

Here we go. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Dr. Edward Darell on November 7, 2017. And it is a follow-up interview of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview that was conducted on June 22, 2017, via telephone between Washington, DC, and New York City.

In the intervening months since our first interview, Dr. Darell, you've had a chance to review what we first talked about and find some additional information, and wanted to augment, add, sometimes correct what we were speaking of before. So let's start in that frame. What would be the first thing you would like to say?

The first thing is that in our original interview, I stated with considerable conviction that I had a photograph of my father in what I believed to be a Polish military uniform, which raised some questions given his account of how he got a deferment from military service to taking care of his mother.

Yes.

As it turns out, I did a thorough internet check of uniforms of that period. And even though it has some basic characteristics that are in Poland, there are no insignia and nothing that really designates it as a uniform. So I would like to change that and basically assert that I have no evidence that that was-- that's truly a military uniform.

OK. So this is in saying that you do have a photograph and your father did say that he had been in the Polish army, but got a deferment. Is that correct?

Yeah. The part of his-- see, there was a mixed bag there. The part that he said was that he-- and he gave me two different stories several years apart. The first was that he got a deferment as we were talking about with respect to his being basically the sole surviving son of his widowed mother. But he also sometime later, I believe, told me an untruth that he had actually fought during the war, which he later admitted that he did not.

OK. And yet, you had this photograph.

Right.

And you didn't know how to interpret it.

Yes. And frankly, I think that it struck me so hard that I over-interpreted it, and that's why I went to look at uniforms of the period. And it just did not resemble the uniforms sufficiently for me to even say that I'm sure it was one.

Ah, I see. I see. OK, well, I mean, what goes through the thread that you have articulated through your story is that because there were so many lies and obfuscations and then also some truths, it's been very hard for you to figure out which is which. And this is yet one more of those instances. Is that correct?

Absolutely.

OK. So let's go on to the next point.

OK. The next point is that in our initial conversation, I had stated that my grandmother, Helena, my father's mother-- this part is true, that she was, as far as I know, she was married to a gentleman whose last name was Shainman

That's right. Mm-hmm.

And that they had a daughter. In other words, my father's half sister. As it turns out, I do not have convincing evidence that either Mr. Shainman or their daughter were specifically in a concentration camp. I only know that they both became deceased during the course of the war.

OK. And when you say became deceased, they could have died--

They could have died from a number of different causes besides being exterminated-- I hate the word that I'm-- sorry-- in Treblinka.

I see. OK.

And I may have-- I believe I said in our initial interview that one or both of them may have been in Treblinka or were in Treblinka. But as it turns out, the only person that I have firsthand documentation of being physically present there is Helena, my grandmother.

Isn't that interesting? And she's the one who survived.

Yes. The one who survived. And the other thing is-- oh, I forgot that. My grandmother's brother, Joseph [? Halpurn, ?] whom I mentioned at some point, definitely was there. And that's the person from whom my father got the fur coat that got him in trouble.

Ah.

Because I believe that I said something to the effect that it was Mr. Shainman who gave it to him, but that's not the case. It's definitely Mr. [? Halpurn. ?]

OK. So your grandmother's brother, your father's uncle, when he visited your grandmother in the ghetto is the one who gave him the fur coat?

Yes. At his insistence. Not that my father's. At Joseph's insistence, even though my father was afraid he would look too bulky. And as a matter of fact, he got caught, as you may recall.

I remember that.

And arrested.

Yeah. I remember that. That was a very traumatic incident for your father.

Definitely. Definitely.

OK. So we've got that point down.

OK. The next thing is that-- no, actually, that's already subsumed under what I have already mentioned, so I'll move on. I had mentioned that my mother grieved her whole life for her father, who had died in 1945. They were apparently very close, and she would cry even years later when she was 80 whenever she talked about him.

Oh, wow.

One thing that I omitted at the time addresses her mother. And I would like to change or add the fact that my mother was also very devoted to her mother, my grandmother, Wanda, Wanda. And that my mother was in touch by letter with her all the time up until her death-- not my mother's death, but my grandmother's death in her 90s. And that my mother flew to Germany several times up until the early '70s in order to visit her from the US.

Mm-hmm. OK. So she was devoted to both parents.

Yes. But she's-- I mean, yeah. But she seemed to more vocally, let's say, mourn her father.

Mm. Mm. And what was it that he died from again? Do you know?

I don't know. As I mentioned in our first interview, he had some kind of chronic illness. And I guess I would rather not speculate, but whatever it was, he died of it. But I don't have any identification of what it was.

