

April 19th, 1996, Joshua Gray interviewing Peter Masters. Perhaps we should just start with some basic facts, your date of birth, where you were born, stuff like that.

I was born on the 5th of February, 1922 in Vienna, Austria. My father was a Hungarian born in Szeged in Hungary near the border of Yugoslavia and Romania on the Tisza River. My mother was a second-generation Viennese. Or maybe I should say first generation, because her father came from Poland, which was then Austria, to learn a profession in Austria, in Vienna, in the imperial capital.

He was an apprentice gold and silversmith and became a leading one in Vienna, an expert on diamonds, pearls and precious and semi-precious stones known all over Europe. And he came at the age of 14 or 15 from Krakow to Vienna, and lived in Vienna all his life until finally, he understood that the Nazis were a government whose rules you couldn't obey, and that you had to try and get out.

He had always been a respected citizen. It was very hard for him to grasp that. He went to Antwerp where he was well known because it was the center of the world diamond trade. And he came to visit in London, couldn't stay, and came back to Antwerp because there, he could work. He was 74 years old, exactly my age at the moment, when he was murdered in Auschwitz.

And you talk about the fact that your parents were divorced in the book. And how did that affect you and also with your sister?

And also with what?

Your sister.

Yes. Well, I have to say that I accepted the fact that my parents were in fact divorced twice, because the first time, my grandfather said we don't have divorces in our family, and he made them remarry or threatened sanctions. And since he was the financially solvent part of the family, that was a very serious threat.

I saw my father occasionally, but I must say it was not a traumatic loss because after all, the first time he left, I was, I think, eight years old. And my mother was very supportive even when she had a full time job subsequently. And I remember, you know, children, we were brought up. We were asked silly questions, I thought tasteless questions by adults customarily, like whom do you like better, your mommy or your daddy.

And I always felt the politically correct answer was both the same, and said that automatically by reflex. My sister who was two years, 2 and 1/2 years older, objected to that, and she said, why should I say I like my father equally when I don't. And she would speak out.

The most I saw of my father as an adult, as a teenager, was when we were interned together briefly in Britain as friendly enemy aliens. And he took a keen interest in my well-being in the internment camp.

When you were growing up in Vienna, were you raised as religious or secularist, and how did that factor into your childhood?

My maternal grandfather was a very religious man. My paternal grandfather, I'm told, also was a very religious man, but of course, he died decades before I was born, and I never saw him at all. I saw his first wife. He was married twice. I saw his first wife once on a very brief visit, which was very, very uneventful and disappointing.

We expected a new grandmother, and she was going to bring us toys and what have you. And I think she bought us a couple of oranges and an apple and allegedly pulled up a chair to any wardrobe or cupboard in our apartment in Vienna to see whether my mother had dusted the top properly. Whether that's true or not, I'm not quite sure. But I was brought up with that story going around.

And she left after two days. I never saw her again. My maternal grandfather, who was religious, would take us to the synagogue in Vienna, of which he was a member. That was on main holidays.

When I was bar mitzvahed, that was for some reason not to be at the main synagogue but at the local synagogue in my neighborhood. I don't think I'd ever been inside it before because my parents certainly gravitated towards my grandfather's practice of religion, which, incidentally, had some reservations.

For instance, say the idea is to explain to the children what it's all about. My grandfather would do the Hebrew part very rapidly and sort of to himself, as it were, and never translate a word of what he was saying. So insofar as religion was taught in the schools-- there's no church and state separation in Austria-- the only thing we learned about Hebrew at all was in school during one hour of religion every week.

The American practice of kids going to Sunday school certainly hadn't reached us. If it happened, it happened in different circles, not in ours. So I didn't learn anything.

So when I had my bar mitzvah, my grandfather-- my father being abroad-- took me to the local shul and talked to the shamash. And the shamash said, [YIDDISH], what is the boy's Hebrew name? My grandfather hadn't thought that was going to come up because I didn't have a Hebrew name.

So he saw Peter, and he said Pincus. And the shamash said, [YIDDISH], for heaven's sake, [YIDDISH], you are still alive. And your name is Abraham Pincus.

And my grandfather got very red in the face. And the shamash quickly said, you made a mistake. You forgot. And my grandfather said yes. And the shamash said, his name is Peretz. So my Hebrew name has been Peretz ever since.

Did you ever experience trouble growing up because of anti-Semitic beliefs or political beliefs?

Yes. And this is very hard to understand because what happens is the casual anti-Semitic remark which you might run into in any country, which was to some extent fostered, perhaps, by the church. The Roman Catholic Church in Austria was the state religion.

And there was an awful lot of, at times, especially during nationalistic governments, saying we are a Christian German nation. And what exactly they meant by "German" was not, by any means, connected to the Nazis and Anschluss. It preceded it by years. And there was also an undercurrent of anti-Prussianism. And to an Austrian, almost anybody north of the border, whether they are Bavarians or southern Germans or Prussians doesn't really make any difference. They were all Prussians collectively in popular opinion.

