

Stand by. I am rolling.

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Richard Connick on December 9, 2018 in Peabody, Massachusetts. Thank you very much, Mr. Connick, for agreeing to speak with us, to share some of your life story, and to share some of your memories, particularly those that revolve around World War II and what you saw as a result of what happened to the Jews of Europe.

I am going to start with the most basic questions, and then we'll go from there. So my first one is, could you tell me the date of your birth?

I was born May 31, 1926.

And where were you born?

In Buffalo, New York.

And was your name the same at birth as it is now?

Yes.

It sounds like a very anglicized name. Is it?

I guess it is. They originally named me Seymour, but it never was official but my aunt said, no, we're not going to do that. And I ended up with Richard. That's the best I can tell you.

And what about your last name?

The family came from Western Poland.

Western Poland.

I believe the name of the town was Chelm. I'm probably not pronouncing it correctly. But it was close, I guess, to the Oder River.

Oh, yeah.

And the name was Kon. It has been used Konik, Kanik, and various derivations from that.

And that would have been your father's side of the family.

Correct.

And do you know how many generations had been in the Western part of Poland, whether they had been there for centuries or?

I couldn't tell you.

You wouldn't know.

I don't know.

OK.

On my maternal side, the family name was Herrenfeld. And that's kind of odd for Poland. But they did come from Germany, because my great-grandfather was a rabbi. And he took a pulpit in Poland, in Warsaw. And that's how the name Herrenfeld got to Poland, got to Warsaw. So that was the derivation of my mother's family.

And so would you think, if you were to tell your grandkids, would you say we come from an old Polish-Jewish family or German-Jewish family?

Polish.

OK, OK. And tell me, who emigrated to the United States, and when did they emigrate?

On my father's side, the best I can tell would be somewhere between 905 and 1908. He was a young boy at that time. My father was born in 1900. And they came over, a grandmother, my great-grandmother, three uncles, and my grandmother, and my father. And I'm not sure whether they landed in Rhode Island or some place, or New York, but I think it was Rhode Island. And they ended up in Toronto for some reason.

And my grandmother, married-- remarried there. And she stayed. And my father went with his grandparents and his uncles to, of all places, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Wow.

And I have no idea how they got there and why they went there. And then they wanted to visit their sister, who remained in Canada. So they came to Buffalo, and they didn't try to get over into Canada. They didn't have enough money, and were sent back. And they didn't have enough money to get back to Milwaukee. So they ended up staying in the Buffalo area, and they never did get back to Milwaukee. My great-grandfather died in Milwaukee, and my grandmother died during the flu epidemic in 1918.

OK, let's put some names to people. What was your father's name? First name.

Menashem.

Menashem.

And his father, his birth father's name was pronounced Gyps. My father always spelled it E-P-P-S. Well, Bruce, who you met, our son, through research found that in Poland the spelling is different. G-Y-P-S. And that gentleman that worked in Poland for Bruce was able to trace him down.

Oh, wow.

And then through this ancestry.com, whatever, we did find some family, when he remarried. And we found some cousins that live in Australia. And one lives-- part of it lives in Israel. Kind of interesting.

It is. So this is your grandmother's first husband?

Yes.

OK.

And as far as we know, he was killed about 1920 during an anti-Semitic riot.

I see. In Chelm.

Not-- I don't know what town. I don't know the answer to that.

But he had then obviously remarried.

Correct.

And had children who survived that.

And that's really all we know about that family. But we've been in contact. Bruce, who you talked to, has been in contact with them.

OK, and his name was Gyps?

Gyps. Gyps. I've never heard that name before.

I never did either.

All right. And your father, did he Americanize his name from Menashe?

Morris.

Morris. OK, OK. And what was his mother's name?

Leah.

That is, your grandmother on your father's side was Leah.

Correct.

And her mother? Did she come--

Ida.

Ida, OK.

And her husband's name was Meyer. And I'm named--

For him?

Haskell Meyer.

OK. You were named Haskell Meyer?

Yeah.

OK, but you also were Seymour, and you're also Richard.

Well, forget the Seymour bit.

OK.

[LAUGHTER]

That never really happened.

OK. And on your mother's side, what was your mother's name?

Ethel. Ethel.

Ethel.

Anglicized.

And what was it originally?

Josowitz.

That was her maiden name?

Maiden name.

Josowitz. But she was known as Ethel as well, didn't have any different variation of that?

Not-- that's correct.

OK. And her mother's name?

Jenny. Genia.

Geni, Genia. Yeah. All right. So for your father's side, if I repeat this accurately, he was born in 1900, did you say? And the family emigrated here in 1908.

Somewhere around that.

Something like that. And it would have been your grandmother and a stepfather.

The stepfather didn't step in, come till later.

Till later.

In Canada.

In Canada. That's right. Sorry. So she by herself? She emigrated by herself?

With her three brothers.

Three brothers.

And her mother and father.

Did you ever know why they left? Did anyone ever tell you?

No.

OK.

I think for the usual reason. There was a better life some other place.

Yeah. Well, Poland was poor. Poland was very poor.

Well, the only connection I do have is that Milwaukee again. Why they went to Milwaukee and settled there, did my great-grandfather have some family there? I don't know. I don't know.

OK. OK. So then let's turn to your mother's side of the family. And remind me, where were they from?

Warsaw.

Warsaw. They were from Warsaw. And your mother was born there, or she was born already here?

She was born in Kishinev.

Oh, in Moldova.

In Moldova, Bessarabia.

Yeah, yeah. It still is a very-- a territory that is very troubled, because it's between borders. You know, and different forces want it.

That's correct.

So she was born in Kishinev.

Correct.

And do you remember the year of her birth?

Yes, 1903.

Ethel. And when did she come to the United States?

Well, that's a story in itself.

Please tell us.

My original grandfather died in the Tsar's army.

