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OK. If you can just look at me all the time one more time.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Stand by. Three, two, one, and--

OK. I'm Judy Weightman. I'm here today on June 21, 1989, with Rudy Schmerl, and we're interviewing at the [PLACE NAME] town in Honolulu, Hawaii. Rudy, I'm going to start out just asking you a few questions that are basically your family background. And also I need to know what is your present address and your place of birth and date of birth.

My present address is 6750 Hawaii Kai Drive, here in Honolulu. I was born in August 1930 in Nauen, Germany, which is a suburb right outside of Berlin. My father was an ophthalmologist.

We were five in the family, with my mother, my older sister, and my mother's mother. We moved to Berlin about 1935, where I started school at the Theodor Herzl Schule, which was a segregated school for Jews. By that time, of course, the Nazis were firmly in power. Does that get it started?

Yes. And I wanted to go back a little bit and find out a little about your grandparents and also the names of your family.

Yes.

If you could give me that.

My father was the son and grandson of Berliners. My mother was born in Orizaba, Mexico, the daughter of a Russian Jew. He was actually born in Vilna, but at that time in 1866, when he was born, Vilna was part of Russia, because there was no Poland. And both of those facts-- the place of her father's birth and the place of my mother's birth-- proved to be of significance in the emigration that occurred in my family in the '30s.

Her mother was from East Prussia. That was my grandmother, who lived with us for all my childhood and boyhood and early manhood.

My father's people, I suppose, had come originally from-- or-- "originally"-- whatever that means-- from Lithuania. And the name "Schmerl" is actually a first name. And the family tradition is that there were two brothers, Schmerl and Simon. And Schmerl, according to some people, is a diminutive of "Shmarya." And the closest I could come to it in English would be, I think, "Samuel."

The children of Schmerl took his name as their last name. The children of Simon took his name as their last name. This was when the gentiles came through and declared that Jews had to have a naming system comparable to theirs. As you know, the Hebrew naming system isn't like that at all. It's "ben," whatever, "son of so-and-so."

My grandmother's family goes back to someone by the name of Nathan Lichtenstein who was born in Russia in 1742, and that's as far back as we were able to trace it. They were small businessmen, mostly-- educated, but on their own. My grandfather, for example, my mother's father, emigrated from Russia because he could not as a Jew go to the university in Russia.

Why was that? Do you know?

Why did the Russians refuse to let Jews go to the university?

Was there a quota system at that time?

Yes, there was a very strict quota system. He was a linguist and spoke six languages and wound up in Mexico working for an import-export firm because of his linguistic abilities. He actually married my grandmother in Cleveland, Ohio, at

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the home of relatives, at my grandmother's relatives, who were then connected politically to the Republican machine. This was about 1894. And from there, they moved to Mexico, where my uncle and my mother were born.

My grandfather was killed about a year and a half after my mother's birth. The story is that he fell off a train. I don't know if that's true. He may have fallen off. He may have been pushed off. I don't know. He was still in his early 30s.

My grandmother, the widow, then returned with the two infants, my uncle and mother, to Berlin, where her older brothers managed to squander her insurance money fairly rapidly. And my uncle, by the time he was 13, had to contribute to the welfare of the family by tutoring. And my mother became a typist and secretary.

She was very good at reading other people's handwritings and, when she was about 19 or so, got a job in the State Department-- Germany was then in World War I-- because she was the only one who could read the Kaiser's handwriting. And she typed whatever the Kaiser had written. And so there was some connection then.

My father had met my mother when he was six and she was four. He was my uncle's best friend. They had been marched off by their Jewish mothers together, nervously, on their first day of school, and my mother's mother had taken the little daughter along. And that was how my father met my mother.

Excuse me. Was this a segregated school at that time?

No. This was in 1902. And Jews in Germany at that time were moving up rather rapidly-- not in all fields, certainly not in the military or in government or the judiciary or anything like that. But on the whole, Germany was ridding itself of the usual restrictions on Jews, and there were opportunities-- unlike the situation in Russia. So they could go to school.

But then the war broke out, and my father was drafted. He was a peaceful man who was not for war. My uncle, who was more, quote, "patriotic," volunteered. So both of them, at the age of 18, went into World War I and were on the front, both of them, for four years, after which my father went to medical school at the University of Berlin-- with a Rockefeller fellowship, eventually. And my uncle went into the judiciary, which was very unusual for a Jew. He actually became a judge in the Weimar Republic, for which the Nazis made him pay later.

What year was that about, that he went into the judiciary? Do you know?

Well, my father graduated from medical school in 1923, when he also got married. And my uncle was exactly his age, so that must have been about the same time. My uncle went to Gottingen. My father went to Berlin. These are famous universities.

My father was a biologist as well as a physician and had done some research early, in Berlin, which proved to be our saving grace when we came to the United States, because he could not speak English and had a hard time learning it and so, in his first years after struggling here and there as a kind of an assistant physician, got a job as a research ophthalmologist in Toledo, Ohio-- but that was in 1945-- and did research actually until he learned enough English to pass the exam--

Although there was another complication. He kept failing the exam in New York and passed the same exam in Ohio the first time. And I think the explanation is that there were too many refugee physicians in New York and not enough in Ohio. So there was that angle.