And there had been a seven years' war against the Prussians at the end of the previous century. And there were people around who remembered that war of 1866, I think it was. And so you'd find an occasional anti-Semitic remark and sidestep it or take it in your stride. You'd hardly challenge it.

And then it got progressively more so. And one of the biggest syndromes of the Nazi experience was the ever-tightening noose. This was particularly so in Germany. In Austria, fortunately and unfortunately, it was much more rapid. There were immediate atrocities which caused people who could to run away immediately and saved many.

But also, it hurt many people, whereas in Germany, they were living in a sort of adjusted, more or less-- the Jews were living in an adjusted, more or less comfortable way. The Austrians couldn't believe that, in Germany, you could go to public places and sit there or go into businesses or have your hair done in a non-Jewish whatever.

That doesn't mean that the awful things didn't happen in Germany. They simply happened more gradually and lulled a lot of people into a false confidence, which caused them not to run away until it was very difficult or impossible.

So of course, as soon as the Nazis came or even before, when the Nazi party was legalized by pressuring the preceding Austrian government, which was a nationalistic, anti-Nazi government but also anti-socialist and anti-democratic-- so

that the Nazi party was legalized.

And there were more newspapers. They built little wooden frames on stands. And there, they published-- they displayed papers like *Der Stürmer*, which was Julius Streicher's anti-Semitic paper which had retouched photos of Jews with crossed eyes and long noses, supposedly actual photos of perpetrators of horrible crimes from miscegenation to rape to stealing and cheating and what have you in the clumsiest kind of way, heavy handedly.

And one stood there and saw this. And then they would have stickers and flyers displayed with it. And some of those had quite an effect on us youngsters.

For instance, there was one little sticker flyer with a picture of a caricature of a Jew. And with it was a verse that, translated, it would say, who is advancing-- who comes here on flat feet with a crooked nose and curly hair? Every German must know the answer. It is the Jew, and he must be expelled.

So there was a scenario created that the Jews were indoor, weakling [? keeper. ?] And that caused some of us by reflex to want to be back to nature, outdoor people. It caused people to join all kinds of-- what shall I say-- Zionist organizations not only because they wanted Israel to arise, which seemed a very far-fetched idea at the time, but because they wanted to show that Jews could work on the land and not be intellectualized bookkeepers but were tough and get into sports and this and that.

So this had quite an effect on us. And we certainly wanted to prove that we were different. Now, I also think that that caused a great danger to many of us because inevitably, all of us are pondering, if we didn't go to a concentration camp, if we weren't arrested-- and many of us were not because we were young. The danger was greater for people who were 18 or thereabouts.

We said, well, what would I have done? Now, after Green Beret Commando training, I can think of all kinds of things that I would have done. But I didn't have that training then. And what I would have done, the answer which I'm gradually arriving at now is I probably would have said what many people of my kind did say.

I will show them that I can work. And I'll be such a valuable asset that, surely, nothing will happen to me because they will appreciate how tough I am and how determined I am. And I'll show them that I'll do useful things-- not just for the Nazi cause, simply-- the thing was dressed up that we were going, after all, [NON-ENGLISH].

They thought we couldn't work. We'll show them we could work. And I bet you that many people walked into the gas chamber having come in with the determination that they were going to show them that they were tough. Didn't matter, of course, how tough you were, right?

So you're saying that's one of the reasons why you joined the Boy Scouts as a youth.

The Boy Scouts were an international organization. And it was something that-- they were for peace and ethics. And joining the Boy Scouts was probably more or less a social thing plus, yes, what you say is quite right. Incidentally, the scouts are quite different or were quite different in Australia than they are here.

I was a Scoutmaster in America, press ganged in by one of my children. And that was almost unheard of in Austria, that a parent would be the Scoutmaster. The hierarchy of the Scouts leadership starting at the lowest level and on up was from the boys. That is to say, the boys were patrol leaders. The boys were troop leaders. The boys were leaders of the higher-- as they got older, all the scouts.

And then the leadership of the whole Scout organization would be in the hands of boys who had come up through the Scouts, never parents. The whole idea was to go away weekends independently and self-reliance of boys cooking, boys putting up tents, boys hiking.

One of the Scouts groups to which I belonged spent the summer in what was Yugoslavia in Croatia on the Dalmatian Coast on an island. And the whole thing was run by boys and grown-up boys who had been through the system. And we

set up a camp on nothing, primitive conditions.

There were no facilities. There are no houses, nothing. We built tents, and we set up a kitchen and latrines. And we washed our dishes in the ocean. And we were miles away from any-- two hours from the nearest civilization.

So did events such as the Nazi party rallies and the 1936 Olympics affect your views and your actions?