Jenny's husband.

Tuberculosis.

Jenny's husband, this would have been.

That's right.

OK.

And my grandmother, there were three children-- my mother, my aunt, and my aunt, at that time.

OK.

And then she caught tuberculosis, my grandmother. And she was institutionalized in a sanitarium. And the two daughters were turned over to another family. My mother tells this story. And when my grandmother recovered, she came for her two daughters. And the new family was not going to give them up.

Well, if you knew my grandmother, they gave them up.

[LAUGHTER]

She got her daughters back. And then she married what turned out to be my grandfather.

OK.

And his family was on the move to get out of Russia, Moldova, Bessarabia at the time, all because they didn't want to fight for the Tsar. And the old Jewish history of families moving in stages, one would go and earn the money, and the word was a Schiffkarte, buying the boat tickets.

Of course.

And so my father-- my grandfather and his brother had to decide where to go. So the older grandfather, the older great uncle just said, I'll go to America, where he had a half-brother. These families were all mixed up. And my grandfather went to Argentina, because he was a blacksmith. He was going to work on the Pampas.

So he went to Argentina, and he's working and sending money back to his wife and children, his wife in Russia.

This is not Jenny. Or is this Jenny?

This is Jenny.

This is Jenny.

And he wakes up one morning after getting paid, and somebody had taken his money, his meager pay. And he started asking around. He found the guy who took his money. So he went to him, he says I have to have that money for my family in Europe. Then he says, yeah, I took your money, but you're not going to get it back.

Well, my grandfather stood about 5 foot 5 maybe, wiry, strong as an ox. But they all carried weapons. Because they lived out there in like the prairie. So he takes his gun out, and he said I need that money. Fella says, you're not going to shoot me. I'm not going to give it to you.

Well, my grandfather promptly shot him, took his money back, and decided it was time to get out of Argentina.

Get out of Dodge. Let's get out of Dodge.

Get out of Dodge.

Yeah.

He went all the way back to Kishinev.

Oh, my goodness.

And when he got back, there was a letter from his brother-- come to the States. I'll send you the boat chicken.

Schiffkarte.

Schiffkarte. So my grandfather goes to the States, leaving a wife, two daughters, and now one son, and goes back to the States, and accumulates the money to get the ship, sends it to Kishinev. And my grandmother with these three children-- my mother at that time was 10 years old, 11 years old. My aunt was about a year and a half younger. And my uncle was - he had been born in 1910.

We're now talking about 1914.

Oh, my goodness. Right at the edge.

You have the picture. Well, she went to-- in the spring, she left Kishinev, and went up to Warsaw with these three young children. How she got there, she said-- and I can remember that it was walking, buses, or carts, and maybe a little bit of train. Got to Warsaw, saw her family for the last time, and then she had to take-- the four of them went to Antwerp.

Well, that's a hike.

To board ship. Well, that was another odyssey. And they got to Antwerp, landed at Ellis Island, cleared Ellis Island. And they arrived in Buffalo. When they arrived, all the flags were out. And she asked her father and her uncle, why all the flags? And they told her yesterday was the country's birthday, is how-- July 4, 1914, and the war broke out in Europe, August 1914. So they barely got out in time.

My goodness.

So that's how the family from both sides got to the States.

Now, I want to clarify one thing. Your mother, this was her stepfather?

Yes.

Her stepfather, not her birth father who died of tuberculosis.

That's right. His name was Haskell Pfeffer.

Haskell Pfeffer.

Yeah.

Did you know him?

No. Come on, now!

[LAUGHTER]

Well, listen, they're 1914.

I was born in '26.

And you could know him at age four or five. He could have still been around. No?

No, no.

You knew your grandmother, though.

Oh, my grandmother came to the States. Oh, yes. I knew my grandmother.

OK, OK. But Haskell Pfeffer who was in the Pampas, no?

No, Haskell Pfeffer was my grandmother's first husband who died.

Oh, I see. I see. Of course you wouldn't have known him.

Nathan Josowitz was her second husband.

That's who I asked -- that's who I meant.

Yes.

Did you know him?

Oh, absolutely.

OK. Did he tell you these stories?

Yes, he and my grandmother, and my mother.

Were they, in general, storytellers? Because there are families where people tell stories, and families where they don't.

I'd have to say no. I just wish we had-- I had the ability that you have right now to question them. And one of the sad parts, as I think of my life is, I never did that. And I had the opportunity to do it, but I never did it.

Well, none of us do it at the time.

Yeah.

We all think of it later.

Woulda, shoulda, coulda, right?

Yeah. What, excuse me?

Woulda, shoulda, coulda.

What is a shoulda-coulda?

I should--

Oh, shoulda, coulda. Sorry. Shoulda, coulda. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. What about your father's side of the family? Were they talkers? Did they tell stories?

No.

No? OK.

No.

But somehow you were able to pull at least these bits and to know about those things, these parts of their odysseys, the parts of how they got here and where they went also from your background. Some people don't even have that.

I understand that.

Yeah. Tell me a little bit about the relatives that they left in Warsaw. Do you have any names?



Yes, I do. And there's some memorabilia.

OK.

And some of it, by the way, how you got in touch with it, came through that, letters that they wrote during the German occupation that got through before the United States got into war. And there are copies of that at the Holocaust Museum.

I know. Your son donated those to us.

That is correct. So you have those copies and the translations from those. I don't know if you've seen them yet.

I have not, no.

But they're there. And I have copies of that here, if you want them.

Yeah.

Those letters do bring tears to your eyes, because they were pleading for food and help.

Yeah.

And we couldn't get it to them. My grandmother tried so hard, because you're talking about her brothers and her nieces. And they were all lost. In fact, you have a copy. The museum has a copy of a death certificate, where one of them died. And it's that states on it "of starvation in the Warsaw Ghetto." And--

Do you have their name? The last name?