That's been known to happen. Yes.

Yes. Medicine and biology proved transferable; law and the judiciary, of course, were not. And so my uncle had to start over when he came here. And he became a social worker. That was in New York.

OK, let's get back to the period of time when both your father and your uncle were able to enter into the professions--

In the 1920s.

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--in the 1920s. Did they ever speak to you about any problems that they had entering-- you said the judiciary, not too many Jews had gone into. What about the medical field?

Well, a physician normally is his own employer. And my father settled in this little suburb of Berlin-- true, as the only Jewish physician, but also as the only ophthalmologist. So the people who needed the care of an ophthalmologist weren't concerned with his race.

My father was dark and looked very Jewish. There was no mistaking him. There was nothing German about his appearance at all. But that wasn't a problem until 1933.

What happened in 1933 that you remember?

On January 30, 1933, Hitler became chancellor of the Bundesrepublik, still then, at that moment, the Weimar Republik. And for a while, nothing legally-- for a little while-- nothing legally-- although the mood of the people changed rapidly.

Do you remember this? You were a very young child.

I was very young. What I remember of that town is only my first meeting by the German children. I was obviously identified as a Jewish child. And once they caught me away from the house.

We had a dog, a large German police dog, as a matter of fact. And no one would do anything near the house. But once, apparently, I was away from the house, and they caught me and beat me up. And my sister, who was six years older than I am, of course, had a very hard time at school from the children.

How old were you in 1933?

Three.

And your sister was nine--

Was nine.

--at that time. Yes.

Yes.

So she was in school already.

She was in school and had a hard time. Yes.

When you were around three, you were beaten up-- at that time? Or do you think maybe--

I think I was four or five already. Yeah. So that would be a little later.

Do you remember-- I'll get to your sister in a little while. I wondered-- at that period of time, do you remember playing with non-Jewish children as well?

No, I played with no one. There were no other Jewish children. And I played with no Christian children.

Was that because they would not play with you or because you would not play with them?

It was dangerous, for everyone-- for the well-intentioned gentiles as well as for us. The well-intentioned gentiles, who might have been perfectly free of racism, of any kind, were also watched by the people. This this poison spread very,

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very rapidly. And the few older Germans who were decent people and courageous actually were foolhardy and took grave risks in defying the Nazis.

Even that early.

Yes.

Can you remember what happened when you were beaten up? If you could go through that day for yourself.

No. What I remember specifically is being terrified and running, and a gang of boys-- looking back, obviously little boys, but at the time they seemed like big boys-- chasing me and calling me names and--

What kind of names were they calling you?

"Judenschwein"-- "Jewish pig."

So it was because you were Jewish, then--

Of course. Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And did your mother and father talk to you about the problems at that time?

I remember two conversations-- one in Europe, one in America. I don't come from a religious family at all-- no religious background of that kind. So it was--

The talk that we had had nothing to do with the religious aspect of being Jewish. It had to do with knowing something about Jewish history. And I think what they were afraid of was that I would somehow internalize the hatred directed-- at us in general and me in particular-- and think that, yes, there was something wrong with me. Which happens, of course, to people who are discriminated against-- children, in particular-- of any race and any color. It is a very serious psychological problem that is not at all peculiar to Jews.

And so they wanted me to know something about Jewish history and that there was cause for pride and so on. And it didn't mean much to me. What I knew was that-- in Berlin, of course, I went to a Jewish school. What I knew was that my parents were frightened, and therefore I was frightened. And it's very frightening, when you're six or seven, to see your parents, who are rocks, right, uncertain of where to turn and what to do.

Did they have any friends in the village at all or the town, at that time--

Yes. Yes. And they helped us get back to Berlin, where we spent the last two years of my life in Germany. And they had friends that helped us get out-- also very important-- gentile friends as well as Jewish friends. I want to emphasize that. The--

Maybe you want to say what "gentile" is.

"Non-Jewish." Yes. I hope I don't offend anyone with that word. I happen to like it. It makes it simple.

If we could go back then until your first experience with yourself was, around three or four years old--

Yeah.

--being beaten up-- did you go to school, at that time? Were you in any--

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No, I went to school in Berlin. I started when I was five and a half, which would have been about 1935, '36. And that was at Theodor Herzl Schule.

And your sister, though, was in a regular school. Was she--

In Nauen she was, but in Berlin, of course, she went to the same school I did. At that point, Jews did not go to German schools anymore.

So she was in the regular public schools--

In the same school-- no, no, no, not a-- No, in--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--oh, in Nauen.

--in Nauen. Yes.

Yes. She was in what you would call a "public school" but then, in Berlin, in the Jewish school.

OK. And did she talk to you about the experience she had when you were in Nauen-- the experiences of--

No. My sister and I have not talked much at all about Germany. We-- [PAUSES] she's very different from me. And as I say, she was older and has a lot of pain, I think, that is hard for her to talk about. We have similar conclusions. Neither she nor I have ever been back, nor would we go back, to Germany, for any reason, which is not something that all members of my family share but she and I feel that way.

