

1  
00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:10,500

2  
00:00:10,500 --> 00:00:13,190  
This is the United States  
Holocaust Memorial Museum

3  
00:00:13,190 --> 00:00:15,480  
interview with Peter  
Phillips conducted

4  
00:00:15,480 --> 00:00:21,660  
by Gayle Schwartz on June 16,  
1997 in Bethesda, Maryland.

5  
00:00:21,660 --> 00:00:30,000  
This is Tape 3 Side A. Tell us  
about some of the experiences

6  
00:00:30,000 --> 00:00:33,360  
you've had working  
at the museum.

7  
00:00:33,360 --> 00:00:37,380  
One of the first ones I  
was on the third floor

8  
00:00:37,380 --> 00:00:43,667  
of the permanent exhibit,  
PE, when this wiry little man

9  
00:00:43,667 --> 00:00:44,250  
came up to me.

10  
00:00:44,250 --> 00:00:47,475  
I was standing just by  
the Auschwitz barracks.

11  
00:00:47,475 --> 00:00:50,200

12

00:00:50,200 --> 00:00:54,970  
And he was shorter than I am,  
probably about 10 years older

13  
00:00:54,970 --> 00:00:58,460  
than I am.

14  
00:00:58,460 --> 00:01:02,950  
He looked at me and he said, I  
slept in one of those things.

15  
00:01:02,950 --> 00:01:06,670

16  
00:01:06,670 --> 00:01:11,680  
That was very emotional for me.

17  
00:01:11,680 --> 00:01:16,050  
Then all of a sudden  
he grabbed my arms,

18  
00:01:16,050 --> 00:01:20,980  
pinned them to the side, and  
pushed me away from the exhibit

19  
00:01:20,980 --> 00:01:24,662  
and said, I know I'm not  
supposed to take pictures,

20  
00:01:24,662 --> 00:01:25,870  
but I want to take a picture.

21  
00:01:25,870 --> 00:01:28,512  
Why don't you just go away?

22  
00:01:28,512 --> 00:01:29,470  
Which I did, of course.

23  
00:01:29,470 --> 00:01:32,290

24  
00:01:32,290 --> 00:01:38,450

And in those days not only  
was there no photography

25  
00:01:38,450 --> 00:01:39,950  
allowed but they  
didn't allow flash,

26  
00:01:39,950 --> 00:01:41,900  
and this man took  
flash pictures.

27  
00:01:41,900 --> 00:01:44,510  
I could see them out  
of the corner of my eye

28  
00:01:44,510 --> 00:01:46,940  
from around the corner.

29  
00:01:46,940 --> 00:01:50,360  
Well, a couple of hours passed  
and I was somewhere else

30  
00:01:50,360 --> 00:01:54,410  
in the museum, I think  
downstairs by then,

31  
00:01:54,410 --> 00:01:57,980  
and he came out of the  
exhibit and he recognized me.

32  
00:01:57,980 --> 00:02:04,490  
He gave me such a hug, I  
thought he would crack my ribs.

33  
00:02:04,490 --> 00:02:06,680  
That's one extreme.

34  
00:02:06,680 --> 00:02:11,840  
The other extreme just this past  
week I was at the information

35  
00:02:11,840 --> 00:02:17,720  
desk and a man in

his 40s I would say

36

00:02:17,720 --> 00:02:21,710  
came and asked, what is this?

37

00:02:21,710 --> 00:02:23,120  
I answered as best as I could.

38

00:02:23,120 --> 00:02:25,730

39

00:02:25,730 --> 00:02:30,160  
Well, why is this here,  
meaning the museum.

40

00:02:30,160 --> 00:02:32,370  
I answered that as best I could.

41

00:02:32,370 --> 00:02:35,410  
How did you answer  
these questions?

42

00:02:35,410 --> 00:02:37,790  
Well, I'm not sure I  
remember it because I

43

00:02:37,790 --> 00:02:41,180  
was very uptight by  
then already because he

44

00:02:41,180 --> 00:02:44,690  
was obviously hostile.

45

00:02:44,690 --> 00:02:46,400  
I told him the museum  
is here to tell

46

00:02:46,400 --> 00:02:47,750  
the story of the Holocaust.

47

00:02:47,750 --> 00:02:50,810

48  
00:02:50,810 --> 00:02:52,940  
It is in America because  
America had a leading

49  
00:02:52,940 --> 00:02:56,390  
role in ending World War II.

50  
00:02:56,390 --> 00:02:58,990

51  
00:02:58,990 --> 00:03:00,720  
The third question  
was, well, are we

52  
00:03:00,720 --> 00:03:05,310  
supposed to feel sorry for these  
people, he said with a sneer.

53  
00:03:05,310 --> 00:03:12,210  
Luckily, the telephone rang just  
then, and I said, excuse me,

54  
00:03:12,210 --> 00:03:13,572  
I have to answer this call.

55  
00:03:13,572 --> 00:03:15,030  
And there was a  
caller from outside

56  
00:03:15,030 --> 00:03:18,825  
wanting to know about the  
availability of tickets.

57  
00:03:18,825 --> 00:03:21,840  
And while I answered that  
question this man disappeared.

58  
00:03:21,840 --> 00:03:25,710  
I don't think I could have  
answered the question.

59

00:03:25,710 --> 00:03:29,240

It was all I could to  
keep from hitting him.

60

00:03:29,240 --> 00:03:32,190

He had a pugnacious face.

61

00:03:32,190 --> 00:03:34,680

Luckily, there are  
very few of those.

62

00:03:34,680 --> 00:03:36,210

I've only had one before--

63

00:03:36,210 --> 00:03:37,320

I don't even remember.