Yes. We were so keen on sports that we followed the Olympics very, very carefully. We saw the Leni Riefenstahl film on the '36 Olympics and we embraced Austria. We were patriotic Austrians in '36, two years before the Nazis came.

There was an incident involving the Hakoah, the Austrian Jewish sports club called Hakoah, who had a soccer team and had-- but they were particularly famous for their swimmers. And the women's swim team refused to go to Berlin. The women's swim team, I'm mentioning in particular, because they were considered the ones with the best chances. They were so good.

Now, they refused to go to Berlin because of the Nazi setup. And the International Olympic Committee, I believe, banned them from competition for several years, enough years to mean that their career was finished-- because a young swimmer, if you take a couple of years away, you're gone-- which caused quite an outrage among us, certainly.

So we saw the Olympics and heard about Jesse Owens being snubbed by Hitler. And we delighted in the American successes and the American Black successes because it was so very impressive to us. And it disproved all this master race nonsense.

And the American athletic team came to Vienna on a tour after the Olympics. And the whole thing was astonishing and impressive. And we really enjoyed this whole setup.

For instance, there was a film on the Olympics showing the qualifications for the high jump. And the Europeans, I think it was 1 meter 86 foot to qualify or something. And some of them had trouble. It took them a couple of tries, if not on six foot but then on the next one up and so on.

And the Afro Americans jumped it with their track suits on and barely taking a [? lunge, ?] like three steps and over. And only when it got down towards the end did they stood down and mean business because now it was against each other. So we ate all this up in Vienna.

So were you aware how Hitler disguised Germany and the Nazi rise of power during the Olympics and took off the sign that would say, "Jews not allowed here," and stuff like that?

By this time, this certainly hadn't reached Austria. We had heard horror stories from Germany. Now, you have to understand that from an Austrian point of view, the German people we saw, the visitors, tourists, the distant family and so on, we had a sort of attitude that said these people are notorious for exaggeration.

You mustn't believe everything they say. There's an Austrian saying that says the soup is not eaten as hot as it is cooked. I think we used that as an excuse to say, well, this thing isn't all that serious.

And in any case, we said, this could never happen here because we are much more civilized than they are. And we are the hub of the world artistically, musically, medically, what have you. And the world wouldn't permit this to happen here.

And certainly, it's a glib saying. I heard it in England after I emigrated. This cannot happen here. We wouldn't stand for it.

Well, I was reminded of that when, in England, as a young refugee, I saw Boris Karloff film where he has been convicted to death by a jury and then mitigated or escaped or whatever, I don't know. And in the horror film, he decides that he's going to kill the entire jury.

And he invites them over to a party very mysteriously and attractively. And so they all come. And there's nobody there. And they're all sitting in that house waiting for someone to appear.

And there's an intercom system which says what the intention is, and all the doors are locked, and one after the other is going to be killed. And one is killed, and then another. And then a young woman is to be next, and her fianc  was also there or a young man is also there.

And he says, you're not going to kill her over my dead body. And the voice says, that can easily be arranged. You can go first. And that's, within the horror film, a line that brings a laugh. That can easily be arranged.

Well, you multiply that. And the whole attitude of saying they can't kill us all when you have accepted that they are killing some people is then counteracted by someone saying, yes, we can. And over your dead body, fine, you get killed first and foremost.

So you see the immensity. There's some difficulty grasping the immensity of such a plan, which is why it has horrified all of us for so long that when two of us get together now, within five minutes, we are speaking about it.

But you have to appreciate. At first, it was, this can't happen here. Then it happened. Then we said this can't last here. And the attitude of saying the Nazis can't last was extremely widespread by all those who suffered from them.

So before the Nazis invaded Austria, took over Austria in 1938, did you have a desire to resist? Were you angry with what was happening in Germany? Or did you just go on living as usual?

By this time, by the time of the Germans marching into Austria and the very visible local support, which, of course, brings up the quite interesting question, of where does Austria belong in all this? And this is a good question because the Austrians have portrayed themselves as victims, Hitler's first victims.

Now, how come? Well, the Allies-- certainly, Churchill and Roosevelt-- didn't want the Russians, Stalin, to swallow up Austria as he swallowed up Eastern Europe. So it was very convenient and expedient to say that Austria was the first victim.

Now, you needed a little more historical fact to back that up. And the historical fact was there. You could say Germany elected Hitler. Austria never elected Hitler. Austria was invaded by Hitler. The Germans marched in to stop the previous totalitarian Austrian nationalistic government of Schuschnigg from conducting a plebiscite, which he would have won, I'm convinced, against an Anschluss with Germany.

Now, Hitler conducted his own plebiscite, which was not an election-- but the Nazis would have you believe it is tantamount to one-- and won it by 99.8%. And nobody wins anything by 99.8%. So you see, the Austrians-- who were all those Austrians cheering?