Well, yes. It's on that letter. I will give it to you, a copy of it.

OK.

Well, you have the actual papers. Not you, but the museum does.

The museum does. The museum does. We'll come to talking more about these things later on. Right now, I'm still interested in family background in the early part of the century. So when they all got to Buffalo, and for your maternal side, what is it that brought them there? Because you told me that for your paternal, is because they ran out of money and they couldn't get to Canada. And so they ended up settling there. What about the maternal side?

One of these half-brothers had come over before 1900 and settled in Buffalo, and was doing well. And he brought the first one over, my uncle Abraham, great uncle Abraham. And then the movement, the Schiffkarte business got going.

Yeah.

And that's how they all ended up in Buffalo.

OK. And from your earliest memories, it sounds, though, that you had a clan, basically in Buffalo, from one side of the family and from the other side of the family. And so that there were aunts and uncles, and more than just your immediate family and grandparents. Is that correct?

That's correct.

OK. What kind of job did your father do, when you were born?

On my father's side, the family was uneducated. Lived on farms. My father worked at the Pierce-Arrow plant.

Pierce-Arrow plant?

They made automobiles, very fine automobiles.

That no one has heard of today.

Well, I think the last one was built around 1930, '31.

Wow.

And he used to come in, was a 20-mile trip, walking, streetcars to work.

Wow.

10, 12 hours a day. They knew how to work. The uncles were all junk peddlers, horse and wagon, paper, junk. And that's how they started. And they raised families of various-- and they did various things. One was a doctor. Some were in insurance and stuff like that.

That's the children.

The children. But-- [? furrier. ?] The jobs that they brought with them and the families brought with them. On my mother's side, the same thing basically. They were more educated, because as I said, my grandmother's parents, well, one was a rabbi. And that part of the family, and the Josowitz part of the family were pretty well educated.

Well, your grandmother I take it was born in Warsaw.

That is correct.

And so that's a major city. And more likely the girls would go to school in the late 19th century.

I don't know how much schooling she had. Her father certainly would have taught her somewhat.

Yeah. Oh, I had a question, and I just did-- it went out of my head. Let me see if I can trace it back. What language did you speak at home?

Ah, we spoke English. I learned some Yiddish, because my grandmother spoke Yiddish.

OK.

And which is pretty well gone by now. She died in 1952.

Jenny.

Jenny, that's correct. And my grandfather died in the '60s. But basically, they wanted to become Americanized as soon as possible.

So did the older generation also speak English amongst themselves?

Oh, yes.

Oh, really?

Yeah, but they were bilingual.

OK. Had any of them learned Polish, or Russian, or German or any of the other languages?

After they came here?

No, no, no, no. Before. Because if--

Well, they all spoke Russian.

They all spoke Russian.

Oh, yeah in Europe. Yeah. But they worked very hard to forget it. It was very interesting. My mother and my aunt especially, who were the older ones, never had an accent because of their age.

Mm-hmm. They came very young. 11 years old or younger. So they tell me there's something about the construction in your mouth. After 13, 14, you can't get rid of it. But earlier-- I really don't know much about it but you would never believe my mother was-- or my aunt was born in Europe. There was no accent.

OK. In Buffalo, did you live in a mixed community. Did you live in segregated neighborhoods? Tell you a little bit about that.

We personally lived in a mixed community. It was heavily German.

Really?

Really.

Well, that could be-- we'll talk about that. But then describe the city as a whole. Was Buffalo one of those places where East European immigrants were coming to? Did it have shoe factories? Did it have--

Steel mill.

Steel mill? Ah, OK. But was it that kind of a city?

Yes, the city separated into an Irish area, and to an Italian area, and to a Polish area, and to a Jewish area. And I think I can say it started-- that started to break down during the Second World War.

Oh, I see. So there really were strong ethnic communities until then.

Absolutely. Yes, there were.

And you folks lived in the German area?

It was a fringe area between the Jewish area and German areas. By the way, it was Austrian-German.

Interesting, interesting. Do you remember your street address?

Yes.

What was it?

548 Sycamore Street.

OK. And your neighbors, were they German-Jewish? Or were they--

They were just plain German.

They were just plain German. OK. And do you have any earliest memories from your home and your environment?

Absolutely.

OK, tell me about them.

As we said, we grew up, it was a different time, of course. During the Depression. \$4 or \$5 a week in earnings was a lot of money. Was not a lot of money. You lived on it. You had to. And I use the phrase over-- you didn't know you were poor, because everybody was the same boat. And kids played outside, which you don't even see today.

We had chores to do. There were no electric refrigerators. There was the icebox. So the boys, when they would come home from school, had to empty the tray from under the icebox to get the water out.

Where did you get ice in summer time?

Oh, you had the ice truck used to go down the street. The guys were selling. There were little signs in the window that you would turn around how many pounds of ice you would want, and they would bring it in, put it in the ice box.

Interesting. See, we don't know that stuff.

You don't know that stuff. That's correct. The telephone was the first internet, because it was all party lines.

You had a phone?

We had a phone. So the phone would ring, and everybody had to pick up the phone. And you know, there were no secrets. Like I said, it was the first internet. And my wife and I tell those stories to our grandchildren, it's unbelievable. You take a telephone, and you pick up the receiver, and hold it, and say "operator, give me a line." Or the operator would say, "number, please." You know, unbelievable times. Different times.

So does that mean that neighbors would be picking up the phone and listening in on your conversations?

Oh, absolutely.

[LAUGHTER]

Like I said, it was the first internet. You had to be careful what you said. You really were in class when you had a private line. That might save you a dollar a month.

To have it or to not have it?

Well, if you had it, it was an extra dollar.

Yeah, yeah.

I'm not sure of that number, but that was something relative.

It was something more. Yeah, you paid extra.

