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This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Peter Philipps, conducted by Gail Schwartz on June 16, 1997 in Bethesda, Maryland. This is tape number two, side A. You had said you had a little story about Quito that you wanted to talk about.

About six years ago, we redid our kitchen, and that included buying a new refrigerator. It was a more expensive thing. It cost about $1,800. And a few weeks later, it broke. It was a GE.

We called for a service man to come. And he had a Spanish accent, Latin accent. I asked him where he was from. He said South. America I, said I can hear. That where in South America? He said Ecuador. Where in Ecuador? Quito.

Oh, said I. I lived in Quito for years and went to school there. He asked me, did you go to the [? Empresa ?] School? I said I don't know. I don't recognize the name. But let me go look for my report card, which I still have. Brought him upstairs. He looked. Indeed, it was at that school.

And he was about two years younger than I am. He had gone to the same school. We had the same teacher, the same principal. And it was just such a funny coincidence. Here we had gone to the same school. He was a repairman for GE now, and I was a semi retired as a freelance writer and was just a nice coincidence. We had a nice chat about that.

I didn't remember as much about the school as he did, other than that it was very strict and the standards were very high. And the demands on the kids were a lot greater than they are in this country, even in that primitive country at that time.

Before we leave Quito, you had previously talked about some unpleasant experiences, anti-Semitic or fearful times on the other tape. Are there anything else you want to talk about how you dealt with that as a young boy? How did you handle this fearful experience?

I became a good runner. I am not now, nor was I then, confrontational. And when there was a confrontation or a potential fist fight, I didn't escape them all, but I would turn and run. And I became quite fast. And I did that. Unfortunately, I had to do that many times.

What were some of these situations like? What did the kid say to you?

There were taunts. I don't remember the Spanish word for Jew. But we were certainly called that and gringo, which is [INAUDIBLE], German. So we had three strikes against us. We were immigrants. We were Jewish. And we were German. And so they were always taunting us and not leaving us in peace.

And they also referred to my brothers and me. My brothers, luckily for them, have much better coping skills than I do. They did then, and they do now. And actually they protected me a few times. They're tough guys. I'm not.

Also, there were two of them, too.

There are two of them, and they're twins. And they are fraternal twins, incidentally. But they're very close They'd always stick together. And they were totally fearless as well. They would never run away from a fight the way I did.

What kind of advice did your parents give you in how to cope with these frightening situations?

To try to avoid in any way possible. If it meant running away, that was the way to do it, just stay out of trouble. And I don't think my parents were fully aware of everything. We didn't tell them everything. Well, we felt sorry for them. We didn't-- we sensed, or at least I sensed, that they had other things on their minds. I shielded them from some of this unpleasantness that we had to endure.

That's a very mature reaction for a child.

Well, I guess it comes from-- with the mother's milk. You sort of drink in the anxiety that you sense your parents have.

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You either overreact, which I think I did-- I'm, today, a terrible worrier. And I'm sure it comes from those years.

My brothers are totally opposite, which is good. Good for them. People should be different.

Did your parents express concern about friends and relatives that they had left behind? Did they talk to you about that?

I don't think so. It wasn't until we got to New York many years later that my father found out his mother had been killed. There was correspondence between my father and his brother Hugo in Amsterdam. And there were years when he sent him money because, as you probably know, there were years of hunger in Holland, even after the war.

My parents-- I say my parents. My mother did not like this uncle. And she did not want to help him. But my father, I think, did some of that and perhaps behind her back.

Now, this is your Uncle Hugo from Essen?

Was he born in Essen? I think so. But he lived in Amsterdam at the time. What brought him to Amsterdam, I don't know. I think it was job related.

And he married Christina?

Yes, he married a non-Jewish woman. And they had one son by the name of Herbert. I think I met him once maybe 60 years ago and have no contact with him. I don't even know whether he's alive. He is, of course-- if he is alive, he is one of the few Philipps who are Jewish who's got a name, as we do, with one L and two Ps at the end.

Any other stories about Ecuador that you wanted to talk about? As an overall description, it was a very difficult time of life for you.

It was a meager existence. We had enough to eat. But there was never any indulgence of any kind. Dessert did not exist. Movies did not exist for us. There was no real entertainment or leisure.

It was you made do with what you had. And you made up your games. And I guess the equivalent of cowboys and Indians we played. But nothing pleasant to look back on.

Did you make any close non-Jewish friends?

No. No, I think the Jewish community stuck together. It was-- they heavily depended on one another if for nothing else, then moral support. And I think the Gentiles, who, then, of course, would have been Ecuadorians, just didn't fit in anyway if for no other reason then the language barrier.

Did the Jewish community get together on special occasions? Or was it just by chance?

I think just by chance. I don't remember attending any religious services in Ecuador at all. I'd like to think we had Seder at home. But I don't know. I cannot say with any certainty that we did, in part because my mother did not put a lot of stock in that.

And so there was no religiously, no Jewishly oriented education in Ecuador?

None whatever, no. I think my father tried his best to instill Jewish sense of belonging. But I think he may have done his own davening or praying himself at home, but nothing formal.

And now they come to you and tell you you're going to be moving again.

