

5, 4, 3, 2, 1, go ahead.

OK. Would you please identify yourself and tell us a little bit about your background?

Well, my name is Martin Donald, formerly Dorffman. And when you say identify myself about the background, where should I start?

When were you born?

I was born May 2nd, 1920 in Berlin, Germany.

And would you tell us something about your family, your immediate family?

My father's name was Robert Dorffman, my mother's name, Frieda Dorffman. Her maiden name was Gutterman. I had a sister by the name of Erna Dorffman.

We lived in Germany. I was born, as I mentioned before, in Berlin. And had lots of other family, close family, such as cousins, uncles, nephew, nieces, all kinds of family there. We were approximately a family of 30 people, living in Berlin.

Furthermore, we had at least another 15 to 20 relatives on my father and mother's side, especially on my father's side, living in Leipzig, Germany. And most of them in Leipzig were in the fur industry. Because Leipzig was the fur industry, the fur business of Germany.

What did your family do in Berlin?

My father and mother were in the clothing business. And we had quite a substantial business in the early '30s. Of course, later on everything was changed because the Hitler regime went after Jewish merchants and so forth. And it became increasingly difficult.

What is your first memory of Hitler and of the rise of Nazism in Germany?

Well, I am still aware today that Hitler came to power in January of 1933 in Germany. And I cannot exactly recall how it shaped up in '33 or '34. But as time went on, of course, it became increasingly difficult.

How so?

By, number one, the concentration camps were opened up for Jewish people and even for non-Jewish people. If I recall correctly, until about 1937 you could still live without being attacked or followed. But I do remember that in November of '37 a purge took place. And the Germans looted and rioted and went into businesses, synagogues, after Jewish households. And it was a absolute miracle that we survived at that time.

How did your parents explain to you what was going on at the time?

Unfortunately, my parents were always of the opinion, if I remember correctly, that things would change, that it would be a passing trend, and it would not go on forever, and it would go back to normal again. I couldn't argue very much at the time with them. Also, I saw it differently because I was young and inexperienced.

So there was a part of you that knew that it wasn't just going to go away?

I had the feeling that it wouldn't. And so did my sister. And my parents, like I mentioned before, were of different opinion, unfortunately. And we were hoping against odds maybe that they were right and we were wrong.

How did the other members of your family feel?

When it came to the so-called older people-- and by old, I don't mean real old, real old. But I do mean not the younger people. They felt the same way as my parents did. They were hoping also and thinking that it has to come to a point where this cannot go on any further. And unfortunately, instead of getting better, of course, over the years it went much worse.

What kind of experiences did you have at school?

I left school when I was approximately 14 years old. My father always wanted me to learn the fur business. Because he felt that number one, he felt that a trade would always be good no matter where I would be. And number two, it was some sort of a family business because brothers and sisters of his and close relatives, they all were in Leipzig in the fur business. And I guess in the back of his mind he was maybe hoping that one day I would also go there and work with them and be part of their business.

So I started in 1934. I looked for some work in Berlin. And I found a furrier that had a retail store in a section called Nurnberger Strasse.

And he was of Polish descent but had lived in Germany for quite some time. And as a matter of fact, just before I went with him, he married a non-Jewish German lady that turned out to be a wonderful person and in the end saved his life and made it possible for him to escape Germany.

And I stayed with this concern. And he really taught me a lot of things about the fur business until 1937.

He was Jewish?

He was Jewish himself. And he had two brothers that were Jewish and also in the fur business. And they also had retail stores in Berlin.

By the end of 1937, my father felt that I should learn more about the raw skin business instead of knowing how to cut a fur coat. And I went with another firm to learn more about raw skins.

At that time, of course, we had already tremendous difficulties to survive in Berlin. From time to time, raids took place by the police. They at random came to apartments where Jewish people lived. And, of course, without any provocation or explanation, arrested Jewish people only to be sent to concentration camps, and so forth.

I had several experiences where my father and I were informed by some German people that we might be the next on the list, and so forth. And we kept on running to a few different places in Berlin at the time, hiding, coming out, going back again. And it was very, very difficult.

