

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Arnold Weiss conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 15, 1996, in Washington D.C. This is tape number three side A. And you were talking about your experiences. And you had left. What did you do after you left the law firm?

Well, I spent a year at the International Finance Corporation as a consultant and also as an arbitrator for Intelsat, the international satellite entity. Most of my career has been as counsel to working with international financial institutions. I represented them in private practice as well. I was principle outside counsel for the African Development Bank and for Intelsat.

And so going back as a consultant to the international institutions was sort of a normal byproduct. I didn't want to practice law anymore. I'd had enough of filling out time sheets and worrying about clients and hustling for clients.

So one of my close friends who was the number two at the World Bank, chief of operations, senior vice president, a Pakistani by the name of Qureshi, Moeenuddin Qureshi, a very close friend. And I had been as his personal lawyer for a while. He was also retiring from the World Bank together with the treasurer of the World Bank, Don Ross.

The three of us started an emerging markets corporation, which, eventually, after some trials and tribulations, including Qureshi's going back to Pakistan to become prime minister for a period of months, we were able to convince the American International Group and the government of Singapore to back us in putting together a fund for infrastructure development, an equity fund, which we were able to pull together over \$1 billion, which we are currently investing in infrastructure projects in Asia, mainly China, but a good deal in India and Pakistan and Indonesia and Thailand and so on, the Philippines as well. We are now in the process in the market of raising the same amount of money for Latin America to do the same thing. And we'll probably go back for-- since the Asian fund is almost totally committed, we'll be going back for an Asian fund.

So I am a general counsel and senior vice president and cook and bottle washer. And we have a small staff of around 30 people here in Washington and a dozen in Hong Kong and a few in Singapore. And I hope it will never grow into a big firm. I prefer to keep it small. But I'm having a lot of fun doing it and enjoying it immensely.

When did you change your name?

I changed my name when I came here to the United States, when I came to Milwaukee really. Wangesheim is a hard name to pronounce. And I owed no particular loyalty to the name of my father. I mean, I didn't particularly care to carry my father's family's name.

I could have changed to Wagner or Wanger or so on. I didn't because there was an All-American at Wisconsin by the name of Howie Weiss. And that sort of appealed to me. It seemed to be enough German and enough Jewish to-- well, he wasn't Jewish. But it seemed to have enough of a flavor, so I could live with it. And I could write it easily. And you didn't have to spend a lot of time dealing with it. So that's how I came to be Weiss. It amuses my children no end, who would have had gone through life with the name of Wangesheim. I think they're just as happy that it's Weiss.

Did your father survive the war?

I think so. I think he got to Brazil. At least, the evidence is that he did. But again, I never saw him again. So I don't know.

Can we talk just a little bit about your feelings and reflections about what you went through? Does it still affect you even now 50 years later?

Yes, I think so. I think it's impossible to totally divorce yourself. Your memory patterns are such that, without realizing it, it enters into your process, your thought processes and your behavioral patterns. Some of it is small things.

Some of it is I eat in a hurry because we were always starving. I mean, we were hungry most of the time. But I haven't

got rid of the habit of doing that.

Some of it is the inability to-- it's very difficult to be intimate because you have a veneer that you develop. Whether or not that veneer would have developed anyway because kids who go through orphanages, I think generally do. But it's the Nazi period adds to that. I mean, the sense of isolation and the need to be your own best friend and not to trust instinctively anybody else. And that withdrawal into yourself is something very difficult to overcome.

There are all kinds of similar patterns that I try to be as honest with myself. I mean, and I recognize some of these things. It's not easy to live with me because of that. I think my wife, who I'm very fond of, I'm sure has had a considerable amount of suffering to do because of this. And I'm not alone, incidentally. I mean, I find this pattern, we have a number of other friends who are either survivors or close to that who have the same kind of difficulty.

The war itself, it took me a long while to get over it. I mean, it had a very considerable effect on me. I mean, there was a period of time when I was quite depressed, particularly in college. I mean, some of that had to do with moving from being an important and having all kinds of ribbons on your chest, being an officer to being a college student.

Thank God it was during the GI Bill days. And I wasn't the only one who suffered from those kind of withdrawal symptoms. But it did. Again, it had its effect on me.

I think as I've gotten older, and I'm old now, some of these things have become much less of a problem. And some of them probably have become stronger. I just don't know. I don't know myself that well enough.

I think, obviously, I get along easily with people. I don't have any difficulty. I'm a good public speaker. And I don't have any of those kind of problems. But this entire experience does lead to loneliness. And you can't escape it. It's just there.

It's a unique experience. Ups and downs. And it's so unique that it's very difficult for someone else to share it and understand it. I'm very successful and so on. But there are times when that isn't enough.

What about your feelings of being Jewish? Has that changed because of what you went through?