OK. OK. So you wanted to then say, if I understand correctly, that your mother was also devoted to your grandmother, her mother.

Yes.

And would travel from the US to Germany to visit her until your grandmother's death as well, to take care of her, to be with her, and so on?

And in fact, the extent to which that happened was that my mother received a call on a given day that she should come immediately and that my grandmother's situation was dire, and that she was expected to pass away. And my mother flew over there, and they met. And somehow, whatever the cause, my grandmother recovered, but then relapsed within a few weeks, and my mother went a second time.

Oh, wow.

Yeah. At which point she really did pass away in the presence of my mother.

But your mother was able to be there to say goodbye, which is often at this point the most crucial thing, is that you don't come too late.

Definitely. Definitely, yes. She even described it in detail, saying that when my grandmother stopped breathing, she could see the pallor of death start with her nose.

Oh, wow.

And then move downward.

Yeah.

Very specific, I know. [COUGHS] Excuse me.

OK.

OK. So that is another point. And now, we had discussed the issue of assimilation in general. And I believe that I had tied it in or you had to my father's ability to pass himself off completely, authentically as a non-Jew.

That's right. That's right. And you had mentioned that, that his features, his outward appearance--

His accent, and that's the key. I in our initial interview erroneously made a mistake, and I'll tell you how it happened, that my grandmother, his mother, did have a strong Jewish accent when speaking Polish.

I think you said that, yes. I think I remember that.

I listened to it in the recording, and it's definitely there. And when I heard that, I thought about the whole situation again. And what I realized was that somehow, I kind of conflated her with Wanda, my mother's mother, who spoke German with a very strong Polish accent.

Oh. Ah, I see. Your maternal grandmother, not your paternal one.

Right. Right. Or I just have some kind of temporary brain glitch, but anyway, that's what happened.

Well, it happens to all of us. [LAUGHS]

Right.

So do you-- how would you explain your paternal, your Jewish grandmother's manner of speaking when she spoke Polish? Well, it goes back to the history of my family and my father and grandmother more specifically.

What I understand is that up until some time prior to his suicide, my paternal grandfather, my dad's father, was quite successful in business. They lived well. I have photographs of my dad as a baby being held by their permanent nanny, who happened to be a Gentile, not that that means much.

But more importantly, there were several occasions when even though I would say that in general my father was not that "class" quote, unquote, "conscious," but he several times let it drop that his grandmother's maiden name was Silberstrom, which means you may know silver stream.

That's right. And he associated it not only with its beauty, that there was a subtext that it sounded somewhat aristocratic. So what I'm leading up to is that my thought about neither one of them having a strong Polish-- I mean, Jewish accent in Polish was that after my grandfather, my father's father died, I think that they were essentially a unit of two, isolated from most other family, other people. And one element may be that somehow there was a synergy that one of them spoke without an accent and the other picked it up. Or it's possible that my grandmother deliberately did not acquire it.

And there's another element also, which is that-- and I'll start with saying that based on my reading, 10% to 12% of Jews in-- only 10% to 12% of Jews surveyed during the interwar period in Poland identified themselves as Polish speakers. In other words, 90% or so were Yiddish speakers. And it was primarily some of the city dwellers that spoke Polish as their first language.

So extrapolating from that, I thought to myself that there may have been-- and here, I do have to speculate, but I think I have some grounds for this-- that my father and his mother had a certain discriminatory posture towards the Jews who came from the shtetls and were much poorer--

Well, it's a process.

--and spoke only Yiddish.

Yeah. I mean, the education levels, class distinctions, the ability to earn money.

All of that, because there was a wide disparity between how the Jews had lived in-- first of all, the Jews that lived in the shtetls were predominantly poor. They were often tradesmen. But over 50% of doctors and lawyers were Polish speaking at the time. And I think that what I was going to actually add earlier is that I can't speak for Helena, my grandmother, but I can speak for my father that he placed an enormous value on education.

And what's interesting is that I have no idea. I wish I'd asked these questions when my parents were alive. But they visited Poland frequently up until just a year or two before my mother's death in '95. And their social circle consisted of prominent people in Poland.

So in other words, they took an interest in what was going on in Poland and Polish culture and Polish theater, Polish cultural events, that sort of thing. Can we make that assumption?

Yes. Very much so. It's in contrast-- I'll elaborate on what you just observed. It's in contrast to the fact-- and I believe I mentioned this, that my father's best friend when he was either in his late teens or early 20s, that person's family owned a Yiddish theater. And my dad once in a while would sing a song in Yiddish that he remembered from a performance.

