

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Werner W. Weiss on August 15 in Manhattan, New York. Thank you very much, Mr. Weiss, for agreeing to speak with us today, to share some of your and your family's experiences under the Nazis, and how those policies that were instigated, promulgated, and executed by the Nazi regime affected your lives.

I'm going to start the interview with the most basic questions, and we'll develop things from there. So my very first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

September 28, 1924. That makes me, if I have to admit it, 95 years.

Congratulations.

And date of birth, what?

Date of birth was September-- what was it again?

September 28, 1924.

Within a month, you're going to be 95, 96?

96, I think.

96.

I'm not counting.

[LAUGHTER]

OK, where were you born?

I was born in Munich, Germany and lived there the first 14 and a half years of my life.

OK. And what was your name at birth, when you were born?

Same name. Werner Wolfgang Weiss.

So you were-- it was a very German kind of name. Werner Wolfgang.

Well, that was my father. He was a very German kind of boy. And then when I was here and came in the army, nobody wanted to call me Werner or anything. So they said, hey, Charlie, come here. And from Charlie, it became Chuck. And I've been Chuck now since about 1940 or so.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. So that's how you got the nickname?

Yeah.

And that's how it stuck?

Yeah.

OK.

And the most people know me as Chuck Weiss now.

Tell me a little bit-- I'm going to ask a little bit about your parents.

Could you--

I'm going to ask a little bit about your parents and your family. You were born in Munich, you say.

Yeah.

Were both sides of your family for many generations living in Munich?

No. My father was born in Breslau, which is Prussia, part of Germany now, in 1885. My mother was born in Czechow, Poland in 1890, and came to Germany in 1891 as a one-year-old. Both my parents ended up eventually in the states, and unfortunately passed away, my father at the age of 65, and my mother at the age of 60.

My father, if I may just a little, had a very thriving industrial machinery business in Munich, well-respected, well-known. And my mother, in 1922, received her medical degree magna cum laude.

Wow.

And actually, I must say that she worked for one year in my father's office as an employee, then took a year off to study, and did this for a number of years until she got her medical degree.

So she would work a year, study a year, work a year, study a year?

Yeah. And got her degree with honors. An extremely bright, bright woman.

Did she have a medical specialty?

No. In fact, after she had her degree, she decided to stay in my father's business and ran the business. But kept up to date on everything. When she came to the States in '43-- '42, she studied again and took the exam. And within half a year, top speed, got her MD degree.

That's really impressive.

And then practiced medicine, became specialized in anesthesiology. And did that until she passed away.

That is very impressive.

Very hard-working, but as I said superbly, bright. And then I had two sisters. One was a year older than me, but died at the age of 10 of a heart condition.

What was her name?

Which I-- she died in 1933. I was told at the time that nowadays, or 5, 10 years later, she could have been saved with the improvement in medicine. But at that time, even with my mother's being a doctor and connections, couldn't be saved.

Then I had another sister who was two years younger than me born in 1927, also in Munich, who came to the States with my parents, and unfortunately died of cancer at the middle age of 50. Or just under, 50 actually. And so that left me.

I want to-- well, thank you. Thank you for that quick overview. I'd like to find out your sister's names. The older one?

The older one was Hannah Weiss.

Hannah Weiss.

Hannah Margaret Weiss, after grandma, my father's mother.

OK, and the younger one?

Called Lainie, but actually Helena.

Helena.

And in this country she was Helen. Helen Weiss.

OK. Did Helen ever marry?

Helen married, has two daughters who we're close with. One living in Colorado, and in California, very nice girls.

What was her married name?

Harf. H-A-R-F-F.

H-A-R-F-F.

Married a young man from a prominent German banking family who also were living here. And had a good life while she was well.

I want to step back a little bit and ask a little bit more about your family background, as much as you might know it. You said that your father-- by the way, what was his name? His first name.

Walter Sigmund Weiss.

Walter Sigmund Weiss.

OK, and he comes from Breslau, you say?

No, he-- Breslau, yes.

So he was born-- and that's a part of Germany that also has a Polish aspect to it. I believe it has a Polish name.

Well, after World War II, it was taken over by Poland.

Yeah.

And it's now Poland. But it was at that time-- you couldn't tell him that it's anything to do with Poland. It was Germany as far as he was concerned.

Well, that's interesting. Was your father a patriot, a German patriot?

And how.

Really?

He, in fact, I was going to mention that later, but he always said, I'm never leaving the country. I'm German. I've never done anything wrong, legally or anything else. I've always been-- I was in the army in World War I. They can't touch

me.

We found later that they could.

Of course.

But no, my father was very, very German. My mother, from 1934 on, wanted to come to this country, had cousins here, et cetera. But no.

Well, this is different.

You say she's from Czechow, in Poland?

Czechow in Poland.

Czechow. And I believe that's on the eastern part of Poland. I'm not exactly sure.

My wife could answer that better, because she's born in Poland.

OK. Again, it's not a large place, but I've had a few people mention it to me earlier. At any rate, her background is Polish, is more from a Polish milieu rather than a German milieu.

Pardon me?

Your mother. Your mother's background is more from a Polish milieu than a German milieu.

Well, yes, but--

But she came as a young girl, as a baby.

She came as a one-year-old to Germany. And I spoke no Polish and knew very little about it.

What was the reason for your maternal grandparents to come to Germany from Czechow?

I have no idea. But I think a lot of Eastern Jews in the '20s emigrated from Poland.

Do you know about when that was that they emigrated?

Oh, you said. Excuse me. 1890.

If she was born in '90, then it would have been '91, 1891 that she came to Germany.

Again, if it was the part of Poland that was under tsarist Russia-- if it was the part of Poland that was under tsarist Russia, then that could have been enough motivation.

That could also be, yes.

OK. But I'm speculating here rather than--

I really don't know.

OK. Did they have family that they left back there?

No. My grandfather, I really don't know whether he had any brothers or sisters, my mother's father. And my father's for

the-- same thing with my father's father. I just knew his parents, but knew of nothing else.

And what about your mother? Did she have siblings? Did your mother have siblings?

Yes. She had a brother, who also was a doctor, who started somewhere in Germany and in 1934 immigrated to Palestine. And practiced medicine there as a radiologist, became the head of the top hospital in Palestine.

What was your mother's maiden name? What was your mother's maiden name?

Kleinhaus

Kleinhaus.

Yes.

And her first name?

And her sister, what should I say? What was she? She was a beauty queen. She married, I think, fairly young to another doctor, also, I hate to say it already, but a top radiologist in Munich, very well-established, whose family went to Spain in 1936, '37.

Wow.

I have a whole story on that. Should I throw that in now?

Please do that.

His name was Carl Bacharach.

And hers?

Hers was Fanny.

Fanny or Funny?

Yeah. F-A-N-N-Y.

And Kleinhaus.

No. Bacharach.

Bacharach. After she married, it was Bacharach. And they had two kids about mine and my sister's age, two cousins of mine who I was-- we were pretty close with. That family, in '36 or '37, decided with all the wonderful life they had there to leave the country.

He had a brother who emigrated to Spain in 19-- just before World War I. And became a very successful businessman there. And that brother kept talking him into coming to Spain. Of course, he couldn't practice medicine there, so the brother gave him a management position in one of his factories.

But he was not well. His wife, my mother's sister, wasn't too well. And they were just not-- couldn't settle in. They were very, very unhappy. And after about a year or so in Spain, the whole family committed suicide.

Oh, my goodness.

It was written up-- of course, [INAUDIBLE], his [? letter ?] was written up in all the Spanish papers. I still have one Spanish paper with the story. And so this whole family was lost too. We blame it on Hitler.

So the reason they had left Germany, had he lost his position?

No, he didn't lose his position. He was doing well, et cetera. But they just didn't like-- didn't-- he thought he saw what was coming. And he didn't want to have any part of it. He wanted out.

He wanted out.

That is a degree of--

And having enough money to do it, they figured they could go to Spain and just retire. But then he became active, and it just wasn't happening.

That's such despair.

It's very sad. It of course upset my mother. First she lost her daughter, my sister, now she lost her sister.

And the two boys?

And the cousin, a boy and a girl.

A boy and a girl.

Yeah. The four of them.

Do you remember their names? Do you remember their names?

Wolfgang and Steffi--

Bacharach.

Bacharach. Nice kids. We played with them in the country in summertime quite a bit. And so we saw them. We were friendly with them.

Do you remember learning of what happened? Do you remember where you were when you learned of it?

What happened to them? I, as a 14 or 13-year-old, was told that they died. But it was a secret, because my mother had her 80-year-old father living with us at the time. And she couldn't tell her father that his daughter had passed away. So my mother used to type letters without signatures, fake letters, as if they were coming from Spain, and every couple of weeks gave one to her father until he, at the age of 80, in frail condition, moved to Palestine to his son.

I see.

That's he lived a couple more years.

And did that fiction, was that kept up in Palestine?