And she has been to Europe many times, but she would never set foot in that country again. And of course I wouldn't. So that's a similarity,

I did want to bring up, though-- you had been talking about-- although you wouldn't go back to Germany, I understand you have German friends that are acquaintances that are--

Yes. I'm not a racist, I hope, and I don't think that the individual German is responsible for anything but for what he or she did. I am uncomfortable among large groups of Germans, for fairly obvious reasons. I have no way of knowing what Germans my age or older did at that time, and I don't want to know. I would rather not.

But my first wife was a German, and my children are half-German. I mean, they were born in America. So I'm not-- I'm not crazy. [LAUGHS]

Your first wife was German, and you met her in this country, of course, because you were already--

In this country, in America. Yes.

You went to high school and everything here.

Yes.

I see. OK. Well, how did you know about the experiences of your sister in school-- in Nauen?

Mostly from my mother. My mother and I were the talkers in the family. My sister and my father are more reserved. My father "was" more reserved. My sister "is" more reserved. And most of what I know comes from my mother.

And what did she tell you about that? Can you remember anything in particular?

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Well, my sister was as discriminated against as a Black child was in a White school in the 1950s in Little Rock, Arkansas. There's no difference.

Did she have any friends that were--

She lost them very quickly. My sister's also dark. And there's no mystery, in Germany, about who is what.

It's not like America There were two kinds of people. There were Germans, and there were us, at that time, and we stood out.

I see. Mhm.

And besides that, the police knew everything anyway. Everything was written down. It's a very-- or it was-- a very official regimented, bureaucratic country with lots of forms-- lots of papers. It's not like America.

Did your parents, in those early years in Nauen, did they think at all about leaving Germany at that time?

I don't know when they realized that they had to, to survive. It was extremely difficult, for all kinds of reasons. You can't just leave a place. You have to have a place to go to.

It's not a question of roots. "Roots are for trees," as some Jew said long ago, and he was right. It's a question of survival. How do you make a living? Where will people give you a chance?

The prime minister of Canada, at that time, when asked how many Jewish refugees he would accept, said "Even one would be too many." Cordell Hull was the Secretary of State in America, at that time. He was not running a State Department that was particularly interested in welcoming refugee Jews. Jews have not been welcome, to my knowledge, anywhere for 2,000, years except in Israel once they reconquered that country-- which is another question.

So it's not just a question of leaving. Where do you go, and how do you get there? There are all kinds of complications. And if you like, I can be fluent about this and read you what I've written about the legal system at the time.

Go right ahead, yes.

Thank you.

That might be a good time to do that

We have a couple minutes left on this tape, so--

OK.

"The Germans, because we were Jews, defined us as stateless. That was legal. And as far as I know, all other countries defined us either as Germans or as nationals of the countries in which we happen to have been born. To get into the United States, if you were not born in the Western Hemisphere, you had to wait your turn according to a quota system fixed by law, depending on your country of origin-- presumed to be the country in which you held citizenship. You also had to have a passport issued by that country and a visa issued by the United States.

There were two ways of obtaining a visa. You could get an affidavit from a resident of the United States, guaranteeing that you would not become a public burden, or you could show at least $5,000 in cash. Now, since the Nazis were expert at relieving you of all possessions, especially cash, the latter requirement made the issuance of the passport so much propaganda, demonstrating that the Nazis were not the ones blocking the emigration of the Jews."

It was, in effect, a challenge to the rest of the gentile world. You want them? Prove it. That's what the Nazis were

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saying.

"But it was the quota system, the American quota system, that condemned thousands of people-- to restrictions, as Germans, and to death, as Jews. Now, there were no such restrictions if you had had the foresight to pick a country in the Western Hemisphere as your place of birth. And if you were a man, you could bring your wife and minor children with you. My uncle"-- and I've said this-- "who had become a naturalized German to enlist in the army in 1914, thus had a German passport but entered the United States with his wife and daughter, both born in Germany, as in effect a Mexican, although he had left Mexico at the age of three. Had my mother been willing to abandon her mother, husband, and children, she could have entered the United States similarly.

What mattered to the Germans was our race, the one thing the Americans-- concerned instead with the place of birth, relationship, sex, and age-- refused to acknowledge." I was a minor, so I was all right. "Money, of course, mattered to everybody. If the various bureaucracies compounded these mazes with a few garden-variety errors, things became still more complicated.

An American official in Prague, in Czechoslovakia, used the wrong code letter to designate my mother's birthplace"--

What was-- --"resulting"-- for Orizaba, Mexico-- "and his little clerical error resulted in our stay in Ellis Island, where I spent my first week in America while papers were sent back to Prague for correction and return. So not fitting into all the definitions that mattered"-- which never included religion-- "was what, in fact, defined us until we became United States citizens"-- which was an amazing metamorphosis, because we had been enemy aliens.

When you came to this country.

When we came as Germans.