64

00:03:37,320 --> 00:03:41,670

I erased it from my memory--  
somebody who was hostile.

65

00:03:41,670 --> 00:03:47,240

Most people who comment  
at all comment positively,

66

00:03:47,240 --> 00:03:50,070

and they are either  
survivors who

67

00:03:50,070 --> 00:03:54,550

have survived the  
death camps who

68

00:03:54,550 --> 00:03:57,090

want to share that with  
you, want to tell somebody

69

00:03:57,090 --> 00:03:59,620

that they lived through it.

70

00:03:59,620 --> 00:04:04,522

And then there are those who are  
mostly native-born Americans--

71  
00:04:04,522 --> 00:04:06,780  
I don't mean Indians,  
I mean people

72  
00:04:06,780 --> 00:04:10,130  
born in the United States--

73  
00:04:10,130 --> 00:04:14,250  
who may or may not have had any  
knowledge about the Holocaust

74  
00:04:14,250 --> 00:04:19,410  
but who will come up to you  
shaking their heads and say,

75  
00:04:19,410 --> 00:04:21,029  
this is incredible.

76  
00:04:21,029 --> 00:04:22,330  
Things like that.

77  
00:04:22,330 --> 00:04:24,180  
That is very heartwarming.

78  
00:04:24,180 --> 00:04:27,690  
It makes it all worthwhile.

79  
00:04:27,690 --> 00:04:29,130  
When people come  
up to you and say

80  
00:04:29,130 --> 00:04:32,560  
they lived through  
part of this, do you

81  
00:04:32,560 --> 00:04:35,668  
volunteer that you too  
were born in Germany?

82  
00:04:35,668 --> 00:04:37,710  
No, I don't want to take

anything away from them.

83

00:04:37,710 --> 00:04:40,100

They've had a unique experience.

84

00:04:40,100 --> 00:04:44,760

I am in awe of their  
ability to survive,

85

00:04:44,760 --> 00:04:49,620

and this is a little moment of  
glory, if you will, for them.

86

00:04:49,620 --> 00:04:51,540

I didn't choose a  
good word, probably,

87

00:04:51,540 --> 00:04:55,608

but I don't want to in  
any way detract from the--

88

00:04:55,608 --> 00:04:58,240

89

00:04:58,240 --> 00:05:02,490

I think if I say that I  
shared some of your experience

90

00:05:02,490 --> 00:05:08,760

it would diminish their need  
to tell me their psychological

91

00:05:08,760 --> 00:05:12,610

or whatever it is they  
get from telling me.

92

00:05:12,610 --> 00:05:17,820

So I have a hard enough  
time not showing any emotion

93

00:05:17,820 --> 00:05:18,800

at that point.



94

00:05:18,800 --> 00:05:25,450

I have at times actually  
broken out and cried.

95

00:05:25,450 --> 00:05:27,300

The exhibits, of  
course, are sort of

96

00:05:27,300 --> 00:05:30,217

dimly lit so they  
may not have noticed.

97

00:05:30,217 --> 00:05:31,050

I hope they haven't.

98

00:05:31,050 --> 00:05:34,490

99

00:05:34,490 --> 00:05:38,060

Do the volunteers  
who are survivors

100

00:05:38,060 --> 00:05:41,090

get together as a group,  
or is it an informal type

101

00:05:41,090 --> 00:05:43,580

of relationship?

102

00:05:43,580 --> 00:05:46,160

I'm very fortunate to have  
a very nice group of people

103

00:05:46,160 --> 00:05:48,950

in the Thursday afternoon group.

104

00:05:48,950 --> 00:05:51,230

We have become quite friendly.

105

00:05:51,230 --> 00:05:55,170

We have only socialized  
once at someone's home.

106  
00:05:55,170 --> 00:05:58,530  
That was about a year ago.

107  
00:05:58,530 --> 00:06:00,830  
We haven't done that.

108  
00:06:00,830 --> 00:06:02,880  
We probably should.

109  
00:06:02,880 --> 00:06:04,505  
I should take the  
initiative, actually.

110  
00:06:04,505 --> 00:06:07,040

111  
00:06:07,040 --> 00:06:09,980  
We are a very caring group.

112  
00:06:09,980 --> 00:06:13,670  
When somebody is  
absent, we all call

113  
00:06:13,670 --> 00:06:17,720  
as soon as we get home to ask,  
why weren't you at the museum?

114  
00:06:17,720 --> 00:06:20,540  
Are you OK?

115  
00:06:20,540 --> 00:06:23,270  
We keep up with each other  
with family stories, family

116  
00:06:23,270 --> 00:06:25,910  
pictures, and things like that.

117  
00:06:25,910 --> 00:06:33,230  
We switch off among ourselves  
on our assigned posts

118

00:06:33,230 --> 00:06:36,140

if somebody is tired and  
doesn't want to stand

119

00:06:36,140 --> 00:06:37,790

or isn't feeling well.

120

00:06:37,790 --> 00:06:39,980

We keep an eye on each other.

121

00:06:39,980 --> 00:06:42,470

We help one another  
out with tickets.

122

00:06:42,470 --> 00:06:44,550

It's a nice group of people.

123

00:06:44,550 --> 00:06:49,020

These are people who also are  
survivors, or is it a mixture?

124

00:06:49,020 --> 00:06:50,150

It's a mixture.

125

00:06:50,150 --> 00:06:56,120

There's one couple who have  
a story similar to mine

126

00:06:56,120 --> 00:06:58,400

the others are  
all American-born.

