Excuse me, I would like to inform all participants at this time that conference is now being recorded.

If you have any objections, please disconnect at this time.

You may begin.

I'm ready.

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Julius Jortner on March 20, 2019.

Thank you so much, Mr. Jortner, for agreeing to speak with us.

We very much appreciate it.
Well, thank you for inquiring.

Yes, sir.

Absolutely.

So we're going to start at the very beginning.

I'll ask you some biographical information and information on the pre-war years.

And then, we'll go from there.

OK.

So the first question--

what is your date of birth, the place you were born, and your name at birth?
I was born on March 3, 1936 in--

26
00:01:05,160 --> 00:01:13,080
well, I knew the town as
Chernivtsi in Romania.

27
00:01:13,080 --> 00:01:17,040
And what was the rest?

28
00:01:17,040 --> 00:01:19,710
And what was your name at birth?

29
00:01:19,710 --> 00:01:20,700
Oh.

30
00:01:20,700 --> 00:01:26,505
It was the Polish version
of Julius, which is Juliusz.

31
00:01:26,505 --> 00:01:29,130

32
00:01:29,130 --> 00:01:36,630
And my last name was
Jortner, J-O-R-T-N-E-R.

33
00:01:36,630 --> 00:01:38,130
I see.

34
00:01:38,130 --> 00:01:39,330
And what about your parents?

35
00:01:39,330 --> 00:01:43,350
Could you tell me their dates
of birth, places of birth,

36
00:01:43,350 --> 00:01:47,620
and, also, what
were their names?

37
00:01:47,620 --> 00:01:48,280
Yes.
My father's name was Michal, M-I-C-H-A with I don't know how to pronounce the letter. It's an L with a line through it.

Michal Jortner.

And he was born on May 23, 1895 I believe in the town of Tarnów, T-A-R-N-O-W, Poland.

And my mother, Maria Ana Spielzogel, S-P-I-E-L-Z-O-G-E-L, was born in Kraków on July 22, 1901.

Great.

And so they're both from Poland.

What brought them to Chernivtsi?

Well, they continued to be Polish citizens.
They had a business in Chernivtsi, which, at the time, was right at the border with Poland, between Romania and Poland. Today, Chernivtsi is pronounced differently and it's in the Ukraine. So it was business that they lived in Romania, frequently visited Poland, and traveled on Polish passport. I see. And what were their educational backgrounds? Had they gone to university?
Yes.

My mother went to university in Kraków and was one of the few women who had achieved a law degree of some sort.

I don't know much detail about that.

My father was a mechanical engineer, educated, I believe, in Czechoslovakia, in Brno.

I don't know the dates of his degrees or hers.

Oh, that's OK.

No, thank you.

And had your father been a soldier in the First World War?
Well, I believe he was, but he also had some health problems.

So I don't know.

I don't know much about that.

That's OK.

I don't think he saw action.

I see, OK.

And did you have any siblings growing up?

No.

OK.

What about did you have any grandparents or aunts and uncles who also lived in Chernivtsi?
Yes.

My father's brother, Ignatz, was another principal partner in the business and lived in Chernivtsi.

His daughter, Marie, was my closest cousin and she was five years older than I.

And we were only children so pretty much we served as siblings to each other.

[CLEARS THROAT] Excuse me.

And was that the only relative who also lived in Chernivtsi?

Was the rest of your family back in Poland?
Yes, of course.

I see.

Were you able to visit them or were they able to visit you very often?

Well, I have some old photographs showing me with my maternal grandmother.

I was held in her arms and I don't recognize her.

I must have been, I would say, 18 months old or something like that.

And I believe we also visited my paternal grandparents.

I believe my grandfathers had passed by the time I was born.

But the grandmothers were alive.
Also, my father had several siblings, I think six, six siblings, two female and the rest male. And they had children, also. I believe they perished during the war. No, not all of them. Of course, Ignatz was in Romania. And he and my father left Europe together. So we came to the United States in 1946. And my cousin and I were rather close.
until she passed away two years ago.

122
00:08:00,770 --> 00:08:09,040

123
00:08:09,040 --> 00:08:12,070
I don't know what else to say.

124
00:08:12,070 --> 00:08:13,310
I did meet--

125
00:08:13,310 --> 00:08:30,300
I did meet my father's brother, Edward, who spent the war--

126
00:08:30,300 --> 00:08:33,659
World War II in France.

127
00:08:33,659 --> 00:08:38,919
I don't quite understand the circumstances.

128
00:08:38,919 --> 00:08:46,050
And Edward had a daughter.

129
00:08:46,050 --> 00:08:51,090
She's still alive, living in France.

130
00:08:51,090 --> 00:08:52,110
I've met her.

