

I'm Sally Weinberg, and I'm interviewing Alfred Spitz for the Holocaust Archives Project. We are continuing in our interview.

Alfred, we last left off when you were in Italy. You have one child by now, and your wife is also pregnant, as I recall. Would you like to continue with your story?

Yeah. I have to correct something. She was not-- pregnant later on. When we lived in this Catona, this little city, a little village between Florence and Rome, I want to point out is I don't know which month it was. It must be in summer. We heard-- how should I say? Canyon. Canyon fire. Canyon.

Canon.

Canon. And anyhow, we found out that the English army is advancing towards this Catona, this little city. And so we were alert. We had to hide because we didn't know what will be, what will the Italian or what will the German do. Yeah?

Where did you hide?

No, no. We didn't go out of the apartment. We didn't go on the streets, yeah.

I see.

I forgot another part. All right, this is OK.

You can tell us what you've forgotten. We'll be happy to hear it.

Like I told you, the German were in this little city. And I was with the other people on the plaza. And I heard some soldiers speaking, that they are speaking German. I was from Austria. So I forgot all-- everything-- young boys, yeah. Two of us start talking with them.

And they were so enthused to have somebody that speaks German and is from Austria, or from Vienna, like me. So they want to do something for me, yeah? Now I was hesitating, but then I thought, my God, these boys, they couldn't do any harm.

And so it was. They came to our apartment up. I introduced my wife and my little boy. And they brought chicken, and potatoes, and butter, and everything. And maybe they planted it. I don't know.

These were German soldiers.

Austria, from Austria, but Austrian soldier.

Austrian soldiers.

I detected on their dialect, yeah.

Yes.

And we had a very good time. And they were not very happy in the army, but they couldn't help it. They had to. But it was a very nice evening we had there together with them. I was always afraid that the other German soldier would find out they are here, and they were afraid that they are found out through the same. But it was-- but really a nice evening.

We didn't see them again because, like I told you, the English army was advancing. And one day came the English army. And you know which part of the English army? It was the Jewish division.

The Jewish division.

From Israel, from Palestine. They came. I saw the Star of David when they marched in the city-- only I couldn't talk with them. They spoke only Hebrew. And I couldn't talk with them with Hebrew.

So only I gave them to understand I'm Jewish, yeah? I can speak a little bit Yiddish. And the rest I couldn't understand, but it was good enough.

What year was that? It was '42 or '43. I don't know. Yeah, my boy was about a year or two old. Yeah, maybe-- I don't know. Between '41 and-- between '42 and '43. It was summer, I know. Yeah?

And naturally, with this day on, we are really free, yeah. The little fascists, the few what were there, they were hiding in their houses.

Yeah, I have to tell you another thing. Actually, everybody was a fascist, a fascist in school. And there was also a woman teacher what taught them, the kids, German. And when she found out that I am speaking German-- she was a fascist, a really fascist. But still she invited me to come to the class and have the pronunciation, how to write in German.

And so I went to the class. I spoke there German and taught them German to speak. And at this time, yeah, there was-- my son was born. They brought me a Kinderwagon, a wagon for the child, a buggy.

This is your first child was born.

First child, yeah. First, a buggy. And bought me a bag top, everything, because I didn't want to take any money. I was happy that I could do something, because at this time I had no work at all. So that was a-- I was very happy there.

I told you, I was polishing--

Tombstones.

Tombstone.

Yes.

And then I worked for-- yeah. Before this, again, I forgot something.

That's all right. Let's hear it.

After the German left where I worked, where I had to split wood and prepare, somebody from the Italian people came to me and said if I want to work. I need work, yeah. So there was an organization, ORT.

ORT.

Unfortunately, this is not the Jewish organization. It was a German organization ORT. And they worked on the ferrovia. What is ferrovia? On the train. How you call it for the train, the train runs there?

On the tracks.

On the tracks. Because the American or the English, the Britons, bombed the tracks almost every night-- or every day. And by night they sent a-- they send out these people, Italian people, what under the command of German soldiers to reconstruct the tracks again. And they know I speak German, so they put me as a foreman, as an interpreter there.