You paid extra.

I have some standard type of questions, and they may sound a little bit funny, but I'm going to ask them, because they tell us a bit about development at the time, the level of development. So you had electricity in the house.

Oh, absolutely. Yes.

How was it heated? How was your house--

Coal furnace.

Coal furnace, OK. And there was indoor plumbing?

Oh, yes.

OK. Did you live in a single family home or in an apartment building?

Well, where we lived, my father had a little store. We lived in back of the store, and that was a flat. A flat upstairs.

OK, so it had a couple of apartments and a storefront. Does that mean that-- was it a storefront? OK

Yes.

Where was it in Buffalo? In the center of town, in a neighborhood?

No, in this neighborhood.

OK, what was the neighborhood name?

Pardon?

What was the name of the neighborhood? Did it have one?

Oh, no. It didn't have one.

OK.

Well, we would call it the East side, the West side, the North side, South Buffalo. Stuff like that.

And what did he sell in the store?

Groceries.

OK. So was it the local grocery store?

Yeah.

Was there a lot of competition?

Probably not too much.

And where did he get the groceries from?

A supply outfit.

Was it local farms, or was it--

Well, sometimes fresh flowers, vegetables, which he would go to the commission market.

OK.

Interestingly enough, my wife's father worked on-- had a stall on the commission market selling celery.

In Buffalo?

In Buffalo. That's right.

Small world.

Well, you know. It's a small world.

Did you have any food delivered to you, like milk in the old days?

Yes. Oh, yes. The dairy truck would come by and deliver the milk and the meats and stuff like that, yes.

Did your father have an automobile?

Yes.

OK.

A 1926 Buick.

Oh. Ooh. Now, those have been around for a long time.

Yeah.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

No.

You were an only child.

Yes.

OK. Did any of your relatives live with you?

No.

Your grandparents or so?

No.

Did they live close by?

Yes.

Walking distance?

Yes.

OK. What did the family's social life consist of?

Family.

Family, OK.

Originally, and my mother branched out, became active in Jewish affairs.

OK.

At that time, it was called the old folks home. She was on the board of directors there. And then she was active in a group, they called themselves the Jewish liberal arts club, and they would sponsor a concert and use that money for charitable uses. And then my mother and a couple of other women formed at that time-- and that's another story-- The Buffalo League of Advertising Women.

How did that come about? That's a little unu-- put it this way, did she work outside the home?

She started working when she was about 16.

Wow.

And she worked for Buffalo Forge. They hired her. She still doesn't know why, but they hired her. And she worked, and there was a notice on the bulletin board, they were starting an advertising department. At that time, she may have been 18. And she applied for the job. And she didn't know what the word "advertising" really meant. But there was a new job, and she got the job.

And she worked with a gentleman. I still remember his name, Fred Stubinger, and he formed a group. And that led to the forum of the Advertising Women of Western New York of Buffalo, for which she was active till the day she died.

Wow, wow.

And I think at one time she was president of it. Yeah.

Now, did your parents-- did they finish college? Did they go to college?

No, no. Not even close.

OK. Did they finish high school?

I don't think-- no. My father may have gotten to this fifth or sixth grade. My mother maybe one or two years of high school.

OK. Tell me a little bit about their personalities, and the personalities of your grandparents as much as you knew them.

Grandparents were tough, because they had to be. They were survivors. They were basically hardworking people, family-oriented. Had no idea for many years what the good part of life was. One of my things that I look back on sadly, that they never were able to benefit from some of the great things that have occurred, especially my father.

Mm-hmm.

And--

What do you mean by that?

Well, work was their existence. To survive, they had to work. And that was true of my in-laws, the same thing. And it wasn't easy for them.

No.

And every day was a trial. And that was where their concentration was. My dad, before he died, had-- of course, my mother had the opportunity to go to Florida for a couple-- for a month. And they would drive down. And that was one of the big parts of their whole life, that they had that opportunity to do it for a couple of years before my father died. But I would like to have seen them see some of the success that I had in later life.

Yeah, yeah. The fruits of what they worked so hard for.

Yeah.

And does that mean you went on-- did they have ambitions for you?

Oh, yeah. Which is not unusual among our clan.

Yeah.

We always wanted our children to do better than we did, right?

Yeah.

That's not unusual.

No, but in some families it's more pronounced than in others. It's a common, common belief, but some have just more drive to help the kids get there.

I would say that fits my parents, but there were some members of the family that were, during this Depression and so forth, I could do these menial jobs. Why can't my kids do it? That did occur also. I have one-- had one cousin who wanted to be a doctor, a physician. And his father said, well, I peddled junk. It was good enough for me. It's good enough for you.

Oh.

He said, no, it's not. And he worked at Bethlehem Steel to earn the meager paycheck to do this. And he became a physician, in spite of everything. And many of us, in later years, certainly gave him high marks for what he went through.

I had another cousin who wanted to be a teacher. This was in the early '30s. And there was no money for it. You can't be. And he held that against family till he died.

That's also a burden.

He didn't have that opportunity. Young people don't-- I don't think they understand that to this day. I have trouble understanding it.

Yeah. Well, you know, it's another discussion, but sometimes it is the parents don't want to have their children become strangers to them. If they enter these other professions, they'll leave them. They'll not want to deal with or have anything to do with simpler, uneducated, older generation. Those can be some of the motives that I speculate here. I speculate.

Oh, I understand.



Yeah.

I never thought of that, by the way.

Yeah. Let's go back to your neighborhood. If you were an only child, did you have friends in the neighborhood that you played with?

Yes.

OK.

Young boy next door. Year older than me. But we were very close. And of course, as I said, he was not Jewish. He was German.

What was his name?

George Schweitzer.

George Schweitzer, OK.

I still remember. And we were good friends.

And at his parents, in the German community, did people still speak German with one another? As much as you know?