Yes, so I guess that was the dream that they all had, and that sounded very exciting, something to look forward to. And I think I was able to finish my second year of school before leaving for the United States.

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And what time-- 1941 we're talking about. And is it summertime?

It was May. We arrived here in May 1941, a scant six months before Pearl Harbor. We were met--

Your boat ride?

Yes, oh, it was a Chilean steamer by the name of CopiapÃ³ back through the Panama Canal in the other direction-- a lot of seasickness on my part again. If memory serves, when we pulled into New York Harbor, I was in the men's room throwing up into a big urinal, as I recall it. My parents, I think, and brother stayed on deck to watch the sights. They abandoned me to be sick by myself.

And we were met at the pier by a colleague of my father's from days in Germany. And he had preceded us to New York and worked for the same company, the Kaufman firm. He was a bookkeeper or something of that type. His name was Paul Jonas, and he saw us through the immigration process, and whatever.

What was your first sights, your first impression when the boat docked, when you came out of the men's room?

I don't remember that so much, but I do remember my first impression when we were in a taxi riding in Manhattan. I saw the fire escape on the apartment buildings. And never having seen fire escapes, I thought they were the stairways. And I was immediately alarmed that one would have to walk up and down stairs on the outside of the building. And this Mr Jonas laughed, I remember, and explained to me that they were fire escapes and explained to me what they were for.

And we went to the HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, down on the Lower East Side. And we stayed there for two weeks. Had a lot of black bread and herring and sort of primitive entertainment, including one motion picture, which was sponsored by Chesterfield cigarettes-- very entertaining at the time, very insidious, now that I look back on it.

Did you understand what it meant to come to America then? Did you feel more free, more open, more relaxed? Did it make a difference to you as a youngster?

I think it did. I think my parents were less anxious in terms of being persecuted. But the anxiety was then replaced by the anxiety of finding work, finding a place to live, finding money. I believe that immigrants were entitled to stay at the HIAS only one week, other things being equal. And we, because we had no place to live, were allowed to stay an extra week until my parents found a place to live.

Did you have any knowledge of English at that point?

Not a word. But I immediately began teaching myself, not with books, but by reading signs and making connections between, oh, say, a sign Local, on the L. That was the Third Avenue L, I think, which still existed in those days. And that had made frequent stops, as opposed to the express, which skipped many stations.

Signs in stores-- I made the connection with what the sign said outside and the merchandise that was sold inside. So I started teaching myself, actually, a little bit of English like that. Again, my parents were gone, looking for work during the day. And I was in charge of my brothers.

And then where did you go after you left the hotel?

My parents rented a one-room apartment in a brownstone somewhere in the 70s, in the West 70s, right by the railroad tracks. Again, they were looking for work. My father actually started working for the Kaufman firm then, I think, at $10 a week, as a bookkeeper. I don't know what my mother did, actually. But again, I remember we were alone during the day.

And one of my first memories was-- and it must have been a detective living in that building, who came out of the

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building one day, while I was sitting on the stoop. And he showed me his gun, thinking that all kids must be fascinated by guns. Of course, I didn't speak any English, so I couldn't communicate with him. So it was kind of a-- I wasn't frightened, or anything like that. There was no reason to be. He just wanted to engage me in a conversation. But I couldn't respond to him, because I didn't know any English.

From there, we moved to 34th and Hillside Avenue, in the Washington Heights section of-- excuse me, I am ahead of myself. No, we moved to 188th Street, again, a brownstone. We were on the second floor of a three-story brown house, brownstone house. I believe, in those days, they were not called brownstones, but railroad flats.

I went to school there, PS 189. I was sent to the third grade. Can I back up here? And I just remembered something. While we were in the HIAS-- I think we were there longer than two weeks. I must be wrong about that, because I was sent to a daycare. I was sent to a daycare. And by then, I was 9 and 1/2 years old and much older than the other kids, of course, spoke no English.

But the teacher understood the situation. And I was allowed to keep my head up and read, when the other kids had their rest period, when they had to put an arm on the desk and cradle their head in their arm. I was allowed to read. But of course, I couldn't read, because I didn't know any English. So literally, I was the old man in this playschool, a daycare center, what it would be called today.

What thoughts went through your head, hearing these sounds and not knowing what they meant? What is it like for a child to be surrounded by sounds that have no meaning to them?

Well, kids pick up language. Young kids, particularly, pick it up rather quickly. But you never felt comfortable, of course. You never knew what was going on. And even years later, there were words that I had read and pronounced in my mind, but totally incorrectly. I always put the accent on the wrong syllable.

I remember, for example, once screwing up my courage enough to ask a classmate, what does emergency me? And he didn't know what I was talking about. So I told him it's on the red truck. Oh, emergency, you mean, he said-- things like that.

It wasn't until I was an adult that I learned that the word that I thought was pronounced anemone was anemone, things like that. Until I heard the word, I had read it. I knew what it meant, but I didn't know how to pronounce it.

Learning stickball, learning curve ball, learning marble games-- we'd play with marbles on the street, baseball, of course. That all took a long time to assimilate and grasp and learn the rules and learn the physical part of it, which I never became very good at.

And your parents now are following, of course, what's going on around them, in Europe. And you're a little bit older now. Did they talk that over with you at this point?