--mean to be a foreign-born academic at an American university. How does that biculturalism influence your teaching, your research, your work on committees, your-- there's been a fair amount of work on what they've contributed to their science. Lewis Coser, the sociologist, who's also a German Jewish refugee, published a book about two years ago, just listing the mostly German [LAUGHS] Jewish refugees in sociology and political science, and so on, who have contributed important work to the research. But, to my knowledge, very little recognition has come to the fact that American academia is probably half foreign, I would guess.

Is this ready to go on yet?

Mhm. Mhm.

Let's go ahead. I want to get this on.

We're going.

OK. Are we on?

We're on.

We're on right now?

Mhm.

All this was on?

Yeah.

Oh, all this was on.

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OK. At what point did it start being on?

Started talking about his book--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

You rolling the tape at the same point that we said we should have this on tape? OK. [LAUGHS] So if you want to just repeat what this material had come from.

Yeah. This is from a chapter I've written for a book I'm trying to put together. I'm editor and organizer of a group of people-- half of them at my previous institution, the University of Michigan, and the remainder, I hope, from the University of Hawaii-- I've recruited one man already-- to write autobiographical essays on the question of what it means to be a foreign-born academic at an American university. My conviction is that biculturalism of this kind has all sorts of ramifications for choice of research topic, perhaps even an approach to the topic-- as a researcher, certainly as a teacher, certainly as a committee person-- functioning inside an American department of whatever it is, where you have to make decisions, for instance, about what students to recruit and admit to graduate school, whom to recruit to join you, whom to offer tenure-- which is like a marriage, as you know.

And the kinds of positions that you take and the sorts of reasons that you give for those positions and the way you interact with people seems to me inevitably to be influenced by your background. And if your background is not the presumed solid, White, more or less middle-class, straightforward background that American universities seem unconsciously to expect, then there is going to be some sort of tension. For instance, when I was a graduate student in Ann Arbor, in my department, English, the assumptions were that you were intimately familiar with Christian theology-- which I was not-- and you could therefore read and understand what was then the canon-- C-A-N-O-N-- in the department. And the department was representative of the major departments across the country. And people wrote dissertations about John Donne and TS Eliot and John Milton, in all of whose work Christian theology figures very prominently.

This was all very foreign to me. And no one was interested in my background. So it's not surprising that what I remember chiefly is my advocacy of other points of view and my involvement with what later became known as the Civil Rights movement.

Well, I'd like to get into that a little bit more, too. And maybe if we could-- I'll make a note of that, because I want to come back and talk about that--

Mhm.

[INAUDIBLE]. Let's get back, then, back to Germany, if we could, again and talking a little bit about when you left Nauen. What made your family leave Nauen?

Leave--? Nauen.

Nauen. Yes.

Well, we went to Berlin, as I said, in '35. And that became progressively more dangerous. I remember my mother coming to school in the middle of the day to take me out, because the word was that the Nazis had organized a parade and it would be dangerous for me to come home just with my sister.

And I remember the parade. I watched it from the apartment window, with the swastika banners and the men in uniform and the drums pounding. I can still hear the drums. And I remember the signs-- [GERMAN]. This and that.

Would you translate that for--

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"No Jews wanted here. No Jews can buy here. Jews get out." And that was the mild part.

And we used to go for walks, my father's sister and I, on Sunday morning, usually to the Grunewald, the green forest, which was a famous public park in Berlin. And walking then, and probably still, was a very common form of recreation. It's what we did, especially on Sunday mornings.

And you would see this-- or, we saw the signs. And my father kept trying to shield us. You know, we'd cross the street and so on.

But people started looking at us with very clear hostility and so on. So my father came to America in--

Before we get to America--

Yes.

--I wanted to go back-- when you first want to Berlin--

Yes.

--there was a period there must have been something that happened, I imagine, that made your father know that he should leave--

Yes.

--the small town you were in. Do you remember what that incident was?

He was prohibited, in 1936, from continuing to practice medicine--

I see.

--as a Jew-- on Germans. No, he could practice on Jews. But there were no Jews in Nauen.

I see.

You see.

And this was characteristic. I still have that piece of paper with a swastika on it, by the way, that says, the first three words-- "Der Jude Schmerl"-- "the Jew Schmerl," you see? --"is"-- and so on-- "is hereby prohibited from"-- What we did to each other, whether on stage in the theatre or on newspapers or physician to patient, for the time that was all right. But we could not have any intercourse, literally as well as figuratively, with Germans. We were vermin.

No difference, by the way, between the lies told about us and the lies that White people have told about Black people in this country. No difference. I have not heard anything new about Black people from White people here that I don't remember being said about Jews in Germany, down to the last physiological detail.

OK. So, we survived for a while longer in Germany and--

In Berlin, at this point.

--in Berlin, yeah. And because my father had done some research and had published-- of course, in German-- and because he was a veteran of World War I. The Nazis got to the Jewish veterans last. And that was partly because of respect for Hindenburg, who had been the president of the Weimar Republic when Hitler became chancellor-- you remember this-- and who had been the great World War I German general-- general of the army.

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Would you make the connection, perhaps, that-- partly out of respect, you said, for him--

Partly out of respect, yes. To that extent, Hindenburg was still somewhat influential, and there was this lingering tradition of respect for anything military. And my father had spent four years in World War I, as what was then a German soldier-- before he had been transformed into an untermensch, a subhuman.