Meanwhile, also, my father couldn't continue being in business anymore. It was very difficult for us to exist. And unfortunately, we had let it go by over the years without my parents and other members of the family trying to get out of Germany. To retract, I meant to say that they were still thinking, in the early stages, that some changes will take place. And that, of course, never happened.

We had some relatives on my father's side at the time living in London, England. And my father-- I can't recall exactly-- either spoke with them on the telephone or we were in correspondence, of course. And in 1938, they informed us that they would try their best to get us over to London, my sister and me only-- they couldn't do nothing for my parents-- to try and continue to learn the fur business.

I also had, at the time, a cousin, a close cousin of mine, and a girl cousin. Because in our family actually, in Berlin, two brothers married two sisters. And each brother and sister had a boy and a girl.

My sister's name, I do not recall whether I mentioned it, was Erna. And my cousin's name was Leon Dorffman. And his

sister's name was Ruth Dorffman.

In January of '39, out of the blue sky, we were called, if I remember correctly, to some sort of authority. And I was told that I had permission to go to London, England to further my knowledge of the fur business. And my cousin and his sister, their papers came through, too.

Somehow my sister Erna's paper were mislaid or lost in the shuffle. She never got permission to leave Germany and eventually ended up to be killed in a concentration camp.

In January of '39, I remember like today, when I was in a position to leave Berlin, having been such a close family, it was a terrible thing for my parents to see me go and for me to go without my parents. My mother came to the train station in Berlin.

And as the train pulled in, I will never forget, she had tears in her eyes. And she said to me, Martin, my dear, I have a feeling I will never see you again in our lifetime. And unfortunately, it was so.

I came together with my cousin, Leon Dorffman, to London. His sister came about three weeks later. We arrived in London. And as you know, London always has fog and rain. We arrived at Victoria station with maybe less than \$10 in our pockets.

We were given to understand by our parents that we had a wonderful family in London and they would help us when we get there. We did not speak any English. Downhearted as we were, we went to the telephone to call our relatives, who at that time lived in Golders Green, only to be told by the maid of the house that they could not be disturbed this evening.

And we were given to understand that there is a lot of Jewish relief organizations that help people that come from Germany or other countries. But the agencies would not open before Monday morning. So in the meantime, we should go and look whether we can get in for a couple of days, until the agencies open up, whether we can get in to the Salvation Army.

Still today when I see my cousins in England, we talk about this incident. And I don't have to tell you the way we felt, having just come from home, and looking for a close, warm relationship with relatives in London, the way we felt of what happened to us the first day on arrival in London, England.

We did find shelter for the couple of days. And on Monday morning went to the Woburn House in London, where we registered and where I also knew that someone wanted to give me the chance to further my knowledge in the trade that I had learned in Germany. Also my cousin that would have liked to stay in London with me had to go on to Glasgow, because people had given him papers in Glasgow, Scotland to stay and help him to get on his feet.

I found some people that took me in as a boarder in London. I started to work for this particular company, again as an apprentice with very, very little money. And my most important goal was to learn the English language so I'd be able to communicate with the English people and get the know-how and learn and see what it is all about.

My cousin Leon Dorffman, who still lives in London today, went on to Glasgow where we had some very poor relatives that actually even couldn't afford to support him for a short period of time. But they were so nice to him and did so much for him that until the day they died, he was forever grateful to them.

Having seen what kind of a family we had in London when they treated us on our arrival the way we never expected they would, I kept completely out of touch with them. I wasn't interested and in any way proud to call people like this my family. I wasn't used to it. We were a very, very close family, always.

As I mentioned, I started to work. Things were very tough in the beginning. But somehow, one survives, especially when you're young.

I tried my utmost, through a number of Jewish relief organizations in London, to see whether there is any possibility of

getting my parents out of Germany. I knew with my sister it would only be a month or two because I was hoping the papers were just mislaid, and she had permission to come, and they would find the papers and she ultimately be in a position to come and join me in London. Unfortunately, this never took place.

I did everything possible to get them out of Berlin, of course not knowing how long it would be or whether a war would take place. But as you well know, in September of 1939, war broke out between England and Germany. And every hope that I ever had to get my family out in these 6 or 8 months that I had arrived earlier in London, every hope was gone. There was nothing I could do anymore.