I mean, in Palestine? He never knew.

He never knew. He never knew. Oh, my. And when did you learn the truth?

I really don't know. But it must have been, I think, before I left the country. So when I was about 14 or so.

OK. Let's go back now to your father's side of the family.

My father's father in Breslau had I think it was a garment manufacturing business. He made a living, but nothing-- I mean, a middle class Jewish family.

Had they been there for generations? Or had they come from somewhere else?

His wife's been there for a generation, because his wife was not Jewish, but also converted before she got married.

Was she German?

Yeah, they were German.

OK. Do you remember her name?

Her last name was-- she was Margaret, I think, Sasse. S-A-S-S-E.

Sasse. So she was an aristocratic family? Von Sasse?

Way back there supposedly were some. But everybody claimed that they had aristocrats in the family. I never went for that.

OK. Was she your grandmother?

She was my grandmother, lived in Breslau. And summertime, either she or her husband, while they were alive, used to come to Munich and went with our family. We always rented a house in the country somewhere for the summer where we stayed. And the grandparents stayed with us.

And until later, we had our own country house, which was inherited from the Bacharachs. They had a beautiful country house outside of Munich. And when she died, my mother inherited the country house. And we spent weekends there. And one of the-- my happiest memories were from that place.

Really.

Now, I don't want to jump too much, but-- no, we'll get that after Kristallnacht.

Yeah. We can talk about-- I'm trying at this stage to get as much background as possible, about even before your birth, as you can see. Where did people come from? What were the roots? What were the traditions? What were the professions?

So that's one of the reasons I ask about Breslau and the roots in Breslau. Did your father have brothers and sisters?

He had two brothers. One became a dentist, moved to Berlin, and for whatever reason divorced the family.

Really.

Never contacted them. They couldn't find him. Never knew what happened to him.

Do you know his name? Kurt. Kurt Weiss.

Kurt Weiss. And the other brother, Albrecht, also lived in Breslau, married also a non-Jewish woman, and claims that because of that, he survived in Germany. His son, by the way, was bar mitzvahed, even with a non-Jewish wife, et cetera. His son, my cousin, who I was not too close with.

Did he spend the war, then, in Breslau? Uncle Albrecht. Did he spend spend the war in Breslau?

He was part in Breslau, and then the next thing I heard he was in a town called Weilheim, which is outside of Munich, a small town. And I think he spent the summer there. His son, who was of military age, I don't know. There was no talk about what happened to him during the war, but he survived.

So did you maintain contact with him after the war?

After the war, my father established contact with him. And I once went to visit Munich with my wife. And he's living still in that town, Weilheim. I contacted him, and he came to Munich, and we spent an evening together.

And it was-- there was no warmth or nothing between us.

So there was nothing to bind you. Nothing to bind you.

No.

How sad. Because then on the two brothers, for one--

So my father's family, there was no contact. And there is no more.

With the siblings?

One of his grandkids once contacted me and came over here. And we spent a couple of days together. Very nice young man. And then a year later, I got a letter from him, since you're in America, you must be well-off. I'd like to borrow \$10,000.

I didn't know the man or anything like that. And I just told him I can't do that. End of story. Never heard from him anymore.

Yeah.

And so my parents' families-- well, wait a minute. No.

Your father's side.

My father's side there's nothing that I'm in touch with now. My mother's side, her brother that went to Palestine, when I went to England, he paid for my school for the first two years until he couldn't afford it anymore. And I'll come back to that part later.

But he was married.

What was his name again? You must have told me, but I forgot.

Pardon me?

What was his name again? I forgot.

He was Emil.

Emil.

Emil Kleinhaus.

OK.

And he was the radiologist in Palestine. He had two sons. Gabriel, the younger one, and Uri, the older one. Uri became a radiologist and had the same job as his father did in the hospital in Israel. They're, of course, born in Israel, et cetera.

But in 1937, this uncle Emil, his family, his wife, and Uri came to Switzerland from Palestine. And we came in '37, our whole family, to Switzerland for a few days, we spent them together.

And was there talk while you were in Switzerland about what to do?

Pardon me?

Was there talk while you all met in Switzerland about what to do? To stay or to go. Do you remember the kind of conversations that you had?

Well, my uncle always wanted my mother to come. My father still said no. Nothing doing. And so what else in the-- My uncle Emil, he-- this cousin Uri who lives in Tel Aviv came over here and had a year's whatever professorship at Harvard. And went back to Israel, of course.

And [INAUDIBLE] used to see him every two years or so. He'd come over. And we were in Israel a couple of times.

Haifa.

I'm still in touch with him.

In Haifa.

Hmm?

He's in Haifa.

In Haifa, OK. And he has three or four kids. We are in touch, but I can't even give you their names without looking them up. So slightly. When they come over here to study or something, they come, call on us and see us, but not too much.

But my sister's one daughter is going to Israel this Christmas. And she wants the whole family tree. And she wants to see that cousin Uri and family, et cetera.

You'll be there?

So this is being kept alive thinly. That's unfortunate, that families do drift apart.

They do. They do. Even when there aren't such cataclysmic events, things like that can happen. So you never knew what happened to Uncle Kurt, whether he survived or didn't survive?

No. He was a dentist, we were told, but that's all we knew. And was this kind of distance also evident towards your paternal grandparents or not? That is, the two siblings didn't seem to have much--

I don't know whether they were in touch with them either.

But you--

It wasn't talked about in our family. So I don't know.

But as far as your father's relationship with his parents, and--

Excellent. Excellent. His parents were worried. When my father got married, he sent them a note. And his parents started worrying, will you be able to support a wife and children? Et cetera, et cetera. And I have my father's letter to his parents--

Do you?

--where he said-- I have a few old letters like that-- where he said that he has a good going business, et cetera. But if he wanted to, he could close up now and retire for the rest of his life. So that kept his parents happy, I guess.

And they got married in the fanciest hotel in Munich. I have a photograph of them in their wedding tuxedo and long gown.

Maybe we'll film that later.

OK. And by the way, today is my parents' 98th wedding anniversary.

Today, August 15?

Yeah, 1921.

1921 they got married.

Yeah.

Congratulations to them.

Thank you.

And to you. So you were the middle child, then?

I was the middle child, from the age-- my sister was 10 when she died, so I was eight. From the age of eight on--

The oldest.

We were two.

I myself, as I said briefly, we spent summers in the country in rented homes until we took over the house that originally belonged to my mother's sister [? on lake ?] 30 miles outside of Munich. Lots of acreage, 100 apple trees, and a very, very lovely place on a hill overlooking the Alps, the whole mountain range. It was gorgeous.

And we played. And it was so big that we had agreed with a local farmer he could raise his cattle there, in exchange for which we got milk and butter all year long. We just went down to his barn, his home, and picked up whatever he wanted.

Did that stay, that kind of exchange and relationship stay, when the political atmosphere changed?

Oh, and how.

With that farmer.

And how with that person, with that family.

Oh.

I was going to mention it later. After Kristallnacht I wanted to bring that up.

Well, OK then. We can leave it for later. We can leave it, but we'll come back to it.

All right. Now, my-- next to our inherited family house in the country were not a Jewish family with a beautiful home. And my parents and them became very, very friendly. He also doctored, my mother doctored, so buddy-buddy. They both skied together, et cetera.

And he had a son and a daughter. A son about my age. And we became very friendly, played all day long on bicycles all around the neighborhood. And also, when the farmer sent some of his cattle on some other meadow to graze, we'd go out with one of his sons to watch the cattle and loved it. Came home smelling like--

Cattle.

--whatever. My mother almost threw us out. But it was great. We loved it. And well, I'll throw it in now. This son, or this farmer, and others too. After Kristallnacht, when we escaped Munich or left Munich, we went to the country house. No lights on, no nothing.

We went in front of the house. We just were outside in the back of the house for about two weeks. We sort of hid there. We didn't want to stay in town, because we didn't know what was going on. And every night or evening, the farmers came with food. And they checked up whether we needed anything.

And they were tops. There were [? prevailing ?] Catholics and there were quite a few of them that felt that way. That village had 11 farmhouses, and they were all with us. All very good and supportive.

What a nice thing to hear.

And in fact, after the war, when I went once to Munich and went out there to look at the house and visit them-- what did I want to say? I lost my train of thought now. But I--

About after the war.

It was the same, warm relationship. I mean, they were 14-year-old kids like me at the time. But we were now in our 40s or so. But we were in their home. We had dinner with them. We drank beer together. And it was almost a homecoming type of thing.

How ironic. How ironic that amongst your own family on your father's side, the relations were chilly, but here with a totally different background, Gentile, from a very conservative part of Germany-- Bavaria is very conservative, and Munich was Hitler's base, could say-- that you had such support and such a relationship.

I think Hitler had support more with the working class. But farmers were something entirely different. And by the way, the farmer's kids now, one is an accountant, one is a lawyer, et cetera. They're not-- and they say if they run low, we'll sell an acre of land. The land there is now just so valuable.