And my name was then Spitzzi. And I came from Romania. Romania, as an Italian, yeah. It was this-- I was fleeing

Romania to go to Italy back where I was born in Italy. They told them.

Oh, they told them.

But I studied German, so I could be the interpreter, not knowing at what danger I was, because 90% of this interpreter were shot when they found out they are German and Jews.

So you had to hide that fact.

Yeah, sure. And the Italian knew who I am or who I was. And to look at the job. The job--

This was a paying job?

This was a paying job, and a good paying job. And most of all, before we start work around 5 o'clock in the evening, and worked all night until 4 o'clock in the morning, yeah? Because at this time, there came no more bombs. And so it was safe for us, yeah, for us and for the German what were surrounding us.

So I was, in the beginning-- not right away I was an interpreter. But after a short while, very short while. Yeah. So I had the day of my life, yeah? I had not to work and got paid.

So you were able to save some money then at that point.

Yeah. And my little boy at then was two years old. Like I told you, this Catona, the city lays on a little hill. And you saw down to the track from the station, the track what the trains went by. And when the American came to bomb the tracks, my boy was under-- on his mother's arm and was looking down, and said, no, no. I mean, more, more. He was fascinated from the explosion from that.

Oh.

And one day, the German-- the American came later. They came around-- I don't know-- 6 o'clock, when we were already there working. And all of a sudden, we heard the signal that--

A siren?

Yeah. Yeah. Put it this way, a siren. But we had to run. We were running with the German, because they were running for their life like we did. And the bombs were falling-- fortunately, not close to us. But still we saw it not all too far away. Yeah?

And after a while, a few hours, they stopped bombing and left. And I needed the money. So many people left the work, and I didn't, many others, not knowing what my wife will think about. Because she was up in the town and saw what's going on. And she knew I was there.

And they gave one man, I gave the message, go to my wife and tell her I stay on because I am all right, and I want to stay on till I come home at 4 o'clock or so, once in the morning.

And this guy forgot about. He went to a tavern and had a beer, or had a wine, and got shicker, and forgot about whole thing. My wife went to the police, who went to the hospital, and went to everybody. Look, what is-- why didn't I come home?

But finally she found out, yeah. He came. Then he remembered-- I don't know-- around 10 o'clock or so in the evening. He remembered he had a message. So he gave her the message. OK. Imagine what state she was?

But when I came home I found out the whole thing. It was very sorry. But this was one of my experience, being in the middle of the war.

Of course.

Oh my. All right. Now going back to when the Israeli troops liberated us, I couldn't talk with them. They didn't understand me. I didn't understand them. But we had a chance to go where we want. And we found out near Rome is a camp for refugees.

Jewish refugees?

Yeah, from the UNRRA, United Nation Reliefs. So we found them.

No, they had to leave, the Israeli, because I couldn't stay with them. They didn't go back to Rome. They advanced farther and farther north. So I found transportation with other army trucks. Anyhow, we went to--

Is that how you got to Rome with your family?

Yeah, we went-- came first to a-- with a truck to another town, and from there we took then the train to Rome. And yeah, we were not far from Rome. We had to stop.

I didn't know we were so close to Rome, yeah? We were in middle of the field. We are stopped. For some reason, we couldn't go farther. So we had to stay overnight in the-- in the train, yeah.

But the next day-- yeah, then I saw there two-- I thought they are soldiers, but I saw they are Jewish, yeah, because they were probably talking German or were talking Jewish. Anyhow-- Yiddish. So they were from the UN, but in uniform, in American uniforms, without being military, yeah.

So I went to them and said, I was a prisoner till now. Now can you help me. And he said, naturally, yeah?

In what language were you speaking?

In German or in Italian. I didn't know any English-- very little.

And yeah, they brought milk, and chocolate, and all kinds for the baby, yeah, and for us, and put us on a truck what went to a-- came in Rome, near Rome.

It was Cinecitta. Cinecitta is-- how should I say it? Like Hollywood.

Cine citta.

Cine. Cine means cinema. Cinecitta. Citta is the city.