Well, politically, in the first Austrian Republic, which is the republic after the Hapsburgs, after World War I, were politically opportunistic. They had been pretty well shaken by the fact that they lost the First World War and lost their empire. And now a nation that had a huge Austro-Hungarian Empire was reduced to a 6 million country with 2 million living in Vienna in the capital, every third person.

Therefore, a surfeit of doctors, lawyers, and what have you, 2 million in the capital of 6 million. So the dissatisfaction of the depression and unemployment and so on led to extremism and opportunists. And certainly, the Germans promised work for everyone. Hitler did.

Now, there's another factor. In Poland, and I've just seen a film called Shtetl-- I don't know whether you saw it-- which is quite shocking. In the film, a young Polish historian, who comes across as a very positive figure to begin with, finally really chickens out when it comes to mentioning the fact that, in that particular shtetl in the small town in Poland, anti-Semitism was rampant, had been rampant, was rampant still and didn't mention the Jews in the celebration of its 500th

anniversary celebration when the Jews constituted, I believe, 50% or 60% of the population in [PLACE NAME].

Now, why? Pragmatist. He feels there's nobody there now. What support is he likely to elicit by speaking positively of the Jews? It's true that the Poles, also egged on by a narrow-minded Catholic church, were anti-Semitic, as were most countries, and perhaps more so.

Then they saw the opportunity of enriching themselves by just simply looting with official encouragement what had belonged to the Jews. This kind of-- what you want to call it-- blue-collar envy of Jewish shopkeepers, as in the old film, *The Shop on Main Street* in Czechoslovakia, where a woman has a button shop and barely makes a living. But they all think she's rich because it's in the Main Street.

And after they get rid of her, they search and search to find where she has hidden her money. She didn't have any. The idea that all the business is in Jewish hands and so on, the envy from below has always been affect anti-Semitism.

Now, subsequently, under the Nazis in Poland, it was like bounty hunting. In other words, looting was authorized and encouraged. In Austria, also, anybody puts up a swastika [INAUDIBLE] goes looting. Well, where there is greed meeting opportunity, it takes ethical principle of a rare kind, apparently, regrettably, to resist the temptation of enriching yourself, especially if you don't want to think about it too much.

And the powers that be say, well, not only is that the thing to do. You must do it. It's your patriotic duty to do it. So everybody starts going looting.

At the time, there were black humor jokes. A comedian said great, big Mercedes drove by. And would you believe? There wasn't a Nazi driving it. This was early with Nazis in power, about to take power, in power. So they arrested him for saying that.

After he got out-- in those days, when still got out-- he went back on the stage of his cabaret and said, a great, big Mercedes drove up. And I must correct what I said before. There was a Nazi driving it. So he was arrested again.

You see the thing. You're damned if you do. You're damned if you don't. And this was a joke. There were jokes to the end until the horror sunk in fully.

One of the famous Viennese Jewish comedians who was in the concentration camp early supposedly wrote a letter saying, I must say I'm being treated very well, letting it stand at that, which, of course, has a double meaning. I must say, meaning in spite of myself-- I must say, I'm being forced because somebody is holding a gun to my head.

Now, to me, the horrendous thing is that there were jokes. There is a main street in Vienna called Graben. It means when the city was surrounded by a moat. But the word Graben meaning "moat" is retained by one of the main streets.

And it also has another meaning, namely to dig is [INAUDIBLE] And one of the black humor jokes in the early days was that somebody referred to this street in Vienna. And his Jewish friend says, oh my god, they're digging, too, now?

And this doesn't translate well. But what I'm saying is they were scrubbing the streets. They were doing this and that under duress. And naming that street in Vienna suggested to someone that they were being forced to dig up a street.

But as I said, the horrendous thing was that there was actually black humor, people saying so-and-so was arrested. In the beginning, if somebody told you somebody was arrested, the natural reflex question is, why?

That was going out of style. The black humor response was because he had scrambled eggs for breakfast. Again, that this is a bad joke is neither here nor there. What I'm pointing out is that it wasn't taken so seriously yet that you wouldn't make jokes about it.

So people were making jokes. But at the same time, and progressively more so, they lived in horror, horror from the fear of the knock on the door at an unusual time of the day. Doors had these little peepholes where you looked.

And I remember looking out at an unusual hour when there was a knock at the door. And I saw a black hat with the eagle and swastika. And I said, oh my god, the SS. And it was a postman with a new uniform. But in the meantime, I was shaking.

I was such a keen soccer fan that I went to watch the first big soccer game of Germany versus Ostmark, the new name for incorporated Austria. The Nazis being Nazis, they combined with a political gala and the Reichssportführer, the sports leader of Germany, von Tschammer und Osten, who I think was subsequently tried at Nuremberg-- I'm not sure-- spoke.