131
00:08:52,110 --> 00:08:57,020

132
00:08:57,020 --> 00:09:00,140
Oh, well, thank you.

133
00:09:00,140 --> 00:09:01,910
What about languages?
Did you speak one language at home, one language outside in Chernivtsi?

Well, my parents were fairly well off.

And I believe I had a nanny who was German.

And I spoke German with her.

So German-- and I spoke Polish with my parents.

So I was sort of bilingual to begin with.

The German has not lasted in my life as much as the Polish.

I continue to speak Polish with my parents.

and I spoke a mixture of Polish and English.
with my cousin in New York.

What about Romanian?

Did you ever learn Romanian?

No, no.

Romania, at least in Chernivtsi, there was a fairly large German population.

And it seemed like my parents, when they--

I'm not sure, in fact I was young.

We left when I was three or four.

They spoke-- I'm sure they spoke German there
as a business language.

I see.

And was your family religious?

No.

We were-- we--

I don't recall attending any sort of religious service when I was young.

They identified as Jews.

And were aware-- well, and were perhaps victimized by the Romanian police because they were Jews.

I'm not sure.

My parents did not talk about the Holocaust,
although they are certainly aware of it.

And according to my cousin, who are quite concerned about their siblings and parents who remained in Poland.

And occurred, according to my cousin,

they tried to convince them to leave unsuccessfully.

And my father's mother--

well, a few years ago my cousins and I visited Poland and we had a chance to go to the house.

that my paternal grandparents lived in and spoke to the Polish person who was living there at the time.
And he was old enough to recall the German invasion

and said that my mother had been rounded up in the streets

with other Jewish people, many of whom were shot.

And he believes she had been shot, too.

I know nothing about my maternal grandmother's fate.

They certainly didn't survive the war.

My mother had a sister and a brother, both of whom

survived the war.

My mother's sister, I believe, passed as non-Jewish.

My mother's brother,
Hugo, somehow

00:13:54,790 --> 00:14:02,860
found his way to Great Britain and was in the British Army

00:14:02,860 --> 00:14:03,570
during the war.

00:14:03,570 --> 00:14:04,514
Oh, wow.

00:14:04,514 --> 00:14:09,840

00:14:09,840 --> 00:14:19,910
So as I said, my parents never talked about these things.

00:14:19,910 --> 00:14:26,600
Everything I know is by, sort of, either intuition or things

00:14:26,600 --> 00:14:30,110
my cousin, who was five years older, was aware of.

00:14:30,110 --> 00:14:36,774

00:14:36,774 --> 00:14:40,310
Mr. Jortner, let's jump back a little bit.

00:14:40,310 --> 00:14:41,140
OK.

00:14:41,140 --> 00:14:43,570
I know you were very young, but could you tell me

00:14:43,570 --> 00:14:45,820
a little bit about Chernivtsi?

205
00:14:45,820 --> 00:14:48,010
Do you have memories
of the town?

206
00:14:48,010 --> 00:14:50,770
The house or apartment.

207
00:14:50,770 --> 00:14:52,810
Yes.

208
00:14:52,810 --> 00:14:56,900
Memories considerably
aided by photographs,

209
00:14:56,900 --> 00:14:59,810
which I still have.

210
00:14:59,810 --> 00:15:09,675
And Chernivtsi strikes
me as a small town.

211
00:15:09,675 --> 00:15:13,950

212
00:15:13,950 --> 00:15:15,915
I don't know what
the population was.

213
00:15:15,915 --> 00:15:19,370

214
00:15:19,370 --> 00:15:22,360
I think I was in a kindergarten.

215
00:15:22,360 --> 00:15:28,670

216
00:15:28,670 --> 00:15:33,200
And I remember,
well, again aided
by photographs, of walking around town,

pretty well dressed, rich kid.

My parents were always quite well dressed.

And--

You said, your father and brother worked together.

And they owned a factory?

Yes.

They were 2/3 of a trio that owned the factory.

I don't quite remember the name of the third person.

But my uncle was an attorney, and my father was an engineer.
So they were--

I don't know what the third person was, perhaps a businessman.

And what about your mother?

I know you mentioned that your parents were well off.

Did your mother work, as well?

I don't remember her working in Romania.

I think she was a woman of leisure.

She never practiced law, although she had a degree.
She had servants.

I see.

And I remember some, I don't know, jovial sort of remarks later on in life about how her days in Chernivtsi comprised going to the hairdresser or the dressmaker or--

It was sort of a rather privileged life.

I see.

And, again, I know you were very young, but do you remember about when and why did your parents start...
thinking about leaving Romania?

Well, as I mentioned, Chernivtsi was a border town between Poland and Romania.

And when they left Chernivtsi, I believe, in 1940,

there had been a stream of refugees from Poland escaping the German occupation of Poland.