Citta. How do you spell that?

Cine-- so like you-- like a-- C-I-N-E-C-I-T-T-A. Cinecitta. This is like Hollywood. This is the movie--

Movie center.

Movie center from whole of Italy, yeah.

Yes.

But this was for refugees, made what for refugees. On one side were the Allied refugees. On the other side were the Italian refugees, because for many Italian what were without home because of the bombs and so on. So it was what was found the Italian refugees were under Italian government--

Auspices?

Auspices, yeah. And the other were under British or American auspices.

But before we came to the camp, there came a priest, a Catholic priest, to my wife, and said, I heard you have a baby, and you are pregnant. You will need probably something for the baby when it comes. Yeah? Diapers and all kinds of that, and dry milk, yeah. And whatever it take. But I don't have anything with me.

Here is my address. I will let you-- no. Here's my address. Nothing. I will let you know.

And we were in the camp already for a week or two. All of a sudden, I got a message. I have to come to the front desk. And these priests were there and said, I have a lot of things for you, but you have to come to the Vatican City to give it to you. I couldn't take it with me. All right.

The next day he came to the-- he came in the Vatican.

How far away were you from the Vatican City?

I don't know. Like from here to Mayfield Heights. Yeah? I have from camp, I worked in the camp. I was there a maintenance officer.

Did they call Rome the Vatican City? That was the same as--

No, no, no, Vatican City is a part of Rome. Really, it's separate, yeah? Vatican has his own police, yeah. And the same police, the carabinieri that stands in front of the Vatican, yeah. But this is part of Rome and is easily accessible, yeah. There is no real barrier.

So I went there. And he came. Then he saw me. He had an office there. I put in his office, close the door, and said, thanks God I can talk German with somebody.

So he was from Tyrol.

Where is Tyrol?

Tyrol's a part of Austria near the Bavarian border, yeah? He was so happy to speak German. And the Austrian German-- the real German, the harder thing.

And he gave me diapers, and things, and I don't know. Two valises.

Suitcases.

Suitcases, yeah. And he said, I will give you more, and so on. I was happy, and he was happy, and my wife was happy. She had everything what she need for the baby.

Unfortunately, when the baby came, there were a month before was-- were an epitomi-- when many people are sick and--

Epidemic.

Epidemic, yeah, from, I don't know what, scarlet or was-- I don't know, some infants sicknesses were there. But this-- I don't know what they were.

Anyhow, when she was ready to go there, they said, is everything OK? Everything is disinfected. And no more. It's a

month ago since the last fall was from the epidemic. So go there.

To a hospital?

Yeah, in the Italian part. So she went there. And unfortunately, the epidemic was not completely clean.

Not completely over.

He got, I don't know what this was. A diphtheria. Is this the right? Can you understand what I mean? Diphtheria? Hospital.

Diphtheria. Diphtheria.

Yeah, diphtheria. And he got infected. A baby is immune in the throat, but it was not immune on the navel. He got infected there. And after a short while, he died.

We had, at this time, came penicillin. It was discovered. And fortunately, the camp had it, yeah? So I brought it there. But it was too late. So the baby died. This was the second baby what we had.

And then we lived in the camp. And like I told you, we had a very good social life there, because this was not-- this was a camp from the UNRRA-- UNRRA, yeah? So we were mostly-- soldier who was there were Britons, were English. And the captain was there, was English.

I worked as a maintenance officer. I had all the different professions I had under me. I started--

You had a job. Yeah. I started as a carpenter, and then the foreman left, so I was the foreman then.

And they paid you?

Oh, yes, they paid me. Not as much as they paid the Italian. There were Italian people also working there under my command, yeah? But they paid us less, because we had the rooms, we had the food. So anyhow.

How long did you stay there in this--

I think it was--

--area?

--a year. Maybe about a year, yeah.

Were you trying to make arrangements to leave Europe, or what-- did you--

Yes, yeah. I was still afraid that the German will come back.

Did you try at this time to contact your family in Austria?

