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Harry, we would like you to start to tell us your full name, your place of birth, the names of your parents, and if there are any sisters or brothers.

All right. I'm Harry Adler. I was born in Germany, in Berlin, in 1924. And my father was Abraham Adler. My mother was Malka Adler. Both Mom and Dad were originally from Poland. And they had spent some time in Austria after World War I.

And by 1924, when I was born, they were well-established in Germany. And my brother Paul is three years older than I am. He was born in 1921. I have no sisters. So we're basically two brothers. And Paul is still alive and doing well. He lives in New York City.

What kind of schooling did you have there in Berlin?

Well, in Germany, the first thing that I remember, really, is at the age of seven. That's my first recollection of being alive, for all intents and purposes. I tried to find the little bits of things that I want to remember before that age. But I'm having a hard time.

At that particular time, those were the first days of school in Germany. And at that particular time, we were living in a little place called Bad Freienwalde, which is just east of Berlin. It's now the Eastern Zone.

And at that particular time, Dad was in the piano business. He had a piano factory, called the Adler Piano Factory. And it was a pretty well-known piano establishment. At that time, the upright pianos were coming into style. And he had a fairly good business going, from what I understand, and told by my mother that was so.

So schooling, is that what you're asking? The first schooling would be the early grades at age seven. And after that, as we progress into the story, I'll tell you more about it, education, and friends, and then what education I had in the United States.

Did you go to a public school?

Oh, just very shortly.

Sure.

Because I was seven years old in 1932. And in 1932, the Nazis burned part of the factory. I still remember the fire. It was a very impressive kind of a thing. I was a kid. I was very impressed by all the commotion and what have you. That I remember well. I guess you remember those things better than others.

And in 1932, we left Germany. We all packed, and did our thing, and went to Paris, France. So my schooling really began, if you will, in Paris. So I went to what they call the Ã©cole communale, which is the standard-- what do you call it in the United States, the early grades?

Primary.

Primary grades. And went to high school in France, in Paris. And those are the things, those are the years that I remember, from 1932 on, really. I don't remember anything before then.

In France, how did your dad earn a living?

My dad was an apprentice furrier from the Austrian days, when he was a youngster. He was an apprentice furrier. I mean, he had a craft. And he decided that he was going to be in the fur business in Paris.

There was a facility for that because in the fur business, most of the exchanges are done in Yiddish. You didn't have to

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have a command of French. Or it really wasn't important. And he was able to function quite well.

So we had this workshop in France, which was, by the way, the same place that we lived. Years ago, we had these very cavernous apartments. You had seven or eight rooms and two of the rooms or three of the rooms were converted to a workshop. I remember that.

For years, I remember the smell of opossum [LAUGHS] in the house. We got up in the morning, we went to sleep. But he did well in Paris. And I went to school. We sort of settled.

We were fairly comfortable in Paris from 1932, let us say, till about 1939, when the fracas really started. And I went through the normal French schooling, all the fun that youngsters had, you know.

It wasn't too much part of the Jewish community. I don't remember us being very involved in the Jewish community. Didn't have much of a Jewish background. We did have the Shabbat meal. But I didn't go to cheder, per se. I really didn't. I'm surprised I didn't now, in retrospect.

You had no education?

Very little education in this direction. And when it was time for bar mitzvah, I got caught up in the war years. So I really missed that. I pass no judgment. I mean, I don't know whether it's good, or bad, or indifferent. I am not really concerned about it to any great extent. But it's interesting that, now that I think about it, there was no shul involved. And we didn't belong to a shul. But perhaps in Europe, it isn't like it is here.

Yes. Perhaps because you were resettled. You were not natives.

Yeah, but that's not the point. I don't think that in Europe, we have the same setup that you have here in this country. The shuls are primarily little synagogues that are supported by the local people, you know, the local neighborhood. We don't have these large edifices that we have here, where you have to have a building program and where you have to contribute to these bits. They're really not on the scale that we have them here.

So I do remember going to the synagogue. I remember Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah. We certainly did. But they were always small shuls. They were always small, local synagogues in some basement, some apartment, some place where they had the minyan. And it was always on a small scale. And I think, in the main, except for some very large-- there was a very large synagogue in Paris, certainly. But the local people tended to go to smaller shuls.

So I went to I went to school, went to public school. And most of my education is French, like the classic education. The trunk of my education is certainly French. It's not English, by any means.

Did you ever feel an outsider in public school? Or did you blend in?

No. I blended in without any problems. In France, there was no antisemitism, per se. And if there were undertones of it, I was too young to really feel them. I guess I was a kid just like anybody, like any other kid, and blended right in. I was an average student, enjoyed public school, had fun.

And this went on till 1939, when things really became a little heated. First of all, in 1939, my father decided to go to Poland. I think it was in '38.

He had gotten an arrangement with some importers who required goose feathers. At that time, the shuttlecock was very popular, the shuttlecock in badminton. They used to make the balls with little feathers on top. You know, not the round ball that you play tennis with, but there was a little rubber ball. And attached to it was a bunch of feathers. So that flew. That was the bird that you played back and forth when you play badminton.