What did they tell you when you tried to get them out, when you went to the relief organization? What did they say?

They had tremendous lists of people to bring out, on their list, even. So they couldn't do much. It became increasingly more difficult, coming closer to '39, to leave Germany.

I also mentioned to them that I had some very influential people that were my relatives, by the name of the Sachs family. And to my knowledge, I believe they got in touch with them once or twice. But I was then given to understand that this would be a lost cause for them because they're just not willing to help.

Because according to them, they helped so many other people. And they just had come to the end of the line and couldn't help anybody else anymore. Even so, the Mr. Sachs was a brother of my father's father. And my father knew him very well.

This is the family in London?

This was the family in London.

That wouldn't take you in when you first got there?

The same family, yes.

OK.

And I had made quite a few friends. And of course, I was forever grateful that I was over there. Because had I been in Germany, it would have been a different story.

So I was always talking about one day joining the army, and the British army, and get an opportunity in my own way, hopefully, to fight against the Germans. Unfortunately, in the beginning of the war it looked for quite a while that Germany would be in a position with their fifth column and air support to invade England. And the country, for quite a while in the early stages of the war, was in a tremendous uproar and afraid that this might happen any minute.

I lived at that time together with a friend in order to share the expenses for the room that we had rented from someone. One morning, we both go downstairs to go-- we lived in Stamford Hill, which was area where quite a few Jewish families lived. We are on our way down to go to work as usual and take the bus into the city.

And right in front of the door of the house where we rented a room is a police van. And the policeman comes out. And he says Martin Dorffman, my friend's name at the time was Henry Brooks, we have to take you in for questioning.

Don't worry, the officer even said. I remember that. You'll be back. It's just routine information that we need from you.

Little did I know at that time that because of the fear that spread all over England at the time, that they didn't care whether as a German you were a Jewish, non-Jewish, or whatever. They took you in. They send you to a camp.

And they wanted to make sure that you are not a fifth column for the Germans, and that everything is all right with you, and the information that you gave them earlier are correct. And they were so afraid at the time that they couldn't do it in

a way of getting to the people by not taking them into the camp. They picked them up all over London, Scotland. Wherever a German Jew would live, he was taken in to be interrogated and eventually, hopefully, cleared. So they wanted to make sure that nothing could go wrong. The situation became very bad because it really looked like Hitler would be successful in invading England.

And they took several ships of German non-Jews and Jews. And took the people, instead of looking into their history in England, they took them to Canada. They had permission to take them into camps in Canada.

I recall we were put on a ship in Liverpool, England. And that ship was full of German of prisoner of wars. And we were mixed on the same boat with them as Jewish-German refugees, which was a terrible, terrible thing.

On the way over to Canada, we were very fortunate. Because one or two of the boats were torpedoed by the German navy. And hundreds of people lost their lives. Our ship was fortunate. We made it into Canada.

But tremendous incidents took place on the boat. Because I would say we were, maybe, 150 Jewish people on the boat. And there must have been prisoners of war that were taken by the English, I would say, about 800. Terrible fights broke out on the boat because we did not want to have anything to do with them.

When we finally reached Canada, we were put in the same camp with them. And we went on a hunger strike. And we refused to eat. And we wanted to identify ourselves 100% that we are Jewish people and we run away from Nazi Germany. And here they are putting us together, again, with German prisoner of wars.

I recall that they were the most arrogant German people that I've ever met. They used to march every morning in the camp, and sing their songs, and so forth, being convinced that it would only be a short period of time they would be liberated and Hitler is on the way to conquer the world.

Due to the strength that we had within the little group of about 130, 150 Jewish people, Jewish men, we were in a position to make ourselves known to the authorities that were in charge of the camp. And within 90 days, our cases were cleared. And we were sent back to London, England with an apology that what has happened was very unfair to us, but could not be avoided. And we were set free to go about our own business.

Was it the hunger strike that really attracted the attention of the--

I think what attracted the attention of the authorities was that a lot of times we had incidents of fights. We had incidents that we refused to have anything to do with them. We kept to ourselves. We only wanted to see the people that are in charge and explain and plead our cases with them. And explain and show them how wrong they were, what was done to us.