And of course, they had relatives in Poland,

so, to the extent they could, they kept in touch.

So they had some knowledge of what was going on and resolved to leave, particularly after Ignatz, my uncle,

was visited by Romanian police and essentially

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media. It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.
had to buy his way out of whatever detention they were placing him under.

The story was that his wife had to go to the bank and get money to spring him loose from police detention.

And they had-- they being the two families-- had been contemplating leaving for some time because of the situation.

And they-- the family legend has it that they left the very next day--

that Ignatz was released and they were ready to drive-- somehow get to Bucharest, which is,

I don't know, several
hundred miles south

of Chernivtsi and the capital of Romania.

I remember-- I don't remember the dates, myself, of course,

but while we were in Bucharest--

to me, the time passed as if it was a day or two.

But my cousin says we were there long enough for her

to be enrolled in school.

So we were there several months during which

the most severe earthquake in Bucharest history occurred,

it was 7.7.

I just looked it up in preparation for this talk.
But the earthquake occurred at around 3:00 AM.

And we were lodging in some place.

I don't exactly know what it was.

But I remember being woken up by my mother, who was standing over my bed, leaning against the mirror that hung on the wall above me, presumably to try and keep it from falling on me during the earthquake.

And we hired a taxi so that we wouldn't be trapped indoors as the earthquake proceeded.

And we were driven around town.

I sort of remember--

I have a vague memory.
of destroyed buildings

and one of the largest buildings in Bucharest--

I don't know how many stories it was,

but at least 10 or 12 or one of the tallest buildings in town--

collapsed during this earthquake.

And--

Oh, wow.

And so during these months in Bucharest, it was [INAUDIBLE]----

And I was four in 1940.

And I was four in 1940.

OK.

Just saying.
Yes, sir.

It was your parents and yourself, as well as your uncle, aunt, and cousin?

You were all together?

I believe so.

OK.

And--

I don't remember-- I don't have any direct memory of being with cousins--

with my cousin and uncle and aunt.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.
That's OK.

I think Ignatz and his family traveled separately from Europe to India.

Oh, I see.

But we ended up only a couple of blocks apart in Bombay for most of the war.

And Mr. Jortner, you mentioned that you believe that you and your parents left Chernivtsi the day after your uncle was released from prison.

Right.
And they had been thinking about leaving Romania for a while,

but to leave the next day, were they able to prepare,

you know, to pack belongings, prepare [INAUDIBLE]??

I think they were very well prepared.

I recall seeing in Bombay trunks of possessions that they'd taken with them.

We had blankets.

I'm not sure exactly why I recall blankets mostly, but--

they weren't-- they didn't have a lot of stuff.

But they-- my cousin also told me that they had--
I don't know whether it was before they left Chernivtsi or after. They had somehow sent funds ahead.

They weren't sure where they were going, but they would--

when they knew where they were going, they would send some sort of money in care of the British embassy and whatever town they were headed to.

Apparently the British were open to that.

So they had a--

they had means as they traveled.
And so we jumped ahead.

You mentioned Bombay, India.

But where did you go straight from Bucharest to--

From Bucharest, the next stop was Istanbul.

Well, I don't know if it was the next stop.

But Istanbul was an international city and just about every country had an embassy there.

And basically, as I understand it, my parents and my uncles shopped around for places to go to.

I remember some talk of South America being a possibility.
They went to Istanbul because it was an international city, like you mentioned, with lots of options.

So that they were-- they were figuring out what they-- where they wanted to go.

Yes.

And I should mention that another uncle and his family, during the same period, made their way to Palestine and that's where they settled.

So I should mention, I know those two cousins survived the war.
Who were just about my age.

The boy was three years older and the girl was a year younger.

And they grew up in Israel.

So they found their way to Israel.

And we traveled--

I guess we must have had a direction, then, probably thanks to the British.

We traveled first to Baghdad where we stayed at a hotel for I have no idea how long.

And--
The Baghdad in Iraq.

In Iraq, yes.

And I don't know how long.

And my main memories of Baghdad were,

first, that I was playing with some other well-off kids who

were living at the hotel.

And one time we went to the rooms of a slightly older boy

who, I believe, was Iraqi.

Anyway, he had a BB gun.

And he handed it to me and I shot him, not knowing--

Wow.

[CHUCKLING]
I shot him in the hand.

He was holding-- he was holding the barrel as he handed it to me.

And I guess I just picked it up by the trigger or I don't really know.

But no great harm was done.

But it was a traumatic experience.

And the other traumatic experience was that while playing in the park--

the hotel had a--

the grounds of the hotel were park-like--

I was bitten by another guest's dog.
Those are my violent memories of World War II.