Yeah, it is. Yes. Let's go back, though. Let's go back to your father's history. He is born in Breslau. Does he go to university?

Did he what?

Go to university?

No, he did not go to university. He was basically a self-educated-- I mean, he went through high school or equivalent-- but basically self-educated, played the violin. Very little [INAUDIBLE], but he played the violin, my mother the piano. And they made music together too.

But he from Breslau as a young man got a job with a industrial equipment company in Berlin. And moved to Berlin, and lived there for quite a number of years. Then that company transferred him in 1915 or something to Munich.

I was going to ask about that. Where was the Munich connection? And this is it.

He was transferred for business to Munich. My mother was living with her family in Munich. And they met when she applied for a job. And she had a summer job with his company, the company that he worked for, and then he made himself independent.

Then she went with him. And every year she worked with him, his secretary, his everything else. She apparently had fallen in love with him. And he used to say to her, send a note to so-and-so and send her a dozen roses.

Oh, my god, how cruel.

And my poor mother must have suffered.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah. But she did, huh? She sent the note and she got the roses.

Part of the job. But that changed eventually.

So the year that they met, was that 1915?

Pardon me?

Was the year that they met 1915? Your parents.

It was '16, '17 or so, I think.

So that's the middle of World War I.

Yeah.

Was your father serving? I mean, he was in his 30s, his early 30s by that point.

Well, '85 to '15. 30, yeah.

Was he in the military? Did he serve in World War--

He was in the military but never outside of Munich. I don't know what he was. It wasn't talked about too much. He was no hero, no combat man or anything. But he served.

OK. Did he ever talk about his experiences?

In the army? No.

No.

That was I don't think his-- he wasn't that-- I can't say he wasn't proud of it, but he was not--

It was not a big part of him.

Not like come to me later, like I was. And so he was in the army, and then he went back to the business.

What did he-- tell me a little bit more detail about this business.

If it was appropriate, I have catalogs from his business.

Oh my goodness.

He worked for a company that was buying, selling in heavy industrial equipment. That's equipment that was used for building highways, building buildings, heavy construction.

Not residential.

Not private homes. Not little jobs. So big work. And he worked for that company and then eventually started that on his own. And got the idea somewhere along the line, not only would he sell the equipment, but he rented the equipment with trained crews.

So when a construction firm needed something to build a highway for one year for two, he would lease it to them. And nobody else had ever done it. And it was a very profitable business.

Well, it sounds that way. If between 1915 and 1921, when he marries your mother, he's able to tell his own parents that he could retire if he wanted to. That's not a long time to build a fortune.

But he did. He was a very good and smart businessman.

Tell me this, then. I want to ask about your parents' personalities. We already know this aspect of your father that he was very German and saw himself as part of German culture.

Very German, but in his way, very Jewish.

Really.

He was from early on active in the Jewish community in Munich. In the liberal, not conservative, not orthodox or anything. But he was early on the board. In the '20s, he was president of B'nai B'rith. I don't know whether it was up in Bavaria or Munich or something.

But I have some papers on that where it addresses it, "dear fraternity brother". So he was-- and I've written to B'nai B'rith, but they only have a record that he was vice president in 1922. But he was on the board of the Jewish community in Munich from early on. And in fact, now at the new Jewish Museum in Munich, there's at the main entrance a huge picture of the people that were the last board of the Jewish community in Munich. And he was one of them.

Wow.

He was very active, very generous. And like I said in my synagogue here when I started volunteering, you can ask me to do anything, but don't ask me to come to services. I never learned how to pray, really. But now I-- then I became an usher at our temple, because I felt if I can keep the quorum and let other people have the opportunity to do their praying, I accomplish more than sitting in a seat and just following the Hebrew not even knowing what it all means.

So you didn't-- when you were a child, were you sent for special religious instruction?

I went to regular [INAUDIBLE] with Nazis and with everything. In fact, there wasn't too much antisemitism. Once in a

while, somebody would say something, "hey, that Jewish kid" or something. But no big fights or anything like that. But this was till 1939.

But I went to-- we had religious school during the week also. Different. In German schools, you had to have religious schools.

That's different than here.

So even the Jewish religion was taught in my public school. A rabbi or somebody came to teach us. And so I went to that. I went very often on Saturday to synagogue.

And after synagogue, they usually had for kids something to do. And I was always there. And the high holidays, of course I was there. Of course my father was in the first row, seat number five, and, little me right next to it with top hat and all [INAUDIBLE].

Really? Oh, wow.

And also getting one of my parents' best friends was Rabbi Leo Baerwald. Rabbi Baerwald was the Chief Rabbi of Munich.

Oh, wow.

Somehow, when my father got active in the congregation, they became friendly and were the closest of friends.

So that was your father's social circle, would be with--

Yeah, his social. So Rabbi Baerwald, and his wife Jenny, and their kids were very close friends. They were in our country home many a time.

Do you know what happened to them?

As a rabbi, you didn't need a quota to come to America.

Really?

So after Kristallnacht, within a few months, Leo Baerwald managed to get here. And worked his butt off to try and get my parents out.

Did he?

Contacted every Tom, Dick, and Harry. And really, it took a while, but they got out with some of his help and without. But no, they were very close.

He was in Dachau Kristallnacht. They took him to the concentration camp, let him go after six weeks or so, came out. And also my parents.

He came by bus to our country home. I picked him up at the bus station. And there I expected my Uncle Leo, as he was known to me, Uncle Leo, with his beard and whatnot. And there comes an old man, completely shaven, face-- he was like an inmate. They shaved him point blank, completely. But then he stayed with us for a while too.

And we were Passover at his home, every holiday at his home, et cetera. At my bar mitzvah, his wife made a poem this long in German about me. I still have that.

Do you?

And no, we were very close and very friendly.

So tell me, why is it that you say that you never really learned to pray. It's not like-- it sounds like you had a complete--

I just didn't-- yes, in combat, in a foxhole, when I saw all sorts of things, I started saying, I'm going to pray. And oh God, please help me. Only time. I mean, I believe in God. But I don't believe in talking, communicating.

Well, put it this way. Maybe that's just not your way.

I've never really learned it.

OK. People have different ways.

Yeah. But I feel, I've always said, doing good things and being good to people is much more my religion. And I think I've lived my life that way. And I had a reputation in business, which was textile, that you can trust Chuck. He's the only honest guy in the industry. And all over.

When I retired, I went to our temple here. We belong to Rodeph Sholom, a pretty large, reform temple. And we'd been going there for the last 50 years. We became members. And my son was bar mitzvahed there.

He didn't get married there, no. That's another story. But my children were confirmed there. But anyway, so I went to the rabbi there and I said, you know, now I'm retired. All these years, I came to service and I've never done anything. Now I have time. I want to do.

And over the years, I became chairman of the archive committee. It's a 175-year-old temple. And everything was in a mess, and we reorganized it. I did a lot of work there.

I was on the house committee taking care of the building, alterations, repairs, et cetera, with, of course, a group of other people. I was on the committee. I was not chairman.

But I had a reputation that they can ask me, and I'm there to help. And since I've been sick, I wasn't there for over half a year. And this past Tuesday, the first time I walked in, I was in tears, the hello I got from everybody.

How nice.

It's so nice to see me, and so glad, and blah blah. It was heart wrenching.

How wonderful. How wonderful.

Can I jump a little more?

You can jump as much as you want.

All right. At one time, on some occasion, our family was called to the bimah. That was my son, my daughter, their spouses, and their two kids. So all eight of them and my wife and I stood there at the bimah. The ark was open. The Torah was standing there.

And then I-- it still gets me-- I looked at that, and I remembered that in '23, Hitler marched on Munich, and some of his buddies were shot. When he came to power after '33, he had a Memorial erected right near where they were shot. And it said on there, [NON-ENGLISH]. "And you have won after all" to his fallen comrades.

When I stood on that bimah, I said that. We have won. [NON-ENGLISH] We have won. Look at my family. This garbage is gone. But we, my family, the Jews, everybody, we are here, and we are proud of it.

And that, even nowadays, when I still-- again I don't pray, but I go to bimah. I get called up once in a while. I open the scroll, the Torah. I still get goose pimples. I still get goose pimples.

I don't have a direct link to God, but--

It means that much to me.

I said, I don't have a direct link to God, but I would say he would think you're a faithful person.

I was what?

That you're a faithful person, a religious person.

In my way. Thank you. And OK, bouncing back a little bit.

That's OK. We can bounce as much as we want.

Bouncing back a little bit, at 35 I think, not exact date, the [INAUDIBLE] started. Hitler's Nuremberg laws against the Jews. One of the first things was you couldn't have any more household help, women that were under 35.

So we had to get rid of the cook, and the maid, et cetera. Got somebody else all the-- but Jews, or we interpreted Hitler wanted the young people not to be with Jewish boys. Because Jews would ruin them. And also, all the people couldn't get jobs. So let the Jews hire them.