So he was able to get to America-- I believe, in '38-- and was offered a job at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, provided that he took it immediately. And he said, but I have a family. I have to go back and get my family out.

He went from Berlin to the United States.

To Baltimore. Yes

And how did he get out, that first time? Do you know?

Well, as I say, he was a veteran. It wasn't that difficult for him to get a tourist visa for us.

Oh, he had a tourist visa. OK.

Yeah. His brother, with his wife, had left Germany-- I believe, in '34-- and had gone to what was then Palestine on a tourist visa. The English, as you know, were running Palestine at that time. And my uncle, my father's brother, simply disappeared and lived underground.

Oh!

[LAUGHS] This was in Palestine, so it was possible to take the chance and to do something illegal-- for survival! I'm talking about survival.

So my father decided, no-- that he couldn't take that chance. And he went back to Germany, gave up the opportunity to stay in Baltimore, but, for reasons that I can't explain, because I don't know them, was separated from us again. The rest of us would be my mother, her mother, my sister, and I. And he came to America before we did, on his own papers.

We left. The four of us left illegally. We got on a train, in the summer of 1938. My grandmother had broken her leg, some months before that. And I still remember that she-- I believe she was-- yes, she was still on a cane. And if they had checked our papers on that train, we would have been stopped, and we couldn't have gotten out, and I wouldn't be here today.

And we took the train to the Sudetenland, which was the south German land, the part of Czechoslovakia that was negotiated away by Neville Chamberlain in the famous conference with Hitler some months later. But we got there, and came to a little village-- Reichenberg. The Sudetenland, you have to understand, was really a piece of pre World War I Germany full of Germans, not Czechs, given to Czechoslovakia in the Versailles dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire-- which had been on the losing side of World War I-- and the Kaiser's Germany.

So Czechoslovakia, like other countries, was created out of different pieces, and different kinds of people lived in different sections of it. And in this particular section, as you can imagine, from the name, it was full of South Germans-- who were very pro-Nazi. There were two Jewish families in this little village-- an old couple, Ginsberg-- Herr Ginsberg and Frau Ginsberg-- and us.

My sister, as far as I know, didn't go to school. My mother thought that, because these were [LAUGHS] Germans and there were papers and there were police and whatever, that I should go to school, so I went.

And I was the only Jew in this school. And that's where I really learned what it was all about. And--

What happened during--

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I was beaten every day and smeared with horseshit. I hope you don't mind the vulgarity.

No, that's--

And they beat me bloody and tore my clothes every day-- every day. The first day, I was surprised. The second day--

There had been a fat boy-- I remember him well-- who had kicked me after the others had gotten me down and so on. The second day, when they came for me, I ran up to the fat boy and hit him as hard as I could in the eye. Which probably was a mistake also, because after that it was pretty awful.

And the teachers looked the other way. So, after two weeks, I didn't go there anymore. And my mother took the chance--

On I believe it was the night of August 31, 1938-- I'm not sure about the date. It was the night before the troops marched, after the Hitler-Chamberlain conference. Somebody got word to Herr Ginsberg and to my mother that the troops were coming in the next morning. Herr Ginsberg got a wheelbarrow. I still remember it.

It was a wonderful night-- warm, full moon. And we made our way, with the suitcases in the wheelbarrow, to the train station. And we had enough money to buy a ticket, somehow or other, to Prague-- Prague.

And I don't know how we survived in Prague, but we were there until March of '39. I think people sent us money, somehow or other. And the Czechs could see what was coming.

And of course, we had to have all the paperwork, and the German embassy in Prague was not terribly interested in helping Jewish refugee families get out of Europe. So it took a long time.

Who were you living with, in Prague?

We had an apartment, somewhere, a corner of an apartment, somewhere in Prague. I was eight and a half or so. And what I remember mostly of Prague was that it was a beautiful city and I didn't have to go to school because the language was impossible. And all I was supposed to learn to do was to learn to play the piano, from a Jewish piano teacher-- also a refugee, obviously-- who persuaded my mother that, however nice I might be, I had absolutely no talent whatsoever-- which was true.

And so I remember the winter and then the first airplane ride to Rotterdam, where we had a friend-- also a refugee-- I think he was half-Jewish-- who had money. And he's the one who got us out

I see. How did you find him there?

Oh, well, he was from the old days. And there was a network.

And your-- I see.

And the adults always stayed in touch. The old Jewish networks, wherever they are, which is how we have survived not this century but for 2,000 years.

Let me take you back a little bit. You had said, earlier, that you had friends who helped you leave Germany.

Yes. Yes.

And I wanted to go back to those days right before you left Berlin-- or, that was where you left from--

Yes.

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--when you went across. Do you remember anything happening to let you know that would be leaving? Did your mother talk to you about all of this?

No, I overheard my parents in a conversation. Some people-- my father's cousin, for example, went to England with his wife and son. And I have already said that his brother had gone to what was then Palestine.

