

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Arnold Weiss, conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 15th, 1996 in Washington DC. This is tape number 1, side A. Could you please give us your full name?

Yes. Arnold H Weiss. It formerly was Hans Arnold Wangesheim. When I left Germany, I changed my name once I came to the United States.

Where were you born?

I was born in Nuremberg, Germany, July 24th 1924. July 25th, 1924.

Let's talk a little bit about your family. Who were the members of your immediate family?

Well, my father and mother and two sisters, grandmother, a variety of granduncles and uncles and aunts on my father's side.

What was your father's name?

My father's name was Stefan Wangesheim.

And what kind of work did he do?

He was a newspaper writer, mainly sports, but he did other articles. Worked for the Nürnberg Zeitung and the Acht Uhr-Abendblatt, as best as I can remember.

Had your family been in the city for many generations?

Well, they were in the general vicinity. They were in Franconia probably for about 300 or 400 years. But in Nuremberg itself, I really don't know that much. But certainly, both on my father's and my mother's side, as best I've been able to trace it down, to about the 1700s, they've been living in that vicinity.

And your mother's name?

My mother's name was Tekla. Her maiden name was Rosenberg.

And your two sisters, their names and relationship to you and ages.

I have a sister, two years older than I am. Her name is Beate, or Beatrice. And I have a younger sister, four years younger than I am, whose name is Evelyn, or Eva.

Was your father very politically affiliated with organizations?

No, I don't think so. As far as I know, not. I should add that my parents were divorced in 1930. And my memory of my father is rather vague. I think I saw him the last time in 1934, but I don't have any really clear recollection of being particularly close to him. I just didn't know him that well.

Was your family a very religious family?

No, I would say not. They were both in the reform movement. My parents were married in the [? hoch ?] synagogue in the main temple, which was a reform temple in Nuremberg. They were married, I believe, in 1920. And my father had been in World War I as a German soldier. He had been a frontline soldier. He'd been gassed. But he had been a sportsman. I mean, he was an athlete, mainly gymnastics.

Did your mother work?

Yes. My mother was an accountant, mainly in retail business. She kept the books. She was a bookkeeper, basically. But she couldn't keep the two of us, I mean the three children, after what was a rather messy divorce. And so I was placed in the Jewish orphanage in Furth.

Obviously, you were very young when you were living in Nuremberg. Were you right in the center of town. And as I said, you were quite young, of course, so whatever you can remember.

Yes. We lived in the center of town. I remember Gostenhofer Hauptstraße, which was almost in the-- well, not in the old wall city, although my parents had lived there for a while, and I sort of vaguely remember there. But it was just outside of the walls of the old wall city.

Did you live in a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

As far as I know, there were no other Jews. We lived in an apartment building, which was a series of apartment buildings around a courtyard. I don't recall any other Jews in that apartment building. They may have existed, but I didn't know them.

Were there any unpleasant incidents of your family being Jewish that you can recall?

Oh, yes. Certainly in school, there were all kinds of nasty remarks made occasionally, a beating or two, but it's vague in my memory at this juncture. There were a lot of Nazis in that neighborhood, generally, but there were also quite a few communists. It was a middle class to lower middle class neighborhoods, so a working class neighborhood, and so there was a mixture.

There was a lot of political agitation, generally. This was as far back as [? I know. ?] It was 1930. I don't have any memory really beyond that. But yeah, occasionally there was a set to in the schoolyard. It was a public school, so there were probably a number of other Jewish children, but I just don't remember them.

Were you involved in any of these incidents?

Yeah. I got knocked around a little bit, but I think no more than is generally true among kids that age. How much of it was politically motivated, I can't tell you. It's just too many years ago and my memory is [INAUDIBLE].

Was this something that you talked over with your mother and father, these experiences?

Not really. My mother and my father were in the process of getting a divorce, so there was relatively little of that kind of conversation going on. In later years, when I asked my mother about those times, she had put it out of her mind.

Was your father a very strict disciplinarian? Do you remember any of that?

No, I don't think he was particularly a strict disciplinarian. He had a circle of friends, mainly people that he had been in the army with. He must have been in a local regiment, or something of that nature, because he had a good many friends who he hung out with. So he didn't have all that much time for his family, and this is, I'm sure, one of the bones of contention between my mother and my father.