Yes, now the conversations are constantly about the war. We did have a radio, a little Emerson. And I do remember once being in our living room at 188th Street, having the radio on. And there was an announcement that there would be an air raid. It was in the middle of my favorite serial, [? Hal Paragon ?]. And our windows were taped up in those days with masking tape, to prevent shattering. Because we thought that there would be-- I mean, it wasn't we. It was America thought that we would be directly affected by the war.

And the radio announcer said, you should lie on the floor. I was home alone. I don't know why. And I remember lying on the floor, and my program was interrupted. And that was sort of my first real sense of the war, until the all clear sounded. And of course, there were many visits among my parents and their friends. And that was always the prime topic of conversation.

These are refugee friends?

Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. Some of these friends-- well, I shouldn't say some. One lady, who is now 92, still survives

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from those days. She's now a widow. They have no children. She lives in Santa Barbara. And my wife and I just came back from there to-- we went actually to visit her. Because I've known her since I was nine years old.

What was December 7, 1941 like for you?

There are times when you don't remember whether an event of such significance, whether you are actually remembering the event, or you remember talking about the event. And that is one of those instances. It was a Sunday. I do believe we had the radio on when the first reports came through. Inevitably, you are going to wonder how we reacted, how my parents reacted, what they said. I don't remember. I'm sure it was scary, but I don't remember specifically.

Did you ever have the feeling of it being hopeless, that you could never escape the war here? You left one city after another and country after another. Did that feeling of hopelessness ever get to you?

It sure seemed that way. And when the war broke out in December of 1941, one had no idea that America would actually escape the war, in the sense of, I mean, we were in the war. But the war didn't come to America-- quite the opposite.

And you didn't have to be a refugee from Germany to be scared. And a kid, in particular, would be scared of the bombing attacks and invasion, and that sort of thing. And of course, you heard the adults talking about that, which only fed into that fear.

And of course, you brothers still were too young for you to--

Yes.

Was there anybody that you could talk over your fears with?

I had one friend. I have him to this day. His name is also Peter. He's 11 years old-- excuse me, 11 months older than I am. We met in Hebrew school. We've been friends ever since.

And we were inseparable. He is more of a brother to me than my actual brother is. And yes, we talked about the war and what we would do and what we could do. And like all kids in those days, we saved tin foil and aluminum foil, whatever, and the newspapers, and things like that.

Peter and I went briefly to the same school, PS 189. He then went on to high school of music and art. But we would meet. He was in a higher grade than I. But we would meet at intermission-- excuse me, lunch hour, and stand in front of this pushcart, which was just loaded with candies of all kinds.

And we would have one penny to spend. And the amount of candy you could buy for one penny, the choices, you could not describe that to a kid growing up nowadays. It was an incredibly hard decision to decide what to spend our penny on.

Was he a refugee child?

Yes, Peter was a refugee child. His mother was a widow. He came here with an older brother. His father died of a heart attack. They had come via London. And as I said, we are very good friends to this day.

Did you experience any anti-Semitism during the war? Did people mistake you for being German?

Constantly. It was a never-ending struggle, first of all, because we were German, I think-- so that was exacerbated after Pearl Harbor-- then because we were Jewish. So we got it constantly. The kids on our street-- in those days, of course, kids didn't carry guns. But there were fistfights with rocks thrown. There were chunks of ice thrown at us from the roof of the building.

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I managed to save up, still in 188th Street, enough money to buy a pair of roller skates-- not in-line skates, but roller skates that you strapped onto your shoes. And the first day was a Saturday. And I tried them out in front of the street. These two toughs came over and asked to borrow the key. And they fled with it.

I can still remember the face of one of those. I could still kill him. My skates were useless without that key. But that's the kind of thing that we had to endure. If we had a toy, it was usually given to us from a Jewish agency or some charity. If we showed up on the street with a toy, it was taken away from us. We were never safe.

Peter Adler, my friend that I mentioned, he lived about three blocks from us, had to go through a little forest, believe it or not. This is upper Manhattan. There was a little forest. Now, of course, there are 30-story apartment buildings there. And there were always these guys waiting in wait for me. And it made the friendship with Peter very difficult for us to visit one another, because we always had to go through this gauntlet of tough guys who were waiting for us.

Any religious training at this point?

Yes. I went to Hebrew school. Peter and I met, actually, in the rabbi's apartment. That was our first religious school in this country. His name was Dr. [PERSONAL NAME]. He was a former rabbi of the congregation in Munich. I've recently learned that the Munich synagogue-- and this is hearsay; I do not know whether it is historically accurate-- the Munich synagogue was the first one that the Nazis destroyed. And when no one rose up in protest, the Nazis had a signal that they could go on and keep doing this.

So we had lessons in Dr. [PERSONAL NAME] apartment. That's how I met Peter. There were maybe three or four other students in the class sitting around his dining room table. Subsequently, my parents joined the congregation by the name Beth Hallel. They used a basement in a dance hall on 183rd Street and Wadsworth Avenue-- very, very primitive.

The Ark was an old clothes closet. And on high holy days, they rented the actual two dance halls on a couple of floors above, the same building. It was a German Jewish-- excuse me-- it was a German congregated refugee congregation, I meant to say. And the sermons were in German. The rest of the service was in Hebrew. It was not easy for a kid to follow.