I can't answer that. I can't recall it.

OK. OK. And who were your father's customers in the store?

Those people.

Those people?

In that neighborhood.

What was school life like for you? Did you like going to school?

Did I like going to school? I don't know. It was something you did. I think that's the only way I can answer it.

OK, OK. You were born in 1926?

Correct.

So those years, the 1930s, are your formative years growing up.

Yup.

And a lot happened in the 1930s. Did-- the Depression, of course. Because your father had a grocery store that was on him, because he didn't work for someone else, did he struggle? Were people not buying food from him, or did they want it on credit? Was he able to make ends meet during this time?

He eked out a living. And yes, there was credit. I can picture the book where he tallied what they would purchase. And we didn't know any better. That was the way you lived. That's all.

And your mother worked also while you were--

My mother did not work. My mother was active in these organizations that I told you, but she stayed home and helped my father and raised me. And then you get to an interesting point in life, is the day that I went into service in March of 1944.

I want to get there in a little bit. Is there something particular you wanted to say?

But yes, that was the day she went to work.

Ah. OK.

The same day. I know I jumped on it.

That's OK.

But that was the day she went to formally-- and the job that she got was with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. And she became the first woman agent.

To sell life insurance? to life insurance in the United States.

Oh, my. Oh, my.

Now, that may be disputed, but that's what she told me. But she was the first. And then a couple women followed her in later months and years. And that's what she did. The day I went to the service, she went to work.

You know something? In the end, it's an accomplishment. No question. But it's also not surprising, because the men were off to war.

Absolutely.

And so these jobs which normally wouldn't have been even considered that a woman could do them, they were open for women.

Rosie the Riveter.

Exactly, exactly. But let's go back a bit.

Go ahead.

Did your parents-- I mean, again, did you listen to the radio much? Did you get newspapers? Did they read newspapers?

Yes.

OK. On all three?

Yes.

All right, what did they read? What newspapers they get?

There were two newspapers in Buffalo. No, there were three at one time. The Buffalo Times, The Buffalo Career Express, and The Buffalo News. The Times finished, I guess, in the mid-'30s. The Courier Express lasted until way after the war. And The Buffalo News still exists today.

Radio, good question. Yes, we had a radio. And I can go back as far as sitting with my father looking at the radio, just as you would look at a television set. But you looked at the radio, at that sound coming out. And it was a visual thing, imagination that went into it. It was a wonderful thing.

And my wife and I will tell you the stories of listening to the children's programs, Little Orphan Annie, or Superman, or Dick Tracy, that was on the 15 minute intervals late in the afternoon. And you would look at the radio, and imagine those scenes in front of you.

But I can go back sitting with my father, looking at the radio in 1932. I was six years old. And what were we listening to? The election returns of the Hoover-Roosevelt election.

Well, that's interesting.

And I can remember sitting with my dad, listening to those election returns come in.

Well, that means that he had an interest beyond having to struggle to make a living.

Oh, yes.

So what were some of his views? Or did he have a stake in who was going to win that election? Did he have any thoughts about things like that?

I don't remember that. But I'll tell you, he was a registered Republican. He never voted a straight ticket, though. That I know.

OK.

And he would take me into the voting booth with him. And at that time, they had the machines where you pulled the levers down. And he would point out the lever to pull, and I would pull a lever. And so I do remember that. And to this day, voting is one of the most important things that I do.

So that's what he modeled for you, the right to vote.

Oh, yeah.

The duty vote.

I would say, I would agree with that. Yes.

Yeah. In 1933, Hitler comes to power in Europe. Do you remember that having any reverberations in your neighborhood? You were a little boy. You were seven years old.

I don't remember much until about that. I don't think it manifested itself until the later parts of the '30s.

OK.

I vividly remember the events of Kristallnacht. And you have to remember, there was no television at that time. We got our news basically from the newspapers, not from the radio.

But I'm going back. I don't remember. I remember some of those things in the '30s happening. And your question was, did it reverberate through the neighborhood? And of course, you're alluding to the fact that it was a German neighborhood, Austrian neighborhood.

Yes, there was some Nazi activity among certain young men. I remember, and I won't mention the location, but there

was a business that had a large floor in the back. And I think it was in '36, '37 that we would see these strange dressed men come to this building. And a number of us crawled up on the roof and looked through the windows from the top. And it was a Nazi group.

Was it meeting sort of secretly?

Yes, because in later years, the owner of that building said it never happened. Well, OK.

OK.

But I will also tell you, after Pearl Harbor day, that all changed, that many of those folks in those neighborhoods that did have that feeling, it disappeared, and they actively participated in the war. I'm sure you're going to get to that later. But--

So they were American first.

They were American first. It turned out that way. That was like-- I would-- how would I describe it? Maybe as a social-- a German social club, and they had no meaning to them. Really understood it was something to identify themselves to the old country. That's me saying that in 2018.

Yeah, yeah. Well, that's a phenomenon that not enough, I think, research has been done for immigrant groups and how they still maintain a sense of identity from where they've come from and have a tie to a country. But the things that go on in that country are so different from what those immigrant groups remember. And so their developments go in very different ways.

And I'm thinking, for example, German-- German immigrants to Russia in the 18th and 17th centuries, well, whenever it was Catherine the Great was Tsarina, she invited a lot of Germans to move and settle in Russia. They became completely split. They had no tie, really, to contemporary things that were going on in Germany.

And how they developed and how they kept their language became very different from what was going on in Germany itself. And their sense of being German was something that was so antiquated to anybody who was from Germany. So I mean, maybe I'm making this more complicated, but immigration to the United States had similar aspects.

It certainly did.

You know?

You and I-- well, I didn't live in Europe, and I have no understanding of it. I did get some sort of a feel for the peasant class. And I'm sure we'll get into that later. But yeah, there was a difference. Yes. They adjusted differently.