Yeah, I tried. But there were from the Red Cross, when various officers what-- who had inquire, put out all the names from all my relatives. But there came no answer.

Only from my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law, yeah, came. They notice she died in Theresienstadt. Theresienstadt is another concentration camp, a death camp. These all what we know about.

And then I got a letter. From this cousin who lives here in Cleveland, that she sent me a affidavit to the consul in Rome, but unfortunately in Rome was no American consul. The consul was in Naples. So I don't know.

Anyhow, this was lost. I couldn't get it. Maybe the consul sold it to somebody else. I don't know what it was. But anyhow, I didn't get it.

So I had friends. They lived in Bolivia.

Friends from Vienna?

Yeah, from my wife's friends from Vienna, yeah. They lived in Bolivia. And we told them. I wrote them about, yeah, that we had a chance now to go to the States. And the affidavit is lost. We don't know what to do. We want to get out of Europe.

So she said, come to us and stay here what you have not to catch the dollar in the States. He have a easy life. Come to Bolivia.

You had no desire to return to Austria?

No, never. I hated them too much. Not the city itself. The city is beautiful. I liked it, but not the people.

I have to interrupt my story. We went one. In 1970 we went to Europe. I told you before, my son wanted to know-- he graduated from-- he graduated, had a master in chemistry and had a master in business administration. So he said, before I start to work, I want to see where I was born. It was in Italy. And then I want to see where you were born.

So we went to Vienna. We went to Italy. If this is what I want to say? Yeah. No, I interrupted myself, and I don't know what. Anyhow, we went there--

Well, I asked you if you had any desire to return to Vienna, and you--

Yeah, I went as a visitor, yeah? We were in Vienna three days, yeah? I wanted to show him where I lived, where I was born, and where I worked, and whatever. And this was enough. And then we went in Italy. In Italy, I was at home, yeah?

Then I showed him where he was born. We went to the city where he was born, yeah? And we went to Switzerland, and so on. But this I wanted to say, yeah.

Otherwise, no. There were many people what went back, and sometimes I don't blame him-- blame them, because all their life they lived in Vienna. They don't know what to do. They didn't know the language, yeah? So they went back.

But I didn't, because maybe I had a backbone that I have Bolivia, where my wife's friend lives, and they knew somehow-- sometimes I will go to the States, because when this is lost, maybe I can find another one.

In the meantime, I worked as a supervisor in the maintenance department. And they had also some Jewish carpenters. They were not carpenters.

Where was this?

In Rome.

In Rome. In Cinecitta. And then I made acquaintance of a couple. They had a grown son. And they went to the States. They had an affidavit and went to the States. And I was still sitting there not knowing what to do.

Wait a second. Yeah, I was in Bolivia. When I was in Bolivia? No, yeah, OK. In the meantime, from my friends in Bolivia came the answer. They don't need that affidavit. You have only to see that I get a visa, and it should come to them. And I went to them. Sucre is the name of the city.

How did you get there?

I flew to Rio de Janeiro.

You had money to buy a ticket, or did someone help you?

No, no, no, no. No, I went with-- I went the-- HIAS or the UNRRA paid my tickets to going to Bolivia.

With your whole family?

Yeah, my wife and my son. We went as first with-- yeah, we flew. We flew to Rio, and from Rio we flew to other city in Brazil. Sao Paulo, where we stayed about five or six weeks. I don't know, for some reason. Maybe the visa was not ready,

Anyhow, then we got a flight to Bolivia. We went to Sucre. Sucre is the capital of Bolivia. The real capital is La Paz, but we heard more about La Paz. Anyhow, we stayed in Sucre.

And Sucre was terrible only Indians, and a few Arabs, and a few other European.

Where were your friends?

In Sucre, in this little city. But they were there 10 years before. They were settled. They had a store, they had a job, they made good money, and I had nothing.

So I started all kinds of things. First, I went with a crew up in the mountains to cut trees, yeah, and brought them down. And then had a dry cleaning. Yeah. Dry cleaning for menswear, yeah, shirts. All right, anyhow.

You had money with you from Italy?

No, I didn't need any money for--

To start a business, no?