So from Baghdad, we traveled to Basra, which is a port on the--

I guess it's the Indian Ocean.

I'm not sure.

And flew, by sea plane, to Karachi.

Oh, wow.

And I had my fifth birthday in Karachi,

but we must have arrived in March of 1941.

Overall, starting from Chernivtsi to get to India,
to travel there?

Well, I assume there weren't very many months in Bucharest.

But the earthquake was November of 1940.

And we ended up in Karachi in March of '41.

So it was-- that's four or five months.

Not very long I guess.

From Bucharest.

I don't know when we left Chernivtsi.

But let's say it was--

probably about-- less than a year before.

I don't think we spent
a year in Bucharest.

00:31:20,640 --> 00:31:23,130

OK.

00:31:23,130 --> 00:31:23,630

Yeah, so Karachi-- how long did you stay there?

00:31:26,850 --> 00:31:30,570

I think our intention was to go to Bombay.

00:31:36,000 --> 00:31:37,800

The plane landed in Karachi.

00:31:37,800 --> 00:31:42,450

And I don't think we stayed very long.

00:31:42,450 --> 00:31:53,320

My first memories of Bombay were probably boarding house run by Britishers, and fairly soon after that, we

00:32:02,650 --> 00:32:07,830

found an apartment, which we
spent the next two years in.

00:32:07,830 --> 00:32:11,030

And do you remember--

00:32:11,030 --> 00:32:13,430

455

00:32:13,430 --> 00:32:14,960

456

had your parents

made arrangements

00:32:14,960 --> 00:32:16,760

for the apartment

ahead of time or was

00:32:16,760 --> 00:32:18,170

it just when they arrived?

00:32:18,170 --> 00:32:19,950

I think it was

when they arrived,

00:32:19,950 --> 00:32:22,940

but I have no real idea.

00:32:22,940 --> 00:32:25,140

OK.

00:32:25,140 --> 00:32:28,710

And what was the

apartment like--

00:32:28,710 --> 00:32:31,110

the apartment itself

as well as [INAUDIBLE]?

00:32:31,110 --> 00:32:35,880

It was part of an art

deco modern apartment.

00:32:35,880 --> 00:32:36,900
I think it was--

00:32:36,900 --> 00:32:44,740
we lived on the third
toor with a balcony area.

00:32:44,740 --> 00:32:51,880
It was-- the look of it
was pretty luxurious.

00:32:51,880 --> 00:33:01,380
We had a kitchen with servants'
quarters and lived there.

00:33:01,380 --> 00:33:04,820
I guess we hired him.

00:33:04,820 --> 00:33:06,830
Oh, so you had someone--

00:33:06,830 --> 00:33:08,420
Served as our cook.

00:33:08,420 --> 00:33:19,895
And I think we had a
servant come in to clean.

00:33:19,895 --> 00:33:24,910

00:33:24,910 --> 00:33:28,690
And do you remember where
in Bombay the apartment was?

00:33:28,690 --> 00:33:29,290
Yes.

00:33:29,290 --> 00:33:35,170
It was on a street called
Churchgate Reclamation.
I don't know what "Reclamation" means but it was--

479
00:33:40,210 --> 00:33:43,390

Churchgate Reclamation was one of the streets bordering one of the large parks Bombay called the Maidan, M-A-I-D-A-N,

482
00:33:56,900 --> 00:33:59,750
I think.

483
00:33:59,750 --> 00:34:05,920
On the other side of the park was a university.

484
00:34:05,920 --> 00:34:12,480
It was quite pleasant living there.

485
00:34:12,480 --> 00:34:17,750
I was allowed to walk around and go to the park

486
00:34:17,750 --> 00:34:24,080
and visit the university with friends.

487
00:34:24,080 --> 00:34:27,360
There were a lot of refugees.

488
00:34:27,360 --> 00:34:28,810
Oh, I see.

489
00:34:28,810 --> 00:34:30,820
Many of them Polish.
My mother found an occupation--

I don't know if she volunteered or was paid--

with a Polish refugee organization.

I don't remember the name of the organization.

But she was either volunteering or being paid to work

for this-- the refugee--

oh, I see.

Right.

And my father, based on his engineering background,

was hired as a supervisor in a British arms factory.

I think it was a factory for some other purpose when
it was founded, but during the war

they made supplies for the British army.

So he had a job.

She had a job.

I went to school.

That was my next question.

I went to school.

You were about, you said, five when you arrived and yeah.

I was enrolled in a school called Cathedral High School.

The term "high school" isn't the same meaning as here.
I think it was founded and run by Scottish missionaries.

And it was co-ed.

It had certain memorable features for me.

One is that, being a missionary school,

we started each day with prayers in the chapel.