Where was the camp in Canada? Do you remember?

Ontario, Canada.

Having gone back to London then, finally, after approximately 90 days, it could have been a little less than 90 days, I really tried to understand in my own mind what has taken place so unexpectedly. And I didn't want to judge harshly their behavior in what they had done to us.

And I came to the conclusion that there was room for forgiveness. Because like I mentioned earlier before, that it was a terrible situation in the early months of the war between England and Germany. Because everybody was so afraid that invasion of England was imminent.

After I was finally able to deal with the situation, after I came back to London, I started to work again for a few months. But I became very restless, always wondering and worrying what could happen, or has happened, to my family in Germany.

I had some other friends. A couple did join the army at the time. Another couple did not. They weren't quite ready. Also, in the later years, it became compulsory that they had to join.

In late 1940, I guess I came to a point where I said, well, I should now also participate in this war. Not working in a war factory, but just going to war and see what I could do. I went to the offices where the recruiting took place. And I offered my services and was told it will take a couple of weeks or so and I will hear from them, which I did.

And I believe it was towards the end of 1940 or the very early part of 1941 that I was informed that my services have been accepted and that I should report to a training center. I believe it was at the time in Ilfracombe, if I'm correct. I think it was Ilfracombe, which was about eight hours by train out of London. I stayed in the training center for quite a while, did service all over England. After I came out of the training center, I was in the artillery.

And in my opinion, coming back occasionally to London, England on furlough, I had to give the utmost credit to the English people to go through what they went through during the German air raids over London and other parts of the country. Every night, for a long period of time, the bombers used to come and do tremendous damage to London and many other places.

I'm trying to remember some dates now. Apparently 18 months or so before the invasion took place of Normandy, I was approached by some people in the military to come in for an interview. It turned out to be with reference of joining the intelligence corps, being transferred for reasons of my knowledge of German, which turned out to be a tremendous asset eventually.

And I was asked whether I am interested, in case I will be sent to the continent, whether I would like to change my name prior to going over there. Because there was this tremendous danger that I could be captured by the German army. And my name being a typical German name, by the name of Dorffman, could do me some harm if I get captured by them.

I was also informed that if everything being well and I get back, that I could always take back my name of Dorffman. And in the meantime, I can choose any name I wanted.

I do not remember today what gave me the idea of changing my name to Donald. Because I had a lot of problems with the name of Donald because my first name is Martin. And I choose my surname as Donald. And many a times people reverse my name to Donald Martin instead of Martin Donald.

To jump the gun a little bit, when I came out of the army, I could have changed my name back. For one reason or another, I didn't do it. I am actually sorry I didn't do it, because that is my real name, Martin Donald. And I should have changed my name back to Dorffman.

My cousin also was in the army in the later years, Leon Dorffman, that I referred to before. He did change his name back to Dorffman. I didn't do it. But I'm afraid it's a little bit too late now.

[LAUGHS]

We were trained with reference to eventually invasion of the continent and which then took place in 1944. And I was attached to a regiment with intelligence. And we ended up at the beaches of Normandy.

I really do not like to talk that much about it. Because unfortunately, we were together with a Canadian division which was almost wiped out on the beaches of Normandy. And terrible, terrible casualties took place.

But in the long run, we succeeded. We worked our way inland. I went through France, eventually through Brussels, into Germany. And one day we found ourselves just outside Hamburg, Germany, ready to fight to take over the city.

We were fortunate. The mayor of Hamburg at that time, against the instructions of Adolf Hitler, surrendered the city. He saw, apparently, the handwriting on the wall. And even so, he was, what we later found out, instructed by the German

high command to fight to the last wall of the city.

He did not do it. And he gave up. And consequently, we were able to go in there and take the city without too much loss of life. Of course, the city had been bombed prior to that for months, like so many other cities in Germany. And it was a tremendous sight to see how much damage was done there.

I have a question that may jostle you up as far as keeping track of time is concerned. And I hope that doesn't happen. But the last we heard about your family in Berlin was when you said goodbye to them at the train station. What, if any, communication did you have with them before you joined the English army? What did you know about what was happening to them?