And at that time, they used to use a specific grade of feathers that came from a goose. And where else but in Poland do you find geese? So my father, all of a sudden, decided, this was it. He was going to corner the market in geese feathers.

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And my mother, who had the connection, was going to be the sales lady.

We had connections in London. We had connections in Paris. And there was a large market for that. And my father was convinced that he was going to be the king of goose feathers. So Mom and Dad went to Poland and settled in Poland sort of semi-temporarily.

And my brother was shipped off to London. And so was I, for a period of time, where my father had a brother. And it was decided that Paul and I were going to go to what they call a private school and that the British call a public school. They got the roles reversed over there. The public school is really private school.

And there we were, both Paul and I, what-- how old was I in 1939, 14? 13. So there you have Paul and I in Slough, in England, in this public school, very British. We wore these blazers with a medallion here. And we had the little beanie hats and knitted tie. And we played cricket.

Did you have a command of the English language?

No. But at that age, it isn't difficult. You learn that real quickly. And amongst the kids, you learned to communicate real fast. And we do have, both Paul and I, my brother, have a facility for languages. We speak French, and English, and German fluently. We have a phonetic ear for it. So it wasn't all that trying.

Some people have an accent for years and don't lose it. And other people are able to speak fluently without any traces of an accent. I would suppose that I speak fairly well. And if anything, it's the intonation, the way I speak, the manner in which I do the sentencing that is strange to the average American person.

So anyway, where were we? We were in England. And we were playing cricket, right. And we ate the English food. And I was really-- I was unhappy in that school. I didn't like the food. I didn't [like the environmnet. My brother felt comfortable. I wasn't.

So it was decided that I was going to be farmed out from England, from London, back to Paris, and to live with a friend of my mother while my mother and dad were in Poland fooling around with the geese feathers.

And so I came to live with this Russian family. And they were-- I remember her name, Mrs. Litvak. Mrs. Litvak was Jewish, of course. But she always considered herself sort of as a piece of royalty. She was a White Russian, in the true sense of the word, very proper lady.

And of course, you've got to put yourself back in, what was it, 1939, shortly before the war. She was living in an apartment in Paris with her two sons and her husband, who was retired.

And I got to live with that family for about a year. And they spoke Russian amongst themselves. So here I was, with a smattering of Russian. I can understand a little bit of Russian as a result of that experience. I don't speak it well. But I found myself alone again without my parents, living with that family, fairly comfortable, no problem.

And then, of course, 1940. The Germans invaded France. My father and mother just barely extricated themselves from Poland and are able to come back to Paris.

Don't ask me how, but there they are. I'm not clear on how that came about, whether they caught the last train out or whether they were-- Hitler had invaded Poland before that, in 1939. So they must have been the last one out. The dates are a little confusing to me.

But anyway, here we are, the three of us-- my mother, and my father, and myself-- in Paris, France, when the war really started in Paris in France. Paul remained in England.

And I didn't see Paul, my brother, until 1943, when I met him again in England, when he was an English soldier in the RAF, and I was an American soldier. So I didn't see Paul from '39 on, for a period of five years.

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Were you able to make contact when you were in Britain to find him?

Well, no, we knew where he was.

Oh, you knew where he was.

And Britain was an open country. It was no problem. We knew he was in school. And we knew he was with my uncle in London. We felt comfortable. We felt that Paul was quite safe in England. So when France was defeated, they occupied the northern part of France.

And Mother, and Dad, and myself, we ran away to the southern part of France. And we holed up in Marseille on the Mediterranean for a while. We were trying to get a ship out to the United States. That's easier said than done.

And I've got to preface this by saying that my mother had her father in Fall River, Massachusetts. Now, how did that come about? My grandfather, my mother's father, left Poland at the beginning of the First World War, going back to 1914. And he left a wife and two children in Poland.

The idea was that he was going to come back and pick them up. But the war started. And he was stuck in the United States. And his wife and the children were stuck in Poland.

My grandmother died in 1916 from typhus fever, leaving my mother with her younger sister. And in 1918, after the First World War ended, my mother shipped her youngest sister to Fall River, Massachusetts, where my grandfather had settled.

So on one hand, in 1940, you find us, my mother, and my father, and myself in Southern France, my brother Paul in England. My grandfather in Massachusetts remarried with other children and my aunt, I guess my aunt, my mother's sister in Fall River, Massachusetts.

So what do we do in Marseille? In Marseille, we try to come to an American consulate to see if we could get visas to come to the United States. But things don't move that fast.

We had made no attempts to get a visa earlier. I don't know if my father didn't realize the political implications of Hitler. And even after the fall of France, I don't think he quite grasped what was happening. I suppose many people didn't. It's hindsight. It's easy to say today what it was.

But many people always considered, even after the war started, that this madman was going to die, or the things were going to go away, or things were going to straighten themselves out, and life would continue. He never realized that the catastrophe that was about to come at us.

