my knowledge, convert to Catholicism. But when he told me the lie, the big lie, one of the big lies, which he only-- he told me that he was Catholic up until he was forced to give up the truth because my grandmother came-- Jewish grandmother, his grandmother-- his mother came to live with us. And she started going to synagogue, and I was old enough to come with her.

So your grandmother from the ghetto survives.

Yeah.

And what--

She--

OK.

Oh, go ahead.

She's not one of the 50.

No.

But her daughter doesn't.

Her daughter doesn't, and her second husband doesn't.

I see.

And all the cousins-- her sisters. She had several sisters that are also included in all that, and their children.

OK. OK.

So it starts to mount up, as I mentioned, once you get to that and cousins.

So-- well, it's easy to get to such a number given what the policies were.

Right.

That's not the issue.

Yeah.

How did your grandmother survive?

That is a big question mark because, as you probably know, the ghetto was liquidated.

Yes.

And everybody was sent to Treblinka, pretty much.

That's right.

I don't know how she survived. But I do know that what my father told me-- and this is something that my cousin Jacques, Mr. Michael Luben's son, [INAUDIBLE] to help you keep up track--

Sure.

He didn't know anything about any of this. But my father told me that Jacques's father, Michael, was the person who somehow facilitated my grandmother escaping from the ghetto, getting out. Maybe-- I mean, he was a smart guy. Maybe he figured out a scheme like my dad did to get out. And my dad got-- he ended up getting arrested, but he got out of it.

Yeah.

Who knows? My uncle was-- Michael was a very, very shrewd man.

So--

I never--

Yeah.

Nobody ever told me how my grandmother got out, and nobody whom I asked, who's left alive, knows.

Tell me. So-- one of the thi-- OK, that explains one of the questions that I have from what I was reading that you had written before--

Yeah.

--is that, it sounded to m-- on the one hand, that everybody who was in the ghetto from your family ended up in Treblinka, including grandmother, and then, later, you write that she visits you when you're living in London and you're 12.

Oh, did I-- if-- yeah, I mean-- yeah, if I wrote something to the effect-- you wouldn't happen to have my

thing, my write-up, in front of you, would you?

I do.

You do.

It says-- but here-- [CHUCKLING] OK, let me go back to it later.

OK, yeah.

But one of the things that really jumped out to me was that your father didn't tell you he was Jewish until you're 12 years old.

Yes.

And was that the-- so your assumption until then is that he's [? Konstantin ?] [? Dombrowska? ?] [? Dombrowski. ?]

[? Konstany, ?] a T-Y.

A T-Y. [? Konstany ?] [? Dombrowski? ?]

Yes, absolutely.

And that he's a Polish Catholic.

Yes.

And that, consequently, you are half Gentile Polish and half Gentile German.

Right.

Well, that does a number on somebody's own identity.

Yes, for sure.

So you had no idea that you have any Jewish ties or Jewish roots until your grandmother from Israel, your father's mother, who is able to survive the Warsaw ghetto, arrives in London.

Right. From Israel, yeah.

From Israel.

Yeah, she spent about a year-- I think it was just a year-- in Israel. And then, she came to England only a few months before we left for the US.

What kind of-- is this the only time that you ever saw her or knew her or had interactions with her?

Oh, she lived with us from about 1956 to her death in 1962.

Oh, so a long time.

Yeah.

A long time. So did she-- was she a storyteller? What kind of a personality did she have?

Well, I guess the most salient aspect of her personality was that, like my father, she had an extremely

explosive temper. And they would have horrendous fights very frequently. She was very loving towards me, and she made Jewish specialties like kugela and chicken soup that I liked. Very loving, as I said.

But the atmosphere in the home was horrible. And if my mother-- if my father wasn't fighting with my grandmother, my mother was fighting with my grandmother. She was extremely nasty, argumentative, did not really talk about the war at all. She never mentioned anything.

But it was always there. How could it not be?

Yeah, I'm sure it was. Yeah.

But she-- I don't know. She was a very kind of closed-in person in the sense of really not discussing. And I guess it's not uncommon for her generation and culture and everything to not have her emotions on her sleeve. But no, she just totally-- I knew nothing from her about her experiences, not even a hint.

OK, but, nevertheless, was there an explanation that was offered to you when she starts visiting a synagogue and you realize that you're Jewish, you're part Jewish?

Right.

And does he then say, oh, gee, I forgot. Or does he say, you know--

Sorry. [LAUGHS]

Yeah.

Yeah, right. I don't remember his giving an explanation, see. The only thing I believe happened was that my mother may-- I think my mother said something to the effect that they just wanted me to be A, protected from hearing a lot of unpleasantness, and also, since I was-- they were raising me, actually, as a Protestant, as a Lutheran, as my mother was.