127

00:06:58,400 --> 00:07:01,490

128

00:07:01,490 --> 00:07:04,280

But my question was is  
the group of volunteers

129

00:07:04,280 --> 00:07:12,757

who are survivors themselves,  
do they get together,

130  
00:07:12,757 --> 00:07:13,715  
or do you get together?

131  
00:07:13,715 --> 00:07:16,220

132  
00:07:16,220 --> 00:07:17,945  
I'm not aware of any of that.

133  
00:07:17,945 --> 00:07:20,630

134  
00:07:20,630 --> 00:07:24,960  
The museum, of course, has an  
annual volunteer appreciation

135  
00:07:24,960 --> 00:07:26,820  
night where we all get together.

136  
00:07:26,820 --> 00:07:30,920  
But these survivors as  
such do not get together

137  
00:07:30,920 --> 00:07:33,620  
that I'm aware of, no.

138  
00:07:33,620 --> 00:07:36,650  
I just meant a more  
formal acknowledgment

139  
00:07:36,650 --> 00:07:44,910  
of a bond that you all share,  
that you experienced or share.

140  
00:07:44,910 --> 00:07:46,810  
I don't think so, no.

141  
00:07:46,810 --> 00:07:52,790  
I really, in fact, don't  
talk much about it.

142

00:07:52,790 --> 00:07:54,140

Why is that?

143

00:07:54,140 --> 00:08:04,890

I don't know. , I think I tend  
to be obsessed is probably too

144

00:08:04,890 --> 00:08:08,160

strong a word, with the  
Holocaust more than others,

145

00:08:08,160 --> 00:08:14,940

but I can't get  
enough reading of it.

146

00:08:14,940 --> 00:08:18,590

In fact, I don't  
know how many people

147

00:08:18,590 --> 00:08:20,070

saw Schindler's List twice.

148

00:08:20,070 --> 00:08:21,480

I did.

149

00:08:21,480 --> 00:08:25,350

The first time I was so  
upset I think I missed a lot

150

00:08:25,350 --> 00:08:28,580

and I wanted to see it again  
so we rented it and watched it

151

00:08:28,580 --> 00:08:29,464

at home.

152

00:08:29,464 --> 00:08:33,340

153

00:08:33,340 --> 00:08:37,120

Evelyn can't  
understand how I can

154  
00:08:37,120 --> 00:08:40,090  
read all the books that I do.

155  
00:08:40,090 --> 00:08:42,610  
I think it's because no  
matter how much I read

156  
00:08:42,610 --> 00:08:45,710  
I still can't believe it all.

157  
00:08:45,710 --> 00:08:46,300  
So I do.

158  
00:08:46,300 --> 00:08:48,295  
And I want to enhance  
my knowledge as well.

159  
00:08:48,295 --> 00:08:52,060

160  
00:08:52,060 --> 00:08:55,360  
Meantime, ironically enough  
paradoxically if you will,

161  
00:08:55,360 --> 00:08:59,320  
the exhibits themselves  
don't upset me the way

162  
00:08:59,320 --> 00:09:00,460  
they did in the beginning.

163  
00:09:00,460 --> 00:09:03,970  
You become used to it.

164  
00:09:03,970 --> 00:09:05,410  
It's only when I  
see other people

165  
00:09:05,410 --> 00:09:07,930  
getting emotional in the  
exhibit that I in turn

166  
00:09:07,930 --> 00:09:11,230  
become emotional.

167  
00:09:11,230 --> 00:09:13,660  
But having gone through  
it now for four years

168  
00:09:13,660 --> 00:09:17,500  
and knowing where  
everything is, it doesn't

169  
00:09:17,500 --> 00:09:21,250  
have that impact any longer,  
which is good, which is good,

170  
00:09:21,250 --> 00:09:23,540  
I guess.

171  
00:09:23,540 --> 00:09:27,230  
The first time I went  
through it with Evelyn,

172  
00:09:27,230 --> 00:09:32,380  
she couldn't take it.

173  
00:09:32,380 --> 00:09:34,630  
And although she  
was born in New York

174  
00:09:34,630 --> 00:09:38,410  
and did not have  
these experiences,

175  
00:09:38,410 --> 00:09:40,143  
she couldn't take it.

176  
00:09:40,143 --> 00:09:40,810  
We had to leave.

177  
00:09:40,810 --> 00:09:43,840

178  
00:09:43,840 --> 00:09:46,440  
Where are her parents from?

179  
00:09:46,440 --> 00:09:49,210  
Evelyn's mother  
was born in Berlin.

180  
00:09:49,210 --> 00:09:52,913  
Her father was born in a tiny  
town called [? Zuterne. ?]

181  
00:09:52,913 --> 00:09:54,455  
I don't even know  
where it is, but in

182  
00:09:54,455 --> 00:09:57,360  
the Western part of Germany.

183  
00:09:57,360 --> 00:10:05,860  
He was a physician in Berlin  
and they met in Berlin

184  
00:10:05,860 --> 00:10:09,290  
and fell in love.

185  
00:10:09,290 --> 00:10:13,540  
She, my mother-in-law,  
they're both deceased,

186  
00:10:13,540 --> 00:10:16,720  
was then married  
and had two sons.

187  
00:10:16,720 --> 00:10:23,090  
It was a poor marriage, and  
to make a long story short,

188  
00:10:23,090 --> 00:10:26,350  
she fell in love  
with Evelyn's father.

189



00:10:26,350 --> 00:10:30,160  
And he came to the  
United States in 1934

190  
00:10:30,160 --> 00:10:35,410  
because he was no longer  
permitted to operate

191  
00:10:35,410 --> 00:10:37,550  
as a doctor in Berlin.

192  
00:10:37,550 --> 00:10:44,050  
He came to the United  
States and she followed him.