But also, whenever he attended-- when he went to-- my parents in the US and in England went to a movie about once every four years, and it invariably was a Polish movie, but nothing to do with Jewish culture or anything like that. It was

always a pure, quote, unquote, "pure Polish film." And they attended lectures that were given by Gentile Poles of a cultural nature.

Well, I'll say that that is, in the experience that I've had interviewing people, it is a minority, but it is not completely unheard of. There are people I've interviewed who identified also with the larger Polish environment and the society and culture and interests, and saw themselves as both, as Jews and Poles.

Yes.

It was not the majority, but it certainly was something that was there and was pronounced. And there are still people today who are quite prominent in Polish society, and also who are very proud of being Jews and see themselves that way.

Right. I do want to add, though, that my father quite frequently, whether here or when visiting relatives in Israel, he liked to-- I believe I mentioned this-- he like to kind of quiz people or lecture people as opposed to engage in more casual discourse. And one of the things he said repeatedly or asked as a quiz is, how many Jewish Nobel Prize winners were there? With pride.

But never once in my life, at least as I remember it, did he ever use the phrase we Jews. He always distanced himself from any inclusive-- any inclusion of himself in that group.

Well, those are sort of interesting distinctions for him, for him as an individual.

Mm-hmm.

Now, one thing that I did want to make a comment on whether or not it's true-- you can tell me-- is that although now you've corrected the record to save that your paternal grandmother, your Jewish grandmother, did not have a strong Jewish accent when she spoke Polish, she nevertheless looked more Jewish than your father did, and she nevertheless ended up in the Warsaw ghetto and he did not.

Do you know any of how she did? My question is, is that true that she nevertheless-- you know, while her speech was not indicative, do you know how it is that she ended up in the ghetto?

No. I can only speculate. There's-- OK. There's one reason that I believe is not speculative, but reality-based and practical, which is that my father was married to-- in the eyes of the Germans, a German woman, which took some of the heat off him and the attention, which apparently was paid by many German soldiers, people of all ranks who were specifically looking people in the eye to see if they detected any Jewish feature or habit or quirk.

Mm-hmm.

So that was part of it. And unfortunately, the rest is completely a blank. Nobody ever talked about how my grandmother ended up in the ghetto.

OK. OK. OK. Do you think we've covered this point?

This point, yes.

OK. Let's go to the next one.

OK. I'm trying to leave the Oscar Gunter one till the last. Let's see. Let me just look-- I've annotated the comments.

Sure.

And I just want to make sure-- so I covered that. OK, yes. We've covered everything except that rather long write-up I

made, which as I believe I mentioned, was based on material gleaned from the web, from the internet, and which contrasted with the information that I gave in the first interview, which was largely based on my cousin Hans's account.

OK. And this is in regards to which of your mother's relatives? And your relatives?

This is my mother's brother, Oscar [PERSONAL NAME] Gunter.

OK. And remind us of the role that he had with the occupying German forces?

OK. My cousin, who I-- and I know I mentioned is about five or six years older-- but appeared at the time he told me this to be already losing some of his mental faculties.

Yes.

Told me that my uncle [PERSONAL NAME] worked for something that he called the Rosenberg Commission. As you probably know, it was led by Alfred Rosenberg, one of the major theorists of Nazi ideology and practice.

And also quite prominent in the Eastern part, in Eastern Europe, in the Baltics and Eastern Poland.

And also, there was mention-- my cousin also mentioned parenthetically some association with Heinrich Himmler.

Yes.

But from my voluminous reading-- I'm now going to shorten what I wrote to the essentials, which is that my uncle's involvement with history, specifically as it relates to Russia, did not begin with the war. It actually dates back to as early as 1932.

Wow.

But-- yes. But I want to clarify that when-- OK. The institution that he started working with was called the Institute of Eastern European Studies.

And how do you say that in German?

The-- Jesus. I knew you were going to ask that.

[LAUGHTER]

Well, I could kind of translate, but it must have had an official title, official way of being identified.

It's interesting. I did that for Rosenberg's ministarium but let me just see. It'll either-- I'm not going to delay this for more than a minute, but I may have a reference to it fairly handy.

OK.

Do you have a pause on--

Yeah. We can pause, I believe.

Could you pause it for a minute?

Sure. We'll pause it for a minute.

Because I know I can get--

OK, great. We had a moment here. All right. So it's called--

[Name of institution -German]

--[INAUDIBLE]

--Institute

--Institute

--Breslau.