Anyway, the Germans decided that they were going to occupy all of France. Remember, there was a period of time where MarÃ©chal PÃ©tain decided he was going to run the Vichy government. And Hitler never trusted him. So he decided to occupy all of France.

We were fortunate enough, at that particular time, to get one of the ships that was leaving for Lisbon. And we said to ourselves, let's go from Marseille to Lisbon, which was at that time a free country, a neutral country. And from Lisbon, we were going to do our thing about getting papers to come to the United States.

So we embarked with a ship, a French vessel-- I don't remember the name-- to go to Lisbon from Marseille, which means we would have had to go through the Mediterranean, through the Strait of Gibraltar, into Portugal, into Lisbon.

We had approximately 30 families or 40 families on board, maybe more than that-- I can't remember the number-- doing very much the same thing, running away. We had families with children. We were already the teenagers. I was already a teenager at that particular time. But there were little kids amongst the families.

And we stopped temporarily in, let's see, Algiers, which is in Africa. The boat stopped to reprovision or whatever. Then it stopped in Oran, which is also part of Algeria, and finally got to Casablanca, Morocco.

And in Casablanca, Morocco, the Vichy French government issued an edict that all French vessels which were flying the French flag were to remain in quarantine in French ports. And if you remember, Casablanca, Morocco was a colony of the French.

And there we were in Morocco, not able to continue. The ship unloaded. And the Vichy French authorities in North Africa in Casablanca really didn't know what to do with us. They finally figured out that there was a Foreign Legion camp inland, almost at the edge of the Sahara Desert. It's a place called Oued Zem.

And I remember it like today. It was nothing but a sandy, dusty, hot outpost in the middle of nowhere, where the Foreign Legion had a bunch of barracks. And they decided that they were going to put us in those barracks.

So here were these people with their belongings, and with their releases, and schlepping all their worldly belongings into this godforsaken place, in Oued Zem. And we organized life as best as we could. There was rudimentary. It had barracks facilities and bunks. And some had double bunks. And some had single bunks. And the French really didn't do much to make us very comfortable. We had to make ourselves comfortable.

Did you have any sanitation facilities?

We had sanitation facilities, yes. There were toilets. And there was a kitchen. But like I said, what can you expect from a French Foreign Legion barrack in the middle of the desert? It really was right on the outskirt of the Sahara desert in the middle of nowhere.

The war started to go sour for the Germans in North Africa. And the Vichy French had really no great desire to keep us. They really didn't know what to do with us. So they asked, who are the people that have papers, possibilities of going further? Where is there a chance for them to get out?

They really didn't want to feed us. They really didn't want to keep us. They had no purpose in doing that-- certainly weren't going to exterminate us, because that wasn't the ballgame.

We indicated to the commandant at that time that we had a grandfather in Fall River Massachusetts. And if we were to go to another country, if we had an opportunity to get out, we would make tracks for the United States. So he let us out.

And Mom, and Dad, and myself, and some of the other people who had visas to go to other places, we went to Casablanca. We stayed in Casablanca for, I would say, about four to five months.

The year is 1941, late '40, beginning of 1941. And here we are in Casablanca, which is really a very lovely city and away from the war, if you will, waiting for some ship to come in to the Port of Casablanca to take us to Lisbon, which is, again, like I said, a free port, where we could hole up for a short period of time.

As long as we knew that the ultimate goal was to go to the United States, we felt comfortable that we would eventually get there. And sure enough, we did have a Portuguese ship that came along and took us and a number of the families that had visas from Casablanca to Lisbon.

So Mom, Dad, and myself, we were in Lisbon, which is, again, a very lovely city, like a travelogue. [LAUGHS] And in Lisbon, we went to the American consulate. That was an embassy, actually.

And we said, my mother said, my father is an American citizen living in the Fall River, Massachusetts. We want to emigrate to the United States. This is an emergency. And we need the visas now. And sure enough, we got the visas to go to the United States.

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When we were in Lisbon, of course, we called my brother, Paul, and my uncle in London to find out if everything was OK. And sure enough, things were well. So we actually extricated ourselves from the war relatively well.

So we arrived in the United States. We arrived in New York in 1941. I would say it was the month of October or November. Pearl Harbor was what, December 7, 1941? So we arrived shortly before Pearl Harbor.

And we went directly to Fall River, Massachusetts, where my grandfather lived. My grandfather had a junkyard. That's what he started with. It was a very large junkyard. I had fun looking the place over.

At that time, they were still buying up rags from peddlers. They had cottons, and rayon, and linen. And he had a sorting arrangement. And he had a big bale press. And he used to press all the cotton together and all the rayon together. And today, it doesn't mean anything. But I was most impressed.

The peddler used to bring in metal-- copper, and tin, and what have you. And again, they separated the material and pressed it all out into these bales. So he had remit. What's that?

Really? Was your grandfather greet you as open up?

Oh, yes, my grandfather was happy to see his daughter again after all these years. And we were introduced to his wife. It wasn't a new wife anymore. I mean, he got married, I think, in 1920.