The whole place decked out in swastika flags and everybody standing with their right hand raised, which, in Austria, Jews were not allowed to do. In Germany, some pupils in school were forced to give the Hitler salute. In Austria, the Jews were not allowed to desecrate the Hitler salute by raising their right hand.

Everybody, of course, was wearing swastika lapel buttons-- if they were party members, the one in the little red circle. And if they were not, just shiny chromium ones to show off that they were loyal.

I went down to the soccer game. And the newspapers had printed in advance all kinds of stories saying, of course, the Ostmark players don't have a chance because they've been undernourished. And the regime didn't foster their sports people, whereas the Germans, of course, had been under the Nazi diet and are well fed.

The Austrians won 2 to 1, which was really embarrassing for the people who had been printing all these stories, you see. And they salvaged something by saying the outstanding player was the center half, SS man so-and-so, who had been an illegal party member, you see, or something like that.

The audience all stood with their right hands raised. And I looked through my binoculars at the Reichssportführer because I didn't want to be out there visible without my hand raised. It was really an act of daring to go to the game, you understand. But as I say, my being a soccer fan overloaded those risks.

And I was cycling all over Vienna. And on one occasion, I carried an amount of money to my mother's business because it was deemed in the family that this money had to be transferred because it was already known that if you left, you could only take 10 deutschemarks with you. And so to try and get some money out-- which usually meant giving it to some foreign diplomat and pay 75% to him and get 25% out or some such arrangement. All kinds of things were being attempted.

Anyway, I, as a teenager, was considered a better risk to carry the money than an adult who might have been stopped in the street any time, as might I have. But I was on my bicycle. So I stuffed it all inside my shirt in banknotes and cycled and transferred the money.

On the way back, I was assailed by a Nazi from my neighborhood who knew me and who started to shout some Jewish epithets at me. And by sheer reflex-- also, the Nazis were already in power-- I responded in four-letter word responses, which was a dangerous thing to do.

And he said, I'm going to get you. And he started to ride after me. And I cycled faster. I knew my neighborhoods well. And I turned the corner and put my bike in between a taxi stand, and he went on by. But the terror of these things was that these guys knew where I lived. So you never knew what was going to happen next, you see.

And these things happened a couple of times, things like that, barely worth mentioning. But somebody calling your name, you calling it back. I have one story in the book about it and other ones that I don't have in the book.

I went to visit my great aunt and her daughter in the Vienna second district, which was predominantly Jewish. And when I came over the bridge on my bicycle, over the bridge to the Danube Canal, a uniformed Nazi of the NSKK-- that is, the Kraftfahrkorps, the automotive corps of the Nazi party-- pulled me over.

Again, pulling over, it's like a cop giving you a ticket or something, which usually gives you sort of a pang of something happening. It's no comparison with what you felt then because you didn't know whether you were going to get away from this or whether they were going to pull you in for no reason. There was never any reason.

He had a microphone like you have, and he had a loudspeaker. And he started to address me very pompously. Here, I'm 16 years old, right? And I've been stopped in the middle of a bridge in the center of Vienna.

And he said, we have here a young man who has committed a very serious offense. I had no idea what he was talking about. And a crowd gathered, of course, because of this loudspeaker in the middle of a bridge.

And he said, you are no doubt aware of what your crime is. I had no idea. And I didn't say anything. And he said, were you going too fast? I said, no, sir. They asked silly questions like that.

And then he said, I will tell you all what he was doing. And I'll tell you so you remember it. You were cycling too close to the curb. What if a pedestrian had stepped off the curb?

My reflex answer would have been, I would have put on my brakes. In the middle of Vienna, you don't speed on a bicycle over the bridge. It's not possible. I didn't say anything at all. I was just hoping he'd let me go at the end. He did with a severe warning.

He wanted to create an incident. The fact that I was Jewish didn't come up. I didn't wear a badge. That's enough, you see.

But the terror of being confronted by a uniformed person in public in any manner at all-- because it could end any way at all. There is no telling how it could end. And this is a nothing story, you see? Nothing. But it contributes to feeling, let's get the hell out of here.

What about contributing to the feeling of resistance or wanting to do something, take up arms? Or did you just want to flee and emigrate to Britain, for instance?

It didn't-- there was no-- OK, when the Nazis first moved in, there was actually resistance. Relatively little publicity reached the outside world. But there were socialists. There were communists. There were dedicated members of the nationalistic right-wing party that was the government.

One of my best friends was a doctor in emergency. He told me that people were coming in, Nazis, with their throat cut, some with knife and shot wounds of all natures. And this doctor was quarter Jewish and certainly a liberal-thinking person.

But he had an awful time. The Nazis would lie there in emergency with their throat cut and say heil Hitler. Say heil Hitler, doctor. And he would say, shut up. I'm doing a job. And the Nazi would say, if you don't say heil Hitler, I won't let you stitch me up. And he would say, if it weren't for my oath, I wouldn't stitch you up. So shut up.