So that was some of the Jewish interpretation. So that was the law. And it wasn't so bad. You lived with it. The next thing, a couple of years later, a law came out you had to turn in all your silverware, jewelry, silverware, et cetera.

So like in 1937, 1938?

Pardon me?

Around 1937?

'37, yeah.

Something like that.

It may have been early '38, '37 or so. And my mother put stuff-- I think she made a list, but put it in a couple of suitcases. We went there, I don't know why I went with her, but she got two little pieces of paper, received two suitcases of silverware. That was the receipt for all the treasures that you have picked up over the years.

Gee.

My father kept, I don't know why he had the nerve, a gold watch that he got on his 25th birthday. He wasn't going to part with that. And he wanted his son to have it on his 25th birthday.

Did you?

The watch went with a friend of ours to England. She gave it to me. I had it to my 25th. My son had it to his 25th. His son got it on his 25th. He's now 28. So it's been handed down.

Four men.

Just a good, nice, gold watch. But we managed-- he managed to keep that.

Wow.

Talk of managed to keep-- no, later.

I want to bring you back, though.

Hmm?

I want to bring you back. We started this thread because I was asking what kind of a personality did your father have? And you told me how active he was in the community and so. Was he someone that you could talk to as a young boy? Or was he someone who was more distant?

I think more distant. He was cool. He was always telling me that he was going to bring me up like a Spartan.

Oh, gosh.

And fortunate, not a Prussian, but a Spartan.

[LAUGHTER]

A Spartan, OK.

But boys don't cry, and et cetera, et cetera. He was in his way strict, but on the other hand, so warm that he just couldn't express it. Because he was brought up the Germanic way.

But you felt it, yes? You felt it.

I felt it. I have a letter also still from him when I left in summer of '38. I was still home. He wrote me a letter to where I was going in England with best wishes, and with God's blessing, and don't forget your parents et cetera. And I also still cry when I see that.

Of course.

And so what-- yes, he was. And even with my mother. I give my wife Helen [INAUDIBLE] once in a while, and I think I tell her what I feel. I never heard my father say that to his mother-- to his wife. I found a couple of letters where he expressed a little bit, but verbalizing, or holding hands or arm around her, I never saw it.

Were they happy together, do you think?

Well, my mother had a pretty tough life because of her losses. And she worked very hard. And she was too conscientious. Everything had to be just so, and nothing was quite right.

When I was in college and had studied something for chemistry and I needed help, I went to her, and she proved something wrong in the book.

[LAUGHTER]

That's the way she was. That exact. Oh, god.

But what was she like as a mother?

Again, both my parents were Germanic and not very warm. That's the way I felt. They meant it, but they couldn't--

didn't know how to express it.

And I always swore that when I have children-- my father was very strict, too. "I'm putting you on notice", I was told I don't know how many times. If I sneezed too loud or [? something, ?] I think.

How do you say that-- how did he say it in German?

[NON-ENGLISH]

Oh, god. [NON-ENGLISH] "You have been warned."

Yeah.

Oh, jeez.

I heard that quite often. And now I think-- then I decided, if I have kids, I would be a bit more lenient to them. And I think I was. Even my wife objected to my leniency at times, right? No comment.

No comment. Your daughter is sitting here, just so that people would know on camera when they see your interview that you are joined here by your wife and your daughter who are listening to it.

Is my wife here?

Yes.

She's behind.

She's behind us.

You've been listening to all of that?

Some of it.

I'm here too. Behind you.

Do you agree with me so far?

Do you agree with him so far?

Well, I would--

You say [? later. ?]

[INAUDIBLE] his father a little harsher.

You'd be a little harsher about his father.

Yes.

OK.

Very, very German.

Because she-- you didn't understand him. It was just-- she hardly knew him. She saw him two or three times. And shall I

tell the story? She met my father-- no, no. She didn't meet my father.

We were invited at a wedding. And my wife had a-- looked the way she-- one's supposed to look, but a little bit exposed. And she was sitting there at the table with her thumb up. And my father took a magnifying glass, looked her over top and bottom, said nothing about that, says, she has a crooked thumb.

[LAUGHTER]

It became a family joke. Right?

Mm-hmm.

And no, he was-- they were strict. But they couldn't express themselves. You've got to forgive them for that.

Yeah, it sounds like you have.

But I also feel, now that I know that she's sitting here, that I don't express myself enough to her either. What this woman has done for me when I was sick this last year, 30 days in the hospital, day and night in two chairs. Wouldn't leave me. If you don't call that love, what do you?

Yeah.

But she is a unbelievable woman. 69 years with her. And I don't express my appreciation enough.

Well, I think you have right here. Thank you for sharing it.

69 years married.

But that means more together?

No, I'm just saying. 69 years married.

She's not 69 years old, but 69 years married.

Yeah. Let's go back. It's OK. You know, that's how conversations go, is we go in different directions, and then we come back. Let's go back to your early years. You mentioned school, that you went to a regular public school.

I went to a regular public school. I still have the picture of my first year in school with the fraulein teacher there and all. And my girlfriend at the time there.

You were how old?

Well, I must have been seven years, six, seven years or whatever year.

Those relationships are serious at that time.

Yeah, absolutely. And I went to that until-- I forget now how many years you went to the volksschule. From there you went to either gymnasium or realschule.

That's right.

I went to realschule. And I was there I think about three years until '38, until Kristallnacht.

OK. I want to ask a few questions. Do you remember what school life was like before 1933? You would have been nine

years old, and it was before Hitler comes to power. Do you remember what school life was like for you before 1933?

I don't think much more different than until 1936 or '37.

Really. So his coming to power didn't have much of an effect?

Me personally?

Yeah, you personally.

No. We had a gym teacher, who was the only ardent Nazi that I knew of in school, who a couple of times made comments about, the Jewish boys don't really like gym. They don't want to be active. Some derogatory remarks like that.

And a couple of times somebody would yell, Jew, or Jews, yell at you. But not so that I was afraid or anything else. As I got a little older, I went by bicycle to school.

What was the name of your school, the first one?

[NON-ENGLISH] Oh, my god.

[NON-ENGLISH] OK.

And I still have some of my early reports of how I behaved.

What did you get for conduct? What did you get for conduct?

Conduct was all right. What was not-- singing was impossible. And pretty well-behaved, so average student. No cum laude or anything like that.

Did you-- first of all, let's translate this. This was Children's School on Steel Street? [NON-ENGLISH]

Children's School on [NON-ENGLISH] was the name of the whatever.

The street.

Street.

OK, and you went there for how many years? Until the-- as far as it went. Must have been six years.

OK.

I'm sorry, I don't recall.

That's OK. But something like that. You would have been--

I finished that and then went to the-- transferred, applied or whatever, I don't recall-- to the realschule.

And why realschule and not gymnasium? Because real is more for vocational--

Because realschule was more industrial or business. And gymnasium was more science.

University.

And my father wanted me in his business. He was going to send me to England to study engineering and then come into his business. And my mother would have liked me to be a doctor, I think. But sometimes some people win.

Tell me, the thing that you mentioned before of your father not wanting to leave Germany, and your mother wanting to leave Germany, was this a conversation or a tension that you witnessed or that came up? Was it a tension at all?

I knew about it, but I didn't-- I don't think I was ever privy to any conversation. But I knew that there was a feeling in the family. Or it's possible that I didn't know until I saw my parents back here, back in the States, that I was told about it. I'm not sure of that.

OK. And in order to fill in another gap, tell me about your home in Munich, what kind of place you lived in. You said you had maids.

It was a five story apartment house. One apartment per floor. The building belonged to my parents. We had the third floor. It was about I think six or seven rooms. And then in addition to that, in the back of the house was a garden. And in the far back was another building, a long building, where my father had his offices.

And there was a three story building where my parents had two rooms, which were their bedrooms, because in the front, there was a little noise, the cars. In 1930, how many cars were passing by? But so they went to sleep there every night.

So they'd leave the apartment itself. They'd leave the apartment itself, and go across the courtyard to another building.

Yeah, we had a what do you call it, Kinderfraulein?

Nanny. A nanny. You had a nanny?

Yeah, a nanny. But as we got older, it was just a girl, a maid or whatever you call her. And we had that that stayed. And the cook stayed. They both lived with us. But they were next door.

And did your father have an automobile?

Yes. He had-- well, actually, the first one I really remember was what's called a Horch, H-O-R-C-H.

H-O-R-C-H. the

I call it the Bentley of Germany. The only-- [INAUDIBLE] of a Rolls Royce over there was Maybach, a little bit higher. That's what he had.

He didn't learn how to drive until 1936 or '37. It was all with a chauffeur, the white coat and the cap and all that. Except in the later years, when we came home, we did not stop in front of the house. You went in the back, in the driveway, and went in.

And we also, on the Jewish holidays, the high holidays, the chauffeur used to pick us up at the synagogue. But picked up us from the back, my parents, and the rabbi and his wife. We always went home together.