And much of the class work that I remember had to do with Bible stories.

So I became fairly well-educated in New Testament stories about Christ and His disciples and the Old Testament,

Moses in Egypt.
And I got a fairly good knowledge of the Bible even though we weren't religious in any sense. I do remember my father occasionally would go to synagogue in Bombay, I think particularly on Yom Kippur. And what about—what was the language at the school? English. Wow. So not only have you moved to a very new, very different country, you're also going to a school with a new language. Yes.
Had you had any--

I don't think I had any preparation for that.

I mentioned that when we first came to Bombay we were at a boarding house where the language also was English.

My parents spoke English.

They were-- well, not very well to begin with.

But, eventually, they became very fluent.

I really have no recollection of how good my mother's English was.
I suspect it was quite good.

My father had some English education in Europe.

I don't quite know why or how.

But I picked it up pretty quickly.

My friends and I, some of whom were Polish,

would speak English with each other.

Oh, really?

Not Polish, always English?

Not Polish, always-- pretty much always English.
I think my cousin and I spoke English, but I'm not sure that we didn't speak Polish. Probably spoke--

That's great.

But she went to school there, too, and had to pick up English.

And you mentioned your aunt, uncle, and cousin traveled to India separately, but they lived nearby?

Yes.

So we were pretty close.
There were some family feuds, which I believe kept my mother and my aunt apart.

But my uncle would visit us.

I don't recall her ever visiting us.

I would visit them.

And-- well we lived in India five years.

Big part of my growing up.

Yes, sir.

Yes, sir.

And I know you mentioned your father, you know,
But do you remember any other interactions with Bombay's Jewish community or any specific experiences with non-Jewish Indians?

Well, many of their acquaintances were refugees from Europe and from Germany and Poland is what I remember--

the people. They were all multilingual--

--and, as I recall, educated.
What about-- do you have any memories of India's independence movement?

The independence occurred in '47, and we had left India in '46.

I recall knowing of Gandhi and Nehru and Jinnah.

So you left before the partition took place, I see.

I wasn't there when partition took place, no.

But I remember-- well, I would frequently walk to school and on the way meet people.
One of the memorable meetings was with--

I think he was a Hindu boy, probably a year or two older than I. I was nine or so at the time.

And he talked about independence. It was well before partition.

But he said, independence is coming. We're going to be free of the British.

And I remember being intimidated because I didn't know anything about it.

And he was more passionately vocal than anybody else.
I knew and about subjects
I knew nothing about.

623
00:43:50,430 --> 00:43:55,220
I know we were--

624
00:43:55,220 --> 00:44:04,970
being white and having money
in a very poor country,

625
00:44:04,970 --> 00:44:08,770
our acquaintances
were Europeans.

626
00:44:08,770 --> 00:44:11,410

627
00:44:11,410 --> 00:44:14,460
I don't recall any
British-- oh, I do.

628
00:44:14,460 --> 00:44:14,960
I do.

629
00:44:14,960 --> 00:44:20,320
I had a friend who
lived not far away.

630
00:44:20,320 --> 00:44:23,005
Peter [Luflin, Loflin ?][? Loflin ?] perhaps.

631
00:44:23,005 --> 00:44:25,660

632
00:44:25,660 --> 00:44:28,450
I was going to say Lawford,
but I'm sure it wasn't.

633
00:44:28,450 --> 00:44:31,240
So I had British friends, or at least one.

And I remember a couple of kids from the boarding house that--

well, we became quite friendly while we stayed there.

Mr. Jortner, so in the years you're living in Bombay, were you able to receive news from Chernivtsi, learn about what was happening in Europe, in general?

I don't know.

I don't know that--

of course, Chernivtsi was under German jurisdiction.

The Germans had had links with the Romanian government for some time before the war.
Communication with Poland--

I don't recall any.

I recall my father sitting at the dining room table with an atlas and the newspaper.

He would follow news of the war and make markings in the Atlas as to where the front was.

But he never talked about it.

And I don't know that he was in contact with anybody.

I don't think they knew the fate of their relatives--

my parents.
So in total, your family lived in India for about five years?

I think you said you left in 1946?

Yes.

We-- I didn't hear the beginning of your statement.

Oh, I'm sorry.

So in total, you were in India about five years?

Yes.

I see.

What was life like in the immediate post-war,

in that year after the war's end?

Did more refugees, maybe survivors of the camps
come to Bombay?

Not that I'm aware of.

But one of my friends in Bombay who was the one who recommended that I go through this interview process, Nahum Laufer, his parents were in touch much more with other refugees than we were.

Well, that's not really true because I could probably, if I gave it some thought, rattle off at least half a dozen families.

Some of whom we kept in touch with when we arrived in New York City.

Oh, wow.
Because they say came also.