Were you speaking German to your parents still?

Yes. We spoke German at home. My parents worked assiduously at learning English. They went to night school at George Washington High School. And they never lost the accents, but they became quite proficient in English.

Did you study and become a bar mitzvah?

Yes, I did. The bar mitzvah was in this basement room. And the party, if you can call it that, was in our one-bedroom apartment. And I then was living on Hillside Avenue. My mother made some canapes and a punch, and there were a few adult friends. It was very, very homey and simple. If I got any presents, I don't remember them.

Did you think a lot about Europe during those years of the war?

No, I don't think so. That quickly became a very blurred memory. And I just wanted desperately to become an American and to lose my accent and to look like the other kids and to wear penny loafers, which I couldn't afford for years and years.

In fact, the first pair of shoes I wore in the United States were girls shoes, because my father's company, the Kaufman firm, got a shipment of shoes. There was something wrong with them. They landed on the doorstep of the company, which was supposed to be something entirely different.

So he brought home these girls shoes, and my parents couldn't understand why I hated wearing these girl shoes. They looked like loafers, but they had higher heels. And it made me very self-conscious. So the first pair of actual penny loafers that I had was a great day in my life.

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[CHUCKLING] All right, so you tried to become an American. And then the war continues. And I guess, anything else during the war that you can remember that stays in your mind?

The rationing, being sent to the store with the ration coupons; gasoline, we didn't have to worry about, because my parents didn't have a car. And I hated to go shopping. My mother always made me go shopping. It's hard for anyone growing up nowadays to remember that the first supermarkets, which were relatively tiny things, self-service places, men did not like to be seen shopping, let alone pushing a shopping cart. My mother made me do it. It also added to the many complexes that I've acquired over a lifetime. But I do remember the shortages and going from one store to another to get the things that we needed for our daily living.

And now it's the end of the war. What were your feelings about that?

End of the war in 1945 coincided, I guess, going to junior high school. My English was pretty good by then. I hadn't lost my accent, but I certainly could keep up with the work in the classrooms. And that was a good feeling.

And it wasn't long after the war that my father's firm started sending him abroad. I didn't mention to you-- I said earlier, my father started working at $10 a week as a bookkeeper. But he had started with the firm at the age of 13. By the age of 18, he was already traveling in Europe for the company. He was a junior executive, actually. So working as a bookkeeper was an awful come-down for him.

So after the war, he had an opportunity to go back to where he was, in the sense of the company's hierarchy. And he traveled a lot, first to Mexico and Cuba, And. then starting in about 1949, to Europe again.

When the war was over, did you feel a sense of relief and a sense of more security? Did it make a tremendous difference to?

On V J Day, the day the war ended with Japan, there was great jubilation, of course. And the kids on the street, as part of this celebration, threw stones at the streetlights and broke the bulbs. Well, [PERSONAL NAME] mother went out in the street and scolded them. And they yelled back at her, go back where you came from, you dirty ref-- which was, of course, a phrase that we heard countless, countless times in all those years.

Tough for a kid to see his mother treated that way. Another experience, my mother had a tomato thrown at her; you dirty ref, go back where you came from; very hard to see that-- not to be compared with other kids my age saw in concentration camp, who weren't nearly so lucky. But nonetheless, these things leave a mark.

What else did people call you?

Dirty ref. Dirty ref was interspersed with dirty Jew. I mean, that was synonymous. I'm not sure that the kids even knew what they were saying. But that didn't make it any better.

So now it's the end of the war, and you're in junior high school?

Yes.

And then what happened?

My father started, as I said, making these trips. They were frequent. They were long. It added to my-- or revived, if you will, my anxiety. His leaving was always difficult for me. Plane travel wasn't as commonplace and natural as it is today. Nowadays, it's like getting on a Greyhound bus. It was a big deal. And I cried a lot. I felt very insecure without him. I was very attached to my father. So--

Were you closer to your father than to your mother?

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Yes, I was. My mother was incapable of showing love. I'm sure she loved us, but she wasn't capable of showing it. And so that was tough. By the time I went to high school in 1950-- no, wait a minute, excuse me.

I graduated in 1950 from high school. But anyway, by then, my parents had moved back to Europe. My father's firm in Rotterdam had invited him to a post as a director of the firm. And my mother got sick and tired of all the traveling that he did. So she went back to Holland with him in either 1949 or 1950. So they lived in Rotterdam. And my brothers moved to Holland as well and went to a school, a boarding school, in Holland. And I lived by myself during the high school and college years.

Where did you live in high school?

In high school, I lived in Hillside Avenue. I said I lived alone. That wasn't quite accurate. A cousin of my father's, an Auschwitz survivor, who married a German woman, came to the United States, had no place to live. And by coincidence, my parents were just leaving for Europe then. So they struck up a deal where they would have the living room as their bedroom, and I had the bedroom as my bedroom and living room. And the woman, Mrs. Hirsch, did the cooking for me.

And so they took care of me, took care of my material needs, but certainly not my emotional needs. They didn't speak English, for one thing. They had, God knows, a lot of scars from the war.