--open a dry cleaning here, because I need only an iron, yeah? And my wife was washing the wash, the laundry, and I was ironing it. Yeah? People brought me the shirts, yeah. The shirts were there. I don't know how you call it. What you spray on to have it--

Starch.

Starch, yeah. I starched and ironed them. But it wasn't the right thing. I couldn't make any money, really. I have no idea how to iron a shirt, yeah. So many times I have to send it back to my wife, wash it again. I have to iron it. Yeah.

But anyhow, one day I said, no, I don't stay here. The American consul is in La Paz, yeah? And La Paz is a bigger city than Sucre. Sucre was really a village. So we sold everything what I had.

I had a lot of tools I brought with me from Rome. When I had this-- was a maintenance job, yeah? I bought all kinds of tools what I could get my hand on, yeah? Maybe I can start a job in Bolivia. I don't know what to do.

Anyhow, this tool, all these tool I sold. I sold it to a good price. Now I had money. So we went to La Paz, took a room in a hotel.

Were your friends disappointed that you left?



Yes, yeah, but I couldn't help it. I did not have luck with my job as a dry cleaner because I didn't understand it. And there were other things I could do. I had little jobs, but I thought in a bigger city I could rather have more chance to find anything.

So we went to La Paz. And I started with a salesman for liquor, and then I was a salesman for something else. Didn't go.

So I had a chance to take over a restaurant. No. First, it was a-- you see how I forget the words. I know this very well, how you call it. What serves in a coffeehouse and a restaurant.

A waiter?

Yeah. I was a waiter in the Jewish club. Yeah? And this was very good. I learned how to balance the plates and bring it to the table, yeah. And I made good money there, yeah.

Private club? A private Jewish club?

Private Jewish club, yeah. I had to work many hours, but it was worthwhile.

And when the poker player, when they played poker, had always a card from them, yeah? So much, so much I got always from the winner.

Oh, it was a gambling club.

Yeah. No, no gambling. They gambled in the evening. After the other people left, they stayed on and gambled. It wasn't really a gambling club. But playing poker there is a--

Pastime.

Yeah, like eating a lunch, yeah? This is the way. And the waiter has to reimburse for staying that long there, because I didn't get any salary. I got only the tips and what I got from the poker player. But it was plenty, yeah?

OK. And this was in La Paz.

And then I took over a restaurant from Maccabi. Maccabi had there-- it was a sport club, but I was not involved with the sport. I was only involved with the restaurant. So I was managing the restaurant there.

Maccabi. What is Maccabi?

Maccabi is a Jewish sport organization.

Sport organization?

Yeah. It must be here also a Maccabi. I think so.

How do you spell that?

M-A-C-C-A-B-I.

Maccabi.

All right.

All right.

All right.

OK. And Maccabi the German spelling. I forgot about.

Yes, all right. Good.

And so I took a restaurant with another woman. She was in the kitchen, and I was in front. And I took this well again, yeah, until for some reason was a misunderstanding, and I left them.

But in the meantime, it was also-- I expected now that another affidavit came. And this time it came, I think I told you, from Ratner, one of the Ratners, I don't know which one.

You went to the embassy first, to--

No, no. I was notified from the embassy, an affidavit is here for you.

You had been seeking something, though. You had been seeking an affidavit to leave.

Yeah, yeah. And I wrote I wrote to the States, to this authority under-- there worked under me a man with a grown-up son. And he went before. He went earlier to the States. And he knew my troubles, yeah? He or she was seeing to send me an affidavit.

They tried first a friendship affidavit, but it wasn't enough. So they went to Ratners. And Ratner made up an affidavit for me. And when this came to La Paz, the consul called me and said, you can go. I had only trouble, my son was born in Italy. So I was of the Austrian quota, and he was off the Italian quota. They didn't go together.

But he finally said, OK, let him be an Austrian. Let him come off this quota so that they can go together.

That was the next question-- how should I go? I don't have any money. I mean, with all the money what I have, I had to live, yeah? So it wasn't much when I had to--

You didn't have any savings, in other words.