And we saw his son, his son, Yossi. Yossi was a big man. Boy, he was big. I was a little fellow. But this guy was a giant man. At that time, he was in high school. And he wasn't much older-- as a matter of fact, I think he was my age, if not perhaps a year younger.

So when I arrived as a greenhorn, here was this guy that had a car. And he was driving in high school. And he had that Chevrolet and all the girls around him. To me, this was a revelation. He was a liberated kid already.

Anyway, so we remained in Fall River, Massachusetts for about a month and a half, two months. We decided what we wanted to do, where we were going to settle. And Dad, of course, decided to go back to New York and try the fur business again, which was his trade.

So we all wound up in New York, back in New York, in, I would say, 1942, if we're trying to put this in some chronological order. In 1942, then, I went to high school. I had a smattering of English.

I didn't have too much trouble filling in the gaps. I graduated high school at night, worked during the day with Dad. And I graduated, I would say, late in 1942. And it was George Washington High School.

We were living at that point, at that time, in Upper Manhattan, New York, where the rest of the refugees were. And a lot of people came in at that time. Everybody spoke German.

And my father and mother didn't feel too bad. They were comfortable. The language came to them slowly. But they managed to do well. Dad opened up a shop, where he was making fur coats.

We also had a retail store in the Bronx, New York, where we settled after. After we finally went from Manhattan to the Bronx, we opened up a regional store, kept the factory. And one of the reasons I graduated so quickly is because the school accepted credits, which I had from my French education. And they were really good about it. So I was able to graduate very quickly in 1942. And I guess I was all of 17 or something like that.

So now comes the war at a rapid pace. And I am asked to register for the draft and all that good stuff. And I was in the army. I was in the army in '42. End of '42, I was in the Army. Went through basic training in Kentucky, then in Abilene, Texas.

Finally, wound up, would you believe, in Phoenix, Arizona, 1942. And from Phoenix, Arizona, went to what they called

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the Desert Training Center, which was down in Yuma.

And in Yuma, they ended basic training. And I became part of a field hospital. The closest thing to that today would be Mash, if you remember the Mash episode. That would be the type of unit that I was attached to. And I became what would be perhaps the equivalent of Klinger. I became a company. I became a company. What do you call it? A company clerk.

Servant.

A company clerk. So here I was, speaking English, and French, and German fluently, working as a company clerk in a Mash unit in Yuma, Arizona. And we went through field trainings. And we dug trenches in the desert. And we had tanks going over the foxholes.

And people came to us with broken arms, and broken legs, and all this stuff. And we fixed them best we could. And I wanted to transfer because I felt I was in the wrong spot. First of all, this is very hot, very uncomfortable. And we were going on hikes in gas masks and all that nonsense.

And frankly, I prepared myself for going to the Far East. I thought the unit was not going to go to Europe. I thought the unit was going to go to Asia because of the Desert Training Center and the hot climate there.

I found a buddy of mine by sheer accident. One day, he was on leave. And I met him, I don't remember where. He says, what you doing? I tell him where I am. And he happened to be in the 29th Division, which was stationed back East, somewhere in Pennsylvania.

And he was an interpreter. And he was saying that his group needed interpreters very badly. They were ready to go overseas. And it was important for them to have somebody that spoke languages. And what were you doing as a company clerk in a Mash unit in Yuma?

And he managed to arrange with his commanding officer to arrange for my transfer to the 29th Division. So if you know anything about the army, this is a complex piece of machinery when you ask one corporal to be transferred from a Mash unit in part of one army to another army group someplace in another part of the world or in another part of the country.

So the applications go up to divisions corps headquarters, and army, and from army, over to the other army, and down again. That's the way the transfer works. It's a lot of paperwork that gets shuffled around.

But in this process, I got stuck. My application got stuck in a corps headquarters, a Third Corps headquarters, with a colonel who-- his name was Maroney-- who read this application. And he says, I need that man. I don't want him to go down any further. So we're going to transfer him here.

So lo and behold, I got a notification one day that Corporal Harry Adler was going to be transferred to the Fifth Corps headquarters, which was, at that particular time, some place in Pennsylvania, ready to go overseas. And overseas meant England at that time. The year is 1943.

In 1943, here I arrive at the Fifth Corps headquarters. And I become attached to what was then called the G2 section-- excuse me, the G3 section of the corps headquarters. It's a very small section.

It had a colonel, a couple of captains. It had a company clerk, and had a master sergeant, and another couple of people running around, and drivers, and what have you, and Harry Adler, who became the colonel's driver and the interpreter with the rank of sergeant in arms, [? Yekkes, ?] things got better.

Colonel Maroney is a little short fella. He's a West Pointer. And he was in the same class with Eisenhower, gung-ho type of a person. Going to do his schtick. And we, would you believe, wound up about two weeks or three weeks after I got to the corps headquarters to a staging area to go to England.

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So it was Christmas of 1943 that I was on a ship with the corps headquarters with my small group going to England. And I arrive in January. I arrive in England. And we get billeted at the Fifth Corps headquarters in Taunton, England.