I had communications from them in the form of some letters, that I kept on sending them letters and they kept on sending me letters. Many of the letters never arrived. But I actually had contact with them until the war broke out with England.

They couldn't write much. And they didn't have to write me much because I knew how much suffering they must have been going through, or gone through. I couldn't help the situation. I knew the war was on and there was nothing I could now do anymore. I was only hoping, and that went through my mind all the time, that by a miracle maybe they would survive, or they would be able to hide, and I would see them after the war again if I survived myself.

We then came into Hamburg. And after a month or six weeks, I was attached with a section of the intelligence corps to a war crime commission, discovering war crimes in Hamburg and making arrests. The first thing I had in my mind was how can I get to Berlin after the war and see what has actually happened to the many members of my family, especially my parents and sister.

I had a very understanding commanding officer. It was a brigadier general. And he was very dear to me. And for some reason, he understood my situation more than anybody else.

In private life, he was an attorney in Leeds, England. And he had a wonderful heart. And he made it possible for me within about 60 days-- now it could have been a little more, just when the war was finished-- to get permission from the British for me to go to Berlin and see what actually happened to my family, if I can find it out, or if I can't.

I do not forget that I finally was able to get to Berlin. The street that I lived on before I left Germany was the Kaiser Strasse 33 Alexanderplatz in Berlin. There was nothing there no more. The street was completely in ruins.

I tried to get as close as I could. Because I knew exactly where the house was standing at the time, which was a small apartment house. And I got as far as the house was concerned. But everything was hanging in ruins and blocked off and barricaded, that nobody was allowed in because it was just too dangerous to get into the house.

I made a lot of inquiries, whatever I could around it. I stayed in Berlin, I think at the time, three days. It was too early. I just could not find out exactly what had happened to my parents. I only knew one thing, that my parents and my sister were taken away from there in 1941 and taken to a concentration camp.

I came back to Hamburg. And as time went on a little bit, I had some connections in Berlin with some Jewish organization. And they looked high and low for my parents, what camp they could have ended up in, and my sister.

And they could not come up with an answer. In the end, I believe, I was given to understand there was a possibility that they ended up in a concentration camp by the name of Theresienstadt. But it has never been proven out 100%.

To go back to my time in Hamburg, which now the war was over, I had, of course, a tremendous hate and misgiving towards any kind of German that I would come across on the street in Germany, in Hamburg because of the terrible tragedy that had taken place where not only so many Jews lost their lives in concentration camps and were tortured, but I also had lost an entire family of maybe 50 people. And none of them were alive anymore, according to what I was able to establish.

I was young at the time. Nothing frightened me. I was only looking for some sort of revenge in a small way. By serving for the crime commission, for the war crime commission, I had the opportunity to be in touch with a tremendous amount of people that, number one, I was looking for, or number two, that came into headquarters willingly only to be too happy to denounce some of their former Nazi friends.

Just to mention how badly and strongly I felt towards the Germans, I could not control my temper in many ways. And at times when I made certain arrests, let my emotion run away with me. As time went on and I, again, try to recollect all my thoughts, I had to come to the conclusion, in order to keep my sanity, that I just have to simmer down. And I have to take the things the way they are because life goes on, either for better or for worse.

I spent approximately 18 months in Hamburg, Germany, interrogating, arresting German war criminals and others. It was a very interesting and satisfying time for me. Because in my own small way, I could show them that they never accomplished what they intended to do in the first place.

Just to mention one very interesting case, I was on duty one evening at headquarters. And a telephone call came through, which was eventually referred to me. And I was given an address in Hamburg where supposingly, the, at that time, German foreign minister von Ribbentrop was hiding out under a different name. I was given to understand that it would be impossible to recognize him, but that he is definitely the person. And we should interrogate him and we will find out that it is von Ribbentrop.

In no time did we leave headquarters and were on our way to the place and address given to us. We broke down the doors of the apartment and found von Ribbentrop in bed. He didn't even deny that it was him.

Of course, being of such high position as this man was at the time, we had to immediately inform the higher British authorities about our capture. And in no time was he taken away and eventually was tried at the Nuremberg trials in Nuremberg, Germany.