I see.

And that was the Horch. And then when we had the country home, they bought a much smaller Opel. And that's when my father learned how to drive. And then they got my uncle, the one that went to Spain, his Mercedes. But then eventually, I think, they dropped the Horch.

Which, by the way, during 1934 or whatever, when Hitler occupied Austria, the German army confiscated the car for about three weeks.

Really?

And used it as a staff car. So it was a nice little automobile.

Tell me, when is the first time you felt that there is this hostile force in power. You yourself, in your life.

I guess I was too much protected. Because, you know, I went with my mother to have the jewelry delivered. I heard about things. But me, personally, physically, until '38 I was never touched.

OK. I take it you had a radio at home?

Hmm?

I take it you had a radio at home.

Yeah.

Did you hear Hitler over the radio?

If my grandfather wasn't around, yes.

[LAUGHTER]

My grandfather used to, when the newspaper came, if there was a picture of Hitler, he'd throw it out. My father used to get angry, because he couldn't read his paper. And whenever the name Hitler was mentioned, out comes some Jewish from my grandfather.

He was also a character. I mean, retired. I don't even know what he did in Munich for a living.

This is your mother's father.

Hmm?

Your mother's father.

Yeah. He was-- when the Bacharachs moved to Spain, he came to live with us. He was living with them before, with his own companion. And a couple of times, I don't know if it was two or three times, some Nazis, Gestapo or whatever, came. Herr Kleinhaus, [NON-ENGLISH]

"You have to come with us, Mr Kleinhaus."

Yeah. You have to come with us. My grandfather sat in his club chair, [NON-ENGLISH]. "I'm not going." First time and second time. They finally left. They didn't force him on. The thing he was an old man, et cetera, et cetera, and they just left him. And the third time, he also or something like it. But he never went.

My goodness.

Also, luck. Some other guys might have come and said, hey, you, come. And then pulled him out.

Yeah, or beat him up.

Yeah. And so this was our apartment with the rooms for the kids and the bathroom. And then one of the maid's rooms in the back half. The front, a big entrance way with a huge table and a antique commode of sorts.

Then the dining room, to the left the Herrenzimmer, and to the right of the dining room the saloon. My father took the Herrenzimmer after lunch every day, and took his nap. And the saloon was more for guests, very fancy with Chinese stuff, et cetera. And well furnished.

Do you remember the address?

35 Paul-Heyse-Strasse.

35--

Paul-Heyse-Strasse. He was another German writer or whatever.

Paul-Heyse-Strasse.

And it was a couple of blocks from where the Oktoberfest was. So we went to that in '37 also.

Really.

'38, I don't know. '38 I wasn't there anymore. No. Yeah, in '38 I was there. [INAUDIBLE] But in '37 we went to the Oktober [INAUDIBLE]. We went on the rides. We had the chicken. We had the beer. And sat with the local whatever.

And were there Nazi, you know, emblems and flags all around?

I guess they were all happy on that occasion and ignored you. We've also gone-- my father took us a couple times to the Hofbrauhaus, which was where Hitler had his first speech and whatnot, to have sausages and beer or whatever. And you didn't hear anything, seldom until '38, that there was any outward attacks on my family. Not seldom. There wasn't.

So tell me, what happened in 1938.

All right, Kristallnacht. In the middle of the night, three guys, I didn't-- I wasn't awake-- came and asked my father and told him, come with us. Armed guys. What are you going to do? They took him.

And the first thing they started asking is, [NON-ENGLISH]. "Where does Rabbi Baerwald live?" Baerwald had just moved a couple of weeks before. My father said, I don't know. I know he was going to move, but I don't know. Of course he know.

And so they took him by car into a forest near Munich and started beating him up for my father to tell. My father did not tell. And they finally-- I guess he must have fallen to the ground or what, but they left him, I assume either dead or what. But he was badly beaten up, bloody and what have you.

This is Kristallnacht itself?

Kristallnacht, yeah. I guess early in the morning or whatever. I don't know. And my father finally managed to drag himself to-- there were a couple of houses, farmhouses or something nearby. And he went to one and knocked on the door. And they took him in and helped him a little bit and called my mother.

And they said, lucky you came here. You would have gone next door, they were Nazis. They would have called somebody. And my mother called our driver. She didn't know how to drive. They came with a car, picked him up.

Now, there was one story that he spent that night in that area that the foreman of his warehouse was living. Not Jewish, but they went to him and spent the night there. But the other is that I heard that they went to a few hospitals. That could have been the following day, though.

They went to a few hospitals for my father to get stitched up and fixed up a bit. And every hospital said, this is a Jew.

I'm sorry. We can't take care of him. My mother said, but I'm a doctor, and help me, et cetera. Nobody did.

So my mother-- I don't remember how he got patched up or whatever. But then we got in the car and went to the country home.

That is-- you were not with him as he was going from hospital--

Pardon me?

You were not with him as he was going from hospital to hospital.

No. I knew of nothing at that point. I had-- after my father had been taken, and before my mother knew where he was or what was going on, she says, you'd better go to school. The Gentile school.

I went to school. And at the front door, one of the teachers says, I don't think it's advisable you come in. So I went back home. Then a few kids yelling Jew, Jew, Jew.

But then I still didn't know anything until I knew my mother went there to get my father. And when she came to the house to pick us up and we went to our country home and spent the two weeks there.

OK. Now, did you--

But nobody-- by the way, during those two weeks. Nobody came to look for us in Munich.

Did your father's view change about leaving Germany?

That day. That was the day of reckoning. Yes. He now said, we've got to get out. Not that easy. America didn't take anybody except if you had a quota number. Which we had, which was due in five years or something at the time.

And nobody else, no country would take you as a Jew. Except in-- this is two years later now. This was '38, '39, '40. In '41 I think it was.

My parents were still living there. From their seven, nine rooms, whatever, they were down I think to one room, the three of them in their own home.

The others were occupied by other Jews. You know, they took other people's homes and just quartered them there. And--

But when you-- excuse me. Just to understand the sequence. When you're in the country home for two weeks, after that, do you return to your apartment in Munich?

Yeah.

After that two weeks.

Yeah.

And for the beginning, you're able to stay in all of the rooms that you had?

Yeah.

And how long did you live there with things unchanged?

Well, I left in the summer of '39. One month before England, Germany invaded Poland. I lived there, and they still have

the whole place.

So it's after you leave that--

I don't know how or when, which way it went. But I lived the way I've always lived.

So how did it happen that you left? What was the mechanism? What was the--

Of course, after Kristallnacht, the first thing was that my parents had to try and get me out. I was two years away from military age. They certainly didn't want me to serve in the German Army, if they would have taken me anyway. And so the first effort went that way.

And somehow they found out that an organization managed to get children to schools or to private homes in England.

So was this the Kindertransport?

Yeah. And somehow they got in touch or got together with them. And I got on a Kindertransport in July of '39.

And you were then almost 15 years old?

Almost. In September, I was 15.

OK. And what about your younger sister?

Hmm?

What about your younger sister?

Stayed with my parents.

They didn't think--

They only allowed so many or whatever. And boys were more important to get out.

Do you remember saying goodbye to them? Do you remember saying goodbye to your parents?

Oh, yes. First of all, in order to go, I was permitted to take a certain amount of two suitcases. My mother had to list every item of what I was taking, show it to an inspector wherever it was, I think Gestapo, with a list. And then they were sealed, and I could take them with me.

The list included two pencils and one pen. That's how detailed it was. And then the day we left it was cool. My mother said, we'd better give you a sweater. And then decided, no, it's not on the list. Don't take it. That's how much afraid they were at that point. They didn't want anything to happen to me on--

On the way.

So then my parents took me to the train station where these kids were being assembled. And there was a goodbye. I don't remember it. I somehow think I did not get-- I got a hug from my father. But I think the first kiss I ever got from my father is when I went in the army.

Oh.

German. Men don't kiss each other. Should listen to it now, huh? And if you want to erase that, it's OK. And then, so I said-- my mother, of course, kissed me goodbye.

And it didn't sink in. In my father's letter, it hinted that they might not see me anymore. But it did not sink in to me that this could be a final goodbye.

And my father, the goodbye wishes, still said, this train goes along the Rhine, one of the most beautiful sections of our country. Serve it well. He gave me a map showing all the castles. Watch it well. You'll come back, and you'll like it.

Oh, my gosh. The poor man.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Still our fatherland, our homeland or something. And then I went by train to wherever it was on the French coast and to England. And from there by train to London, where I was picked up by I think it was the Joint Distribution Committee.

I want to interrupt at this point. Did you share that feeling of, Germany is my homeland? Or by that point were you not?

Not at that point anymore. But I'll come back to 1936, the Olympics, and tell you. And then--

London. The Joint picked you up.

Yeah. They're trying to assemble all the kids in the room. And the names were called. And I was being picked up from a distant relative, actually, a New Yorker that lived in London.