My father was not a Zionist. He was a doctor. He felt-- I remember him saying this-- that the last thing the world needed was another state and another army. Which I find, in retrospect, very prophetic. He was proud of Israel later but not the military aspect.

And that was not an option. And England did not attract him. And we had some relatives in the United States, specifically a cousin of my mother's who had converted to Christianity to marry a tall, handsome Lutheran minister-- violently anti-Nazi-- who was already a famous theologian and who had gotten a job at Princeton University. And they're the ones-- not my Jewish relatives in Cleveland-- but they're the ones who guaranteed to the United States government that these impoverished Jews from Mitteleuropa would not become burdens on the generosity of Americans.

And so my father got a job at Union Hospital in New York. My mother became a maid. My grandmother, sister, and I went to Princeton. That's how that worked. As I say, it took a long time for all of the papers to be signed and accepted and approved and whatever. But that was the connection.

OK, so when you were in-- your father left Berlin before you did, then.

Yes. And you were still there--

Got to New York--

--about how long before you left Berlin did your father leave Berlin? Do you know how much time--

Almost a year, I would think.

And do you remember what was happening during that year? You were with your mother--

Yes.

--with your grandmother--

Yes.

--with your sister.

Yes.

And what was going on with your family? Were you staying at home most of the time?

Yes.

Were you out?

You couldn't go out.

How did you get your food, at that time, do you remember?

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Well, my mother went out and did what she could and ignored the insults and-- but there were also Germans who helped. There were decent people. For example, in Nauen there was an older lady, a seamstress, who had become very friendly with the family. And she helped.

My mother always made sure that I recognized that, whatever Germany was, there were many Germans who weren't that way at all-- not at all. And they were taking enormous risks to help us-- at first, perhaps, not so great. But as time passed, the risks became more and more severe. Germans went to concentration camps, too.

And when you were in Berlin, right before you left, do you remember that-- were you living in a house with other--

In an apartment.

Were there were only Jews there? Or were there--

No. No. I do remember that-- in the New York, you would call them the "superintendent," the janitor-manager-- was becoming more and more insolent to the Jews, because he could see that he could get away with anything. And it was more and more difficult.

But as far as I know, the family was breaking up. The older people couldn't-- they didn't have it in them anymore to start over again.

My mother had an uncle who had a chance to get out. He was in his 60s. And my father said to him, but you can go to England now. We can arrange that. And from there you can go to America. Look at it as a springboard.

And the old man said "and how long am I supposed to keep on springing?" And they were killed-- Theresienstadt, Oranienburg, you know. That generation didn't get out. They didn't have the energy. They didn't have the whatever. They were done.

Do you remember the day you left?

I remember getting on the train in Berlin. And I remember the village in Sudetenland. And I remember being beaten.

Do you remember what you took with you? Were there suitcases full, or--

Yes, there were always suitcases. There were always suitcases, and there were always things to be left behind-- always. I think what remains now are some books, two pieces of furniture, and a lot of things that had been handed down-- or, to my mind, a lot of things-- that had been handed down from one generation to the next-- objects-- two silver candlesticks, some porcelain figurines-- things that my mother dearly loved-- that sort of thing. Maybe two boxes worth of objects that remained from six, seven, eight generations. [LAUGHS]

Ehh, useless. Useless. You don't want to be burdened down, it seems to me. What you really want to take with you is money and jewelry-- and that, they were very good at relieving of.

You could hide--

Yes. The jewelry, yes. Some friends did manage to sew diamonds in the coat lining and things like that. But others got caught. And that was very dangerous.

And do you remember how you felt when you were leaving Berlin? Do you remember--

Frightened. What I remember of my emotions of that whole period is just that-- fear. I grew up afraid-- afraid and angry-- and I still am.

Mm. It takes a while to get through most of that fear and anger. And I imagine-- you're saying you still are. You don't

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appear to be, so you must have felt some way of dealing with it, though.

That's not for me to say.

At least you've made a life for yourself, anyway.

Yes. I hope so.

When you first got to Prague, did you-- you said you enjoyed it a little bit more there. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit--

Well, there were no Germans. They were Czechs. And there were no signs on the street-- or if there were, I couldn't read them if it was in Czech. No, I'm sure there weren't.

And Masaryk had been president, or still was president, who was a freedom-loving man, a great man. And although I don't know that the Czechs were particularly pro-Jewish, I doubt that they were-- they weren't organizing to kill us or beat us or torture us. So you could go into a store and buy what you wanted to. And they might resent you as a foreigner but not necessarily as a Jew, and [LAUGHS] that was a big change. Right?

Mhm.

There wasn't that hostility. For a moment, you had put some distance between you and the people who were trying to kill you.

And you were feeling that. You--

Yes.

--immediately knew that.

Yes. Because of my mother's face.

Mhm. And you were in touch with your father, during that period--

I was not. My mother must have been-- must have been. Sure. I don't remember anything about that. As I said, when we got here we continued to be separated for quite a while.

Oh, I didn't realize that. How long was that?

Another year.

I see.

For economic reasons.

Mhm. But you knew where he was, at that--

Oh, yes, we saw each other maybe once a month or something like that.