And all of a sudden, it turns out that we are the group that plans for the invasion of France. When I was there, when I got there, it was because we were sequestered. In other words, we were cut off from the rest of the country because we were doing work that was very delicate.

We couldn't blabber, couldn't get out. So for a period of about four months, we were stuck in Taunton. And we were analyzing the reports that came from the free French in France. We were getting reports all the time about the conditions. How are we doing timewise, by the way?

Plenty of time.

So we were getting reports about the conditions in France. And we were recording all this information. We wanted to know what condition the beaches were in, who the mayor was, who the people were. In other words, we had a very thorough documentation of the towns that we were planning to invade, if you will, before the invasion.

We created what was called a civil affairs section. Remember that when we arrived in France as soldiers, we were not an occupying power. The game plan was to turn over the towns as they became free over to the free French, who were then going to start the administration of the towns going again.

What we were was an advanced echelon. Our function was, at that particular time, to go with the front line and turn over the various towns that were part of that frontline to special groups, special detachments that were trained in England to begin the civil affairs operations in those towns as they became occupied.

And we had, in England, detachments that were studying the conditions of those various towns as I was giving it to them, as the reports came in. So a detachment for the town of Caen, for instance, which was one of the towns that we were going to occupy after the initial invasion, we had a group of, I remember, some 40 people that were sitting in England, studying the conditions of that town. Who was the mayor? Who was going to be imprisoned? Who were the collaborators? Who were the people that we had to find?

And as the war progressed, more and more information was turned over to these people. The corps headquarters landed on the Normandy beaches on D-Day plus one. That was one day after the initial shock wave.

And the colonel and I were on the beach. We drove off the pontoons with that Jeep. And we set up headquarters about mile and a half in on the beach, mile and a half in. We stuck the tents up and put up our little thing.

And we started to call in one of the detachments for one of the little towns that we had taken over. And I can't remember the name of that town. And for a while, we were stuck there. The front didn't enlarge to any great extent at the very beginning. We were consolidating the front.

And we were bringing in more and more equipment before we made the push inland. When we had enough ammunition and we had enough troops landed on the beach, we then started to enlarge the war.

The Germans were not prepared for us. Not to say that we were so best prepared, because the confusion was fantastic. But there we were on the beach, ready to face the Germans. We constantly remained with the front line, not in a shooting capacity, but more or less in an intelligence-gathering capacity more than anything else.

And our detachment, the colonel, and the captains, and a couple of people that were with us stayed with the front line as a detachment of the Fifth Corps headquarters. Our job was to make sure that the detachments that we were calling in were ready to function.

As the front expanded, we sent back information on the various towns as to just how badly damaged they were. So when the groups in the detachment came to take over, they already knew the condition of the town. The water tower was

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destroyed.

Some of the houses were down, the extent of the damage. Was there drinking water? Was there a possibility of life to continue real quickly after the front passed? So when they arrived, they knew what was happening. But again, we were not an occupying power. We were civil affairs. We became military government only when we crossed into Germany.

So our detachment was one of the first detachments to go into Paris. We were one of the first GIs into Paris. Actually, the American soldier was not involved in taking Paris. We gave that covet, if you will, to the French.

The French General Leclerc, part of an armored division, French division, was placed in position to go into Paris. They were the first to go into Paris. But we as civil affairs officers were able to go into Paris with them. So we were part of that first group to arrive in Paris. It was quite a celebration. But we stayed in Paris only a short period of time the war went on.

And before we go in end of '44, I would say, here we are in Germany. There, our roles changed. And we became an occupying power, rather than a friendly helper.

And there, we had close cooperation with the intelligence facility. We were very close to G2, which we were G3. G2 is the intelligence section. And there, we made sure that we had, how would I say, occupying powers. We did it differently.

Did you actually see action there?

Yes, we saw action there, yeah, actually. I crossed the Remagen Bridge, which was the first bridge that broke the dam into Germany, which was a railroad bridge which the Germans did not manage to destroy across the Rhine there, over the Remagen Bridge, which was the first bridge that was.

And we crossed into Germany. And then we became an occupying power. Those detachments that we had to take over these towns were now in power. They were the law.

And we didn't turn that over to the Germans. We actually administered the town. And we had intelligence information. We knew who was who. Again, who was a Nazi, who was not a Nazi.

And we found stragglers, Germans that had left their units and had tried to go back into civilian life, took off their uniforms. We found those. It was an interesting part of the military career, I would say. I found a general that was hiding under a pile of rubble. We put him away. And we worked closely with the G2 section, which was the intelligence gathering section of the army.

The connection with the Holocaust came when we were in Weimar. And the Third Army-- I was part of Second Army. The Third Army, which was Patton's army, really, it was on a roller thing.

They were really on a drive into Germany and had passed the town of Weimar. And they had discovered the situation in Buchenwald. And when I heard about Buchenwald, I decided to go and see what it was. And I took leave from the colonel. Actually, the colonel let me go for a period of a day and a half. And I said, Colonel, I'd like to see this.