193  
00:10:44,050 --> 00:10:46,060  
He was one of these  
people who thought

194  
00:10:46,060 --> 00:10:49,630  
that even though he had been  
deprived of his livelihood

195  
00:10:49,630 --> 00:10:52,850  
he thought it would blow  
over and he sent her back.

196  
00:10:52,850 --> 00:10:55,810  
He literally sent her back.

197  
00:10:55,810 --> 00:11:01,170  
And during her  
absence, her husband,

198  
00:11:01,170 --> 00:11:04,000  
realizing that the  
marriage could not work,

199  
00:11:04,000 --> 00:11:06,820  
said he was willing  
to give her a divorce,

200  
00:11:06,820 --> 00:11:10,840

but he left for Brazil  
with the two sons.

201  
00:11:10,840 --> 00:11:13,895  
So Evelyn has two  
half-brothers living in Brazil.

202  
00:11:13,895 --> 00:11:16,868

203  
00:11:16,868 --> 00:11:17,410  
I'm wheezing.

204  
00:11:17,410 --> 00:11:21,520

205  
00:11:21,520 --> 00:11:26,540  
The relationship with  
them is not very good.

206  
00:11:26,540 --> 00:11:31,500  
But anyway my mother-in-law  
came back and obviously

207  
00:11:31,500 --> 00:11:33,250  
they got married.

208  
00:11:33,250 --> 00:11:38,140  
And they spoke only German  
to her when she was born--

209  
00:11:38,140 --> 00:11:39,760  
she is the only child--

210  
00:11:39,760 --> 00:11:41,650  
Because they knew  
there were grandparents

211  
00:11:41,650 --> 00:11:44,260  
and they might have  
survived and they

212

00:11:44,260 --> 00:11:46,772  
wanted Evelyn to speak  
German if and when

213  
00:11:46,772 --> 00:11:48,230  
the grandparents  
came to the United

214  
00:11:48,230 --> 00:11:50,560  
States, which indeed happened.

215  
00:11:50,560 --> 00:11:54,940

216  
00:11:54,940 --> 00:11:58,720  
Her grandfather also  
had a second marriage,

217  
00:11:58,720 --> 00:12:04,510  
and he and his first and second  
wives came to the United States

218  
00:12:04,510 --> 00:12:08,800  
after the war, lived with the  
Cohen's in the same apartment.

219  
00:12:08,800 --> 00:12:14,230

220  
00:12:14,230 --> 00:12:18,400  
The grandparents were hidden  
during the war separately,

221  
00:12:18,400 --> 00:12:21,310  
did not know of each  
other's existence

222  
00:12:21,310 --> 00:12:23,665  
until they met again in  
New York quite by chance.

223  
00:12:23,665 --> 00:12:30,970

224  
00:12:30,970 --> 00:12:35,280  
You obviously lost your  
childhood in many ways.

225  
00:12:35,280 --> 00:12:39,520  
And given such responsibility  
as a young child,

226  
00:12:39,520 --> 00:12:41,020  
do you think you  
ever got it back?

227  
00:12:41,020 --> 00:12:43,750

228  
00:12:43,750 --> 00:12:45,640  
No, I don't think so.

229  
00:12:45,640 --> 00:12:48,000  
I still have a yearning  
to have an electric train

230  
00:12:48,000 --> 00:12:50,980  
and I think I'm too old now.

231  
00:12:50,980 --> 00:12:55,870  
No, I don't, and I think my  
lack of interest in sports

232  
00:12:55,870 --> 00:12:58,180  
has to do with it.

233  
00:12:58,180 --> 00:13:01,630  
Although I liked to play  
softball when I was a kid,

234  
00:13:01,630 --> 00:13:04,390  
I went to camp and all that,  
I have absolutely no interest

235  
00:13:04,390 --> 00:13:04,990

in sports.

236

00:13:04,990 --> 00:13:08,710

There's something infantile to me about sports respectively.

237

00:13:08,710 --> 00:13:13,080

The excitement that the sports engender nowadays,

238

00:13:13,080 --> 00:13:17,470

I just don't relate to it.

239

00:13:17,470 --> 00:13:20,798

240

00:13:20,798 --> 00:13:22,090

You said you have two children?

241

00:13:22,090 --> 00:13:22,673

Two daughters.

242

00:13:22,673 --> 00:13:23,920

Two daughters.

243

00:13:23,920 --> 00:13:26,980

When your children were very young,

244

00:13:26,980 --> 00:13:32,080

at the age that you were when you had to move, did that..

245

00:13:32,080 --> 00:13:34,570

At that time in their lives did that

246

00:13:34,570 --> 00:13:41,740

make you think of your childhood even more so?

247

00:13:41,740 --> 00:13:42,980

I don't think so.

248

00:13:42,980 --> 00:13:47,470

I think in part  
because they are girls.

249

00:13:47,470 --> 00:13:55,570

I was very enormously  
lucky to have two children.

250

00:13:55,570 --> 00:14:00,986

They are the first members of  
my family born on American soil.

251

00:14:00,986 --> 00:14:04,662

They are true Americans.

252

00:14:04,662 --> 00:14:11,620

They are very much aware of  
my history, my family history.

253

00:14:11,620 --> 00:14:14,660

254

00:14:14,660 --> 00:14:20,660

They are very Jewish, which  
I'm enormously pleased about.

255

00:14:20,660 --> 00:14:22,510

Our older daughter  
just got engaged

256

00:14:22,510 --> 00:14:29,080

to a very nice Jewish  
boy and I'm just

257

00:14:29,080 --> 00:14:32,040

a very, very lucky man.