They were--

That was my next--

Mm-hmm.

Go ahead.

I was going to say that was my next question.

You know, where did you go from India?

Well, we went from Bombay I suppose when we're trying to make arrangements to leave India--

I don't know whether the US was the choice from the beginning,
but it became the choice.

And the way to get there after the war was by ship.

So at some point, I don't exactly know how long we were in Kolkata, but we took the train from Bombay to Kolkata and stayed there several months, waiting for an appropriate ship.

So I have memories-- I was older. I have memories of Kolkata. Was it similar to Bombay or would you say different?
Well, I think it was larger.

And I was older so--

I was 10.

And there was a very well-stocked zoo there in Kolkata.

I was old enough to remember places that we went to like the Victoria Memorial, which huge marble palace.

And did your uncle and his family also come to Kolkata?
No, they-- and I don't really know their story, but they made their way to Ceylon, Sri Lanka.

Or took some sort of other boat to the US where we caught up again in New York.

And so you're in Kolkata, waiting for a ship, and then, you find one.

What was the ship journey to the United States like?

Well, it was an adventure.

I don't know exactly how my parents felt about it.

The ship used to be a cruise ship,
or it was built to be a cruise ship.

I don't think it ever served as a cruise ship.

It was built just before World War II.

It found service as a troop ship,

troop carrier for which it had been converted

so that the women in our--

the women on our journey lived in the officers quarters

and the men lived in the soldiers quarters,

where I lived with my father.

Bunk beds, maybe four bunks high hanging from the ceiling
and swaying back and forth with the ocean.

And they were-- it was a fairly long journey.

I think it was about four weeks.

And where in the US did you arrive?

Well, I think--

I don't remember when we left.

I think we arrived in August of '46 in San Francisco and spent some time there.

And one of my parents' co-partners maybe--
I'm not sure-- but lived in Chicago.

And my father's family, several of his aunts, had come to the US and lived in New York City.

They had come right around World War I.

I don't really know whether it was before or after World War

I--

come from Poland.

So it's probable that his entry to the US was, in some way,

facilitated by having relatives who were able to guarantee

some form of support.
So we were headed for New York.

But on the way, we stopped in Chicago.

And I actually went to public school in Chicago while living with these business associates of my family.

Wow.

So if you are in school, that must mean that you're in Chicago for a few months at least.

Yes, I think so.

I don't think more than one semester of school.

But I remember being very popular with the teacher because I had stories to tell about geography.

And I remember one exchange which had to do with the fact
that I'd been across the Mississippi River on a train.

And the teacher said, and did you find it to be a really huge river?

It's the biggest river we have.

And I wasn't intending to be a wise ass,

but I ended up saying, well, you know, when they build bridges,

they don't build them across the biggest part--

[CHUCKLING]

--which impressed her.

And I felt, gee, I'm smart.

Anyway.
It was a good experience.

Marquette School, Chicago, suburban Chicago.

And you're there for maybe a semester of school.

And then, you go to New York?

We went to New York.

And while my parents looked around for a place to live

and ways to make it, I was parked with a family

that we knew from Bombay, a Polish family who

had come to the US earlier.

So they were settled.
And they had two kids, one of whom was my cousin's age, a few years old than I. And that was a good experience. Again, somewhat luxurious, well-to-do.

My mother found a job with the Helena Rubinstein Cosmetics Company. Helena Rubinstein was instrumental in supporting many refugees.

My mother and my aunt from Bombay found work there, which I think helped
a great deal because took
my father a bit longer.

But we found-- we
found places to live.

And I did well in school,
and I went to college.

All that experience was
crammed into 10 years.

I left New York when I was
20, arriving when I was 10,

I think.

And which-- I guess
my two questions are,

where in New York did you
live and what college did you

attend?
Please repeat the questions.

Where what was?

Yes, sir.

Where your apartment was in New York,

and where did you attend college?

Well, our first apartment that I--

well, actually the second.

OK, the first apartment was in Brooklyn near Coney Island,

a community called Manhattan Beach.

We rented the upper story of a house and I went to public school.
Then, we moved to another place in Brooklyn where I went to junior high school, and eventually ended up in Manhattan, 96th Street, East, Manhattan, where we lived for several years.

And my parent's social circle included several families in Bombay.

Plus, my best friend, at the time, also was a refugee. His family traversed, on
their way out of Europe,

01:01:42,130 --> 01:01:47,410
through Siberia and Japan.

01:01:47,410 --> 01:01:47,910
Wow.

01:01:47,910 --> 01:01:52,130

01:01:52,130 --> 01:02:07,130
We-- it's interesting that we both had these varied histories

01:02:07,130 --> 01:02:10,760
full of unusual experiences, but I

01:02:10,760 --> 01:02:13,880
don't recall that we talked much about them, he and I.