Mhm? And do you remember how you got to Rotterdam from--

Airplane. My first--

And we don't have to do the whole 20 minutes, because we can just start the next portion right in the middle.

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Mhm.

So whenever you feel-- you know, I'll go through--

That's up to you.

--yeah. OK. And I wanted to know whether there was anything else that you particularly wanted to say about the United States. You wanted to talk about the Civil Rights movement.

No, you wanted me to. I don't--

I want to. That's what I mean.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Is there anything else that you wanted to--

Yes, there was one thread left loose in what I said earlier.

You want to turn around, there.

Yes. Oh, are we on again? Yeah. I said--

Are we ready? OK.

--in response to your question about my reaction to the hatred of Jews, that there were two [PAUSES] reassurances that I received-- one in Germany, and I told you about that, that my parents let me know something about Jewish history to counteract any feeling of shame I might have had. And then there was an episode in America, I said, and that was in Princeton. And we stayed with my uncle, who was then a professor of theology at Princeton University.

This was on Mercer Street. The address was 56 Mercer Street. And three blocks up the street was a very famous man by the name of Albert Einstein. And one day, my grandmother took me for a walk to go past the house where Einstein lived. And I actually glimpsed him through the window.

And she wanted me to know that here was one of the most famous men in the world, who was living here for exactly the same reasons that we were there, and he was admired and respected by everybody except the Germans, and he was a Jew. And that was her way of telling me, don't be ashamed of who and what you are. So that was the second part of the answer to your question.

Thank you. And we did say-- we may as well just get back to the part on how you got to Rotterdam.

Yes. The airplane. Well, that was very exciting, for a small boy in 1939. Of course I was frightened and upset and scared. And mostly I was afraid that I would throw up-- so I did.

[LAUGHING]

But we survived anyway. It wasn't nearly as bad as the ship going across the Atlantic, which took 10 days. It was a converted Dutch tramp steamer of some kind-- the Gerolstein I still remember that. And I think I developed the measles, around that time, so I was sick anyway.

And then there was a fairly severe storm which delayed the ship about three or four days. And I remember, the waves were so high that there was an accident in the-- "galley"? Is that what you call a ship's kitchen? And the soup spilled, and the cook or the cook's helper was burned and so on, and this sort of thing. It was a memorable journey that I don't

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care to repeat.

And then you got to Ellis Island. Do you want to talk about that--

Then we spent a week in Ellis Island. Yes. And that was an experience. That was, I think, the only time I've ever been behind barbed wire-- anywhere. And we were incarcerated in a relatively humane environment.

But the Americans, of course, were not attuned to subtle differences in diet and culture and so on. So this time, as Jews-- I think it's the only time I've been treated as a Jew by officialdom in America-- we were seated with Jews from East Europe, whose speech we could not understand, whose clothing was also foreign to us, and whose food frankly was completely alien. And I remember not liking it.

What I do remember liking was American milk. I didn't know that milk could be that rich. It was wonderful.

There were people from all over the world, in Ellis Island, who could not speak, read, or write English. And so we wound up in each other's bathrooms. I remember embarrassing a Chinese lady who had gone into the wrong bathroom-- or maybe I had gone into the wrong bathroom. It's also possible.

On the whole, it's just ironic. I remember Ellis Island as a place that processed us-- which, by that time, was very familiar. You had to have papers. You had to wait. There were lines.

There were officials who were bored with you. It wasn't a very exciting job, I suppose-- United States naturalization and Immigration Service. There were so many of us and so few of them and so much paper.

And eventually we got through. And as I say, my grandmother, sister, and I went to Princeton, which was lovely in 1939. And my mother eventually got a job somewhere in New York as a maid, as a live-in maid. And my father, who could not, as I say, speak English, inspected people's rear ends for piles and whatever at Union Hospital in the Bowery in Manhattan.

And a year later, we got we got together again in Manhattan. I lived in Harlem-- what was then at the edge of Harlem. That was probably the center of it. And then I got used to being beaten up for other reasons. [LAUGHS] So.

And where were you in enemy alien, and where were you considered to be an enemy alien?

In the United States of America, from 1941 until we became citizens-- when America declared war on Hitler. Or was it that Hitler declared war on America? I believe, on December 8, 1941, all people of presumed German citizenship-- never mind what the Germans had said-- since that's where we had come from, we must have been German citizens, according to the Americans-- resident here were automatically enemy aliens. And we had to register.

My grandmother, who never became an American citizen, had to register, I think, forever. Even after the war had ended, she was still registering as a foreign-born noncitizen. And that did not stop until my mother became a citizen.

My father became a citizen earlier, because he had arrived here earlier. When my mother became an American citizen, I became a citizen automatically, because I had been under the age of 14 at my arrival-- which was not true of my sister. You see. So she had to become a citizen on her own, sometime later.

I see.

At least she got her picture in the paper. [LAUGHS] Yes.

That's nice. [LAUGHS]

We were very proud.

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And then you grew up in Harlem? Or how long did you stay there?