And, again, to answer your question, there was-- I seldom would get a straight answer to anything from either-- from my parents or my grandmother. I didn't ask a lot of questions, but when I did ask questions, I frequently got evasive answers. So I can't answer you know precisely how they explained this huge lie, the biggest lie that I think in my life that I've ever been told.

That's huge. That really is huge.

Had a lot of consequences for me.

Such as?

Well, this is where-- things can get a little dicey. But I remember that, first of all, [INAUDIBLE] several things happened when I was maybe around 13 or 14-- no-- yeah, younger than that.

OK.

Still 12 and almost 13, maybe. I developed an ambivalent attitude towards Germans and towards Jews. It was almost as if they were conflicting aspects of my personality, of my perception.

To give you concrete examples of that, while I was still in England, I progressively began to be very, very interested in war, and particularly World War II and particularly the war in the geographical areas that my parents were involved with and-- primarily. Concurrent with that was a tremendous conf-- I had more than one identity conflict. Another one was that, coming from London, arriving in New York that I expected to be like it was portrayed in the movies was an extremely rude shock.

I mean, I remember the customs official that checked us out saw that I had a violin. He says, basically, why

are you such a wimp? Why are you playing the violin? You should be playing football.

Oh, good god. Yeah.

Anyway-- and then, so for a year or more, I was conflicted as to wanting to have a British identity. I felt that I was ripped away from England just when had begun to truly develop a desire to be English.

Yeah.

Strong desire. So that was concurrent with what I was talking about before was I started reading and I remember the very first book I read about the war that-- one of the first-- was the book that had the title that referred to red flares that I mentioned earlier.

Yeah, red flares.

And it was a very touching account by a German soldier, who went through the war with Russia, ended up in Stalingrad, got one of those what they call million-dollar wounds and got shipped out by plane just before the 6th Army collapsed and was basically destroyed.

Yes.

So the book affected me, but what's interesting is it affected me in a way that made me feel sympathetic towards the poor schlub German soldier who had to fight without being ideologically motivated, at least how that soldier portrayed himself. And I had a certain sympathy. And that sympathy was amplified by the fact that my experiences in Germany were very positive.

I liked the people in general. Everybody was very polite. I took violin lessons from a German man who was definitely in the service and showed me a picture of him in uniform. He might have even been in the SS, but--

You don't know.

--his uniform was black.

Yeah.

That's not so important. So here I am in England-- I mean, in New York. On top of it, my dad had insisted long before, when we were still in London, that I go to a French school, A, because of his dislike for the British because he felt they were snobby and mistreated him and didn't give him the same job an Englishman would get, all these resentments.

So I went to a French school. I did very well. I went to France for a vacation. I became fluent in French. So I have to say that that's somewhat ancillary, because I didn't have a French identity, but I did have a very strong French cultural orientation that was not a split in my persona, but somewhat significant.

But now this is the delicate part. I believe that the neighborhood we lived in--

In New York.

--had-- in New York-- was, as I mentioned, a mixed neighborhood, a lot of Jews, Puerto Ricans, and Blacks all kind of coexisting. The guy who ran the local candy store had a prominent concentration camp tattoo. As you may know, all tattoos were done at Auschwitz.

Yes.

Other concentration camps didn't do the tattooing. This guy had that. And I developed some vague-- some vague dislike to some of the Jewish people that I met. I don't know where it came from exactly.

But some of them were concentration camp survivors, for example, our upstairs neighbors, who my parents, I think, knew even before the war had been in camps. And the mother-- it was a couple, childless couple-- and the mother was somewhat eccentric. She was obsessed with Jewishness. I mean, I don't know if you know of a singer, Italian-American singer years ago named Perry Como.

Oh, of course.

Yeah, he-- we were watching a show with them. And all she could say is, he's a Jew. He's a Jew. He's a Jew. And all of us knew he was Italian, but she insisted.

But that's not all of it. The worst thing is that I vaguely remember having a conversation with her in an elevator in our building. I don't remember the tenor of the conversation. And I certainly don't remember what she said I had said. But she said to my parents that I had said to her, verbatim now-- I'm not a Jew, my father's not a Jew, and I hate the Jews--

Oh, dear.

--which I believe she concocted out of her craziness.

Yeah.

Or she picked up on something. Well--

It's enough to give you some guilt.

Yeah. Yeah, I mean I-- in some ways, I'm like my dad. I mean, my dad, as I mentioned, maintained a very strong cultural Jewish identity even at the time when he was denying being Jewish, not only to me, but he didn't want anybody to know that he was Jewish when we came to the US, nobody who didn't know him. He just didn't mention it.

And he became curious a couple of times when somebody assumed he was Jewish who didn't know him. And that was in the grocery store where he was asking for a certain vegetable, and the grocery clerk said in Yiddish, over there. And my dad looked exploded from being assumed to be a Jew.