By yourself then?

By myself, yes. I had the Jeep. And I went into Weimar, which was really not my sector. It was part of the Third Army. And we were Second Army. And I crossed over for intents and purposes. And of course, I had a pass, able to go.

And I got into Buchenwald, I would say, a day, perhaps a day and a half after it was taken. And what I saw there, of course, is the kind of things that you see in the movies today, and the things that we see on television, which is still an unbelievable sight.

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But I saw that. And I saw the bodies, which had to be gathered in mounds with bulldozers. There was sanitation to be concerned with. It was a terrible sign-- cadavers all over the place.

It takes a long time for a camp to be cleaned up like that. This, just Buchenwald, was a very large area. And of course, I saw the facilities that we were setting up to make sure that those people that were alive were given food-- not too much food because they were groping for anything they could lay their hands onto. And then we had to make sure that sanitary facilities were being put back into place.

Of course, I had no part of this. I was an observer. And I can only tell you that what I saw was terrible. It was awful, spectacle. And I stayed in the camp for a period of about six or seven hours.

I saw that things were being put into place slowly, but with some degree of intelligence. I mean, we knew what we were doing. And we realized what had to be done. I don't know that we were prepared for this. I don't think the army was prepared for what they saw because that was for intents and purposes, the first camp that we saw.

And so they had to put their heads together and say, now, what do we do with this mess? How do we handle this? They had to bring in food. They had to bring in the bulldozers. They had to bring in nurses and doctors. And they mobilized internally to do the job. As far as I'm concerned, they did it well. But the mass of humanity is overwhelming. the real problem.

And that, again, is the connection with the Holocaust. I couldn't stay. I had to go on. The war was calling. So I had to go back to my unit and continued throughout Germany.

As the war ended, I found myself in Czechoslovakia, in Pilsen. I didn't see another camp. That's really the only one that I saw. And I ended the war in Pilsen. The war ended, I guess, in '45. It was April or May. I don't remember what month.

We walked. The Americans folded back from Leipzig and from Pilsen, from that entire area, gave it back to the Russians. And for a while there, I was attached to a detachment in Berchtesgaden, which was Hitler's hangout.

Berchtesgaden.

Yeah. And I was there for about two weeks or so before I had enough points accumulated to go home. I came back in November of 1945, went home, and started a normal life again in 1945 in New York. And that's really the story.

You might also tell us when you started life, what you did.

What happened in '45?

Yes.

Well, in '45, Dad was in the fur business. Mom and myself, I went back into the fur business with him. I went back to college. I went to New York University. I did it again at night.

Did you have any GI Bill of Rights?

Oh, yes, I did, yeah, bill of Rights, to go to school as a soldier, ex-soldier. And I remained with Dad and Mom in the business until 1954. Dad died in 1954. And we liquidated the fur business after he died. And Paul, by the way, came back also from England and joined us in the United States. So the family was reunited again in 1945, 1946.

Was Paul safe from the war all this time in England?

Paul was in the RAF. He was a navigator. And he flew the hump in Burma. So he had his moments. It wasn't all peaceful. But his war was in Asia, rather than in Europe.

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By the way, when I was in England, in Taunton, before the invasion, I did have a chance to see my brother Paul. I saw him again. And then I saw him again when he came to the United States. And I think he came in '46.

So Dad died in '54. I was married in '51. I met Ella in New York. And so we liquidated the fur business after dad died. And I was sort of on my own. I wanted to see what other occupation I could find besides the fur business.

I didn't like the fur business. It wasn't my bag. It gave us a living, you know. But it wasn't something that I wanted to do as a steady career. I was a cutter. I was a fur cutter. I was making pretty good money. I was part of the union. And I knew the mechanics well.

Were you doing this while you were going to university?

Yeah.

Yeah.

I made lots of money. I was earning then something like $250-300 a week. As a fur cutter, I was cutting up mink coats. I was good at it too. But I always thought that the fur business was not a means to a future. I always wanted to have something else.

So after we closed down the business, I decided to go into the travel business. I wanted to be a travel agent. I enjoyed traveling. That's what I wanted to do. My brother, by the way, had already gotten himself settled in the travel business. And he did quite well.

And I joined another company. And I got myself a job for-- I think it was $65 a week. And I became what is called a hotel clerk, made reservations for a wholesaler, people that make group travel.

So in about two weeks, I got to know all the hotels-- class A, class B, class C. And I went to the boss. I said, I know all this information. I want a raise. He threw me out. So that was the end of my career in the travel business.

Then I dabbled it a little bit in import-export in the toy business in New York. And finally, I met a man who started us off on a crazy adventure back in Europe again.

Let's see. Let me try to put that together for you. 1959, I meet a guy who was an officer in the Navy. And he put together what is called the Navy Ship Stores Afloat. What is that? The Navy Ship Stores Afloat are a PX--

On the ship.