No, I couldn't have any saving. It was not that much. But so I need-- and he had to go with the ship from Chile-- Chile is on the sea-- through the-- what is the canal?

Panama?

Panama Canal to Miami. Yeah, and from there-- all right. Anyhow, I went there. And finally they brought, from the Hebrew Free Loan Association, I got all the-- got the money.

You applied?

Yeah, they applied here in the States, yeah, and didn't send me the money. They sent me the ticket, yeah, the ticket for the ship, from the ticket for the plane, because from-- yeah.

Wait a second. No. We went not to Miami. From a city in Panama, maybe Panama City, we flew to Miami. And from Miami, we went with a Greyhound bus first to Georgia, to Atlanta.

What year was this?

'51.

1951.

Yeah.

So how many years did you spend in Bolivia?

Hmm. Let's see. I forgot this to tell you. How many years?

When I came, my boy was five years old when he went there in the kindergarten. And then he went to a-- this was still in Sucre. Yeah? He went there to a Catholic school. There were either public school, where all the Indian and [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] is a mixture between Indian and Spanish. And I didn't want to go. So I sent him in the--

Private--

Right, in the private school, in the Catholic school, till one day he came home with a little bottle-- with a song about the Maria. So I said, no, this is enough. No more.

And this was about the time when I went to La Paz. In La Paz, he went to a Jewish school, private school again. Yeah. Were Jewish and other children, but mostly Jewish. And the teacher were Jewish, yeah? By the way, my son was so good in Hebrew that the principal from the school want him to be a rabbi. [LAUGHS] But he never realized it.

But anyhow, in Bolivia, like I told you, I was a waiter. And then I had my own restaurant. And then I worked in a--

And how many years altogether were you there?

No, wait a second. I came here in '51. I think I was there three years or four years. About three years. Yeah, because when we left Italy, he was a year and a half or two.

Wait a second. No. When I came to the States, my son were 10 years old. Yeah?

So you must have spent about five years there, because he was five when you got there.

Yeah, all right. Five years was it in Bolivia. And yeah. And then finally came--

And you took a bus, then? You got to Miami, and you took a bus to Cleveland?

To Atlanta first.

Atlanta.

There we had a friend. We stayed overnight there. The next day, we went to Cleveland.

And you had a relative here in Cleveland?

No.

No relative?

No, only this man what sent me the affidavit.

Ratner.

Besides Ratner, no.

Oh, besides Ratner.

Yeah, he sent me a [NON-ENGLISH] every day. It was not-- was enough. So Ratner sent me another affidavit. And he was here. And I lived in the-- somewhere on Ashbury when I came.

When you arrived in Cleveland, were there any Jewish agencies that helped you get settled?

There were Jewish agency, but they didn't help me. I got already help to go to Bolivia for the HIAS or from some others. So they didn't help me anything.

In Cleveland.

I had already my part-- they already had that part done, yeah. So I didn't get anything. And I was confident I will, somehow will have work. We'll see what happens.

Did you speak English at the time?

Very little. Very, very little.

So that must have been difficult.

I know a little bit what I learned when I still was in Vienna, but it was not sufficient, yeah.

It must have been difficult to arrive with another--

Yeah, I spoke more with my arm, with my hand, than I speak with my mouth.

At the time that you arrived, did anyone ask you to tell of your experiences, or did you just keep it to yourself?

I couldn't tell anybody.

You didn't speak English, of course.

First of all. And the people who speak German had their own experience. They were not impressed with mine, or they didn't want to hear it. I don't want to hear their story, yeah?

Later on, I could tell my story to German people, or even to English-speaking people. But this today is my first chance to talk about in the open, yeah. Other way-- I gave my son a description from all what I had to go through, but never that in detail what I have today.

But anyhow, my first job was in a factory.

In Cleveland.

In Cleveland. Yeah, on Harvard Avenue somewhere.

And where did you live? Where did you find a place to live?

I lived on Parkwood Drive, near 105th Street. There I had some acquaintances. The brother from them was in Bolivia too, so he sent me to them. So we have somebody who-- he was Viennese too. And he had also a room for me, an apartment for me, yeah?