And another incident happened-- and this is my bad judgment-- is that in about 1984, I was studying stand-up comedy just for fun and to be a better public speaker. And I did a routine where with-- again, bad judgment-- I referred to my father and his Jewishness in a certain way. And he exploded at me--

Yeah.

--I think with some justification. I think that was an instance of poor social intelligence on my part, that I guess-- I wasn't as aware of how he would react.

Well, these are big things. These are very big-- I mean, there's a certain kind of thread that, I don't know if I'll articulate it properly, but as we've been speaking, a certain thread through what you describe as your parents' story and their ability to survive really depends on being able to tell a lot of lies and really be able to bend the truth so that they are not victimized, so that they can still live to another day.

And yet, those things don't stop when the danger stops. And that continues. So-- and a child-- I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm not somebody's-- but I know that a child needs something that is both stable and clear.

Yes.

And there's not a lot of clarity when you are creating obfuscations, and only through obfuscation can you find a way to try and avoid a malignant force. But a child needs clarity. A child needs to know who they are. A child needs to know what is it that happened.

And when there's a vacuum of information, you fill it in with your own fears or your own interpretation. And so, if somebody is being evasive, is it because they have-- they're scared and they don't want to be pinned down, or is it that they did something that they're ashamed of? And you don't know. You don't know the answer to that question.

Right. If I can just mention--

Sure.

--a couple of things-- the wife that-- Joan that I am current-- this is my current wife. I was married for three years to another woman in the early '80s. And I don't want to use up a lot of time. But just, basically, my father just hated the fact that I'd married her because somehow he didn't feel that she was doing enough daughter-in-law-ish things, basically.

And there were other aspects, but the bottom line is that I still remember that my first wife, at one point, said to me, I suspect that your parents were spies. And even though there's a part of it that I thought was silly, there's a part of it that kind of resonated with the idea of how little I knew about what they really were doing.

Yeah. Yeah.

And-- yeah.

It is the lack of knowledge, the lack of real-- something firm. Even if people have-- all families have narratives, all families have stories, and we call them narratives and we call them, sometimes, tales, that doesn't mean they're not factual. It just means that you select from an event that happened something that has significance for you.

And that's what you will tell somebody, and they'll tell somebody else, and so on. And I believe that, as human beings, we need those things. We need those stories.

Well, and what you're mentioning about lack of consistency was very, very prominent in my upbringing. And on the one hand-- and my first wife picked up on this even when I was 27 years old. She said one time, you know, your parents don't respect you. And that was true, because-- to a certain degree.

My mother would lie to me about certain things. She'd say I was good-looking at a time when I was really awkward-looking. Sometimes she would just say, you know, Edward, you're a little bit stupid.

And my father was always denigrating me-- you're stupid, you're this, you're that. It was extremely difficult being around him. He was so self-centered that everything he did always had to be something that was to his advantage.

Yeah.

And both my parents were that way. And this, I know, is food for another conversation if we had one or whatever, but my parents were phony in two di-- in different ways. My dad would lie outright, sometimes just to defend himself when we made remarks that he had behaved in a way, like not asserted himself or something. He might fly into a rage.

My mother didn't lie. She just skirted the truth often and seemed in an insincere manner that my grandmother, my father's mother, picked up on when she was living with us, and she had an argument with my mother. And she remarked that my mother had a phony smile. And I think she was intuitive enough to get that too, you know?

Well, the question when we talk about a Holocaust story is how much is this-- how much is this as a result of all those things that happened when you take a mix of people who come from a certain background and

born at a certain time in a certain place and they're with each other, and then these other forces, these malignant forces, are there and play havoc with their lives? And so is what you are describing as being born after the war and growing up with this, are you experiencing the result of that sort of bad concoction, or is this part of people's personalities?

And how m-- I don't know if these are the questions that you have faced. I don't know what-- we've only touched on a couple of those that have affected you. But what I'm impressed by is that you've managed to glean from all the things that you don't know some things that you do know that are just mind-blowing aspects of what they had to deal with, given who they are and the time and place in which they found themselves.

Yes, definitely. I mean, some of the things you just mentioned resonate with the fact that my self-perception is-- don't know exactly how to say it-- that I'm not always as tolerant of other people's quirks as my sort of-- I won't go and use Freudian terminology, because I hate it, but whatever aspect is saying, this is wrong, you shouldn't be that way comes in.

My parents were always extremely critical of everything and everybody. And my mother would criticize everybody's looks, She'd criticize my girlfriend's looks. And they put on this attitude of superiority that I took on as a child where kids at school would say to me, you think you're better than everybody else.

Yeah, and you didn't even know that that's what you were doing.

Yeah. I didn't, no. I was a very-- I was a very angry kid for reasons, a number of reasons. I think my home environment was part of that. And I did want to mention that to give you a very vivid illustration that you may have read in my write-up. I think I put it in there that, why the arguments that my father and grandmother and mother had resulted in my threatening them with the powerful air rifle I owned to shoot them if they didn't stop arguing.