They wanted their photo taken to show the party how they had been mutilated for the sake of the party as capital towards their future careers. I think that they alone in operating, in emergency, convinced my doctor friend that he had to get out quickly.

The next day, he was demoted from being the 6th assistant as a young man to the 17th because there were only 17. He was not yet fired, but you could see what was going to happen.

But for unorganized, apolitical people like myself, because there was this idea of keeping away from politics that my parents certainly-- my mother had. Politics were a no-no. I wasn't allowed to join any political group. It is considered dangerous. And all political parties had been outlawed by the previous Austrian government.

So the Boy Scouts were apolitical, you see. So the idea of now joining a resistance was unthinkable. The wanting to do

something, as soon as I was outside and it was evident that there was going to be a war, that became very, very compelling.

Now, you must appreciate the atmosphere in Britain in 1938 when we came out was not at all [? prepared ?] for a war. They're our good friends, the Germans, you know. And if you saw any airplanes in the air, they were double-decker yellow-painted training planes, Tiger Moth, that would do all kinds of stunts because that's where they trained their Air Force.

And what you had seen in Austria, over flying of the German Luftwaffe, it was very, very intimidating. I never saw a tank in Britain in '38 or '39 until the war started in September '39. The whole attitude was isolationist.

Once you're over in England, though, and you were labeled friendly enemy alien, did that have any influence on you?

Sure. The war had started by this time. And the thing is that we had to-- if you had seen the Nazis in operation, there was no doubt which way they were going, that what they were aiming for was that they were aiming for world domination, that they were aiming for killing and eliminating whomever they perceived to be their enemies.

That meant your friends and your family, for a start. So we actually found ourselves in the perverse position of having to hope for a war because without the war, the notion that they would collapse to their rotten core from within appeared less and less likely. So now, the big thing was to strive to be allowed to participate in what, after all, was going to be our war. [BOTH TALKING]

What do you mean by "our war?" Sorry to interrupt.

Oh. We had lived under the Nazis. We had seen where they were going and what they were doing long before the people in England became aware of it. Britain declared war on the 3rd of September, 1939 and France because of the ultimatum to withdraw from-- the Nazis to withdraw from Poland, which they ignored. And now there was going to be a war.

And we thought, surely, this is our war where we can participate in fighting our nemesis. And of course, now, we were suspect, and they decided to intern us in stages and sent 2,000 to Australia, 2,000 to Canada, and what have you. And what we wanted to do was fight.

Not everybody. There were some who said, well, we've been through enough. Let someone else do it now. But not my guys.

Those of you who wanted to fight, did you view yourselves as friendly enemy aliens? Or did you view yourselves as Jewish refugees?

I got into trouble because of that, of the self image, right? I was working on [? Farm Hill ?] farm in the Thames Valley between Henley and Maidenhead. And I heard a radio broadcast. And it said, enemy aliens must register.

And I thought about that for a moment. And I said, well, I guess technically that could mean me. But then I said, if they want me, they'll tell me more specifically. I'm registered. They know where I am.

But I'm not going to volunteer that. I won't even make a phone call because if I ask, maybe they think I am an enemy alien. So I didn't. Next thing comes the little police car driving down the lane to the farm. And there is a constable.

And he says, you failed to register as an enemy alien. And I said, well, I consider myself a refugee and not an enemy alien. And he said, that doesn't wash. You are an enemy alien. You will have to come with me.

Well, I was just mowing the lawn, which was an extra job for the farmer's wife after a day's work. And I remember because as I was mowing the lawn, I said, oh, I wish something would happen that I don't have to finish this lousy, boring job. And there it was. I had to put the lawn mower aside and-- had push lawn mower-- and go with the

policeman.

I was still in my cowshed clothes and pigsty clothes, which smelled badly. And I said, can I change? And he said, if you hurry up. And I said, I'll be right down. I went to the stairs to go upstairs to my room, change my clothes.

And he came with me, the police constable. And so at the bottom of the stairs, I said, after you. And he said, nuh-uh, after you. And that "after you" convinced me that I was under arrest. I hadn't realized.

Then there was another sequel. He said, do you have a camera or any weapons? I said I had a pocketknife. He wasn't interested. And I have a camera, but it doesn't work much. And here it is.

And one of the farmer's kids said, you had another camera. Gratuitous remark. Well, here's what happened. One of the farmer's kids had a cheap box camera. And he said, it's broken. And they saw it in the trash.

Now, to a Viennese kid, the idea that somebody would throw a camera in the trash seemed unacceptable. So I said, well, maybe it can be fixed. And I fished it out of the trash. And the shutter didn't work, and I couldn't make it work. I played with it for an evening or two. And when it didn't work, I threw it back in the trash.

So I told the police constable. Yes, there was another camera. It didn't belong to me-- what I just told you. So he said, where is it? I said, in the trash if they haven't picked it up yet. Let's go there.