My parents did not come back for my high school graduation. I went to Brooklyn Technical High School, hoping I would become an engineer, which was a terrible mistake. And in 1950, my parents bought an attached house in the Rego Park section of Queens. And immediately, after moving into this house, they moved to Rotterdam.

So I lived in that house by myself for five years. It took me five years to get through college, because I dropped out of engineering school. And so I had to start over again-- a lot of loneliness during those years. I had to take care of the house and myself and go to college. Luckily, my good friend Peter also moved to Queens with his mother. And we lived within walking distance of one another. So we spent a lot of time together listening to classical music and going to dances and going on blind dates, and that sort of thing.

This is tape two, side B, in an interview of Peter Phillips. And you had wanted to say something about the work that your mother had done.

Between the time we came to the United States in 1941 and middle of 1950, when my parents moved to Rotterdam, my mother worked all the time to help support my father, because he wasn't making enough money to sustain the family. She did alterations. She knitted neckties. She made or assembled cigarette lighters for the army. These were flameless cigarette lighters. The whole family pitched in, by the way.

She made cloth-covered buttons, at which she was very, very fast. And it was piecework. It paid pennies a button. She made powder puffs. I don't know if that even exists anymore. She made gloves that contained soaps, so that when a woman-- a mitten, actually. It went into the shower. The glove gotten wet. She could soap herself.

Eventually, she actually did so well, that she opened a little factory about 162nd Street in an abandoned store, bought some sewing machines-- on credit, of course-- employed maybe a dozen women, so sold these powder plants and these gloves. For a brief time, my father gave up his job and joined her.

But it didn't last. They were cheated by a man who had promised to be a silent partner. He did them out of their share of the proceeds. And my mother tried to patent-- no, excuse me. She tried to interest-- I won't mention any names-- a chain of stores, which is, to this day, a household word, household name, in this glove, this mitten, the soap mitten, hoping she could sell it to those chain of stores. They turned her down, but they copied the idea and immediately sold it.

So my mother went back to working at home. Her desk, or workstation, was the lid of the stove in the kitchen. Because in those days, there were inspectors that came into the house to make sure there was no child labor, and such. So she was able, whenever the doorbell rang, she was able to stuff all her stuff into the stove and close it.

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She actually worked at night when we were asleep. She would fill the bathtub with cold water and sit at the edge of the tub and continue her piecework, her buttons, and things like that, while we were asleep. We were totally unaware of that until years later, when she told us about it. So she worked incredibly hard. And I have to give her a lot of credit for that.

When the war was over-- oh, no, let me back up. You said you helped make the cigarette lighters. What was your task?

It consisted of various components, including a wick, an orange-colored wick, that was about a foot long. And you had to stuff it into a little cylinder. You had to assemble the wheel, the flint, and a spring. Everybody got involved with that. We all got involved with the buttons, as well, because the material had to be cut, the little round circles of cloth.

And we got involved with the packing, the delivery. When my mother had an order for buttons, I had to take them on the subway to deliver them to the customer in the city. So we all pitched in.

We had a drying rack in the kitchen. All the kitchens in those days had a drying rack for laundry. It pulled up on a pulley and then hung against the ceiling. And then it had clothespins. And that became part of the factory. My father hung the ribbons on there for the powder puffs. And it was rolled down, and we cut it into the various strips. We were always busy, always busy.

When the war was over and news came out about the terrible death camps, and so forth, what did that do for you and your family?

I'm not sure that we found out right after the war. I don't seem to recall anyone talking about it. Maybe we were shielded. I just don't remember. But again, there are things one remembers 50, 60 years, and there are things one doesn't. So I really don't know. I wish I could remember, but I don't.

You went on to college. Your parents and your brothers were abroad. And then what happened with you? Did you go over to visit them?

Yes. In June 1950, it was my graduation present to visit them in Europe. And I flew-- KLM Lockheed Constellation. It was a grand experience. If you can imagine, you got a program, a seating arrangement. So you knew the names of your other passengers. You got a menu of this gourmet meal that they served you.

I wanted to feel very grown-up, so I decided to take a pipe. I had no idea you couldn't smoke a pipe on a plane. And I was quickly admonished by the stewardess. They were called stewardesses in those days.

The plane refueled in [PLACE NAME] and [PLACE NAME], in that order. And it wasn't long after I-- well, no, that's not true. The Korean War had broken out when I made that trip. But once I arrived in Holland, then I stayed the whole summer. It was a wonderful visit. My parents had a very nice apartment near the zoo, overlooking a canal, a picturesque canal.

But the Korean War was on, and we were obsessed with that. And we got the International Herald Tribune. And I read that every day, listened to the news every hour of the day. My main concern, of course, was being drafted. And I stayed till, I guess, September, when it was time to go to college. And luckily, I was deferred. So I did not have to serve in the army.

While you were in Europe, did you have any desire to travel, to go back to Genoa or Essen?

No. I didn't. I made a number of side trips, weekend trips with my parents. My father was then director of the company. He had a chauffeur-driven Mercedes company car. And so we went to very nice places in Holland, in Belgium. Yes, we did go to Germany. Yes, we did, but not to Essen, not to Essen.

What was it like to go back to Germany?

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It was a wonderful feeling to be an American in those days. You sat on top of the world. The dollar was almighty. People knew you were American just from looking at you, because we dressed differently.