I know he spent a good deal of time being a gymnast. That I remember, vividly seeing him on the rings with his white trousers on, and so on. I also know that he didn't have much wind because of the gas that he had from World War I. But he was a good-looking figure at that time as a gymnast, or at least so it seems to a youngster.

Was your mother interested in sports?

Oh, yes. My mother was a first rate tennis player. I might add she took me on in the courts when she was in her middle, late 60s and still beat the devil out of me. That's how they met. I think their interest in sports is what drew them together.

And it was a marriage which the two families did not like, for reasons I don't know.

But they were both Jewish. They were both from middle class families. But apparently, there had been bad blood between the families, dating back to some incident that apparently occurred a hundred years earlier, but I just don't know. So their marriage was not blessed by either side.

Was the divorce-- again, you were only six years old-- was that a very difficult time for you?

Yes, what I remember of it. There was, as always in these things, a lot of shouting and a lot of yelling and general unhappiness in the house. But it's too vague recollection, and I pushed it out of my mind anyway.

What about your relationship with your two sisters at that point?

Well, I think my oldest sister was a pain in the neck from that point and hadn't changed much over the years of growing up. I adored my younger sister, but she was four years younger. I was six. She was two or three, and she was a toy to be played with.

Yeah. OK, now it's 1930. Your parents have gotten divorced. Did you stay in the same apartment with your mother?

No. Mother couldn't support the three of us, so I was put in the Jewish orphanage in Furth. You've got to remember, the '30s was a depression in Germany as well. There wasn't enough money around to feed all of us, and so my mother placed me in the Jewish orphanage. The girls needed to be more protected, so I was a candidate who was sent to the orphanage.

And when did you go to the orphanage?

1930, I believe. It may have been '31, but I think it was 30.

And you were only six?

Six or seven years old, yes.

And why did she choose this particular orphanage? I know that Furth is near Nuremberg, but were there any other orphanages nearby, closer by?

I don't believe so. I think, for whatever reasons-- well, part of it was that my grandmother lived in Furth, and she was only about 10 or 11 blocks away from the orphanage and I could run over and see her. So I guess that was the reason why Furth was selected. In any event, the family had roots in Furth more than in Nuremberg, so that's how that happened.

Did you take anything special with you to the orphanage?

I can't remember. No, I can't recall anything special that I took.

And what was the orphanage like?

Well, the orphanage was not an easy place. There were, when I first got there, probably around 30 children in the orphanage. By the time I left, there were double that number. It was located, again, close to the center of Furth. The building still stands, curiously enough. It was an orthodox orphanage, so the kids were segregated by sex, of course. But it had its own synagogue in the orphanage, where we certainly spent a hell of a lot of time.

It was pretty grim, even before the Nazis came to power. Discipline was quite strict. We had to get up early in the morning and go to morning prayers. Then we had to walk two blocks to school. There was a Jewish school, even then, in Furth. And came back for lunch, and then spend two hours in religious study. Well, no, we went back to school for

two hours and then two hours for religious instruction at the orphanage.

The school, it's called a Realschule. It was a classical studies school, and so we had Latin and Greek tossed in on top of Hebrew. But there was very little playtime. The food was extraordinarily bad, as I remember. To this day, I haven't liked orphanages, particularly.

When you would be out on the street going to school, what about the townspeople? Were they welcoming to you?

I think they just ignored us at that juncture, I mean, before the Nazis came to power. It became a real problem after 1934 to run a gauntlet. And we were easily identified because the boys had long sideburns and wore yarmulkes, and this, of course, made us easy targets for the kids in that neighborhood.

Were you ever hurt, physically hurt?

Oh, yeah, I had the stuffings beat out of me a couple of times, hung me up once or twice, but there were no permanent damage that was done.

What about relations with your mother? Were you able to communicate with her?

Oh, yes. First of all, I saw my grandmother as frequently as possible. She was, as I said, not too distant. Then I would see my mother once a month maybe for an afternoon. But not much more frequent. She was in Nuremberg, and that meant a street car ride and then walking some distance and so on, nor did I see my sisters very much after that. I mean, just the transportation more was more of a problem than anything else.

Did you have a feeling of abandonment, being put in the orphanage?

Yes. I would say that's a fair comment. Yes, I had a feeling of abandonment, or self-pity, but on the other hand, the orphanage was not such a bad place. I mean, you never had to worry about having companions to play with. Community living, once you got used to it, had all kinds of pluses. I mean, you had somebody else on whom you could lean.

