

OK, we have about 20 minutes--

OK.

--left.

In fact, no women were evacuated, and they shortly after the internment were released again. It was only the male population that they were principally concerned with in England.

OK, so let's talk about what happened then when you got to Australia.

We were put into internment camps which were ready for us. We were very well treated. Upon arrival, we got a postcard, a preprinted card, saying "I'm well," "I'm not well," or things like that, and you sign that. And I knew that our best friend, or a very good friend of ours, was in Australia and that if anyone could help me he would be closest to the line. So I sent him that card.

Like I said before, my father in 1940 migrated from Cuba to Australia. And he was staying with that family in Australia.

But you didn't know that.

I didn't know that, because I had lost completely touch with him, or I didn't previously correspond with that family either, because there was no reason to. So, when he came home that night, the wife of his friend told him she has a very special postcard. Guess who. Couldn't guess. It's Richard. Guess where he is. He's here in Australia.

So my father set everything into motion with the military command to get permission to visit me, for which he traveled over 36 hours by train from Melbourne to Sydney and from Sydney to the outback in Kerang. And he got permission to visit me two and a half hours officially, but the guards over there let him stay for four or four and a half hours. It was another very emotional scene, seeing my father again and him seeing me again. And from then on, he really sought to get his visa in order to come to America.

So he went to the consul in Melbourne, which was none other than the former consul in Rome, of which, of course--

The American consul.

--the American consul-- that he knew as his client and became quite friendly with him. And so that consul promised him that, quota number or no quota number, so long as he could get a visa in America for me to come over, he would get me a visa to come over to America, so long as I could come to the consulate and pick it up.

You were in a--

Simple. Simple.

Yes, except--

Except that I was an internee, and there was no way that the Australian military authorities would let me go as a free man to the consulate to pick up that visa. So the whole thing went to sleep again. In the meantime, however-- that was again 1941, '42-- the Australians suddenly came to the realization that they had very few military personnel left in Australia to guard the Australian continent-- namely, one battalion-- one division-- I'm sorry.

They had four divisions. The Sixth Division was sent to Greece and Crete, the Seventh Division was in Palestine, the Ninth Division was in Africa, and the Eighth Division was in Singapore and Malaya for as long as they held out. They had one division left to guard the whole of Australia and didn't know anymore where to take the manpower from.

So, together with the British government, they gave us a choice. You can go back to England and join the English army, you can go and stay in the camp here, or you can join the Australian army. So all of us voted for staying in Australia. We didn't cherish to go back to England, the U-boats, and everything. And we joined the Australian army.

Was your father still in Australia at that time?

No. No, he was already-- that was after the visa affair. That was 1942.

So your father left, went to the United States, and--

Got me a visa, got me an affidavit, send the affidavit to the consul-- they notified me in the camp, and I couldn't get out.

And they couldn't come to you.

No. They wouldn't. That is one of the conditions. You have to come to the consulate.

And then, how long were you still there after your father went back to the United States-- or went to the United States?

How long was I in Australia? I stayed in the army until '47.

Well, in the camp. How long were you in the camp after he left?

In the camp, I was until '42 and joined the Australian army in '42, I believe. I have my discharge--

You were 17.

I was 17. And later on, I became an interpreter in the army. And I had the rank of sergeant. And then I helped guard the German and Italian prisoners that were sent from Africa to Australia for the duration of the war.

You could speak Italian as well as German.

Yeah. I went to school in Italy.

Right.

Remember?

Right. Yes.

And so I had to stay in the army until all the prisoners were sent back, which was 1947. And then I got out. They were not all sent back in 1945, at war's end--

I didn't know that.

--because there were some of them who were politically very active, and the German and Italian governments asked the British to hold those back because they couldn't handle that at that time.

So I was released from the army in '47. My visa was there. And I came to America in December-- on December 4, 1947-- landed in San Francisco. My mother was there.

How did your mother know where you were?

Oh, in the meantime, when she arrived in San Francisco, she naturally wrote to the people in--

The Rotary?

--no--

Portsmouth.

--in Australia, because they were her friends too, you know. And my father was-- in fact, my father was in New York, and he picked her up when she came off the boat, and he told her right there and then that I was in Australia.

And so we corresponded all the while through, while I was in the army-- or while I was still in the camp. And then at least we knew we were still alive and kicking, so to say.

I went to visit my father in New York, and he got me a position at the Biltmore Hotel on Madison Avenue--

Not bad.