258

00:14:32,040 --> 00:14:34,540

I have a wonderful family.

259

00:14:34,540 --> 00:14:41,220  
And they indulge my  
interest in the Holocaust.

260  
00:14:41,220 --> 00:14:46,880  
They have seen the tape  
of the survivors now twice

261  
00:14:46,880 --> 00:14:51,490  
and they'll probably see it  
a few more times with me.

262  
00:14:51,490 --> 00:14:53,530  
Did you talk about  
your experiences

263  
00:14:53,530 --> 00:14:57,160  
to them when they were younger?

264  
00:14:57,160 --> 00:14:59,620  
When they were old  
enough to understand,

265  
00:14:59,620 --> 00:15:02,710  
when they were teenagers,  
yes, I wanted them to know.

266  
00:15:02,710 --> 00:15:08,106  
I wanted to drill into  
them the idea that--

267  
00:15:08,106 --> 00:15:12,650  
and I hope I'm not saying  
anything offensive to anyone

268  
00:15:12,650 --> 00:15:13,150  
now--

269  
00:15:13,150 --> 00:15:17,770  
I wanted desperately for them  
to be Jewish and to marry Jews.

270  
00:15:17,770 --> 00:15:21,310

271  
00:15:21,310 --> 00:15:27,550  
I didn't want Hitler  
to win posthumously.

272  
00:15:27,550 --> 00:15:29,980  
So far so good.

273  
00:15:29,980 --> 00:15:32,620  
How did you convey that to them?

274  
00:15:32,620 --> 00:15:36,070  
I talked about it ad  
infinitum, probably more

275  
00:15:36,070 --> 00:15:41,170  
than a father should have, but  
I kept repeating that message

276  
00:15:41,170 --> 00:15:43,010  
over and over again.

277  
00:15:43,010 --> 00:15:46,240  
And I think it,  
again luckily, they

278  
00:15:46,240 --> 00:15:49,200  
didn't rebelled against it.

279  
00:15:49,200 --> 00:15:52,480  
I think they  
understood how I feel.

280  
00:15:52,480 --> 00:15:56,020  
I think they are better children  
than I was to my parents

281  
00:15:56,020 --> 00:16:02,230  
because I left the Jewish  
religion and religion

282



00:16:02,230 --> 00:16:03,880  
altogether for a long period.

283  
00:16:03,880 --> 00:16:06,430  
I didn't go to synagogue.

284  
00:16:06,430 --> 00:16:11,970  
I even worked on the  
high holy days sometimes.

285  
00:16:11,970 --> 00:16:17,890  
The conflict about the  
subject between my parents

286  
00:16:17,890 --> 00:16:21,520  
was a terrible  
emotional drain on me,

287  
00:16:21,520 --> 00:16:29,810  
but my mother retreating from  
all her history made it easier.

288  
00:16:29,810 --> 00:16:32,490  
So I made my father  
very unhappy,

289  
00:16:32,490 --> 00:16:39,910  
but I am now back in the fold,  
as it were, and go to synagogue

290  
00:16:39,910 --> 00:16:40,780  
and all that.

291  
00:16:40,780 --> 00:16:42,670  
I wish I knew more.

292  
00:16:42,670 --> 00:16:45,350  
I wish I could read  
Hebrew better than I do.

293  
00:16:45,350 --> 00:16:49,198  
It's at a very infantile stage.

294

00:16:49,198 --> 00:16:53,500  
Evelyn and I belong to a  
Catholic-Jewish dialogue group,

295

00:16:53,500 --> 00:16:56,320  
have been members  
for about 20 years.

296

00:16:56,320 --> 00:17:01,480  
It's been a very  
enriching experience.

297

00:17:01,480 --> 00:17:04,550  
We've made some good friends.

298

00:17:04,550 --> 00:17:08,349  
We also belong to a chavurah,  
which is rather new.

299

00:17:08,349 --> 00:17:10,930

300

00:17:10,930 --> 00:17:19,119  
So I'm trying to be a better  
Jew, trying to make up

301

00:17:19,119 --> 00:17:22,770  
for the years of neglect.

302

00:17:22,770 --> 00:17:26,880  
How often do you think  
of what you went through

303

00:17:26,880 --> 00:17:30,660  
and the childhood you had and  
the moving, the constant moving

304

00:17:30,660 --> 00:17:33,860  
through the years?

305

00:17:33,860 --> 00:17:35,250  
Quite often.

306  
00:17:35,250 --> 00:17:38,720  
But as you get older, the  
memories recede and that's

307  
00:17:38,720 --> 00:17:41,840  
only healthy as it should be.

308  
00:17:41,840 --> 00:17:50,330  
But I have reactions to  
situations in everyday life

309  
00:17:50,330 --> 00:17:55,490  
that are totally  
unrelated to the Holocaust

310  
00:17:55,490 --> 00:18:00,905  
and to my experiences,  
but they upset me.

311  
00:18:00,905 --> 00:18:03,830

312  
00:18:03,830 --> 00:18:18,170  
Any kind of uncivil behavior,  
coarseness, meanness,

313  
00:18:18,170 --> 00:18:21,200  
it upsets me terribly, more  
than is normal I'm sure.

314  
00:18:21,200 --> 00:18:24,590

315  
00:18:24,590 --> 00:18:29,725  
Any unkindness,  
any bad behavior.

316  
00:18:29,725 --> 00:18:33,500

317  
00:18:33,500 --> 00:18:37,400

I have a phobia about driving on the Beltway.

318  
00:18:37,400 --> 00:18:40,070  
It's different from other people's phobias in part,

319  
00:18:40,070 --> 00:18:40,970  
I think.