You had role models there, some good, some bad. But at any rate, it was not a place where you got lonely and it wasn't a place where you really could have self-retrospection. Not that there was any programmatic thing, but children around you all the time of varying ages taught me community living, and very handy at a later stage in life.

Now these are all German-Jewish children?

These were all German-Jewish children, yes.

Did you have any contact with your father still?

Only once. I don't remember exactly the time. I think it may have been around 1934 or '35. He came to the orphanage, took me out of the orphanage, and took me for a walk along the canal. Nuremberg goes near the divide of Nuremberg and Furth. And told me then that he would try to leave Germany.

I remember him placing his hands on my head and saying a prayer, and that's the last I ever saw of him. As I understand it, that was just before he was he was arrested and sent to Dachau, but I had no further contact with him after that.

Let's now talk about when the Nazis came into power in 1933. What was that like for you?

Living in a cloistered atmosphere of an orphanage, there were no radios. There were no newspapers that we had access to. It didn't change dramatically. It was just that we were counseled to be more careful. Within a short period of time, relatively short period time, we had an increase in our numbers of kids who were being placed in the orphanage, mainly because their fathers or mothers were either arrested or were in jeopardy.

So that was the most dramatic sign of what we saw, the increase of numbers. And then more dramatically, shortly thereafter, was the influx of Jewish kids into the Jewish school, because they were being tossed out of the public schools or private schools where they may have been. And so we had a dramatic increase of students in the school. Actually, the school was known as the Waisenschule. It was really a school initially created for the orphanage kids, but it had already passed beyond that many years earlier. Now it really became a fairly sizable school.

What was the name of the orphanage?

Das jÃ¼dische Waisenhaus, the Jewish orphanage.

Did you talk about, with your friends, this man named Hitler? Was it something that you would discuss?

I don't remember any specific discussions that we had. It was ubiquitous. There were marches. The photographs and the Nazi flags, and so on, were all around you. I mean, there was no way of escaping it. It just became more and more and more. And obviously, with each new kid coming into the orphanage, telling his or her story, we became much more keenly aware of it.

The real problems on the outside of running the gauntlet to go to school, or if I went to my grandmother's house, started during that period. And we were fair game. I mean, we were, particularly, Der StÃ¼rmer, which was the antisemitic party publication, which was from Nuremberg. And Streicher actually lived down the street from us. I mean, he was in fairly close vicinity. And he and my father, I think, had been in the same military unit in World War I. They didn't like each other, which I think was part of the problems that my father had, because he was not a political reporter.

Certainly, there was no affection lost between them. I can't recall any really dramatic episode that I can tell you that I became keenly aware of the Nazis. I think every once in a while, on the way home or on my way to my grandmother's, a gang would set up on me and beat the tar out of me. You became fairly keenly aware of it at that juncture.

Did you try to fight back?

I ran most the time. First of all, I was a shrimp as a little kid. I don't think I ever reached more than 5'4" or 5'5". The Aryan race seemed to be a little bit more well set up for the kids in our neighborhood. But every once in a while, if you're cornered, you'll fight back. Got a few bloody noses and I got a big scar on my thumb where they hung me on a goalpost one time. But other than that, it wasn't-- I got as many beatings inside the orphanage as I did outside the orphanage, so it wasn't anything that unusual.

Why did you get the beatings inside the orphanage?

You have 40, 50 kids who live in very close proximity to each other. There must have been a dozen of us in one room sleeping in beds. The teachers were not at all above using the strap on your behind. If you didn't get the sentence in Hebrew correctly, you were liable to get your hand smacked. I don't want to make it sound that it was a history of beatings all around, but there were enough to remember.

What was it like for you to see the German uniforms? Was that overwhelming, frightening?

Yes, I think was threatening, certainly. We knew enough about the brown shirts, and you see them strutting around the neighborhood. The Hitler Youth was much more of a threat to us than the adults. I was nine, 10 years old, maybe 11. We better made for the Hitler Youth than we were for the older folks.

I do remember-- I cannot put a time on it-- a march by the Jews through the streets of Furth to bury the rabbi in defiance of the decree. I don't remember much about it. The reason that I remember it well is because we kids in the orphanage were rounded out for saying the mourners' kaddish, which is a difficult prayer and it was drilled into us. So for a couple of marks, we were rented out to the funerals to say the mourners' kaddish, which didn't particularly please any of us who performed it right.