Now, did you-- when you were the Jewish boy playing with your German friend George Schweitzer, did that ever be commented on? Did you ever feel in your neighborhood that you were discriminated against, that someone called you names, or?

I think being Jewish and being obviously in a Roman Catholic neighborhood, yes, there were some underlying things that occurred. But I don't think I really understood it.

OK. Did your father ever lose customers, for example?

Every once in a while, I thought about that. But I would-- I wouldn't say that. It's possible, but I'm not sure.

OK. And when you talk about those underlying things, is there any way you can give an example, or-- yeah, something like that, to make it concrete?

Well, as we all know, a rabbi, a priest has great influence on his flock. And some members of the church identified Jews

as what? Christ-killers. And we had at that time Father Coughlin. And Father Coughlin was listened to every week. And I know my father would put on Father Coughlin, just to hear what the other side had to say every once in a while.

And I do the same thing today, because it just so happens I happen to be a liberal-- central, liberal Democrat. And there's certain Republican folks around, and I love diversity. I'll go and listen. And I do. So I took that a little bit from my father. And yes, I did hear some of that. But you know, it really didn't register to this young kid.

OK, but that's interesting that you're able to place it to the sources. You know, that it's not things that you'd hear in the streets or the way neighbors would behave to you. It would be the dissipation of ideology.

Probably.

The other forces that were around in society. And it's important to know what those forces were, when you mentioned Father Coughlin. Many people don't know who he is, but he was quite famous at the time. And so that he can be identified. OK, it's like some other folks today could be identified as representing views that can make others uncomfortable, and have within them racial undertones, overtones, things like that.

What about the Jewish community? Did you go to synagogue? Were your parents religious?

Yes. My grandmother, of course, was. And we were very observant. As I said, my grandmother was a tough cookie. And we followed her. We could have been 90 years old, and we would have followed her. Yeah, we did observe kosher. I was kosher until I went in the army. It was a question of starving or eating. It was a very simple proposition.

But yeah, we were observant. And Marianne and I were temple members all our life. Until we moved to [? Brooksby. ?] And of course, we have done it by ourselves here.

OK. Now, was the synagogue close to home? Could you walk there?

Oh, yeah.

OK. And did you socialize with other people, other Jews who were not family members?

Oh, yes. Yes. There was a Jewish community center, which we went to. And that was through the city. Some of them did it through the temples and stuff like that. But families associated with their group, yes.

And my next question is, so did the political things that were going on in the wider world, were they discussed in these circles? And do you remember how people in the Jewish community were talking about what's going on in Europe?

Absolutely. It was a-- as my friend Donna would say, it was a hot topic. And I'll give you a little background on that. My grandfather, the one from the Pampas--

Don't take his money.

Don't take his money. He wasn't a card-carrying communist, but he certainly was a very liberal sympathizer of Stalin.

Oh, jeez.

And because anything, anybody that was against the tsar and that, they were for. And that was not unusual, not unusual. Communism was 180 degrees away from--

Tsarism.

From the tsar. But my grandfather was an interesting guy. The day that Hitler and Stalin signed the pact-- that's before your time-- my grandfather used to give a Jewish newspaper out of New York. There were two. One was The Forward.

And the other was The Freiheit. The Freiheit was a communist paper. And my father-- grandfather's English wasn't that great. And his writing ability wasn't that great. And he came over, and he said, I want you to write me a letter. Write a letter for me.

To you?

He asked me to write the letter. OK. At that time, what was I? 13 years old? Whatever. And the letter basically was, cancel my subscription. Take me off your mailing list. I can no longer follow what you're writing. He says, I can't believe that Stalin would sign this agreement with Hitler.

Non-aggression pact.

Non-aggression pact. And my grandfather turned at that time. And he didn't become a conservative, but he certainly was not a leftist anymore. It had a dramatic effect on him. And I think I can say that that had an effect through the whole community. I don't know about other places. I can't comment on that. But it happened in the circle that I lived in, universally.

That's very interesting. It's very interesting, that it would have had-- in other non-Jewish, shall we say, parts of the United States, this history was so remote. You know? What was going on was so far away. It doesn't touch daily life.

But for people who are recent immigrants, people who come from those territories, people who are following and are affected by, and their relatives are affected by the policies of Hitler, even in a place like Buffalo, New York, there's a resonance. And that's interesting to hear from you. You know, that it really made a difference to your grandfather in such a deep way. You know?

And I was speaking with somebody the other day, who lived in a small town, smallish town, and asking these questions also. And they were far away. They weren't part of that daily reality. But for him, they were.

Let's go back to Kristallnacht. You say you learned about it from the newspapers?

Yes. I'm not sure. Well, you know, we had something else. We had the movie theater. And we had Movietone news.

OK.

And we had the March of Time. So we could go to the theater, the movies, and they had these trailers. And there was our visual effect that we picked up from that.

So did the movies show the effects of Kristallnacht?

Yes, they showed the breaking of windows. And the Germans were not ashamed to show that. We knew it. And later on, I didn't, but my wife did, I have a friend, a young boy that was part of the Kindertransport. And he had lived through Kristallnacht. And I was able to-- and I talked to him about it a couple of times. And yeah, it was a real thing. Yeah.

He came to Buffalo.

Yes. And he was able to-- his parents were able to get out. Interesting. His parents-- his father fought for the Kaiser in World War I. And his father was taken in by the Gestapo or the SS, and sent to a German camp. I can't come up with the exact name right now. But because he was a veteran, they released him. And his father and his mother emigrated to the United States before the war broke out.

Were there more refugees from Europe? Were there were more Jews coming in from German territories and then increasingly German-occupied territories like Czechoslovakia, who ended up in Buffalo before the war?

A few. A few. Not that I personally knew, but I know a few did.

OK.