Oh, how hard. How hard, yeah.

So I sometimes-- I have to say, I've suffered from ever since my early 20s from recurrent severe depressions. I think my father, although he hated the idea of getting treatment, was probably depressed, especially after my mother died, but I think he had depressive traits.

But I think that my-- the greatest pride that I have now, as I look back on 71 years of my life, is that I was able to, in spite of depressions that were paralyzing completely, that I almost wanted to jump out of the window or be hospitalized. But I feel proud that I could still func-- I couldn't function during these things, but I feel a certain pride that I had overcome something, in certain ways, that was a tremendous obstacle.

That's huge. That's huge.

And I-- yeah. I mean, and I also feel that I have overcome certain aspects or certain aspects of my upbringing that formed my personality in ways that, looking back, I realize I don't like. I had-- In other words, there are many selves that I-- in the sense of the self in a philosophical way in the past I assumed or-- that was me that I don't like a lot of what I was.

Well, there's a-- I have a couple of thoughts. We're coming close to the end now.

Yes.

And let me share all of these different thoughts which-- number one, sort of like a logistical one. I would suggest that when I conclude the interview today, let's think if there is anything that you'd want to add to what we've talked about, whether it's a detail or whether it's a certain tangent. You-- keep in mind that we could have an accretion to it.

As I say, the next time that we are able to secure a room where we are able to do this audio interview, we could use that time to do such a thing. Number one. And number two, in order to help that, I'll find out

whether or not we can send you the copy of this interview so that you could listen to it.

Right.

And we don't-- as I say, we don't do editing. And I'll send the release form. I would very much like to have your story to be illustrative of what happens in a family dynamic when you have these forces. But it's a real balance between what is helpful and what is legitimate historically--

Right.

--to what is really personal and is not our business, nor should it be anybody else's business. And you are the person to decide that, how much to share. And we're in that kind of territory when we're talking about these things. They're huge issues. And yet they have these aspects to it. And I want you to keep in mind that this is a public archive.

Yes.

And I think there's something that you really have to contribute to our knowledge of what a genocidal policy, instigated by a right wing political party that took power in Germany, what kind of havoc that could wreak on people's lives, and at the same time have a door that says, well, this really isn't anybody's business beyond here. Do you understand what I'm saying?

I believe that I fully understand what you're saying right now, because throughout my composing my statement, the thought kept coming up that basically said, I have got to draw the line in certain ways between using this as a personal catharsis, which it's not supposed to be, but yet I'm so emotionally tied up with it. And, just to put it very frankly, it made a significant part of my life really miserable.

Of course. Of course.

So I'm constantly saying, I'm going to edit this out, edit that out. So I will make an effort when I'm doing what you suggested, your first suggestion, to see if there's other things that are relevant historically as opposed to an emotional catharsis or expression--

Well--

--or account of staff stuff that's nobody's business.

Well, what I want to say is it can be emotional, but it is your decision as to whether it should be anybody's business. That's the thing is that people respond-- the people that I've interviewed, everybody has an emotional response to what happened to them. And sometimes it has nothing to do with an historical event, other than the largest historical event, that they were in a city that was under occupation or something like that, or they were in the ghetto, or they were in a camp.

But it is emotional. But it is a question of at what point do-- yeah, at what point is that door? And who opens it, and when do you close it?

Right.

And I think that that's the thought I need to end with. It's an unanswered question.

Yeah. Let me just say this. I do-- there are things that I have considered including in this account that I'm very leery of. And that brings me to the idea that the statement I made about emotional things comes from that, but it's more than that. It's that there are certain things that happened that I still haven't come to terms with and that have affected me tremendously which we haven't discussed. And I know it's incumbent upon me to decide whether I should bring them up.

Yeah.

And I'm going to have to do a lot of thinking.

OK. OK, well, I appreciate that you have that you have shared what you have shared today. I think-- I know it takes a lot. And I know these are painful things.

You-- I think that, reciprocally, I think that you asked very good questions in a very sympathetic manner that made it easy for me to respond--

Thank you.

--in the way I think I did. I think I was very-- able to be very frank with you, I haven't gotten upset.

[LAUGHS] I'm glad.

I didn't-- in thinking about the interview, I thought, oh, gee, I'm going to start crying or something. There was a point where I almost did that, but thank you so much. I mean, this has been a very-- I don't want to get all cliché-ish--

That's OK.

--but this was a positive experience for me.

Well, thank you. And so I for this point, I'll say that this will conclude the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with yourself, Dr. Edward Darell on June 20, 2017. But it is possible that there will be an accretion to this interview at a later date. OK? Is that--

OK.

OK, wonderful.