I remember seeing this parade coming through the streets towards the Jewish cemetery. I guess I and another kid were waiting to perform our duties, to say the mourners' kaddish. Can't put a time on it. I don't remember now when that was, but that still is in my mind, my memory.

And what about the restrictive laws that were being enacted all along?

Well, I'm not sure that I remember the restrictive laws particularly at that time. I think the effect on us individually was nil. The food was getting worse. I remember that, as the support for the orphanage fell away. The Jews and the Jewish community didn't have the resources to continue to support us. There was a flood of emigration, and so on. And you must remember, I left Germany before Kristallnacht, so I don't have that memory pattern at all.

Did you have a bar mitzvah?

Yes, I had a bar mitzvah at the orphanage. That's the one and only suit that I ever had. Short pants, though, and a blue jacket. I did the prayers, read the Torah, a portion of the Torah. That day I remember reasonably well. My mother was there and my two sisters were there, and my grandmother and my great uncle.

Was there any kind of celebration?

No, I don't think--

We're talking about July 1937 now.

July 1937. Oh, I don't remember any celebration. The bar mitzvahs in Germany were not celebrated in the same way they're celebrated here in the United States. I think I may have gotten something from my mother. I know I got a prayer book from the orphanage itself. I mean, it wasn't important because at that point in time, I counted towards the minyan and I could wear the tallit. And since we spent many hours in the synagogue, it had more meaning in that sense than it did in any other way.

So then you stayed in the orphanage for how long?

From 1931 or '30, I forgot now which, to 1938, February 1938.

And what happened at that point?

Well, I went out in what is called a Kindertransport, a children's transport, of which there were a number. At that time people, single children were easier transported than breaking up families. So I was one of the orphan kids where, in that sense, easier to deal with. But the story goes-- I have never been able to verify-- that part of my passage was paid by the Quakers to the United States. I didn't know that at the time. Found out about it when I arrived here. But why the Quakers paid, I'm not so sure.

This is tape 1, side B, and you were talking about the Kindertransport.

There may have been some Quaker relation in a generation past that I'm not sure of, but I gathered, when I got to the States, that the transport had, in part, been paid by the Quakers. It cost a good deal of problems for me, but I'll get to that in a minute.

Who told you you would be going on the Kindertransport? How did you find out?

Well, my mother, apparently, was mainly instrumental in arranging it. She had to sign the documentation waiving the rights to me-- that can be the way to put it-- and authorizing that I be placed on the list. Some of the children transports went straight to Palestine and I think some of them went into Russia. But a good many came to the States, and there was just the luck of the draw.

So was it the whole orphanage that emptied out at all?

No, no, no, no, no. I think in this particular children's transport, I was the only one from the orphanage. They were put together from a variety of places. The kids did not know each other. But I was the only one. There's a tablet on the orphanage today, when I went.

When I went in Nuremberg during the war, literally as we took the cities, we found out that the director of the orphanage, a man by the name of Holliman, Dr. Holliman, stayed on to protect his children, the orphanage children. And then he and the 20-some remaining children were transported to Auschwitz.

I met with his son, who had left Furth, also on a [INAUDIBLE] for children. He went to Palestine. But we commemorated his death and the remaining orphaned children with a plaque, which is right outside of the synagogue, which is the only synagogue still left in Furth.

What was that like for you at 13 and 1/2 to be alone and to leave this orphanage? Were you eager to leave?

Yes, I would say so. I was not a happy camper there. A, I didn't cherish the thought of this constant beating that went on. I mean, not physical, but a lot of mental-- I was not the greatest Hebrew student that ever existed and didn't like it particularly. And the food was lousy. I mean, leaving, it was no great pain. And since I didn't have any real attachment to my mother and my sisters, because I had lived six years away from them, leaving was an adventure. It was great.

The real problem was to get the documentation to leave. That was much more of a problem, because you had to go down and get certifications that you were not a member of the Hitler Youth. So you had to go to Hitler Youth headquarters to get the certification. I remember timing my trip there with great care so that I would escape getting the hell beaten out of me.

I picked the lunch hour when there would be nobody around and got in and out in a hell of a hurry. I got the stamp saying that I wasn't a member of the Hitler Youth, but they still caught up with me and gave me a good hiding. To do that was a discouragement to go on a Kindertransport, but to get out of there, absolutely I was delighted. I couldn't have cared where it went, but to leave the orphanage was welcome.