Well, this was a big farm, 300 cows, 500 pigs. There were about 12 trash cans or more. Police constable emptied one after the other on the ground until we found the camera. He was doing his job thoroughly.

So then he had the broken camera. And we drove to the police station seven miles away and waited for a couple of hours for my turn. And they said, you really must be more careful to report when you hear something on the radio. And I explained why I hadn't. And they said, well, that's all. And I could go back to the farm.

Of course, now, I had to go seven miles with no public transportation, which was a little difficult. And happily, there was a very comely young woman who was a nurse at a nearby estate, a babysitter or an au pair or something who was a German refugee.

So I offered to walk with her. And it was very exciting. It was the first time I had any kind of date of any kind.

And unfortunately, after we had walked a mile or two, the farmer came in his Vauxhall and picked us up. He was looking for me. The police had told him that we had been let go. And so my first date was a fiasco, and it ended right there because he drove her home and then me home back to the farm. And he told everybody that I was walking with this young girl and that she was not a suitable person to walk with anyway because she painted her fingernails.

When you decide to join the Pioneer Corps, did you experience any anti-Semitism in the army from a British officer corps, perhaps?

No. No, didn't come up at all. None that I recall of any kind. First, of course, within the unit, there were British non-coms and British officers to begin with. Well, if you mention it, yes, perhaps one could say so.

We had one major in charge in one of the companies I was in who said that he had previously been in Fiji. And he compared the natives of Fiji favorably with us, saying that they were nature's gentlemen-- it was his phrase, first time I heard that phrase-- and that we were lacking in that trait.

But that was about the measure of it. I mean, that's not exactly being exposed to anti-Semitism. There were better and worse non-coms, better and worse-- some good, some bad, some indifferent.

Some non-coms say this on principle, I suppose, which I think made some of us resolve to be different if ever we reached that plateau. I must say the idea of becoming a non-commissioned officer never occurred to me in the Pioneer

Corps.

I was a kid. I was one of the younger ones. And I was fairly-- what shall we call it-- free spirited, and I was more likely to get into trouble than to get promoted. And in fact, didn't get promoted until the Commandos just before D-Day.

So when you did join the army, did you do so aware of what was currently going on in Germany, such as the Einsatzgruppen and the mass murders over there?

To which degree one realized the wholesale aspect of the Holocaust is very difficult to pin down. We knew of concentration camps from very early on, even in my six months under the Nazis in Austria. There were people who were being arrested for what reason? Because they had scrambled eggs for breakfast or whatever.

There's a story-- I'm not sure I wrote about it-- of a friend of my parents who had a food business, [INAUDIBLE] a food shop specializing in exotic food. He would have pineapples and bananas and things which were hard to get in Vienna. Grapefruit.

And the story was that some SS men one evening said, gee, I feel like eating one of these items. But where would I get it this time of the night? And the other one said, well, there's the Jew over in the second district who is very industrious and usually in his shop until late at night getting ready for the next morning.

And because he gets fresh deliveries, let's walk over there. And they did and arrested him and helped themselves to food. And he was sent to concentration camp there and then, just like that. And he was released some months later in the beginning.

In the beginning, all kinds of things happened like that. People were released. He had been beaten and was supposedly out of his mind. I never saw him. He went to Israel almost immediately.

I'm still corresponding with his daughter. But it affected his mind, apparently. One of my Boy Scout leaders was arrested and out with completely distracted symptoms of mental disorder.

Many people in the early days received urns with ashes, [? labored ?] shot while trying to escape. Obviously, this must have been a period where the Nazis were anxious to demonstrate a degree of legitimacy that they had arrested somebody for political reasons or because they were, whatever, dangers to the regime. And they were trying to escape, and so they were shot.

They were probably shot out of hand and murdered without any real attempt to escape. This is really irrelevant. But what is remarkable is that they took the trouble to send the ashes to the family saying, trying to escape. And this happened in the beginning.

Now, later, it got progressively more so. But there are some things that stick in my mind as being absolutely amazing. For instance, in England, there was a thing like The Three Stooges, you know, called The Crazy Gang. I don't know if you ever heard of them. OK.

There was actually a feature film called The Crazy Gang in the Concentration Camp. Funny. Now, I vaguely remember seeing it but not really. I mean, what is horrifying is the idea that somebody would make such a movie.

Of course, Stalag 17 or whatever it was called, that was a television series subsequently, you remember, of prisoner of war camp with a funny German guard who was a nice guy. These are all highly questionable taste wise.

To me, there is no such thing as a joke about a concentration camp, obviously. It's not funny. Nothing is funny.

So at which point exactly one realized-- at one point, I thought I volunteered for the Commandos because they had killed my grandfather. And then I found out I hadn't-- I didn't really know that my grandfather had been killed until after I was in the Commandos. It became a matter of principle, making up one's mind to be a carte blanche volunteer.