No. No-- how long-- we moved all over. We left New York in 1941 and moved to Louisiana. And I spent two years there, as my father kept getting other jobs as circumstances developed-- as I say, as an assistant physician-- and worked for a Jewish physician in New Orleans for two years. And there I acquired a Southern accent and learned something about the Southern version-- this is '41 to '43-- the Southern version of racism.

And then we moved back to New York, to the Bronx, in '43.

What did you learn about racism, in Louisiana?

That it was exactly the same thing as I had experienced in Germany. The fundamental sin, in my opinion, is to look at a human being and refuse to see the human being. And that was what White people were doing with Blacks, just as Germans had done with Jews.

Our neighbors were Black, in New Orleans. And we knew White people who had Black live-in servants. Black people prepared their food, took care of the babies, and the Whites regarded them as furniture. They would speak in front of them about racial matters without regarding their feelings or without any sensitivity at all.

And yet there was this absolute schizophrenia, because they would-- as part of the Southern way of life of the time, they would be available to help Black people in trouble if they knew them-- if they were part of the family, as servants. [PAUSES] Absolute schizophrenia. There's no--

It's a mental illness. Racism is a serious, deadly serious, mental illness. And it is endemic in various cultures. And I am not unique in any way.

And you were a teenager, at that time--

No. I was-- just about. I was 11 in 1941. I was 13 when I left New Orleans, yes, and went back to the Bronx.

Oh, back to the Bronx, then.

Yes. Well, I shouldn't say "back to the Bronx." The Bronx is not Manhattan.

Back to New York. Yeah.

Back to New York. And I started high school there-- went another two years there. And then my father finally got a job, a real job, as a researcher-- as a research ophthalmologist at the Toledo Hospital Institute for Medical Research. And so I finished high school and college in Toledo. And by that time, I was older. [LAUGHS]

And then you were involved in the Civil Rights movement. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Well, for, I suppose, two reasons. One, I think I've explained-- because of my own personal background and my [PAUSES] recognition of what is at work in America-- which was no different from what was at work in Europe. And then for an accidental reason. A friend, a wonderful friend I made in Toledo-- who is still, to this day, my very closest friend-- who is Black--

It turned out that I began to make more Black friends, certainly in college, than White. And in Toledo, the link was chess. I play chess-- not terribly well, but I do play chess. And there were Black people, more or less my age, who played chess, with whom I became acquainted.

There were two Ys in Toledo-- the downtown Y, where only Whites went, and the Indiana Avenue Y in Toledo, where they went. And since they were not comfortable or welcome at the White Y, I went with them. And that-- one thing led to another.

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So by the time I left Toledo-- went first to Cleveland, where I started my doctoral work, and then to Ann Arbor, after that-- my opinions on this subject were firm. And I haven't changed my mind about any of it. Racism is a sin, and it is an evil, and it needs to be combated at every opportunity. And I say this as a refugee Jew who lost relatives in concentration camps.

I appreciate that very much. And let's talk about some of those relatives, before we-- this is almost the end of the tape. We really left that off, too. How many relatives did you leave behind that ended up in the concentration camps that you know about?

Oh, at least a dozen.

And were they your mother's side or father's side?

Mostly on my mother's side-- aunts and uncles and cousins.

And did they ever talk about their reasons for not leaving when you did?

As I say, it wasn't that simple. You can't just leave. This is an American question you're asking me.

Yes, I am.

Behind that, there's the picture of somebody throwing suitcases in the car and driving off into the-- it can't happen that way. It doesn't happen that way. You can't go unless you have a destination. And if people don't let you in, and they send you back.

My cousin's other grandmother was on that ship, that famous ship, the St. Louis, that went to Cuba and couldn't get in and went to Miami and couldn't get in and was sent back by Cordell Hull and the American State Department-- back to France. And that woman died in Theresienstadt.

So most of your family were those people who really knew that they wanted to get out and attempted to do so--

It was--

--rather than, they were--

Yes.

--not of the group that thought that things would eventually get better then.

Yes. Of my grandmother's generation, most of them died in the concentration camps. I know of my grandmother and one other woman of her generation who got out. Of my father's generation-- I mean, my father was 42 in 1938-- still a relatively-- from my point of view today, a relatively young man.

Especially now we think of it as very young.

Yes. Yes. So he was still in good health. He was vigorous and had a great deal left to offer. But people in their 60s, no.

Mm. Had a very difficult time getting the papers to come, as well.

Yes. And the psychological [PAUSES] energy that it also required.

Is there anything that you would like to say to the people that will be reading the materials, viewing the materials, that would relate to any of the areas we talked about? Feel free at this time. Any last words for us.

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Yes, I would like to repeat what I said at the panel discussion at Temple Emanuel, that my conviction is that there are lessons in this. It isn't just that we must remember those who were murdered for their sake because that is all we can do for them. There's more to it. There are also people who are alive today whom we must not forget, and these are people of all colors and all persuasions-- whether they are Black people in South Africa or Arab people in Israel or in territories held by Israel or people in South America or, most recently and tragically, the Chinese in China. We're all human. And Jews perhaps more than anyone else have got to recognize that.

Thank you so much, Rudy, I really appreciate it. Thank you--

Thank you.

--very, very much.

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