What was the rationale for asking a Jewish child to prove that he's not a member of the Hitler Youth?

Well, the authority for Germans to travel abroad was becoming more and more limited. I can only reconstruct now. I didn't know it then. But basically, if you're a member of the Hitler Youth, to travel abroad might have been a sign that you are trying to escape the draft, or whatever it was. And therefore, if you're not a member of the Hitler Youth, they didn't care so much.

But if so, if you were a member the Hitler Youth, then you get a certification from the troupe, or whatever it was, that you were worthwhile to obtain the authorization. But in either end, you had some authorization. You had either the authorization from the Hitler Youth to go or the stamp that says that you are not a member of Hitler Youth.

So you went from Furth to where?

My recollection is to Hamburg. We traveled on a US ship, as I remember, to the United States.

Did any adult leader come to your orphanage and take you to Hamburg?

No. As I remember it, we were just put on a train.

When you say we, who do you mean?

I think there was a girl, as I remember sort of vaguely, who came from Furth, but she was not in the orphanage, who was put on the same train, and we shared a third class compartment to Hamburg. There we were collected. I spent a day

or so in some safe house of some kind or another. I don't remember that too clearly, but then we went on board a ship.

She mentioned in the school, one of my classmates, incidentally, that was a year ahead of me, his brother-- I think he was in my class-- was Henry Kissinger. I think he spent two years in the same class. The classes were combined in many cases, insufficient teachers and all that sort of thing. I reminded Henry of this not too long ago when we were having dinner and he professed no knowledge of me. [CHUCKLES] We knew each other in the Army, and we've certainly known each other professionally since then, but he had no recollection of this particular episode.

Were you friends with him in the orphanage?

He was not in the orphanage. He went to the Jewish school, the orphan school. No, he was never in the orphanage.

So now you're on the boat coming to the United States. How many children were you with?

I can't remember. It must've been around 20, but I don't have any real collection. I mean, I remember sharing the cabin with three or four, maybe more, kids. But I don't have any clear collection. I remember a couple of the people who were on this group because our lives intertwined in a later stage. One was Ilse Judas, who later became rather-- I think she was head of surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital in Chicago.

But she also went to the University of Wisconsin, and we met, as I say, in a later time. Another kid, whose name I can't remember now, who else was sent to Wisconsin, and that's why I have a slight recollection. But other than that, I have really no memory of who the others were.

Who were the other passengers on this boat at this time leaving Germany?

We were down in third class in steerage, whatever it was. I don't know who all was there. Some were just regular travelers. I mean, this was a US ship. There were obviously a sizable number of refugees, people who had the wherewithal to pay their passage, had gotten permission to leave, or permits to leave. How many? I don't know. I didn't meet very many of those people.

And who were your leaders? Were they Quakers?

No. No, they were Jewish. When you say leaders, I don't know whether there was really any supervisory people on board. If there was, I don't have any recollection of them.

And now you land in New York.

I'm in New York February of 1938. Whether it was the YMHA, or whatever it was-- that's what they called it. At least the male kids went there. Then they tried to figure out what to do with us. This is when I ran into a problem with the Quaker side, because the Jewish Social Service decided that I was not sufficiently Jewish to warrant being considered for a Jewish home, and the Quakers certainly had no knowledge of me or any interest in me.

And New York was beginning to fill up with refugees, and the American-Jewish community wasn't all that receptive, either, to have this dumped in their lap. I had the additional stigma of being an orphan, I mean of having come out of an orphanage. I wasn't that attractive of a candidate to place into somebody's home.

After a while, through consideration, they sent me out to Chicago, where there was less pressure of refugees coming in. I got to Chicago. Somebody, some woman, put me on the train. My English was not good at all. I spoke a few words, but not much. They did give me \$5. There I was in my short pants in February of 1938, traveling to Chicago.

Then the train arrived something like 3:00 AM in the morning, and there was nobody there, of course. But I heard some announcer, train announcer, announcing a train to Milwaukee. I had heard, or I had learned in school, that people spoke German in Milwaukee. So I got on the train, locked myself in the toilet, and rode to Milwaukee.



This is all at the age of 13 and 1/2?

An age of 13 and 1/2. But I was streetwise. I mean, living in an orphanage, you live by your wits. So these things didn't surprise me or threw me in any kind of a panic. It was sort of normal, to be expected, that things wouldn't work out. So I got off the train, found a lot of people sleeping in the railway station. It was warm there.