--as an apprentice. And I stayed there for three years, because it was a chance of one in a lifetime to work in such a hotel and learn. And after three years I left, and I went back to San Francisco to be with my mother, who was alone.

And somehow or other, the jobs in San Francisco were not too plentiful at that time. It was 1950. And there was one position open through the union. I was a union member in New York, and I had a transfer card.

And it was a position as a carver in a very luxurious hotel. Nobody wanted it. Most of the cooks don't like to work in public, in the dining room, going around with wagons. It makes them self-conscious.

So I took that job. It was also a very luxurious hotel. It was on Union Square-- the Plaza Hotel. On the same place today, you have the Hyatt House. The Plaza was torn down.

Oh, I've seen the Hyatt House, yes.

So that was a very good hotel. I worked myself up to sous chef and became very friendly with the chef over there, who-- afterwards it developed almost into a father-son relationship. Suffice to say, they came to visit me here in Hawaii. They stayed at our house, and we loaned them a car afterwards and so on.

Anyway, from there, I had my first chef's position in San Francisco at a new luxury motel. There were several motels, but none of them had a swimming pool and a bar and restaurant and so on. That was the first one.

And they had an efficiency firm come in to revamp all their books and systems and order purchasing things. And I was very interested in that, and they were quite impressed that I was so interested as a chef, because, at that time, no chef would have anything to do with an efficiency expert. Every chef thought he runs the place as well as he could.

So, because of that, they afterwards brought me into a country club in San Mateo. And from there, they recommended me to the Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City as executive chef. And that was the first major hotel position that I held.

I don't want to go into the quarrels now at the Hotel Utah between one faction of Mormons against the other. Suffice to say, the Mormon church owned the Hotel Utah, along with all the banks in Utah and so on.

How did they treat you as a Jewish person?

Very good. They wanted to convert me, naturally. But one of the apostles in fact told me-- he said, Mr. Strauss, Mormonism and Judaism are so close, so much akin. Why don't you become a Mormon? I said, since they are so much akin, why don't I stay where I am? No, we were quite good friends.

Anyway, from there, I made an application with Sheraton and subsequently landed a job as executive chef at the PK

here in Honolulu, where I was about a year and a half.

You want to say "Princess Kaiulani." Is that--

Princess Kaiulani. We used to call it "PK." And was subsequently transferred over to the Royal Hawaiian, which was a major step up. That was in 1963. And I stayed as executive chef until 1970.

I wish I would have known you before. You were a chef. [LAUGHS]

I wish you would have known me, too.

Now you're retired! We don't get any of the food there.

At that time, you were just a kid.

Yes.

In 1971, the manager of the Royal Hawaiian, John Brogan, who is now still the manager of the Sheraton Waikiki, was asked to open the Sheraton Waikiki, and I was elected to be the executive chef. So we opened Sheraton Waikiki. I was executive chef for about a year and a half, when the food and--

In the meantime, I should mention that I took all kinds of educational courses through the American Hotel Association-- hotel accounting, human relations, food-and-beverage controls, food-and-beverage service-- anything I could lay my hands on. With all those courses, he said to me, listen, why don't you try and be Food and Beverage Director?

So I told him, under one condition-- if I can't get it, I go back to my job as executive chef. And so I was promoted to Food and Beverage Director, a position that I held until the 31st of December, 1979.

And then?

And then I was transferred to the Unifood Division, which is a subsidiary of Sheraton, and they had me open the office in Denver, Colorado, which serviced five states-- Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Montana. I think that's-- I have five, together, no?

And subsequently I got in touch with-- I wanted to get out of this and get up. And my stepmother, my father's wife, still lived in New York, and my stepbrother also lived there, and my wife's children-- this is my second marriage-- also live in New York State.

Your wife's children--

Children.

Oh!

My wife.

OK, when did you get married? At what point-- we skipped that.

I got married in 1970.

And that was here?

Yeah.

OK. And then--

In Honolulu. That also was my second marriage.

Where was your first marriage? When did that happen?

Also in Honolulu.

Oh, I see. OK.

She came over from Utah.

Oh, OK.

I met a young lady in Utah, in Salt Lake City, and she came over. But let's not get into this. [LAUGHS]

But you have children, now.

No.

No children.

No children of my own. But her oldest child is married and is living today in Poughkeepsie.

Oh, I know Poughkeepsie. Mhm.

And so the idea of being in New York sounded very good, plus the fact that I got a position with the Park Lane Hotel at Central Park South, with a very nice salary-- more than I expected. But I didn't know why everything was so nice until I found out really who Leona Helmsley was-- of whom many of you people have heard.