Did your parents feel German?

No, my parents felt very American. They refused to speak German. My mother was the most chauvinistic American I have ever met-- very, very proud to be American, yes, indeed. But my brothers had bicycles with a little rack in the front on the handlebar that had five or six little American flags. That attracted so much attention in Rotterdam, it made the front page of the newspaper. It was glorious to be an American.

What were your thoughts and feelings about Germany then?

I never felt comfortable among Germans. I don't do today. I try to bury that sense of unease. But particularly when I meet Germans of my generation, the first thought that flashes through my mind is, what did you do during the war? Can't get away from it.

In fact, today we belong to a Swim and Tennis Club in Carderock Springs, about a mile from here. Many, many Germans belong to it, because it's near the German school. So there are many German diplomats who are members there. And although we belonged to [? this stuff ?] for 25 years, we've never spoken a word of German, Evelyn and I. We understand their conversations, are amused by them, but we have never let on that we are indeed conversant in German.

You came back to college. And then can you summarize what your career took and how it went?

I went to City College of New York. It took me five years. During the summers, I worked for the Kaufman firm. I became an instant hide inspector, in the fact, There were a lot of slaughterhouses in New York in those days, some on 10th Avenue. There's a composition slaughter on 10th Avenue, Richard Rodgers. There were a lot of kosher butchers in Brooklyn. .

So I became a hide inspector and did some paper work for the company, office work. That sustained me during the summers. I actually wanted to go into the hide business and follow my father's footsteps. He wouldn't hear of it. He saw it as a dying business. And he was right. For his time, he didn't know that every luxury car in Bethesda, [INAUDIBLE] would have leather seats nowadays.

But I graduated from City College. I had no idea what I wanted to do with myself, which was a source of great unhappiness to my father. So I volunteered to go to the army. I was going to be drafted anyways, so I sped up the process by volunteering in March of 1955. I went into the army.

And as luck would have it, I was sent to Germany. I was stationed in Mainz. And as you know, my parents were living in Rotterdam. So when I was able to get a pass, a weekend pass, I was actually able to go on a train and go home, in effect, home being Rotterdam then, and getting a good home-cooked meals.

Were you stationed in Germany because of your knowledge of German--

No.

--and your background?

No. I thought I was being sent to Germany. I'd hoped I would become an interpreter. It turned out there were so many German-speaking GIs, there was a surplus. It was one of those lucky things, I think. I've had so much luck in my life.

I actually had advanced infantry training, which is most unusual. It was most unusual for any college graduate to go through so much infantry training. I didn't know how to finagle my way out of it. But in the end, I was lucky, because I was sent to Germany.

The other piece of luck I had was that they made a mistake in my records, the army did. They listed my occupation as teacher, which I didn't correct. I thought it my stand me in good stead. And indeed it did.

Because about six months after I arrived in Mainz. The army was looking for former teachers. And they found two, another fellow and me. And what they wanted was to set up a program for the kids of the American families stationed in Mainz, a recreation program.

So this other chap and I did that. And we organized girls' softball teams, gymnastics, outings, and that sort of thing. I actually became a Boy Scout. leader. I'd never been a Boy Scout, and the reason I never was a Boy Scout was that my parents couldn't afford the dues. But I was a Boy Scout leader. And I actually went on a hiking trip with the Boy Scouts.

But because of my German, I somehow hooked up with the German consulate in Meinz and persuaded them to let me set up a parallel program for German kids, which I did. In my off-duty time, had square dances for German kids. Taught them how to square dance, went on outings, and that sort of thing.

I actually met a young lady that I thought I wanted to marry, and became engaged, a Christian girl. It had a devastating effect on my parents. And being the dutiful son that I was, I ended it. She made it easy. Her father had died in the war. Her mother forbade her to go out with me, because I was a Jew. so by mutual agreement, we ended that. And it was a good thing we did.

But it was interesting to be a GI, a German-born GI. In 1957, the German Army came into being again. It started with an officer corps. And the American army was looking for German-speaking GIs. So I was selected, of course, for a one-week program to indoctrinate these new German officers, who were going to be the cadre of the reborn German army, to teach them and train them in the use of American weapons, from tanks to machine guns to M1 rifles.

It was an interesting week. The way it worked was it was one German-speaking GI with an American officer and a group of about 20 or 30 German officers. Those were the groupings. They had forgotten to tell us where we were going to eat. Part of the program included showing them an American army field kitchen.

And so I guided my 20 or 30 German officers to their tent where they were going to be fed and shown how an American field kitchen works. But I stood there outside, not knowing where I was supposed to eat. They had forgotten to tell us that.

Well, this German captain-- he was either a captain or a major-- came to me, clicked his heels-- some habits are hard to give up-- and said, that if I had no other plans, the colonel, who was the highest-ranking member of their group, would be honored to have me sit with him for lunch, which I accepted. And the first question, as you might imagine, was how did I learn to speak German?

Well, I was born in America, I told him. But before the war, my father worked in the German embassy in Berlin. And I made many trips, and I learned speak German. I was not going to be let on. And whether they swallowed it or not, they certainly gave the impression that they believed it.

And I ask, why were you not going to let them know?