Before, I lived with this other, with this couple what brought me here for a few weeks, till I could-- but I was still working. I was working in this factory on a drill. I never worked on drill before. But I learned it, yeah. I worked by night, from 6:00 in the evening till 6:00 in the morning.

When I came home I went to sleep. Can you imagine what sleep it was? It was day, and people there, it was still not completely black, but 75% was black. And the people-- anyhow it was-- I could not sleep, really.

Did you join a synagogue when you came to Cleveland?

Yes, I joined-- now it's the Hillcrest Synagogue. Before, it was the Gates of Hope.

Hillcrest, yes.

Yeah, now it's Hillcrest a few years ago. I joined them, because it was mostly German people what belonged to this congregation. I joined them. And my son came back right away there in the religious school, yeah? I went to join the congregation. I went to the temple, the holidays and so on.

Was your rabbi helpful to you, particularly?

No, I didn't ask any help, yeah? Because like I told you, I had a job. The job was hard, yeah. I had almost a nervous breakdown, working always by night and not sleeping enough by day. But then I could switch for day time, yeah.

And after a while, I could even change my job, and had a job in a Jewish store. They sold cutlery on the West Side, on the West 6th Street. You probably know. Big Stein now is the name, no?

How did your wife and child manage, with all this changing of scenery and language, and people.

We spoke always German at home. That's the reason why my son speaks fluently German with an Austrian accent, but still-- and my wife was working, yeah? He was working. She's a dressmaker. So in the beginning, she worked for a store making--

In Bolivia or in the United States?

No, in the United States. In Bolivia she worked too a dressmaker, yeah, only it was more difficult with the language. Here she learned a few words what she needed for her profession, yeah? And she still works part-- very little, only for a few customer what she had for years. They wanted to stay with her. But in the beginning, she had very, a very good business, yeah?

Out of your home?

Yeah.

Out of your apartment.

She worked first in a store. She worked by Erela, if you know the name. Carnegie. Now Erela doesn't exist anymore. And then she worked on the coventry for a store. And there you met more people and could have her own. Then she started working only half days in the store and half day at home. And one day, she quit completely and had her work, work at home, her business.

And your son adjusted well to living in the United States?

Well, he had difficulty. He had to repeat one class. I think I know which class it was. But one thing had to repeat because his English was not enough to coming-- to taking place in the school.

So it was hard for him.

Yeah.

He was 10 years old.

Yeah. But he learned it, and thanks God he speaks without a trace of an accent.

And he's now a professional--

And German, yeah?

How active are you now in the Jewish community?

I belong to the JCC and swim there every day. For a time, I was teaching English. Don't laugh about. English to Russian refugees. Yeah? First at the JCC, and then in the Heights Temple, the former Heights Temple. Was on the one side was-- there was teaching with-- what's that? The wife of--

Guralnik.

Guralnik.

With Mrs. Guralnik I was there, yeah, teaching. This was more than a year or two. I don't know.

And then--

No, no, after I retired. Yeah, yeah, after I retired.

Then you got a job. After your night shift, you got into other things in Cleveland.

Yeah, I said, yeah, I was in a store that sold cutlery wholesale, yeah?

And then what happened? Is that-- did you stay there until your retirement?

No, I worked for Cook United. Yeah. I worked almost 25 years, 24 years I worked.

In what capacity? As warehouse manager.

First, it was a different company, but it's-- what sold sewing notions, toys, school supplies, what sold to 5 and 10 stores, yeah. And then Cook bought off the company. So I worked about five years on the cook, and 20 years onto the private firm. Cohen.

A very seldom name. Cohen was his name. Cohen there are thousands, no? But anyhow, until my retirement, yeah.

I retired in 1972. In 19-- no. Yeah, I was-- 1972. No, I was 72 years old. So I was retired in 1977.

Who died?

No, I retired.

Retired.

In 1977, 72 years old, yeah? And in the meantime, I had a house, also in Mayfield Heights. After one year-- not even one year-- half year in retirement-- I had a heart attack in 1961.