So I bedded down with the other bums, people who had no work. Besides, it a soup kitchen there as well. It didn't last very long. The cops picked me up, and much to my amazement, they did speak German. So back I went to the orphanage, this time the Jewish orphanage in Milwaukee, which I don't like orphanages, so I kept running away, I kept getting brought back. [INAUDIBLE].

Eventually, a place was found for me with a family. At first, the family in Milwaukee, who mainly didn't have enough to eat themselves. They had 10 bucks per week that they got. That family didn't feed me very much. But I picked up a newspaper route and shined shoes, and pretty soon I was sort of semi-independent. It certainly helped my English. Within six months I was pretty fluent. There was no one to speak German to, anyway, except for my newspaper route.

Finally, after I ran away a few more times, the Jewish Social Service placed me with a family in Janesville, Wisconsin, who wanted a girl, but got me instead. They were absolutely marvelous and wonderful people, and I have been very close to them ever since.

And then you went to school in Wisconsin?

I went to school. I never missed a grade. Went from seventh grade in Germany, it would be the equivalent of seventh grade in Germany, to the seventh grade here in Milwaukee, and then to ninth grade in Janesville.

Were you accepted by the American children?

Oh, yeah. By the time I reached Janesville, you couldn't tell very much. There was some accent still left, but it wasn't a heck of a lot. No, there was certainly no problems at all that I can remember. I fitted in quite neatly in Janesville. The school was an excellent school. It was the only high school in the city, which, at that time, probably must have at around 12,000 to 15,000 people. So it was a fairly sizable town.

It had a lot of German names, and so on, and Irish kids. The battles were more between the Irish Catholics and the German Catholics. The Protestants sort of stood off on their own and didn't care. But the few Jewish children in school in Janesville-- there were only maybe five or six of us-- had no particular problems.

And then did you graduate from this high school?

Yes. I graduated from high school in 1942, '42. My foster brother, Bob, we were in the same class, had all the same classes together, and so on. That was very helpful. Bobby and I became exceedingly, and still are, exceedingly close. that was probably the best time of my life. It was living a normal family existence, which I hadn't experienced before.

They were very gentle, loving people. The town was awfully good. It was reasonably close to Chicago and reasonably close to Madison and Milwaukee. And so it was my first introduction to real culture. I mean, my foster mother was a trained singer and so there was a lot of opera music. It was very nice.

What kind of contact did you have with your mother?

Well, I got to Janesville in 1939. It must have been around August or September of '39. My mother came to England. She managed to extricate herself and my oldest sister out of Germany in August of 1939. It was just before war broke out. So she was in England just about the same time as I came to Janesville.

So my foster mother insisted that I write regularly to my mother. I don't think I would have done it without her. So I said I wasn't particularly close to my mother at that juncture, but I did write to her quite regularly. And of course, she shared

the letter with my older sister. My younger sister remained in Germany, and much to the distress of all of us, she couldn't get out.

But we finally managed, through a variety of contacts in 1940, to get her out via occupied France and free France, into Spain, and then into Portugal, and a very difficult journey to the United States on a Portuguese steamer, I mean, a merchant steamer.

But she came to Wisconsin and came to Milwaukee. The people who had known me when I left Milwaukee took her in and she was raised by them. She has no memory of German, very little memory of Germany. She repelled it. But my mother and my older sister stayed in England during the war.

All right, now you've graduated from high school, and then what did you do?

Well, I started at the University of Wisconsin. Well, first I went to Elgin Watchmakers College. My foster father was a jeweler. He ran a store, and he felt that all of his children should learn a trade by their hands.

So my brother Bob and I went to Elgin Watchmakers College and I'm a certified watchmaker, which, I might add, came in handy at one point in time. And then I restarted at the University of Wisconsin and it became very clear that the pool of eligible 18-year-olds was rapidly being exhausted and the draft was hanging over my head, so I enlisted in the Army later that year.

What was it like for you when the United States went to war?

It was very exciting. I didn't care about Japan, but certainly going to war against Germany, I was very much in favor of that. There were some elements of the Bund in Wisconsin, but none in Janesville that I can remember.

But I certainly had hoped that the United States would go to war against Germany. I mean, I was afraid. I was afraid that the Nazi reach would be extending to the United States. For sheer personal safety, you had hoped that this would be contained.

So then you went into the service?