And he picked me up, took me to his home for two or three days until the Joint arranged for me to get to a youth hostel in Bournemouth, a town on the South Coast of England, where I spent until a month or two after Dunkirk. At that point, all German Jews, or anything German, was returned.

You too?

I was not 16. Anything above 16 was. I was too young. So I was left in the hostel for a few days until they closed it.

But I had a lot of friends that were interned. And then some were sent by ship to Australia, to camps and whatnot. Some were drafted into the Pioneer Corps. A couple were on a merchant ship that sank coming to this country or whatever.

And I was-- again, I was lucky I was too young. Then they found a British family that got x amount a week, working class, that put me and one other guy up in one room in their home. Room and board, everything full.

In Bournemouth.

Yeah, in Bournemouth. And I went to public school in Bournemouth.

Did you already speak some English when you came to the UK?

Very, very little. The Joint Distribution sent me to Bournemouth, put me on a train, gave me a slip of paper. When you get there, take--

OK, we can just cut for a second. OK, we had a quick break. And we were at a point before the doorbell rang where I had asked you whether or not you had learned-- you had spoken any English before you came to the UK.

I had maybe a year of English in private lessons. That was about all. And it was kind of tough. When I got there, I think I started saying, when the HIAS, or I forget now which of the two organizations it was, had put me on a train for Bournemouth. Gave me a slip of paper where the youth hostel was, and gave me money, or I had money, to take a cab from the train to the youth hostel.

Fine. I got off the train. I took a cab. The cab drops me off, puts my two suitcases in front of the door. I ring the bell. Somebody opens the door. What do you want here? This is no youth hostel.

So I showed them the slip. And it said 55 Surrey Road. And the lady says, well, this is 35 Surrey Road. But I mean, it took a while to understand that. And then I don't remember how I got a few houses down where the hostel was. But that's my introduction to tough English.

But then I went to a regular school there that had a class which was called "remove." They put anybody that comes new into the school into that class and observe them. And as soon as they see where, they place them in the proper class.

Well, that's pretty good. And I did that. I went in that and got transferred. I don't remember how quickly. And went to school there. All British kids. I guess I must have talked to them some.

And I remember I got on the field hockey team, but they weren't too happy with me, because I was a bit too rough. They were more gentle. But that didn't last long anyway that I did sports there. But I was in that for I guess a year, year and a half. My uncle in Palestine was paying for that.

So this was a private school?

Yeah. And he, one fine day, wrote a note that this is war. Things are tough. I can't afford to pay for you anymore. So what could I do? I went out and got a job.

You were how old at that time?

Must have been 17.

So how far in schooling had you come along by that point?

I was a few months before the London matriculation.

So that would be-- if we take it in the--

That's finishing high school.

Graduate finishing high school.

And then-- where was I?

You were going to go out and get a job.

Yeah. I got a job. I don't remember how I got it, but it was a trucking company with branches all over the country. They introduced me, of course, as being Belgian. Somehow, British people had no idea what a German accent was or what a Belgian-- they were too enclosed in their own life and didn't know.

An island makes a difference.

[INAUDIBLE] while I worked there, they thought I was Belgian. And I worked there for about, whatever it was, a year and a half or so. Got very friendly with one of the big directors from London who came down every two weeks or so to check up. And in fact, he wanted me to stay. And I have a letter from him wishing me all the best, and sorry that I leave, et cetera.

So I worked there until I-- my parents had gotten to this country. And I, with their aid, et cetera, I got a visa to come here.

OK. So your job, you were a trucker?

Hmm?

You were a trucker at this company?

No, no, no. I worked in the office.

You worked in the office. OK. And this was what year that you then-- was this '41 already? When you left school, was this 1941?

When I left school in England?

Yeah.

Must have been '38.

I thought that's when--

I left England-- no, no, no. Sorry. '39, '41. Pearl Harbor was '41?

Yes, December.

Must have been '40.

Oh, so not that much. You turned let's say 16 in 1940, September 1940. Yes?

Yeah.

And so you would have turned 17 in September 1941.

Yeah.

And you left school when you were 17 years old? OK. But it's around that time. It's around that time.

Now, let's step back a little bit. And tell me about your parents' situation in Germany after you left, and how it is that they get to the United States.

OK. First of all, after I left, we were, which surprises many people, in constant touch with each other. My parents wrote a dear friend or something and sent it to friends of theirs in Switzerland or friends of theirs in Denmark. And I did the reverse. So we always knew about each other, without officially mother and father or anything. By the way, I knew when they were leaving Germany and all.

But in Germany, my father, in the last few years really, became full time active at the Jewish Community. Did all sorts of things.

What had happened to his business?

Oh, Kristallnacht, the following morning, there was a lock on the door. "This business has been taken over by the government." And my father could never set foot in there again.

My goodness.

After a few days, they contacted my mother whether she would be willing-- willing? She had no choice-- to work in the

business for a while until they get their feet wet, get to know it a bit. So my mother worked in the business. I don't know how long. And my father, my father then was full time at the Jewish Community.

What happened with-- what happened with his wealth, his assets?

His assets?

Mm-hmm.

Well, first of all, I didn't mention that to anyone. But after Kristallnacht, the German government imposed a 25% fine on the net worth of every Jew. So a quarter of your assets were gone. And also documents.

Not too long ago, you didn't have to pay the lump sum. My father wrote in a letter, I intend to sell this and this stock by so-and-so and then we'll hand over the money. It was accepted as long as you paid it. So 25% went away in that. And apparently, they had for the business I think-- I don't know when they got a certain amount for that.

They did get some kind of compensation.

They got it, yes.

OK.

And let's see. And then [? that ?] [? three, ?] when they went to Spain, they could take some money too. But on every mark, they had only got one tenth. So you got next to nothing. So the money kept dwindling and dwindling. But fortunately, I guess, they had enough that--

Had he had any foreign bank accounts? Had your father--

They were confiscated or stopped years ago.

OK.

Now we had never had any. And that's what my father also claimed. I did nothing that they can punish me for. Never done anything. And I don't know whether I mentioned that before, but my father and Leo Baerwald were sitting together just before Kristallnacht. Yeah, did I say that?

No.

And Leo Baerwald says, isn't it time to leave? And my father said what I've said before. I've done nothing wrong. They can't do anything to me. I'm not going. A few days later, get me out of here, please, please.

The woods did it.

Hmm?

The woods did it. The woods did it.

Yeah. And then-- should I mention now how my father got out?

Yes.

He was in Munich. He was working at the congregation, of course friendly with the leaders up in Berlin at the headquarters. And he got a call or whatever from one of his friends up there that there is an order from the government coming down that any person working for the Gemeinde cannot leave the country anymore. He said to my father, if you

have a chance, get out.

Three weeks before, as fate will have it, my father got a visa to go to Spain. The reason, because the Bacharachs' brother in Spain, who was very influential, somehow managed to get them a visa. So my father had a German passport with a J on it, which I have here.

And went to show the Spanish visa, went to the airport in Munich with a little suitcase, and booked a ticket on a commercial flight from Munich to Barcelona. Or Valencia. Whatever. He flew to Spain in an hour and a half, in style.

And my mother wasn't quite ready and wanted to get things a bit more organized, wanted to take some personal stuff out, et cetera. And [? to ?] make it short, she went three, four weeks later by train from Munich to Berlin, from Berlin to Paris, from Paris to Spain.

It took her and my sister a week. But they traveled with 20 suitcases. All contents approved by the Germans.

That's so unusual.

They took out their personal belongings. I don't know how. They took out a couple of carpets. They took out this painting. They took out that painting. A lot of the porcelain that's all over the apartment, she packed and took out. Got permission. Took it out.

And went to Spain and met my father. And they sat there for a while. Then I'll go one further. When they-- in late '41 or early '42-- no. It was either just before or after Pearl Harbor.

They got a boat. And they had the visa now to come to the States. So they got on a boat. And the boat stopped in Bermuda. And in Bermuda, there's interrogation by everybody's intelligence and whatnot. And my father was called off the ship and interrogated for a whole day.

Why? He was tall, blonde, blue eyes. And they didn't think that a Jew could go through all the stories that they had. They thought that he was a German spy trying to enter the states as a Jew. It took him a whole day to convince them. So that was the last tough thing that they had. But then they came to the States.

From Bermuda to New York?

No, I was still in England.

No, no, no. They went from Bermuda to New York, your parents.

Yes, to New York, and got an apartment across the street from Leo Baerwald, the same way they lived in Munich. And the same way they're buried. Across a little street from each other.

And where was this in New York City? Where in New York City?

In Washington Heights, 181st, corner of Riverside Drive.

OK.

So they had a four bedroom-- no, no. Three bedroom apartment. Three or two. My mother, my sister. And then in '42 or '43 I came over from England.

And you're now 18, 19 years old?

Yeah. And I came. They had cargo ships going back from the States to Europe in convoy. Because they were loaded with material. But as soon as one was empty, it was sent back alone. No convoy, no nothing.