And the older I was getting, the less I could keep up with the house. It was too difficult for me. We couldn't find anybody to cut the grass or shovel the snow. I couldn't do it. So my wife said, let's go in an apartment. And I sold the

house.

To what extent do you feel the Holocaust has affected your life?

I was without roots.

Roots.

Without root. I had to adjust first to Italian, then to Spanish, and then to English. Now I'm ready-- I'm how long? 30 years? 51. Yeah, more than 30 years I'm here, so I'm adjusted to American life, yeah, even if we speak still German at home. You can help it. I can still express me better.

Yeah, the trouble is I should have gone to night school. Yeah? Somehow. But by day, I worked. I was too tired in the evening to go somewhere. So I thought, OK, it will go. Unfortunately, it went, yeah?

Do you think that survivors are different from other Jews?

In which way?

In any way. Do you feel that you have a different outlook on life, on the way you've gotten through your life because of your experience?

No, no. Should I tell you? Very seldom I remember what was before. I live here in the States. Thanks God I have enough to eat, and I have a few pennies besides. So I am American as far as I can go, yeah. I have still a European background, but this is besides.

I am American, and I try to be American as much as I can, and try to live like an American. Television is for me the same interesting pastime like for everybody else.

And what I do, I, after I retired, I start to volunteering, first I told you in JCC. Then I was-- until started while I was volunteering at Hillcrest Hospital. It was close by.

And I'm still volunteering now in-- Cleveland Heights has a project for retired seniors. And I'm keeping there the-- not the-- a list of the retired person, what makes-- so viel hour in Montefiore home, and so many hours. And there I keep track of that, yeah?

Office work.

To have something to do. Yeah, office work. My wife works one day a week in Montefiore home as a volunteer, as a volunteer to chat with the woman there, and whatever.

Do you think--

I belong to the B'nai B'rith, the Einstein-- Einstein Lodge.

So you remained with your Jewish ties mainly. All of your affiliations are with Jewish organizations--

Oh, yes, yeah.

--just as early in your life in Vienna was also with Jewish organizations.

There were not so many Jewish organization in Vienna, yeah? At least I didn't belong to them. And here, here, I belong to B'nai B'rith. I'm not very happy there, but I know I do something for the Jewish cause. That's the reason I began.

Alfred, do you have a personal message that you would like to share with us regarding the Holocaust or anything that has happened to you in your lifetime? Because many things have happened to you.

Yes, yeah. I wouldn't know how to break this in words. I don't know. I'm happy that I have everything behind me, and I live in peace, and I can see my son-- not so, my son-- my grandsons growing up, yeah, and I enjoy every morning to be with them.

Last week, like two weeks ago, my daughter-in-law had had 20th anniversary reunion from her high school. So she came to here. Because I see my son very little in Cleveland. Mostly, I have to travel to Philadelphia to see them. But I'm happy every time I see them. Yeah? And I'm happy I have them.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before we conclude with our interview?

I don't know what to say. Yeah, I can only say I'm happy that I have a chance to talk with you all my things, my experiences I had in my whole stay since I left Vienna. In fact, I'm longer in the States than I lived in Vienna, yeah? So I'm really more here than there.

When I went to Europe once, was it mostly because my son wanted to see Europe. He said, at this time, his boy, my grandson, was little. He was three years old or so. So he said now is the chance. Later on, I cannot go.

Or I don't know, whatever is. Now is a chance. I have the money. You have a little money. Let's go there. And so this we did. Well, he showed him-- I showed him.

But you were glad to come back to the United States.

Oh, yes. Yeah. You cannot compare that, yeah? Yeah, this is different.

I never had a car in Europe. In Europe was not used-- maybe at this time not even here. But in Europe I didn't have a car. And I was here, I don't know, a few years. And I had already a car, and I can drive to work. So I'm very grateful that I'm here, and I'm grateful to you, that you listen to my story.

Well, we were very grateful that you were willing to participate in this project. You were-- did a wonderful job. And this will go down in the archives at Yale for other people to listen to for generations to come. Thank you very much, Alfred.

Thank you.