I know one young boy who was on the St. Louis.

Really?

And he ends up back in Buffalo. And by the way, he later on in life won a Nobel Prize in medicine.

What's his name?

Hauptman.

Hauptman?

H-A-U-P. Yeah, died a few years ago.

And he had been on the St. Louis?

He was on the St. Louis.

And so few people were able to get off. Does that mean that he was one of those who was returned to Europe?

Who got back, yeah.

And then survived.

There was another one. I think it was-- I'm con-- no, I don't want to say the name. I might be wrong.

OK, OK. Can we cut for a second?

Sure. Rolling.

So off camera, one of your friends was mentioning that in many American-Jewish communities, there was a distance to-- an emotional distance to what was happening to fellow Jews in Europe, and that they really didn't care, or identify, or want to know. Now, I'm asking you to go back to that time, rather than now when we know things. Did you sense any of that in your community?

No. Basically because of what I said before, about the problems of our family in Warsaw, we identified. And as a family.

OK.

And to your question as you've been asking, has been commented on, and I've been thinking about that, I can't recall, where we lived, anything like that. They were all immigrants. They had-- I'm a first generation American. Not unusual. But the families who came from there were extremely interested. Because they themselves had been immigrants. So maybe that changes a little bit and alters the situation. I don't know.

It could.

But no, we had great feeling for anybody that would come in.

So you brought up your Warsaw relatives. And I had a question about that. Earlier, you mentioned that there were these letters that we now have at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, of letters from them saying that they're hungry. And

the few that you got at the time--

One was specific, could you send stuff for Pesach week? Don't have any-- anything for Passover.

Hmm. Did you-- did your grandmother have correspondents throughout the '30s with these relatives?

Yes.

What it ongoing?

Yes.

OK.

They were happy there. They were professionals. One was a musician. I think-- dentist. Why don't you come-- my grandmother wrote, "why don't you come to the States? We'll get-- bring--" "why come to the States? We're happy here?" We heard that many times.

OK. So they were settled.

They were settled.

And they had no real reason to go.

Correct.

And Berlin is not Warsaw. Or Warsaw is not Berlin.

I get-- that's accurate.

Yeah. Unfortunately, they're very close to each other.

They paid with their lives for that thinking.

Yeah, yeah. OK. I'm glad you mentioned the movies. the Movietones. Because I was trying to find out what are the sources of information that you would have gotten. How would the wider world have come into your world? And clearly the cinema had a much bigger impact in conveying news in those days than it does now. It doesn't have any. It conveys other things.

Did you-- do you remember where you were when the war started? And I mean September 1, 1939.

Yes.

When Germany invaded Poland.

Yes.

Tell me about that. Where were you?

We were home. And the radio was on. And this broadcast came in. Well, we were used to it. Before we had Czechoslovakia. We had Austria. This was just another thing, except this time there was fighting. And then shortly after, we know the Russians became involved. Which, by the way, disturbed my grandfather immensely.

You know, we have to remember, the Russians came in supporting the Germans. And I don't think he ever lived that one



down. But yes, I do remember that day.

What was going on in your world, in your home? I mean, were your parents listening to the same news at the same time?

Yes.

What did they say?

They were-- I don't know. That's a tough question. I don't know. They were disturbed. They were disturbed. Did they really understand the significance of it like the rest of us, anybody today? I'm not sure. I'm not sure. It grew, of course.

Of course.

As time. But I'm not sure they understood-- any of us understood the significance of it.

Was there starting to be talked about-- or had this talk going on for a while-- of the US being involved? You know, should we as Americans be involved?

Well, there was a strong movement by the numbers-- I believe Senator Wheeler, Senator Nye, Senator-- keep America out of the war.

But in your community.

In our community?

Both neighborhood and--

"Let's stay out of it."

Jewish community, too?

Yeah, let's stay out of it. I think that was pretty universal. Staying out of it.

OK.

As much as, at that time, 13 years old. You know, as I could assimilate.

I know, but some of my questions are so unreasonable, because I'm asking you to think back to a particular day on a particular time 70 years ago.

Yeah. I guess a neurologist would say this thing is still functioning a little bit.

It certainly is. It certainly is. OK. So between 1939 and 1941, you are between 13 and 15. You're in high school. Do these events start having more interest for you, or are other things on your mind more.

When you say "you"--

I mean "you" personally.

--going to put it as a generation.

OK.

Yes. I think we became-- started to realize that we were going to be part of this, sooner or later. now there was a schism-- no question about it-- in the country. Those who wanted to reach out and help the Allies, even some who wanted to go to war. We know that many-- it was the advent of the American Eagle Squadron that went to serve in Europe. Chennault group in China.

Mm-hmm.

So there was this tendency to start, in the States, maybe the word is sympathy. That it was something that we had to get involved in. I think it was a slow movement. It wasn't precipitous, as what occurred on December 7, '41.

Well, OK, let's talk about December 7, '41. Today is the 9th, so we just had an anniversary two days ago. Do you remember where you were when that happened?

You know, that question is asked so many times, especially two days ago.

Yeah.

Most of us, I can universally say all of us remember that day, where we were.

Tell me about it.

We were home, middle of the afternoon. On Sunday afternoon, my father would take us out, my mother and I. We would go for a ride in the car. Just go for a ride. And we were getting ready to go out for that ride at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And the radio was on, of course.

I've been trying for years to remember that program. That was a group of people, men, prominent men that would talk the day's news. The week's news. Almost like some of the format we have today. Much more civilized.

And the radio was on. We heard that interruption, and that voice coming over, that the Japanese were bombing Pearl Harbor. And of course, everything shut down at that time. And there was a reaction for that one. My aunts and uncles came over to the house, my grandma, my grandpa. And everybody congregated, wanted to be together. And that's how I remember that day.