And most of them got through. Some didn't. And the ship before me, a friend of mine was on it, got torpedoed. I was lucky. I got on a ship and I came to New York.

Do you remember the date?

July. Yeah, I have it here somewhere. But it was in July of '42.

July of '42.

Yeah.

So in the middle of the war, basically in the middle of World War II. And Germany is still winning at that point.

'42, yeah.

They're still-- or put it this way. They're not losing yet. When you get to the United States, what happens with you? What do you do? Because you're at draft age.

Well, when I came, I went to a draft board. I wanted to volunteer. And they said, within a few weeks, we'll get you. You can't volunteer.

So I waited it out. And I first went to YMCA evening high school to get the high school diploma here, which I managed to get in a few months. So I had that behind me.

And then I was drafted. I was in basic training in Alabama. Met what became a long time friend there. We started talking skiing. He was from Rochester, New York, a Dartmouth skier. And he loved it.

And he says he volunteered for the US ski troops. Never heard of it. Heard of the French Bleus Diablos, their mountain troops, but never ours. And he told me about it and I got very enthused. I loved to ski. I loved the mountains. And I applied. This was strictly volunteer outfit.

And I was accepted. Because I had skied, and I had lived in the mountains, et cetera. And after basic training, was transferred to Camp Hale, Colorado, at an altitude of 10,000 feet. That's where the camp was.

So in order to get acclimatized to the conditions, the weather, the high altitude, in the army way, they put me for a week on KP. There was harder work than I did the rest of the time in the army in Camp Hale. But that's the way it was. And then I was in Camp Hale training mountain warfare, et cetera. Then we were in camp swift a little bit, and eventually were transferred to Italy.

To Italy, OK.

And I was in combat in Italy from just below Pisa, so north of Rome. North of the major battles through the mountains in the Apennines up to Lake Garda. And there was some heavy fighting, but not with heavy weapons, et cetera, because it was all hilly country.

And is this where you were in the trenches? You mentioned earlier.

In the foxholes, yeah. We weren't in the trenches. We kept going. We had a company commander who was fabulous. But he was a little Patton. You must take this hill. We know that this division has lost it before. And so-and-so has lost it. The 10th Mountain Division will not lose it, order of the day. And we kept it. We took it.

Basically, also, I blame it on we were a new outfit, relatively new in combat. We didn't know any different. We didn't know how many would get killed and whatnot and how dangerous it would be. And so we did it. We won the mountain.

We kept it and et cetera. And we moved forward into Po River.

We had orders from the high command not to go further forward. General Hays said, I didn't get the command, and kept going. And we crossed the Po River to Lake Garda. And that's where the war ended.

For you.

In the mountains in between, I act a little more foolish maybe than I had to. I did a few things that they called a little more heroic, and I ended up with the Bronze Star. And one of my next door neighbors was-- who was the vice president that didn't make it with the hand that was all damaged in war?

Oh, Robert Dole.

Yeah. Bob Dole was in the company right next to me.

Oh my goodness.

Got wounded there. Yeah.

Tell us about what-- tell us about those little heroic things that you did, that got you-- tell us a little bit more about what got you the Bronze Star.

I don't recall exactly, but we were climbing up a mountain or something, and advancing, but were pinned down because some of our troops had gone forward. And every once in a while, somebody got blown up. They were walking through a minefield.

So apparently, I ran out, and got the guys to turn around and come back. And I guess a little shooting, et cetera. So they thought I didn't have to do that. And also at times, I think I mentioned it before, since I spoke German, they took me out on patrol in case we caught--

No, you didn't. Tell me.

In case we caught prisoners. I could interrogate them right away. Ask him where are your machine guns this, or where is something? And we had a couple of other German-speaking people in my outfit. They've also gone on patrol. And the other two, one was wounded and one was killed.

So our company commander says, Chuck cannot go out on every patrol. It's not going to last. So I was rotated like everybody else.

Did you interrogate anybody?

Not on those patrols. Never got anybody. But the prisoners that were brought in, yes. Interrogated them and confiscated their watches, cameras, et cetera, which no American soldier ever did.

[LAUGHTER]

I'm sure they didn't. I'm sure they didn't.

You walked through houses that you captured and you took stuff. Every soldier did that. And it's not admitted. But we did it too. May have felt guilty, but--

Was this in Italy? Or was this-- those houses, were they in Italy? Or were they in--

This was in northern Italy.

Northern Italy.

Farmhouses in northern Italy. And then at the end of the war, we were at Lake-- I was in one of the first boats that crossed Lake Garda to capture the other side. They had those American ducks, those cars or trucks that floated, where a few of them-- they're still trying to dig one out now with the casualties on it. They haven't found it.

But I made it. I was one of the first ones off the duck on the other side, got an Italian flag from a local guy there, which I still have too, and then we marched or fought through the tunnels on that side up to the end of Lake Garda, and the war ended.

After the war ended, did you go-- after the war ended, did you go to Germany? Or did you go home?

Now, we were stationed first in that area. Then they moved us over to near the Yugoslav-Italian border, because there was a lot of unrest. So we were patrolling there. And from there, they sent us home, because we were one of the earliest divisions to get into combat in Europe. So you'd be one of the earliest to get into Japan.

So we came here to get 30 days leave and get ready for the Japanese invasion with ours being one of the front outfits. But our boat arrived in New York the day the A-bomb was dropped.

So in August '45.

So we never left the States. One of the first divisions back here, just because of luck, and never left anymore and were safe and sound.

When you were deployed to Italy, do you remember when you landed there? What month it was, what date?

Well, we left here in July. So it must have still been July or early August.

'44?

No, no, no.

'43.

Fall. This was in November, December. November. Because it was cold and snow and et cetera up there. But we landed-- and this was up North-- but we landed in Naples in the South and got from our troop ship onto landing crafts and traveled at night along the Italian coast up north to near Pisa. And that's where we unloaded and started our formation and then moved into combat from there.

An interesting thing was when you-- I'm highlighting the pronoun "our".

Hmm?

I'm highlighting the pronoun "our". O-U-R. In the sense that when you leave for England, your father gives you this map and tells you that there are these castles on the Rhine of this in our country.

Yeah.

And by that point, you're already a little bit wobbly about whether-- how much it's your country. And yet, when you join the US Army, it sounds like you had no doubts that this was your country, that this was our troop, our army.

Absolutely No, no. I don't know why, but even in-- I guess because of my mother's remarks-- in '36 I was already not really pro-German. In 1936, the family went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen to watch some of the Winter Olympics.

You were going to tell us about that, yes.

Hmm?

You were going to tell me about this, yes.

Of course, in those days, we still went with a chauffeur and blah, blah, blah. And one of the slalom races was-- the only one I remember was Å%mile Allais, a Frenchman. And my mother started rooting for him, and rooting.

And I was rooting for the German skier, I forget now who. And got so angry at her. How can you root for a foreigner? '36, I was still. But then slowly, I guess, I turned.

It changed so that by the--

When I was in England, and with all the bombing going on, et cetera. You begin to feel it. I was alone, and I learned more and I heard more what was going on. I was too sheltered. But then--

When did you first learn of concentration camps besides Dachau?

Dachau, everybody knew from 1933 on they took them in there. When did I? I really don't know. It's a very good question. But I cannot pinpoint it in the least.

I must have heard of it somewhere, but. I mean, in England, I read the paper daily. In fact, even in the Army, I was picked as information and something, Sergeant or whatever, because every Saturday I gave a lecture on what's happened in the world in the last week.

Of course, mainly it was our troops. This, that, or the other. But when did I hear of concentration camps first? Or extermination camp.

Yeah, basically that's what I was talking about.

I do not know. I went to services there on the high holidays, but I don't remember of any talk there.

Did you lose anybody in the family?

Did I lose anyone?

To the extermination camps.

I-- no, that's your family. No, there was-- no, nobody, really, that I know that--

Except your aunt and uncle and their two children who commit suicide in Spain.

Yeah. But there was not a concentration--

No, there wasn't a concentration camp, and it wasn't murder. It was self-inflicted.

I mean, I knew of friends of my parents that were sent to concentration camps. I had girls that were in school with me that I heard had been sent to concentration camps.

Your grandfather who sat in his chair and said [NON-ENGLISH], when did he leave for Palestine?

Before Pearl Harbor. It must have been about '39, '40. No, no. It can't be '39. It must've been '40, sometime in '40.

That's pretty late.

They put him on a train. And I think in Italy, I don't know how he got on the ship, but and then my uncle got him over there.

And your paternal grandparents--

Hmm?

Your paternal grandparents.

They were gone a long time.

They were gone already. They were gone already. You know, we've come pretty much, I think, to the end of our interview. Unless there are parts that I haven't asked you about and you would like to include.

No. Just a minor thing. In '35, '36, and even '37, a friend of mine and I, we travel all over the country on a bicycle.

In Germany?