You want me to do something, I'll do it. If somebody had said, be a kamikaze and crash land an explosive plane on Berchtesgaden, I would have done it. And I think so would a good many of my colleagues.

Would you have done it for yourself or for the Austrians or for the Jews?

I would say all of the above. We've had a lot of discussion, some of ourselves, about some of these things, sometimes serious, sometimes perhaps lightheartedly.

I remember, for instance, when the Israeli athletes were assassinated in the Munich Olympics, reflecting that if someone had said to me, there is a planeload that contains the German soccer team during Nazi period, you can get some explosives on their plane and blow them up, I think I would have said no.

Not because I'm a soccer fan. Not because I sympathize with Nazis of any ilk. But because I think that my hatred, if you can call it that, my revenge motivation is more targeted to people who have done something.

Now, if it had been a German army unit, a planeload of German soldiers during the war, the most innocent of country bumpkin Nazi soldiers, I would have said yes. You see the difference? I mean, and I'm saying that one does not perpetrate horror measures against, quote unquote, "innocent civilians."

And if I don't watch it, then I'll get into the recent Beirut situation. And I think it's unfortunate. And I think that it's borne of the frustration against suicidal bombers hitting you. And whom do you target in response? An action must be taken. And the next question is, what action?

So do you recall what you were feeling when you first heard the notice to come up if you're interested in a secretive, dangerous position, which would eventually become a 3 Troop?

Oh, yes. I saw the notice on the board which said, special and hazardous duty. And I said, that's for me, surely. I tried to volunteer before for a couple of things and never even gotten an interview, possibly because I'd been interned and some bureaucrat somewhere said, anybody who's been interned is suspect. I don't know. So when they-- an opportunity had to be grabbed.

So do you consider what you did, fighting for a 3 Troop, a form of resistance?

Call it what you will. Resistance or revenge or trying-- I mean, one of my Commando friends, Steve Ross, phrased it perfectly. He said, we may not have known what we are fighting for. We had no great illusions the world was going to be perfect afterwards, and this was a war to end all wars.

But we knew what we were fighting against. And there wasn't the slightest doubt about that, not the slightest. Evil personified.

So did you feel that you had a choice whether to fight or not or that you definitely had to fight?

Well, we made the choice to fight. And I felt ethically there was no choice. None.

Why did it become necessary to disguise your identity in the 3 Troop?

To what?

To disguise your identity.

Oh, for two reasons. One, and I think the main reason, was so that the Nazis shouldn't realize there was an elite-sort parachute unit. Every person spoke fluent German and knew all about the German army in which we were trained-- organization, weapons, and everything else.

And secondly, to protect us in case we were taken prisoner. Several people were taken prisoner and got away with it. And several did not. Several people captured at Dieppe disappeared.

There were, I think, three or four-- three, Bate, Rice, and Smith. Never heard of again. I never met them. They were gone before I joined the Commandos.

Ernest Lawrence, I knew very well. And he was taken prisoner. And I interrogated the people in the line where he was taken prisoner. He was not heard while he was being taken prisoner. And he was never heard of again. A man who left the troop just before I joined it, Giles, probably went in a civilian capacity into Yugoslavia by parachute and was allegedly tortured and certainly disappeared without notification.

There were also some people-- there was a man called [? Hiscot ?] in 3 Troop who was just leaving when I joined it. And he had to go elsewhere because he had an English fiancée who worked in a top security capacity somewhere. And they were afraid if he were in the field and taken prisoner, he would be subject to blackmail.

It seems a little peculiar, that, because that could have been argued about any of us. But the name change, change of identity was deemed to be sufficient to protect us and get us treatment. I mean, my dog tags said Peter Masters, had a number from the [? Queens Own Royal ?] [INAUDIBLE] regiment. And it said Church of England.

The fact that the Church of England-- did that upset you? Or how did that factor in?

Amused me. I think it's in my story that when we were in London being interviewed, there was the obligatory church parade. And we Jewish refugees were leading the parade because, I guess, it was alphabetical and the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps started with an A. And that put us in front of the Irish Guards, Scots Guards, lifeguards, and whatever else. So we led the parade through London. And we were quite amused by that.

Did you ever feel you were compromising something by creating this new identity?

No, not at all. Not at all.

Whatever happened? When you created this double identity, what happened to your original identity? How did you feel? Did you ever feel like it could come back?

Some people took their names back after the war. But I was quite pleased having the new identity and being known by that name for the duration. And most people by that time knew me under that name, so there seemed to be no reason to take it back.

And no, really, I simply became the person whose name I had chosen. Didn't bother me at all.

What about the religion? Did you return to Judaism?

Yes, more so perhaps because-- returned, I never left it. The fact my tags said that-- irrelevant. Well, it turned out that I married a refugee from Czechoslovakia who had come out on a children's transport. And she had--