I did not admit that I was born in Germany until very recently, very recently. As you could hear, I have a bit of an accent or inflection. And up until quite recently, when I was asked, I would say New Zealand, which is what people thought. They never pinpointed Germany. I wanted to erase that part of my past. I wanted to be an American in the strongest possible way.

Somehow, admitting that I was born in Germany made me seem inferior. I cannot rationalize it or explain it any better than that. It's actually only since I started working at the Holocaust Museum that I not only admit it, but I'm now proud to say it. And when I orient groups of kids, the first question I ask them, does everybody hear anything funny about the way I speak? And all these hands go up. And that's how I get them hooked into my little introductory talk.

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I want to talk a little bit about that later. And then you came home. And what did you do when you came back to the United States?

My parents were still in Europe when I came home. Again, I had no idea what I wanted to do. But some-- actually, it was one of the wives of one of the executives of the Kaufman firm heard I was back from the army and asked what I was interested in doing. And not me personally, she asked somebody, my father, my mother, and was told that I'm interested in books and writing, or something. I thought I might become a short story writer.

So she had a friend on Esquire magazine, also a Jewish gentleman, Bamberger, I think his name was. And he granted me an interview-- I only got this interview, of course, because of this connection-- a nice gentleman, who asked me what I wanted to do. And I said, well, I want to work for a magazine.

And of course, I had no experience, no training. And he very kindly told me, that since I had no experience, they had no job for me. But he suggested that I go over to The New York Times. He said, and I quote, sometimes they hire copy boys. So I did that.

I think the following day, I went to The New York Times-- again, one of these extremely lucky things. They must have had resumes by the hundreds, I imagine, for people who wanted to work for The New York Times. The next day, this young woman who interviewed me in the personnel office, called me and asked if I was interested. They had an opening.

I'm sure she thought I was-- she took a liking to me-- not in a-- I don't want to give the wrong impression-- a sexual way. She was an older lady. She was married. She just thought I was-- she just liked me, I guess. There's no other explanation for calling me the next day.

And of course, I jumped at the chance to work for the great New York Times. I mean, ever since I took the subway to school to Brooklyn Tech for Manhattan, there were two kinds of people for me in the world in the subway-- the good guys who read The New York Times and then The Herald Tribune, and the tabloids, which I frowned upon. So this was a great, great opportunity.

And in those days, copy boys did everything but write or edit, of course. It was a glorified errand boy. And my very first job was in the so-called white tower-- excuse me, ivory tower, where the editorial writers sat. And if you can picture this, my job was to take a shopping cart, a supermarket type shopping cart, and distribute the newspapers to all these writers who sat around this bank of offices-- The Times, The Tribune, The Daily News, some foreign newspapers.

Then when I did that, I did the same thing, again distributing the mail; then the galley proofs. I bought lunches for them, coffees. I ran all kinds of errands. In fact, one day, I had the most unusual among many unusual errands. One of the editorial writers had become infected with a tropical disease, during World War II, in the Pacific. And about once a month, he had to go to the medical department-- The Times had its own medical department-- to have a test tube of blood taken.

And I had to rush out to a Park Avenue specialist on the subway, in a brown paper envelope. It was still warm, the blood. That's the kind of things copy boys had to do in those days.

A few months later, I heard of an opening in the Sunday department, which sounded more interesting, because that's where the magazine is, the Sunday Book Review, the Travel section [INAUDIBLE]. I did basically the same thing, but the work was more interesting.

And just as I had taught myself English years earlier, I taught myself how to be a journalist by watching and observing what other people did, making the connection between the clips I had to get from the morgue, the subject of the clips, and the finished story in that Sunday's paper that the writer wrote. So I learned a great deal that way.

But there was no way to move ahead. I actually spent a total of three years doing that and worked my way to an assistant

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picture editor on the magazine, replacing a woman who had gone on maternity leave. And she decided to come back, so I was out of a job, and I had to leave.

I got a job then on a small paper in New England, in Danbury, Connecticut, as a reporter and then editor. Did that for two years. And again, one of those very incredibly lucky things that have happened so many times in my life, one day, I got a call from The New York Times, and they asked me if I wanted to come back. I don't know where they knew I was. I had no contact with them whatsoever. I don't know why this happened, but it happened.

And I went back to The New York Times and moved back to New York and worked on the news of the Week in Review-- it's now called Review of the Week-- as a writer, as a staff writer, one of the group of eight staff writers, which I did for four years.

And then there was a change of editors. The job became boring. And I decided to leave. I got a job at Business Week magazine. I was a copy editor, did that for five years. When, again, a change of editor at the magazine, a man who was very unhappy with The Washington Bureau and the quality of the writing in The Washington Bureau, and I was offered the job of assistant news editor in The Washington Bureau.

So by then, we had two daughters. And the company paid for our trip to Washington, which was a wonderful thing, because New York was not a place to bring up kids. And here we are in Bethesda, Maryland. I spent altogether 21 years with Mcgraw-Hill-- Mcgraw-Hill, of course, is the company that publishes Business Week-- and retired just about 10 years ago at age 55. I've been freelancing ever since.

Let's talk a little bit about your work at the Holocaust Museum. What prompted you to be involved there?