Yes, I went into the service. And when I first started out in the-- I enlisted in order to get into the Air Force, the Air Corps it was, US Army Air Corps. And this is where the fact that my foster father had insisted on the watch making came in very handy, because that qualified me for entrance into the Air Corps as an instrument technician, and later on as a gunner on the old B-17s.

But I had to go through delightful training in St. Petersburg, Florida, and then instrument training in Chicago. I had a very good time in the Army. I enjoyed it immensely. That's where living in an orphanage prepares you for that. I had no problems in the Army. I was a very good soldier. I enjoyed it immensely and had no difficulty in obeying orders and keeping my head down.

Were you an American citizen at that time?

Well, the Army had an interesting way of doing this. They swore me in as a US citizen when I was in basic training, but they attached the citizenship paper to my Army record, which you could only get if you had an honorable discharge. So the answer is yes, I became a US citizen at the time, basically within three months after I enlisted, but the citizenship papers I received, actually, when I was commissioned in the Army during the war at a much later stage. That's how it was done.

So then you completed your training to be the gunner?

Well, I completed the training as a gunner. This must have been around '43. They put a squadron together in Wendover Field, Utah. By this time I reached the grade rank, I think, of PFC, or maybe corporal. And the fact that I spoke fluent

German and so on didn't impress anybody very much. I was in a plane crash at Wendover Field, which put me on the disabled list for a bit. Legs were broken, and so on.

So I was sent down to aviation school in Big Springs, Texas in west Texas. And this was a bombardier navigator training base, and I accrued AT-11s and AT-7s, mainly as an instrument technician, and so on. And that, again, was lovely duty. The area wasn't lovely, but they were nice people. Whenever I needed money, I'd go into town and go to the nearest jewelry store, showed them my certificate, cleaned three or four watches, collected my 20 bucks, then went out and had a good time. It all came in very handy.

And I flew home a lot. The training flights, many of them went to Madison, to Truax Field. So I'd get home, and then my foster mother would bake a cake and I'd bring it back to the plane to the people who were flying these things. The training officers loved to go to Madison because they knew if I went with them, they would get a cake out of it or something.

So that was very nice. I came back from one of these flights one day, in early '44 I guess it was. My bags were packed and I found myself on a flight to Washington. My card had fallen through somewhere along the line. I was transferred into intelligence. I had some more assess training here in Washington.

So the Army came to you? They contacted you. It's nothing that you applied for. Had you applied for it?

Not at all. I was very happy where I was, out of harm's way and eating quite well, and as I say, getting home a lot. No, you didn't have much choice. At that point in time, they were looking for linguists. They were looking for anybody who they could train, who didn't have any real wards in one form or another, and I filled that prescription.

So anyway, I came here and volunteered for the OSS, which I didn't even know what it was. I had not the strangest notion. And then I went through about six or seven months of fairly intense training. First year Congressional-- what is now Congressional Country Club. It had been Congressional Country Club. But it was an OSS training area. And then to Camp Ritchie, Fort Ritchie, now for training and counterintelligence. Then did the University of Pennsylvania for order of battle training, and finally overseas.

By that time, I had obtained the lofty rank of sergeant. But as intelligence people, we sort of wore any rank to appear to be appropriate, and that didn't matter. I wound up in Paris, which was very nice. We had a very nice house on Avenue Victor-Hugo. Again, a pleasant experience until the Bulge hit, and then all of us got tossed out and into the combat zone. This was around December of '44.

What was it like for you to come back to Europe?

Oh, I had no particular feelings about it. I preferred going to Europe than going to the Pacific. I had put my European background so far back in my mind that I didn't look at it really as anything more than as you go where you're told to go. The nice part was that we were flown over. We didn't have to go by cattle boat, so that was fine with me. And winding up in Paris was a real plus, and I was looking forward to an easy time for the rest of the war.

Did you consider yourself a German-Jew at that time?

Not particularly. I considered myself a kid from Janesville, Wisconsin. I had to absorb that. Of course I knew who I was and so on, and there were occasions as we became more cleanly aware, my concern over my grandmother and other relatives, whom I didn't remember that well.

Before I left the States, I went to see my aunt, Dr. Julia Meyer, who had been the active politician in the family and who had been in the Reichstag-- actually, she was at that time at the New School for Social Research in New York. And she had given me certain information that, once I got there, I should keep in mind. So yes, I was aware of it, but I don't think it was overwhelmingly in my mind.

All right. Now how long did you stay in Paris?

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