320  
00:18:40,970 --> 00:18:45,350  
I'm not afraid of something happening to me.

321  
00:18:45,350 --> 00:18:51,800  
I get very upset seeing the aggressiveness, any violence.

322  
00:18:51,800 --> 00:18:56,120  
I go to the movies once a year on Halloween.

323  
00:18:56,120 --> 00:19:02,360  
I cannot stand violence and the coarseness of the language

324  
00:19:02,360 --> 00:19:03,410  
and all that.

325  
00:19:03,410 --> 00:19:07,730  
And I'm sure that's all because of my background.

326  
00:19:07,730 --> 00:19:11,660  
It's not a normal reaction, I'm the first to admit it.

327  
00:19:11,660 --> 00:19:14,780  
You mean because of the overlay of violence in your childhood.

328  
00:19:14,780 --> 00:19:15,650  
Absolutely, yes.

329  
00:19:15,650 --> 00:19:19,180

330  
00:19:19,180 --> 00:19:21,450  
I'm a vegetarian.

331  
00:19:21,450 --> 00:19:24,100  
Have been for about 20 years.

332  
00:19:24,100 --> 00:19:26,770  
I think that somehow is related.

333  
00:19:26,770 --> 00:19:33,640  
Also irrational,  
inexplicable, but eating meat

334  
00:19:33,640 --> 00:19:35,990  
involves killing.

335  
00:19:35,990 --> 00:19:38,590  
I do wear leather shoes  
and I have a leather chair,

336  
00:19:38,590 --> 00:19:42,850  
and so there's some  
irrationality in that.

337  
00:19:42,850 --> 00:19:48,250  
But my first years  
growing up were

338  
00:19:48,250 --> 00:19:50,350  
paid for by the leather  
business, my father

339  
00:19:50,350 --> 00:19:54,550  
having sold hides and skins  
that were made into leather.

340  
00:19:54,550 --> 00:19:57,430  
So I rationalize

it that way, but I

341  
00:19:57,430 --> 00:20:01,000  
don't eat any animals at all.

342  
00:20:01,000 --> 00:20:05,750  
Are there any sights  
or sounds today

343  
00:20:05,750 --> 00:20:09,070  
besides what you talked  
about, aggressiveness,

344  
00:20:09,070 --> 00:20:11,950  
but anything more  
concrete that triggers

345  
00:20:11,950 --> 00:20:13,618  
memories of your childhood?

346  
00:20:13,618 --> 00:20:16,310

347  
00:20:16,310 --> 00:20:18,350  
I can't think of  
anything off hand,

348  
00:20:18,350 --> 00:20:20,720  
but you used the word  
sights and sounds.

349  
00:20:20,720 --> 00:20:23,880  
I cannot stand the  
music of Wagner.

350  
00:20:23,880 --> 00:20:29,140  
It's to me background  
music to a pogrom.

351  
00:20:29,140 --> 00:20:30,170  
Hate it.

352

00:20:30,170 --> 00:20:32,745  
I know there are great  
fans of Wagner's music.

353  
00:20:32,745 --> 00:20:33,620  
I am not one of them.

354  
00:20:33,620 --> 00:20:37,700

355  
00:20:37,700 --> 00:20:42,210  
One of the operas my father  
took me to was Meistersinger.

356  
00:20:42,210 --> 00:20:44,250  
And for many years I  
liked Meistersinger.

357  
00:20:44,250 --> 00:20:47,270  
The libretto was different.

358  
00:20:47,270 --> 00:20:49,160  
It didn't have the gods  
and goddesses and all

359  
00:20:49,160 --> 00:20:53,510  
that fairy tale quality.

360  
00:20:53,510 --> 00:20:57,360  
But I no longer do.

361  
00:20:57,360 --> 00:21:00,890  
What about seeing  
somebody in uniform?

362  
00:21:00,890 --> 00:21:03,250  
That doesn't bother me.

363  
00:21:03,250 --> 00:21:06,110  
After all, I wore the  
American Army uniform myself.

364

00:21:06,110 --> 00:21:10,190  
I was very proud of being an  
American soldier, particularly

365  
00:21:10,190 --> 00:21:10,760  
in Germany.

366  
00:21:10,760 --> 00:21:13,940

367  
00:21:13,940 --> 00:21:15,890  
I do get a little  
uptight if I see a cop.

368  
00:21:15,890 --> 00:21:18,360  
I still think of cops  
as being friendly.

369  
00:21:18,360 --> 00:21:20,230  
I don't think of  
them as the enemy,

370  
00:21:20,230 --> 00:21:22,640  
that they represent  
law and order.

371  
00:21:22,640 --> 00:21:25,280

372  
00:21:25,280 --> 00:21:30,530  
So I feel safer on the  
street if I see police.

373  
00:21:30,530 --> 00:21:37,580  
However, if a policeman  
came behind my car

374  
00:21:37,580 --> 00:21:42,740  
I would immediately  
think, Oh, he's after me.

375  
00:21:42,740 --> 00:21:46,550  
It just happened the other day



some police car in my rear-view

376  
00:21:46,550 --> 00:21:47,930  
mirror.

377  
00:21:47,930 --> 00:21:50,030  
I couldn't imagine why  
he was following me.

378  
00:21:50,030 --> 00:21:52,100  
He wasn't following me,  
but I assumed he was.

379  
00:21:52,100 --> 00:21:54,660

380  
00:21:54,660 --> 00:21:59,020  
Are there any smells  
the bring back memories?

381  
00:21:59,020 --> 00:21:59,920  
Smells?

382  
00:21:59,920 --> 00:22:03,670  
No, not really.