I first read about that there were plans for a Holocaust Museum. I had no idea what it was going to be like. I had no idea it was going to be this grand building, that it was going to be a government project. For some reason or other, I thought it was going to be this small endeavor put together by a group of Jews. And I knew I just had to be involved with it.

And I didn't get anywhere. I made numerous phone calls. I don't know how I got the number that I was calling. I guess it was on L Street. It must have been a friend or a friend of a friend. I don't think they took me seriously, because when they asked what I wanted to do, I said, in all sincerity, I'll do anything you want me to do. I will even clean the bathroom.

And I meant it-- again, thinking this was going to be a small thing in some rented store, or something like that. This is the image I had, for some reason. So they ignored me. And I just kept pestering them and pestering them, until I was called for an interview and was in the first group of trainees.

You said you knew that you just had to get involved. Why?

Because the Holocaust, although I was not in a concentration camp, the whole immigration is the seminal event of my life. I feel very grateful to be here, to be able to talk about it, to have escaped with so few scars-- a few psychological scars, to be sure. But compared to what others suffered-- I read a great deal about the Holocaust, Evelyn doesn't understand how I can read all these books or why I read them. But I do. There's one on my table right now.

When I heard about the museum, even though I didn't know what it was going to be like, I just knew I had to be involved. And I have missed a very few Thursday afternoons. When I was interviewed by the first director of volunteers, Betsy [PERSONAL NAME], she asked me what I want to do. I said, no brain work. I want to be on the floor with the public. I don't want to be behind the scenes.

And I've been doing that now since the beginning. And I truly look forward to my four hours there every Thursday. I am not doing more, in part because, although I did retire 10 years ago, I am actually still working, for all practical purposes, full-time. I make up for the time I'm at the museum by working at least one night a week, and sometimes more, and quite a bit on weekends as well.

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Why did you want to be on the floor with people rather than behind the scenes?

Behind the scenes-- well. Two reasons, I think. It seemed to be studious work. It seemed to be too much like a job that I had left behind-- in other words, table work, research. I'm not good at that. I just wanted to be in the exhibits, to be with people. I just had the sense I had to be there.

It was difficult in the beginning. But I don't mind being assigned to the permanent exhibit, which doesn't happen very often anymore. I don't mind being there. It refreshes my memory of where things are. It always reinforces a sense of thankfulness. I just can't get away from that. And as you see, I get emotional.

What do you think you bring to the museum that someone who did not go through what you-- as she did?

What I bring to the museum?

Yeah, so another volunteer talking to people, who was born in this country and didn't experience what you experience-- what do you bring because of your experience?

Unfortunately, not a great deal. I wish there were more opportunity to do that. I wish the museum would make better use of people like me. In point of fact, they have changed the orientations to make them now content-free, which deprives someone like me of talking to groups of kids about our experiences. I'm very sorry about that. I think my fellow survivors are equally sorry.

I know that it added another dimension to my involvement with the museum. I would like to think it added a dimension to the visitors. I certainly had a lot of people listening to my every word in a way that no longer happens. And of course, the volunteers who had much more interesting experiences than I did have much more to tell, had much more reason to be utilized in that fashion.

It is no longer the case, except for the Fannie Mae program, which I am not involved with, because, as I said, I'm not retired, and I can't devote that much time yet. Those kids do get an orientation, but it's only the kids in that program from the DC and Baltimore schools. It's not the people who come in from all around the country.

So what exactly are your duties?

Very routine-- manning the information desk and tearing tickets and holding the elevators, patrolling the permanent exhibit, answering questions. Unfortunately, most of the questions are not very intellectually challenging.

When you walk into the museum from the street, does it do something for you?

I'm home. I belong here. It's an incredible feeling. I have never had such a sense of belonging to anything. I feel I own it. Excuse me. I always cry. I cry very easily. I've been asked questions.

In the beginning-- this no longer happens with me-- in the beginning, when the museum first opened, there were a lot of survivors. I did a lot of crying. I was better at hiding it than I am now. But i think most of those people have come. It was a pilgrimage for them. And unfortunately, majority of visitors now are quite ignorant of the Holocaust. I hope they learn something. But it's a wonderful place to be.

Has it changed you in any way by working there?

I don't think it has changed me. I think it has reconnected me more with my Jewishness. Some people say I'm religious. I don't think I really am. I'm not exactly observant, but I'm very connected to my past, to my German Jewish past. I'm actually proud to be a German Jew. It's a twin prime, the Jewishness and the German-ness.

I'm even now grappling with the question of whether I should forgive. I haven't decided yet. I have to do more reading. But I'm very grateful, as I said, not only to have escaped, that our whole entire family escaped, but that this museum

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exists.

It has also been a source of some unhappiness for me-- hard to explain, hard to rationalize. I feel very hostile to some people who have absolutely no interest in the museum, who I think should have an interest in it. And I number among those people like my brothers, who have no interest. Parenthetically, one of my brothers, George, is an Episcopalian. He converted.

And I think there is no question, but that the strange relationship I have with my brothers stems from this. So people who I think should visit the museum and don't, other than those who feel that it's too much of an emotional experience for them, I can understand that. But people who have no interest, I just can't grasp that. I think it's a pilgrimage that certainly, every Jew should make.

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