01:02:13,880 --> 01:02:21,660
We were teenagers, learning to be people,

01:02:21,660 --> 01:02:23,665
not very focused on the past.

01:02:23,665 --> 01:02:28,400
I'm still in touch with him.

01:02:28,400 --> 01:02:34,370
And I expect, if we both live long enough,

01:02:34,370 --> 01:02:36,350
we may have that conversation.
And so you said you attended public schools.

Yes.

And where did you attend college?

A school called The Cooper Union--

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, which one of its unusual features is that it did not charge tuition.

Entrance was by exam.

Peter Cooper, who founded the institution,
was a philanthropist.

And thanks to him, I was able to--

I had a full scholarship, basically,

through engineering school.

So you, like your father, you also became an engineer.

I am yes.

My mother insisted.

I was thinking, I really should take a year off and explore the country and learn about life before committing to a college.

But she, being more experienced in life,
suggested that I could always do that.

885
01:04:17,940 --> 01:04:20,520
In the meantime, get a meal ticket.

886
01:04:20,520 --> 01:04:23,980

887
01:04:23,980 --> 01:04:26,650
Since my father was an engineer--

888
01:04:26,650 --> 01:04:28,540
I rather enjoyed engineering school.

889
01:04:28,540 --> 01:04:30,250
I didn't think I would.

890
01:04:30,250 --> 01:04:33,700
But I enjoyed it.

891
01:04:33,700 --> 01:04:38,030
And I enjoyed the engineering career.

892
01:04:38,030 --> 01:04:43,391
So again, I was quite fortunate.

893
01:04:43,391 --> 01:04:48,210

894
01:04:48,210 --> 01:04:51,030
And what about after college?

895
01:04:51,030 --> 01:04:52,740
Did you stay in New York?

896
01:04:52,740 --> 01:04:55,270
Did you move somewhere else?
I moved to-- oh, I might mention, before we leave pre college and all,

but when we lived in Brooklyn, and I was in junior high school, we were in a sort of narrow townhouse, upper story.

And it was next door to a synagogue, which my mother approached the rabbi wondering whether people would undertake to train me for a bar mitzvah.

And his-- after he interviewed us, his stand was it was too late. There was too much to learn.
And I'd have to find some other way to become Jewish, so to speak.

Really?

So around this time, you're 10 years old, but he still says,

you know, you're too behind in your studies?

I was-- I had no studies of Judaism except in the Presbyterian school in Bombay.

I learned Old Testament stuff.

But I had no Hebrew.

And I had no experience going to the synagogue.

I mean, I think I had gone once or twice with my father,
but we were basically secular sort of family.

And after this rabbi refused, did your parents try a different synagogue?

I don't think so.

I don't recall it.

I didn't seem very eager, so I don't think my mother persisted.

I don't know whether she would have approached him, had he not lived next door--or practice next door.

It was sort of an opportunity, in her mind, to do it.
Anyway.

Were we getting to college or where were we?

Oh, that's right.

I had asked you, where did you go after college?

Did you start work or--

Oh, after college, yes.

I found a job in an aerospace company in the Los Angeles area and left New York.
Lots of years in aerospace engineering.

In 1982, I think it was, I left employment for freelance work. I did some [? consulting?] and so on. So I spent most of my working life as--

doing engineering work of some sort, the last decade or two

as a freelance.

So Los Angeles.

And what about your family? Your parents during this time.

Did you ever get
married or have kids?

957 01:09:51,915 --> 01:09:52,415
Yes.

958 01:09:52,415 --> 01:09:57,390
I did get married three times.

959 01:09:57,390 --> 01:10:01,026
The first time, I was 20, I think--

960 01:10:01,026 -- 01:10:08,950
too early.

961 01:10:08,950 --> 01:10:09,640
It was too early.

962 01:10:09,640 --> 01:10:12,070
I graduated at 20, and

963 01:10:12,070 --> 01:10:13,540
I got married-- let's see.

964 01:10:13,540 --> 01:10:17,755
I graduated at 20, and
I got married at 21.

965 01:10:17,755 --> 01:10:23,710
We stayed married.

966 01:10:23,710 --> 01:10:25,090
We lived in the
Los Angeles area,
where I worked, and came to the conclusion that both of us had gotten married too early.

We parted amicably.

And I remarried shortly after and fathered my son, my only child, who now lives in Los Angeles.

That marriage ended in a somewhat acrimonious separation.

And my last marriage was a charm, shall we say.

I was married 30 years when she passed away from illness.

And the last 12 years or so I've been unmarried.
And what about your parents?

Did they stay in New York or--

They stayed in New York.

My father passed away in 1959.