And then afterwards, in the wider community, what did you see at school? How did kids talk about it, teachers talk about it?

There was a UNIFICATION which the young people today, there's no reason they should understand it. It was probably the time in our history where this country was brought together as one. I can't think of another period in our history where it was like that. It was one. The country was one. It was an unbelievable occurrence.

And especially a couple of days later, when Hitler declared war on the United States, you have to remember, Hitler declared war on the United States. We didn't declare war on the Germans. After Hitler did it, then we declared war on Germany. But the country certainly did uniform come together. Like I've never-- you know, even as a, kid I was a bit older at that time, but yeah.

You're entering a very important, pivotal, critical age. When a person turns 14, 15, 16, I'd say 15 or 16, they're leaving childhood. They're starting to think more about big issues.

And they're as smart as they are ever going to be.

That, too.

[LAUGHTER] That, too.

Yeah. Somehow or another.

Yeah, that loses its power.

We lose it. We lose it.

Thank God.

[LAUGHTER]

But you're coming of age exactly at these momentous events. Did they-- how did they impact you?

What was the question?

How'd they impact you yourself?

Oh. I have to say, I understood what was going on. And I think most of us understood that this was not going to be over tomorrow. That there was certainly going to be a point in our life that we as young boys would be young men, would be part of it. We understood that. I certainly understood.

OK, so that was with you for the next three-- three four years, then as you finish high school.

High school was an event at that time. In fact, one of the interesting-- the labor market was short. And during the holiday season in December, there was no one to work at the post office. So young kids like me would work at the post office. Go to school during the day, and work at night at the post office.

I used to go in at 5 o'clock, come home at 1 o'clock in the morning, go to school the next day.

Whoa.

All for \$0.65 an hour. Oh, that was a lot of money. So we became part of it. Youngsters like my wife, younger than me, they participated. Getting scrap metal, and paper, and stuff like that, they would go around and gather it. Everybody became involved.

So even though there were no boots on the ground in Europe, there's a sense of mobilization.

Absolutely. Some of our older cousins-- don't forget there was a draft-- were starting to go.

OK.

Some of them were in the service before 1941. So there was some sort of a mobilization. Many of them were in before '41.

Was there rationing at this time? Or is that like?

I don't know when rationing really came in. I remember in school-- it had to be in grammar school that I think of, where we were issuing the certificates to buy sugar. And the kids in school, people would have to come to the elementary schools to get it.

So that would have been Depression run. Depression. Maybe during the Depression, that you would have had rationing, if you were still in elementary school.

No, not during the Depression.

No?

I don't rec-- no, no.

OK, OK.

There was food, but you couldn't afford to buy it. That was the problem.

OK. So but you were still in elementary school when--

1939, yes.

Oh, that's right.

Yeah.

That's right. OK. So rationing of sugar at that time.

Yeah. Now, when I put it together, I remember that. I forgot about that. High school I don't remember doing anything like that.

OK. Did your parents' work lives change? Well, your mother was still at home, but your father's work life throughout--

My father became a warden. God knows-- my mother worked-- I forgot about that. She worked at a center in the center of town that was tracking airplanes, enemy airplanes flying over Buffalo. Yeah, come on now. That wasn't going to happen back 19-- in the '41, '42, but they were doing it.

Mm-hmm.

And she would go and work a night shift, 12:00 to 4:00 in the morning or whatever it was. Where did she do it? She wouldn't tell us. It was a big secret. Yes, we were becoming involved.

Yeah, yeah. What kind of news were you getting from Europe at this time?

Pretty good news was radio. The Edward R Murrow, Eric Sevareid. We still remember those names, especially Eric Sevareid. Murrow calling in from London. News-gathering was becoming incrementally very fast.

Well, there were some very strong American journalists who had been in Berlin. Some of them left, and some of them stayed.

Shirer.

Shirer. Shirer, yeah.

Those names just pop-- are still in my mind, yes.

Well, he wrote that seminal-- the first major book, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* afterwards. William L. Shirer.

Yes, that's correct.

Were you ready to go into the army?

Yeah.

You wanted to?

Yeah, I enlisted.

You enlisted.

I was 17 years old.

Oh, my God. You were a kid. You were a kid.

But they wouldn't take me on active duty, so they sent me to school down here in Boston. I went to-- at Harvard.

That's not a bad route.

I graduated from high school in June of '43.

OK.

I started at the University of Buffalo. Not a very good student, because I-- hey, I'm not going to be here. I'm going. But I was able to pass the test to go to Harvard. So they sent me to Harvard. But the minute we walked-- arrived in Cambridge, we looked around, we knew this was going to be a short term affair. Because as soon as somebody hit 18, they were gone.

So they sent you to Harvard for what reason?

Take academic courses.

But not necessarily a bachelor's degree.

Well, if you could last, you would get a bachelor's degree. But no one expected to last. We had-- there were members of the family that went to ASTP.

What's that?

Army Specialist Training Program.

OK.

And so when I hit 18, the semester ended. And I got my papers to report to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Just 18 years of age.

And your birthday, again, is?

May 31st. And I think the first week of June I was at Fort Bragg.

OK, and tell me what that was like.

It was a shock. I don't know. I should-- there were two parts of that. Being in the service and being in the army, that didn't affect me. But being in North Carolina was a shock.

OK, in what way?

That was a different world.

Yeah.

I woke up to that world when I had the first pass to go into Fayetteville. Now, I don't know if you've ever been in Fayetteville. And somebody who sees this in the future will wonder and maybe be angry at me for what I'm saying, but that's OK. It's what I saw.

And we got off that bus. I was walking into town. There was a saloon. And that's an apt description. And on the door, there was a sign. And it said "no African-Americans"-- but it certainly didn't say "African-Americans"-- "or dogs allowed." That shook me up. That was the first time I had ever run into anything like that.

Can we cut?

Yup.