Oh, I became very cynical about religion. I think that, to a very large extent, I don't have-- I certainly have a belief in a supreme being. But I think a lot of religion is, whether it's Jewish or otherwise, is for the benefit of the clergy and not necessarily for the benefit of the believers. And for others, religion is a means to hate and to dislike and to grab for something that doesn't belong to them, which I think much of the campaign against the Jews in Germany was all about.

The need for scapegoats is ever present. And whether it's Catholics in northern Ireland, whether it's Croats, the Slovaks slaughtering us or Croats and Serbs slaughtering each other, much of this is based on religions but also on age-old feuds that are there. When I left Germany, I dumped my tallis and my prayer books overboard. I didn't want anything further to do with it.

That was more because of all the beatings I'd gotten inside of the orphanage. But since I so respected my foster parents, who were not devout, by any means, but they were observant Jews, and so I've always been Jewish. And I belong to temple here. And I do my duty.

But if you ask me has it made me more Jewish, the answer is absolutely not. Did it make me less of a Jew? Probably somewhat. But part of it is just that I consider myself more as part of the Enlightenment. I totally resent the orthodoxy that I find in Israel where I spent a good deal of working time there with clients and so on. I don't think that they contribute a hell of a lot to everything. So I don't have much respect for them, which will probably make me an anathema to my own religious orthodox colleagues.

I have certainly respect. I mean, if somebody wants to keep kosher, that's up to them. If they want to go to temple every night or every morning, that's fine with me. I don't have objections to it. Just don't force me to do it.

Are there any sights or smells today that trigger what you experienced?

Sights or smells. Yeah, the smell of decaying flesh is something I don't particularly care for. Whether that is because of concentration camps or just general war and smells, I can't tell you.

Sights, not really. I mean, yeah, I get emotionally upset when I go to Yad Vashem or even go to the museum. It took me a long time before I could bring myself to go. Just uncomfortable. Shaik had been such a good friend, and I wanted to see him in his domain. I probably I don't know when I would have gone. It took an effort. It's not a rejectionism. It's just why remind yourself. This is why an interview like this is not easy for me.

Do you receive reparations?

I did receive not reparations. What I got was some property that belonged to my father's family since there was no survivor. A bunch of us, my sisters and I got a share of a quarry that was owned by some relative or another. And then, no, I did also get a payment for interruption of education, which I didn't have any off. But I got the payment anyway.

The total amount, as I remember it, was something like \$5,000 or \$6,000 of both things. And that was enough to put a down payment on a house. This was after we were married. And other than that, no.

Did you talk about your experiences with your children?

Oh, yes. Yes. Yes, I did. Not only that, I took them with me. I mean, I took them to Germany. I showed them the orphanage. In some excruciating detail for them, I think, I showed them where I had gone into Nuremberg with the army. And I took them to the cemeteries where my grandparents were or, at least, there's a gravestone that I maintained for my grandmother. And I paid for.

And yes, the answer is absolutely. I took them to Dachau. Each one individually, not together. So that I wanted them to understand very clearly what it was all about.

The curious thing is they both married Jewish girl. My wife, which is not Jewish, wasn't particularly pleased about. But so it must have had some influence on them. No, I did. That I did tell them. They certainly have a knowledge of the background.

Did you find out any more about your extended family when it happened? You had mentioned your grandmother. But any other?

Yes. On my father's side, nobody survived, as far as I know. Because I didn't really check that too closely. But as far as I could tell from the tables that were kept, there was nobody.

My wife was an only child. I mean, my mother was an only child. So she had no siblings. But her one uncle got away, went to New York, and his wife and his children. And another aunt got away also and her children, second cousins of mine.

The others, oh, there were about three or four grand uncles and so on. And direct uncles, I mean, brothers of my father who didn't survive. My grandfather passed away before the Nazis came to power.

And I can't answer for the rest. I didn't know them. I didn't know many. I mean, we were a small family. And not a whole brood of relatives anyway.

What about your relationship now with your sisters?

Oh, I've got both of my sisters over, as I told you. We have six college degrees between us. Both of them became teachers. My older sister retired out of the Milwaukee school system some years ago, is now living in Florida. And my younger sister is still teaching, not in the school system. She's teaching college now, but sort of half retired in Milwaukee.

And I see them from time to time. My younger sister and I are much closer than I am with my older sister because we were both in Wisconsin, not living in the same home. But both have children and all adults now and who, in turn, have children.

My younger sister's daughter is in Israel. She had married an Israeli who was killed by the Arabs in Gaza, burned to death leaving a one-year-old child. So the killing goes on. Doesn't seem to stop.

Is there anything you'd like to add before we conclude?

No. I think to anyone listening to this, take it all with a grain of salt. I mean, these are now beginning to sound like the recollections of an old man. Though, I don't feel that old.

But some of the things that I talked about were a little dim in memory and may not be 100% correct. Dates and times and places tend to mesh together after a while. And so I'm not sure about the accuracy of everything. But if the listener gets any value out of this, then I'm pleased.

Well, thank you very much for doing the interview. This concludes the interview of Arnold Weiss.