Did you talk to him?

I talked to him for approximately not even five minutes. But he more or less gave me to understand that number one, he doesn't want to talk, and number two, he does not deny his identity. So it wasn't a question of identifying him. It was just a question of arresting him and handing him over to the proper authorities for further interrogation, and so forth.

I had a lot of interesting cases in Hamburg, Germany and felt very good that I was able in my own way to get this satisfaction and that God was good to me, that I was alive to take care of certain things that I didn't know how they would end up.

Unfortunately, all my family was gone. Out of the close to 50 people, I did not even find a single relative that was still alive. Most of them, of course, had died or tortured to death in concentration camps. And if any one ever got to anywhere else, I have never been able to find out about it or identifying such person.

I was in the army until late 1946, when I was offered, with my commanding officer, to be transferred to headquarters in Paris, France. The offer was very tempting. I was very fond of this gentleman who, in the meantime, became a full general and wanted to promote me also. And I had to make up my mind within two weeks either to move with him to Paris, France or to ask for my release from the army as I felt that my job was done.

Taking everything into consideration and this part of my life, I spent about six years, close to six years in the army. I figured that if I want to go back into the civilian life and further whatever I intend to do, I have got to get an honorable discharge from the army and go back to London and see what I can do there. And that's exactly what I eventually did.

I had been in touch with the general until he died in 1952. He was one of the finest gentlemen that ever anybody could meet.

What was his name?

His name was General Spence, Richard C. Spence.

I came back to England. I was discharged. I started to work in the fur business. I was very fortunate to meet my wife. And eventually, on June 15th, 1947, we got married.

Unfortunately, my father-in-law died in London. And his dream had always been to come to the United States. And his wife and, of course, my wife, which was his daughter, they did like the idea of at least being able to fulfill his dream and come to the United States.

So in November of 1947, my wife and I first, we came to the United States and we've ever been ever since.

Where was your wife's family from?

I'm sorry?

Where was your wife's family from?

My wife's, on her side, they were all from Poland. But my wife was born in Berlin because some people came from Poland to America, some people went from Poland to Germany. And this family, part of the family went to Germany, and her parents lived in Germany when she was born.

How did they wind up in England?

They had some false papers that they were able to get for money. They had the right connections. And they were able in the last minute in 1939 to get out of Germany and come to England.

I have another question. During the time that you were on the continent, making your way towards Hamburg, did you receive any knowledge or information about the concentration camps? Or did you come across them as you were going east?

The only camp that I saw, and that was after the war, was Bergen-Belsen. And I don't have to tell you what that must have looked like at that time.

Did you see it soon after its liberation?

Two months after its liberation.

And what was still there?

People were still dying at the time. They were so undernourished that they just couldn't be fed back to life. It was impossible, with all the medical help that was available to them then, unfortunately, it was too late.

One of the things that you mentioned before was that throughout the war, or at the end of the war, one of the things that you really wanted the Germans to know loud and clear was that they hadn't accomplished what they had set out to accomplish. What do you think that was? What would you have liked to have been able to tell them at the end that they hadn't been able to do?

Well, they intended to conquer the world. There's no doubt in my mind. That madman thought he could do everything. And in the beginning, it looked very prosperous for him. But very fortunate for us, it never happened.

And you were living proof that that hadn't happened. Because you had survived it and, in effect, had really been a part of the process of stopping it, it seems.

Absolutely. And I was very proud of it, that I was given the chance to do so.

Yeah.

How did you feel towards the people you grew up with, the Germans that you grew up with?

I never saw anyone again.

Really?

Never. After I left Germany in early 1939, I never saw anyone again. The Germans and just a couple of people that were able to go to different countries at the time from Berlin, I was able-- especially a good school friend that I had in 1934.

He was able, in the last minute, to get out to Belgium. And then eventually he made his way to America. And we were happy to see each other coincidentally again in New York.

But with reference to any of the people that I grew up with or went to school with, grew up with would not be the right word because it was in the early days. And they started already at the time in 1933, actually, to slight towards the Jews. There is no question about it. So I didn't have many German friends that I associated with. But I never saw any one of these people again.