--on board a ship. That's a naval ship store afloat. So if you were on an aircraft carrier and you wanted to buy a Kleenex, you went to the store that was on that ship that was afloat. And he had gotten some very good connections with a fellow by the name of Hans Ludwig [? Schmetzer. ?] This is after the war, remember, an ex-colonel in the Luftwaffe. I think he was a Nazi. Who now knows?

Anyway, they germinated an idea that went a little bit like this-- the American tourist that's abroad is entitled to bring back, at that particular time, $500 worth of duty-free merchandise, five bottles of liquor without paying any duty when he's physically outside of the United States. Today, the law has changed a little bit.

And there were then a number of duty-free shops where you could buy the cashmere sweaters, the liquor, the Swiss watches, the German radios. You could even import an automobile for intents and purposes.

If a family was going overseas and with the right guy, bring back an automobile, he would have $2,000 worth of duty-free. He wouldn't have to pay any duty on it. He could bring in a whole set of Rosenthal chinaware, for that matter.

Whether you had it under your arm or whether you could have it shipped, it made no difference. Actually, due to the

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fact that you declared it when you came back to the United States, you were entitled to bring in what you bought overseas duty-free to the extent that you had an allowance.

And the idea was that we should perhaps put together a catalog of duty free merchandise that we would hand to the departing resident, that person that's going overseas.

Let us say, for argument's sake, that you, Magda went from Phoenix, Arizona to Mexico City. And while you were in Mexico City, you saw this catalog. And while you were there, you saw, in the catalog, a set of Rosenthal chinaware that sells in the department store here for $500. And you could buy that, shipped to your home, for $225.

By sheer dint of the fact that you were outside of the continental limits of the United States and had this duty-free allowance, you could bring that in by simply paying us for the merchandise and paying for the shipping, no duty. And duty on chinaware at that time was pretty heavy. And that's why the set in the store would cost $500 because the duty was normal channels.

So with this idea in mind, I went to Geneva, Switzerland, where we spent a year, in 1960, and Ella, and myself, and the kids. And we put together a Swiss company. And we put together such a catalog. And I went all over Europe to arrange for the packaging of all these things that we were shipping back to the United States.

So if you were going to Mexico City, your travel agent would give you such a catalog. And such a catalog would have all the goodies that you would normally see in a duty-free store. And when you came back, you declared that while you were abroad, you bought chinaware, or a cashmere sweater, or a fancy Swiss watch, or a sewing machine, whatever it is that you wanted, and that this was part of your unaccompanied baggage.

You would send us the money in Switzerland. And I would take your American dollars and would convert them in Swiss francs to buy the sewing machine. I would arrange for Elna, which is a sewing machine make, to package such a sewing machine and send it to you in Phoenix, Arizona. That package would arrive at your door. You would not have to pay any duty. And that's what you did.

So I arranged throughout Europe to package all these sewing machines and 92-piece set of Rosenthal chinaware in a package that they made-- of course, that they made so it could go parcel post to the United States. We had somebody in Hong Kong doing the jade and all the goodies. And we were in Scotland. And we got cashmere sweaters.

We went into the liquor business. We arranged for duty-free liquor to be shipped to the returning resident. We had a duty-free port in Amsterdam, where all the liquor came together. The scotch came from Scotland. The French cognac came from France. We were taking the bourbon from the United States and bringing it to--

To Switzerland.

--no, to Amsterdam, where we had a duty-free shop, where you had the duty-free storage area. And when you gave us an order that called for a bottle of scotch, and for a bottle of cognac, and for a bottle of RÃ©my Martin, all the things were in that place. And we could put it all in a carton.

And we shipped the carton to the United States. The funny part, the bourbon, which came from the United States, came from Kentucky to the free port and went from the free port back there. That's the way it worked.

Anyway, so I did that for two years.

Were you successful?

We were successful. Yes, we did quite well. But then I decided I wanted to come back to the United States because my kids were growing up. We were expatriates. We felt out of sorts a little bit. I wanted to have some kind of a more stable background.

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This business was a great business. But it was sort of a screwy situation. I was always afraid that somewhere along the line, because the balance of payments was going in the disfavor of this country, that they were going to tighten up the restrictions, that people that were going overseas would not have the $500 duty-free allowance anymore. I always thought that this was just a quirk in time and that it was time to get out.

So we came back to the United States. And since we had all these connections with overseas people, people that were in were in the army, we decided to go into the automobile business.

How did that work? The returning GI was entitled, at that time, to bring back a European car as part of his unaccompanied baggage. While he was over there, he could bring back a Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, what have you, free of duty at a price, delivered in a port in New York after he returned for considerably less than what he would be paying if he went to a normal dealer and say, I want to buy this car. It was probably a saving of approximately 30%.

We made arrangements to have salesmen go, for instance, to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. The Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean had about 120,000 people at one time. It rotated four times a year after the war.