He was 64.

He was on vacation
and passed away

in his sleep, some
sort of stroke.

My mother survived
until 1982, I think.

And she worked for Helena
Rubinstein in their accounting

department all
that time, I think.

No, no, no.
She retired.

And she was 81 when she passed away.

She maintained many of the friends that she'd made in India.

Yeah.

And where do you live?

You mentioned you retired.

I live in Pacific City, a small town-- well, it's actually an unincorporated village
in coastal Oregon.

And I've lived here longer than in any other one place.

Been here 29 years.

There's no synagogue in Pacific City.

Closest one, I think, is in Salem,

which is about 60 miles away, 70 miles away.

Did you-- did you ever become religious later in life?

Not in terms of attending any particular services.

I still think of
myself as Jewish,

1018
01:14:48,800 --> 01:14:54,830
but I haven't been
in a synagogue.

1019
01:14:54,830 --> 01:15:09,420
Well, my last marriage
was in the study

1020
01:15:09,420 --> 01:15:14,076
of a rabbi in Los Angeles--

1021
01:15:14,076 --> 01:15:16,380
the ceremony.

1022
01:15:16,380 --> 01:15:23,055
And I did attend his
congregation a couple of times.

1023
01:15:23,055 --> 01:15:27,540

1024
01:15:27,540 --> 01:15:30,030
I must have had some--

1025
01:15:30,030 --> 01:15:34,590
or my wife may have
insisted I would have

1026
01:15:34,590 --> 01:15:37,080
to try and think that through.

1027
01:15:37,080 --> 01:15:41,370
But neither one of
us was observant

1028
01:15:41,370 --> 01:15:47,936
except for the festive
occasions, like Hanukkah

1029
01:15:47,936 --> 01:15:52,470
and we did fast on Yom Kippur.

1030
01:15:52,470 --> 01:15:59,290

1031
01:15:59,290 --> 01:16:01,600
Yeah.

1032
01:16:01,600 --> 01:16:09,470
There are very few Jewish people in the town.

1033
01:16:09,470 --> 01:16:16,780

1034
01:16:16,780 --> 01:16:18,017
I know some of them.

1035
01:16:18,017 --> 01:16:23,830

1036
01:16:23,830 --> 01:16:24,330
So--

1037
01:16:24,330 --> 01:16:27,290
Mr. Jortner-- oh, yes, sir?

1038
01:16:27,290 --> 01:16:29,960
Well, go ahead.

1039
01:16:29,960 --> 01:16:32,780
I was just going to say I think we're

1040
01:16:32,780 --> 01:16:34,490
getting towards the end of the interview.

1041
01:16:34,490 --> 01:16:35,690
Yes.

1042
Is there anything that we didn't discuss already about your experiences that you'd like to add now?

Well, I would like to add that I have not yet done the work to better understand my journey, so to say. I think I'm motivated now to spend some time learning more about the family. And I'd like to read more about--

well, I'd like to read some of the interviews and histories.
that your organization has accumulated.

And I doubt that I'll become religious in any conventional sense.

But I'd like to understand more what my parents went through.

Mr. Jortner--

I would-- I would recommend to parents in similar situations to my parents to be open with their children,

because eventually it will mean something.

It's one of my regrets that I didn't ask more questions sooner.
Mr. Jortner, I want to thank you, again, so much for taking the time to speak with me today and to say, once more, how much the museum appreciates it.

Well, thank you.

I appreciate being contacted and having this chance to think about things.

So-- and you say, I'll be getting a copy of the interview?

Yes, sir.

Oh, thank you.
Yes, sir, very much so.

Good.

I guess you should have a chance to review the record and decide whether the answer to that question should be public or not, but--

Yes, sir.

Well, thank you, again.

Are you-- are you Jewish?

No, sir.

I'm not.

I suspected not from the name, but one never knows.
Yes, sir.

Would you mind telling me what brought you to this job?

Yes, sir.

Let me just conclude the interview very quickly,

and, then, I'd be happy to talk more.

Thank you.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Julius Jortner on March 20, 2019.
you a call back--

1103
01:20:56,840 --> 01:20:57,340
OK.

1104
01:20:57,340 --> 01:20:58,930
--so you know we're
done recording.

1105
01:20:58,930 --> 01:21:02,430
And I will call you right back.

1106
01:21:02,430 --> 01:21:04,180
OK, thank you.

1107
01:21:04,180 --> 01:21:04,805
Thank you, sir.

1108
01:21:04,805 --> 01:21:05,305
OK.

1109
01:21:05,305 --> 01:21:05,805
Bye.

1110
01:21:05,805 --> 01:21:07,070
Bye-bye.

1111
01:21:07,070 --> 01:21:09,220
[PHONE CLICKS]