383  
00:22:03,670 --> 00:22:04,960  
Nothing I can think of.

384  
00:22:04,960 --> 00:22:12,240

385  
00:22:12,240 --> 00:22:15,120  
What kind of a person  
would you be, do you think,

386  
00:22:15,120 --> 00:22:18,980  
if you hadn't experienced  
what you have?

387  
00:22:18,980 --> 00:22:28,270  
I think I would be much more

self-confident, assertive,

388

00:22:28,270 --> 00:22:29,400  
and more successful.

389

00:22:29,400 --> 00:22:32,430

390

00:22:32,430 --> 00:22:40,300

I grew up believing that  
if you did your job,

391

00:22:40,300 --> 00:22:47,980

did it well, and  
just generally did

392

00:22:47,980 --> 00:22:51,160

what you were supposed to do,  
you would move up in the world.

393

00:22:51,160 --> 00:22:52,910

But it doesn't work that way.

394

00:22:52,910 --> 00:22:55,930

You have to blow your own horn.

395

00:22:55,930 --> 00:22:57,580

You have to be assertive.

396

00:22:57,580 --> 00:23:01,270

You have to do something  
just to stand out.

397

00:23:01,270 --> 00:23:02,760

I never could do that.

398

00:23:02,760 --> 00:23:04,570

I wasn't brought up that way.

399

00:23:04,570 --> 00:23:08,480

I always shrunk back.

400

00:23:08,480 --> 00:23:14,440

It's a shrinking back from  
authority in a way, I think.

401

00:23:14,440 --> 00:23:17,940

Always afraid of my boss,  
always afraid of my teachers.

402

00:23:17,940 --> 00:23:19,170

Respected them, certainly.

403

00:23:19,170 --> 00:23:29,590

It's deferential to a  
fault. Still am to this day.

404

00:23:29,590 --> 00:23:33,453

I think that's all because  
of the way I grew up.

405

00:23:33,453 --> 00:23:35,620

When you say the way you  
grew up, because of the way

406

00:23:35,620 --> 00:23:37,037

your parents raised  
you or because

407

00:23:37,037 --> 00:23:39,080

of the wartime conditions?

408

00:23:39,080 --> 00:23:40,330

It's a combination of both.

409

00:23:40,330 --> 00:23:45,080

410

00:23:45,080 --> 00:23:50,670

I think basically authority  
is no longer respected

411

00:23:50,670 --> 00:23:57,700

in this country since 1960s,

but I have that extra overlay.

412  
00:23:57,700 --> 00:24:00,350

413  
00:24:00,350 --> 00:24:02,390  
Give me an example.

414  
00:24:02,390 --> 00:24:06,790  
For about 15 or 16 years, I was  
an usher at Washington Hebrew

415  
00:24:06,790 --> 00:24:07,660  
Congregation.

416  
00:24:07,660 --> 00:24:11,440

417  
00:24:11,440 --> 00:24:14,010  
I couldn't take it anymore.

418  
00:24:14,010 --> 00:24:18,040  
I couldn't take the  
behavior of the kids.

419  
00:24:18,040 --> 00:24:20,730  
On Saturday afternoons when  
I ushered at a borough bar

420  
00:24:20,730 --> 00:24:25,850  
mitzvah, I would come home  
so upset by the behavior,

421  
00:24:25,850 --> 00:24:31,870  
a lack of respect shown  
to the rabbi, that I

422  
00:24:31,870 --> 00:24:39,750  
had two stiff drinks and so  
I decided it wasn't worth it.

423  
00:24:39,750 --> 00:24:43,900

I get upset about things that  
don't upset other people.

424  
00:24:43,900 --> 00:24:56,440  
I get upset about litter  
on the side of the road,

425  
00:24:56,440 --> 00:24:59,740  
people tossing beer  
cans out the car window.

426  
00:24:59,740 --> 00:25:03,370  
I can't laugh anything off.

427  
00:25:03,370 --> 00:25:06,190  
But that's my own hang up.

428  
00:25:06,190 --> 00:25:10,120  
Did your father ever get any  
or did anybody in your family

429  
00:25:10,120 --> 00:25:13,510  
ever get any reparations?

430  
00:25:13,510 --> 00:25:15,100  
Yes.

431  
00:25:15,100 --> 00:25:21,730  
I myself got 5,000 marks for  
the disruption of my schooling.

432  
00:25:21,730 --> 00:25:24,850  
My mother got  
nothing because there

433  
00:25:24,850 --> 00:25:30,430  
was no record of  
her having worked,

434  
00:25:30,430 --> 00:25:37,270  
so she got no restitution nor  
the equivalent of the Social

435

00:25:37,270 --> 00:25:38,560  
Security.

436

00:25:38,560 --> 00:25:43,060  
My father got a very  
small amount of money

437

00:25:43,060 --> 00:25:49,330  
and then signed a release  
saying that he would not

438

00:25:49,330 --> 00:25:51,470  
make future claims.

439

00:25:51,470 --> 00:25:55,630  
So my parents did not  
get a so-called renta,

440

00:25:55,630 --> 00:25:58,390  
monthly payments.

441

00:25:58,390 --> 00:26:03,070  
How did you feel about  
getting those 5,000 marks?

442

00:26:03,070 --> 00:26:10,420  
I think it was the  
equivalent of about \$1,000.

443

00:26:10,420 --> 00:26:11,920  
I don't remember  
what I did with it.

444

00:26:11,920 --> 00:26:13,462  
I didn't do anything  
foolish with it,

445

00:26:13,462 --> 00:26:17,610  
that I'm sure of, unless  
I bought a stock that

446

00:26:17,610 --> 00:26:19,540

didn't do any good.