Imagine these large aircraft carriers that have, I don't know, 60,000 people or something like that, 50,000, unlimited number of people on these big ships. And they would make the calls on these various ports. They were in Toulon. They were in Marseilles. They were in Nice. They were in Genoa, you know. And the fleet was very visible. The Sixth Fleet was in the Mediterranean. And the Seventh Fleet was in the Hong Kong area.

So we had salesmen going onboard these ships, selling cars, which the kids never saw. And we had catalogs. Would you like to buy a Mercedes-Benz? Would you like to buy a Bentley? Would you like to buy a Volkswagen? And we then went ahead and arranged for all these companies to ship the cars.

And we sold a pot full of cars. We sold Jaguars. We sold Peugeots. We sold Fiats. And the kids, after they came back from their tour of duty, would go to the port. And they would be advised that their car is coming in. And we made it possible.

I left the company in 1963, '64. Then I went into the drapery business in Houston, Texas. I always found something else to do. I was never concerned about what tomorrow brought because we always had a few dollars. There was no problem.

But I changed careers. And so we were in Houston for a while. And we went into the drapery business. And we got into the schmatta business. Did quite well. And then since Houston expanded, we decided to go into a broader market.

And we decided to go into Phoenix and Los Angeles.. And so that's how I came to Phoenix. I came back to Phoenix in the drapery business. 1964, I guess, is when I came here, and remained in the drapery business here-- in the wholesale drapery business, not that retail level.

We used to sell the drapery material to retailers. We were converters of textiles. We took raw material, we wove it, dyed it, printed it, sold it by the yard to the retailer. I don't know if you remember Oscar [? LeGrand. ?]

Yeah.

Remember Oscar? Oscar, who is no longer here, was a very big customer of our. We used to sell a lot of the drapery material to Oscar and a lot of people in the Valley still. The name of the company was Fabrica. And I had partners. We did quite well.

And then we had some words. There was problems in the company. I was unhappy. I decided to strike on my own. And I opened up the little Wall System store that you see in 1966, Christmas of 1966, and have remained with that ever since.

Of course, that business also evolved from things that you hang on the wall, you know, shelves, and cabinets, and what

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have you to a factory facility, where we make our own furniture-- you know, tables, cabinets, and what. And now, we're the distributors of Murphy beds. And we have a lot of stores in California. And we do better in California than we do in Arizona. So that keeps us happy and keeps us busy.

Ella, on her end, came to Phoenix and went back to school. Kids grew up here, went to college. Ella got a degree at ASU and then a Master's degree. And she started her career in 1970, I would say 1974. She worked as a social worker. Well, you've heard the story. She worked as a social worker for 11 years or so before she retired. That's basically the end of my story.

And you have how many children?

I have Diane, who is in Israel now. She's been in Israel now for seven years. I have two grandchildren-- a little girl that's going on four and a little boy that's a a little one-year-old now. They live on a moshav in Israel, quite comfortable. I'm very happy the way they've organized their lives.

And I have a son, Alan, who's the big achiever. He's a Harvard Graduate. He's living in Santa Monica, living it up, comfortable. He's married, no children. We're happy with the way life has gone for us. I really am. I'll say that. Things have worked out for us fairly well.

And you don't mind living in Phoenix?

I don't mind living in Phoenix. I've got used this. It's good living.

Give us a comparison as to how Phoenix looks for you in '64 as opposed to the time when you were stationed.

You're talking '42. You're talking '42.

Oh, '42, excuse me. Yeah.

Well, I must say that as a soldier, you don't have the same priority. You don't have the same things. You don't look for the same things as you do if you're an older person. I seem to remember Union Station.

And I seem to remember that Indian School Road was already-- you know, [INAUDIBLE], it was the end of the road. There was nothing north of there, absolutely nothing. It was a dusty old town with a railroad track right through the middle, with swamp coolers. There was swamp coolers already.

As a matter of fact, I was impressed with swamp coolers, those places that had swamp coolers. And when I came back to Phoenix, I really didn't-- this wasn't planned. This just worked out that way.

Maybe it's fate that I had to come back to Phoenix because when I was in the drapery business, when I was in Houston, Texas, which was miserable enough, talking about heat, and humidity, and whatever. When I was told that I would have to come to Phoenix, Arizona, I said, my god, who's going to Phoenix, Arizona?

But I think, when I came in 1966-- in 1964, the town was not that big. Town wasn't all that big. I sort of missed this growth. I saw this thing grow. And I feel, perhaps, bad that I didn't take advantage of it. Should have maybe bought a piece of real estate in 1964 and let it rot. I guess I would probably be worth a lot of money today. But these are missed opportunities that you don't realize it.

The town just grew around you. The kids got an education. They were part of the scene, part of the Jewish community, active in the Jewish community. We did our thing.

And I knew everybody who was in town, certainly all the Jewish people. I belong to this congregation. And today, the Jewish community is far-flung all over the place-- tremendous, tremendous Jewish community. And I don't know the people in it. OK?

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I think we're glad you became member of the Phoenix community.

Thank you.

Because you're a great asset to it.

I appreciate that.

And I thank you very much for telling us your life story.

My pleasure. My pleasure.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

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