And when that didn't work out, we came back to Hawaii. So my wife got a teaching job again, here at Saint Andrew's Priory, where she is today. I did some consulting work. And now I am more or less retired, doing some volunteer work with the Small Business Association and donating some time to various other organizations, which--

You're allowed to mention them, if you want to.

I'm allowed to mention them?

Surely. Mhm.

The ACLU, which I find very exciting. It's out of--

What do you do with the ACLU?

I go in and answer the telephone, mostly.

What attracted you to the ACLU?

George Bush.

I see. Very good. Mhm.

Mr. Strauss, could I ask you a question?

Yes.

When you were in Australia and you were serving as a guard for the German and the Italian prisoners, did you-- or did they-- well, did you have any experiences of their prejudice as Nazis against you as a Jewish person?

Well, to start off with, they didn't know that I was Jewish, in the first place. But my dialect is German Rhenish, so they knew when I talked German that I was coming from the Rhineland. And several expressed the sentiment that they couldn't understand how a good German can serve in the Australian army. And I left it at that, and I wouldn't go into any discourse with them.

Did you ever talk about their treatment of Jews to you?

No. Because this was strictly the Afrika Korps that was there. And the Afrika Korps was a military organization which had no connection at all with the treatment of Jews or the camps or anything like that.

Did you experience any incidences of antisemitism when you came to this country, to the United States-- anything at all?

Here and there, particularly in New York amongst the French cooks. Sometimes somebody would call me "juif," which is "Jew."

Yes.

And--

What was your response, when they did something--

Hm?

What was your response to that?

I just ignored it, because I didn't want to get into any kind of arguments with them. And so-- but the other night, I saw the War and Remembrance.

Yes.

And I saw the segment in the first hour, which they wholly devoted to the transport of Jews to Auschwitz and Auschwitz itself. And I was really sitting there with cold sweat and goosebumps and said to my wife, there for the stroke of luck I could have been there.

Did any of your family end up in Auschwitz?

Yeah.

Who did?

In Dachau.

Oh-- who was in Dachau?

My uncle, the founder of the wine business. His--

Did they live?

--no-- his wife, and my grandfather, and they were the closest to us. Most of them got out before that.

What happened to the ones in Dachau?

I don't know about my uncle and aunt, but I know that my grandfather had a maid that was with him already since 1924. Because he was-- my grandmother died before I was born. And she looked after him. And when one of the rules came out of the Nazis, that no gentile female can work in a Jewish household where there is a male, she refused to leave him and was subsequently thrown into a concentration camp herself because of that. And she received the ashes from him. So what happened to him-- heart failure-- it's anybody's guess.

When was the first time you heard about the concentration camps and what was going on in them?

Well, we--

When was the first time you heard about that, and how did you feel?

The concentration camps went on right from '33.

So you heard about it back then. When--

Yeah.

That's when you heard about them-- what was going on inside--

Yeah.

Well, he talked about that earlier. But that was not the destruction camps, at that time.

Yeah, they were not the destruction camps. The destruction camps, I heard before I was leaving for England, while I was still in Germany.

Even in '39--

'38.

--'38, obviously, yes.

Yeah.

And what was your reaction, when you heard about them?

Well, we knew what was going on. And we couldn't do anything about it. And I don't know what kind of a reaction I had at that time. I was 15 years old or 14 years, and I really can't say right now what my feeling was, outside of the fact that you were feeling very sorry. You saw some of the people come out of these camps which were not killed, and they were just vegetables, like I said before.

Now, after all these years have passed, do you have any suggestions for us as to how we could avoid an experience like this ever happening again-- any comments on preventing another Holocaust or another incident of--

Educate the people that all people are humans-- are human beings-- and everybody has a right to live.

Thank you very much. Is there anything else you wanted to tell us, before--

No.

--we're finished?

I think we've covered just about-- we've covered a lot of territory, so to say.

Yes, we did. We went all over the world. [LAUGHS]

Yeah.

You want--

Mr. Strauss--

I'm sorry.

Is there one experience that-- a horrible experience, the most horrible experience that stands out in your mind, of your period in Germany, that you haven't told us?

No. The only thing I saw was when they arrested the people in the street and made them sweep up the glass from the show windows that they had broken. That really got to me.

All of the experiences-- Kristallnacht--

Yeah.

--the actual night, which you had talked about earlier. And--