Yeah. And we didn't go north. We always went into the mountains of Bavaria. But not overnight, but day trips all the time. We went everywhere.

If we want to stop to eat somewhere, there were some restaurants that had signs on, "Jews and dogs not allowed", but, I mean, those you ignored. But no, otherwise we traveled freely. We were quite happy. And just let me get a quick--

Sure. Take a minute. Take a look. See whether there's anything we've missed.

[INAUDIBLE]

I have a picture of my dad in Venice from World War II with my son holding the picture exactly where my dad was on my phone.

We will film it later.

OK.

You were saying?

When I was discharged from the Army in '43, I think it was February or so, of course I was still a ra-ra boy. I volunteered for the reserve. And I was in the reserve. I got up to First Lieutenant, reserve infantry, until 19-- it's quite important-- 1953.

Wow.

Just before the Korean War.

Whoa.

If I would have been in the Army then, if I wouldn't have listened to my wife at the time and resigned, I might have never been here. Because I would have been sent over again. So I was-- again, I've been lucky. Even now when I was sick, I was very lucky that I pulled through, much to my wife's guidance. And thanks, unmentionable thanks.

One thing I think I should mention. In 1937, roughly, Munich had a beautiful synagogue, a Reform synagogue. And the Germans decided-- it was close to the middle of town-- that it's got to be torn down. The Jews don't have to have anything like that in town.

So they said, there's not enough parking facilities in the middle of town. This building has to come down. They gave us a couple of weeks to remove everything. We had a big ceremony, all the Torah rolls were walked over to our adjoining building.

But the following day or whenever it was, out came the hammers, and that thing was destroyed. And today there is one big stone, commemorating it. And that was a big blow to everybody.

When was the first time you went back to Germany after the war?

I'd say it was about five, six years or so? '45, '50, and so, '51.

The first time--

My wife never wanted to go. But I wanted to go more so to go to the lake house and-- oh, the lake house. Yes, I've got to tell that.

My parents, my father, when they came to some business dealings, was advised to take an attorney who happens to be a Nazi, but he's helped quite a few Jews, and to use him for that particular whatever it was. My father took him, got friendly with him. I think he flopped the case.

But somehow, found out that we have a place in the country. Came out one weekend to visit, of course, not invited. And a couple of weeks later, it started. You won't be able to keep that property much longer. We want to buy it from you.

Made an offer that was ridiculous. And my parents said no. But they were pressured so much and threatened that the final outcome was that until they leave the country, they can use it and stay there.

Come starts the war, this lawyer appears and says, all bets are off. This is war now. You've got to get out. What could my parents do?

They said, well, next week or something is a Jewish holiday. It's Rosh Hashanah. Give us a couple of weeks to take our stuff out, the stuff that we had agreed to take out. I don't know what he said. But anyway, on the Rosh Hashanah, he sent a truck to pick the stuff up out there and deliver it to our home in Munich.

And then he told my father, you know, if you wouldn't have let me have it, it would have cost you dearly. You know, he still threatened him when the case was finished.

So this, he was a-- one of the guys that marched with Hitler in '23. So a holy one. After the war, he approached my father-- he still had it-- through someone in England, offered him \$10,000. In that time, \$10,000 was a bundle of money.

And my father didn't want to at first. And then he says, I don't have money here. I need it. So he finally agreed to it. And that son of a gun now legally bought the place. The place afterwards we found out is worth millions.

One more thing on that. What did I want to say?

About the house.

Yeah. When we went over and visited the farmers there, he told me who's living there now. Somebody that had bought it from this Nazi after the war. And he says, she seems to be a very nice woman. Go on up. We went up. I introduced myself.

First she thought I was here to look over the property to try and take it back. And I reassured her, I just want my family to see where I was as a kid, what I loved. And after a while, go through the house. Let us walk alone through the house and et cetera.

We stayed in touch with her. I came back with my kids, grandkids and kids, and showed them the place. And she was just as friendly. A German woman, but this was now years after the war. But she was doing-- bringing back young children to schools in England and America from Germany, from German schools. That was her business.

So she spoke English well. And we became quite friendly. I even sent her one of the original pictures of the dining room, et cetera. That was the end and goodbye of our country home. And I still have pictures. Now, I still say once more, "and we have won after all."

I couldn't think of better words on which to end the interview. I said, I couldn't think of better words on which to end the interview.

Thank you.

Thank you very, very much. And this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Werner W. Weiss on August 15, 2019 in Manhattan, New York. Thank you again.

Thank you very much.

Rolling.

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Werner Weiss that we have had today on August 15, 2019. And after the cameras stopped, Mr. Weiss thought of the few things that he wanted to add to his testimony.

And we're going to do that now. So the floor is yours. There were a few things that you wanted to say.

This is not actually a Holocaust thing, but I mentioned I think a couple of times how wonderful my wife is. And how wonderful she especially took care of me when I was quite sick. But I made a quite big mistake.

I did not mention that both my children were absolutely fantastic. The way they came to see me. The way they supported me. The way they supported my wife. They are people above and beyond. I adore them, and I can never thank them enough.

That's lovely.

The other thing I wanted to say is I think at the beginning I said that there was a Memorial in Munich put up by Hitler saying that in 1923, that his buddies that had been killed or shot, it says, "and you have won after all". [NON-ENGLISH] it said in German.

I just turned this around and said it on many occasions. [NON-ENGLISH] We are all here. Our family, the Jewish community all over the world has blossomed, and we can be so grateful and thankful, what the Jews have gone through and what we have achieved again.

Perfect. Thank you very, very much.

So the change you wanted to make is [NON-ENGLISH] instead of [NON-ENGLISH]. We have actually become victorious.

Yeah.

We are victorious.

Thank you.

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you very much. And so that-- is there anything else you wanted to add that you could think of at the moment?

No. I would like to thank you. You've done a-- guided us through this very well. And both our thanks go to you.

Thank you. It's an honor.

And our photographer, I can't say anything. I don't know what comes out. But I will thank him later.

OK. And thank you. It's been an honor. It's been an honor. So this concludes the testimonies. And now what we will do is film a few artifacts and photographs.

Thank you.

OK, Mr. Weiss. So what is this photograph? It looks quite old. This is from the middle 1800s. It's my father's mother and father.

Your grandparents.

Yeah, my grandparents, taken in Breslau, Germany.

And what were their names?

They were the Weisses. She was-- oh, god, my grandfather was-- [INAUDIBLE] slipped my-- their first name now. To me they were Opa Weiss.

Opa and Oma, yeah.

Yeah.

OK, we'll leave it like that. But that's their photograph from the 19th century.

Yeah.

OK, thank you.

Mr. Weiss, what is this lovely photograph?

This is my parents, my father and my mother, August 15, 1921, their wedding in Munich at the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten. This is now 98 years ago.

Today.

Today. I'm very proud of the picture, and I'm proud of my parents.

OK. Thank you. That's quite special.

Mr. Weiss, what is this document that you are holding?

This is my father's German passport. On the front cover is the big red J for Jude, Jew. And this was the passport that led

him to freedom to this country.

OK. Thank you.

My mother's passport--

Wait a minute.

Yeah.

OK.

This is my mother's, Dr. Dora Weiss's passport, German passport. You can see the J for Jew, Jude, clearly on the front cover. This was the last German passport she had, thank god. From here on in, it was USA passports. And she was extremely proud and happy with that.

And the dates that are on these passports are quite late, 11th of June 1941, when they were allowed to leave. OK, thank you for showing those.

So tell me, what is this particular document that we see a photocopy of? And what is its significance?

I'm very proud of this little piece of paper, because it clearly states that I was never a member of the Hitler Youth. This paper was necessary for every young man that wanted to leave the country. Because except for Jews, I think, they didn't allow anyone out anymore, because they were needed for the army. But I'm very happy that I still have this.

So if you had not been a member of the Hitler Youth, it meant you weren't suitable for the army either. Is that we could infer?

Most likely.

OK, all right. It's a good badge of honor to have.

So Mr. Weiss, tell me about this portrait.

This is a portrait of my mother, Dr. Dora Kleinhaus Weiss, painted in Munich in the middle 1930s, which my mother managed to get in a suitcase or something and bring out of Germany in 1941 or early '42. And we're proud to have it hanging in our living room.

So this is one of those that was in those 20 packages that she took when she--

Yes, this is part of the 20 packages or suitcases and boxes that she was allowed by the Gestapo to bring out of the country.

OK, thank you.

So tell me, Mrs. Weiss, what is this photograph of and when was it taken?

It's my mother and me in Havana.

Can we cut for a sec? Are we going? OK, I'm sorry that I interrupted.

Tell me, what is that picture of? What is the photograph of?

It's my mother and me in Havana in 1942.

I see. And your mother is on the left, and you are on the right. And your mother's name again was Regina?

Was Regina.

Was Regina. And she would have been about 45 years old then? Something like that?

Yes.

OK. And she got you through to safety.

That's right.

OK. Thank you very much. Here we go.