--Breslau.

So it was within Poland, or was it now Breslau--

It was-- in the literature that I perused, it was called Breslau. But most likely, it was called [INAUDIBLE] at that time.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. So I believe this-- I don't know my history that precisely, but I believe that this was one of those contested territories that Germany wanted from Poland that had large German populations living in it.

Right. But that comes a little later in my narratives. Because this institute actually dated from 1918--

Wow.

--my father-- my grandfather joined it in about 1932. But at the time, prior to Hitler's ascendancy to chancellor, it did not focus in any way on political or territorial issues or claims by the Germans. That was later.

So you're saying your grandfather--

--certain agenda--

Excuse me. You said your grandfather, or do you mean Oscar [PERSONAL NAME]

I'm sorry. I mean-- I guess he's my--

Uncle.

Yeah. Uncle. Yeah, sorry. [LAUGHS]

Yeah. My uncle, Oscar [PERSONAL NAME]

Yeah.

Yeah, as I mentioned, joins '32. At that time, although there may have been some, you know, let's say indication that the thought and the topics addressed were kind of previews of what was to come, but I don't have extensive evidence of that. But I do have very extensive evidence from the web and from some books that I looked at that the institute from the ascendancy of Hitler in 1933 forward became-- I'll use the word increasingly Nazified, which is hardly surprising. So I'll just try to condense the evolution of it into just the basic steps.

So the-- OK. So I mentioned what I'll the geopolitical and economic research was conducted there under increasing Nazi influence. And then there was, as I mentioned, a consequent-- a shift of focus, and then the issue of examining Germany's territorial rights to land ceded after World War I, which among others included what was called-- I'm sure-- I

assume you're aware-- the Polish corridor.

That's right. [INAUDIBLE], which was Danzig.

Yes, exactly. Exactly. So--

Would it be easier for you to read this rather than summarize it? We usually don't have people read it, but if you wrote this up yourself based on your research, maybe it's just easier to do.

OK. No, I was mostly concerned about the time constraint, which may not-- I don't know how much we've--

If we're on our last point, I believe we have about-- over 15 minutes left.

OK. So I will do that.

And one question before you read. Is this research you've conducted about the institute or about your uncle that you found online?

It's a combination of both.

OK.

I informed myself about the exact-- well, not exact, but the details, and in some detail about the existence, the creation, and the evolution of the institute. Also, its specific affiliations with the Nazis, and references that I'll be reading when I read this to various materials that were published and are listed as references on sites that involve people who were higher in rank, let's say, than my uncle in the institute, including one director.

OK.

So there are a whole bunch of references to his work.

OK. OK.

Anyway--

So let's go.

All right. So we've covered the fact that it started out in what was called [PLACE NAME] Then I just want to continue with where we were. Right. So-- OK. This point I found particularly interesting, which is that once Germany invaded Poland and the war started, right away almost all the junior staff of the institute was drafted into the Wehrmacht.

I thought that was interesting, because you and I had discussed what kind of position my uncle held there.

That's right.

And Hans, my cousin, had made it sound perhaps more important, but he was certainly not a junior member. He was probably, I would guess, somewhere as a fourth or fifth rank below the director, given his substantial publications.

OK.

So during the war, this institute was under the auspices and the supervision of the-- are you familiar with the [INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah. That's the SS, isn't it? It's described in the literature as the security arm of the SS and the Gestapo. And-- we have

10 minutes.

OK. Not much longer. Now, at one point, one of the directors of the institute was-- at least one was a former member-- a member of the Nazi party. But more importantly, as the war progressed, the supervision-- there was strong supervision from higher ups, particularly until he was assassinated. Reinhard Heydrich.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He was brutal in Prague.

Oh, yeah. Even his own fellow Nazis describe him basically as having no heart or a heart of stone or something. Anyway, he made it his policy to keep tabs on anybody even remotely connected with Germany, the conquered territories, those about to be conquered.

And I would say that it appears that he was peripherally-- he was only peripherally involved. He was not involved, obviously. He was too busy to be involved in the exact workings of the institute. But his underlings were clearly infiltrating it and finding out what was being written.

So just as a point of historical interest, the archives of the institute were burned during the fighting for [PLACE NAME] between the Allies and the Germans. But I also omitted to say that this institute became a part of a ministry called the-- I referred to it earlier. let's see -- It was-- it was Rosenberg's bailiwick, and it was called [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

OK. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] No N. [INAUDIBLE].

My German keeps getting--