447

00:26:19,540 --> 00:26:22,780

But I never had a choice.

448

00:26:22,780 --> 00:26:27,850

My parents, my father,  
actually, applied for this money

449

00:26:27,850 --> 00:26:29,300

in my behalf.

450

00:26:29,300 --> 00:26:33,130

And I signed the document and  
I didn't question my father

451

00:26:33,130 --> 00:26:36,670

and I just got the  
money and that was it.

452

00:26:36,670 --> 00:26:40,180

It's very possible that he  
invested the money for me,

453

00:26:40,180 --> 00:26:41,320

that I never even saw it.

454

00:26:41,320 --> 00:26:42,675

I don't remember.

455

00:26:42,675 --> 00:26:44,425

You don't remember any  
particular feelings

456

00:26:44,425 --> 00:26:47,230

you had about getting  
money from Germany.

457

00:26:47,230 --> 00:26:50,710

No, but looking back  
with hindsight I

458

00:26:50,710 --> 00:26:52,570  
would again take that money.

459  
00:26:52,570 --> 00:26:55,930  
I would not mind taking it, yes.

460  
00:26:55,930 --> 00:27:01,600  
I think my schooling  
was interrupted.

461  
00:27:01,600 --> 00:27:07,570  
I spent a lot of years  
trying to catch up,

462  
00:27:07,570 --> 00:27:09,270  
learning English and all that.

463  
00:27:09,270 --> 00:27:14,020  
And so whether 5,000 marks  
or \$1,000 to make up for it

464  
00:27:14,020 --> 00:27:17,220  
I don't think so,  
but it was a token,

465  
00:27:17,220 --> 00:27:21,880  
and yes, I would have accepted  
it and I would again today.

466  
00:27:21,880 --> 00:27:25,970  
Have you been back to  
Germany since the '50s?

467  
00:27:25,970 --> 00:27:27,340  
Well, I was a GI, of course.

468  
00:27:27,340 --> 00:27:30,160  
I was in Mainz for  
almost two years.

469  
00:27:30,160 --> 00:27:30,970  
Since that time.



470  
00:27:30,970 --> 00:27:32,480  
Since then, no.

471  
00:27:32,480 --> 00:27:33,330  
No.

472  
00:27:33,330 --> 00:27:37,690  
I am now in touch with  
the city of Essen.

473  
00:27:37,690 --> 00:27:39,920  
I wish my German were  
good enough to write some

474  
00:27:39,920 --> 00:27:41,770  
to them in German.

475  
00:27:41,770 --> 00:27:45,650  
So we correspond by my writing  
in English and they write back

476  
00:27:45,650 --> 00:27:46,150  
in German.

477  
00:27:46,150 --> 00:27:48,850

478  
00:27:48,850 --> 00:27:52,200  
They have just sent me  
two books about the city.

479  
00:27:52,200 --> 00:27:56,860  
I'm hoping that they will  
invite Evelyn and me to visit.

480  
00:27:56,860 --> 00:28:01,180  
I did see the synagogue where my  
parents, or at least my father

481  
00:28:01,180 --> 00:28:07,120  
and I, went in 1956, I think.

482

00:28:07,120 --> 00:28:12,640

My parents showed me it was then  
a burned-out, bombed-out hulk.

483

00:28:12,640 --> 00:28:15,100

It is now rebuilt. I  
would love to go back.

484

00:28:15,100 --> 00:28:18,220

485

00:28:18,220 --> 00:28:20,470

I would gladly talk to  
German schoolchildren

486

00:28:20,470 --> 00:28:24,200

about my experience, if  
that were a quid pro quo,

487

00:28:24,200 --> 00:28:26,710

and I've written to  
them, written to the city

488

00:28:26,710 --> 00:28:28,420

to that effect.

489

00:28:28,420 --> 00:28:32,470

I think they consider me  
too old by about 10 years.

490

00:28:32,470 --> 00:28:37,030

I have about 200 former  
residents of Essen,

491

00:28:37,030 --> 00:28:42,850

and they're taking them in very  
small numbers by your birth,

492

00:28:42,850 --> 00:28:45,380

starting with the  
oldest, obviously.

493

00:28:45,380 --> 00:28:48,930  
So I think I have  
a while to wait.

494  
00:28:48,930 --> 00:28:51,250  
So you're not too  
old, you're too young.

495  
00:28:51,250 --> 00:28:53,440  
Excuse me, too young,  
too young of course, yes.

496  
00:28:53,440 --> 00:28:58,570

497  
00:28:58,570 --> 00:29:01,330  
Anything else you wanted  
to add or any message

498  
00:29:01,330 --> 00:29:03,430  
to your daughters?

499  
00:29:03,430 --> 00:29:05,610  
Anything that you'd like to say?

500  
00:29:05,610 --> 00:29:11,820

501  
00:29:11,820 --> 00:29:19,330  
The kids know how I feel  
and what experiences I had.

502  
00:29:19,330 --> 00:29:21,280  
Unlike most kids,  
they don't say, Oh,

503  
00:29:21,280 --> 00:29:23,920  
I don't want to hear  
about that again,

504  
00:29:23,920 --> 00:29:28,390  
which pleases me and  
makes me very proud.

505  
00:29:28,390 --> 00:29:30,100  
They both went to the museum.

506  
00:29:30,100 --> 00:29:34,690  
Our younger daughter went  
twice of her own volition.

507  
00:29:34,690 --> 00:29:47,180  
And I hope that they will  
remember me as a survivor

508  
00:29:47,180 --> 00:29:50,560  
and tell their  
children about it.

509  
00:29:50,560 --> 00:29:53,520

510  
00:29:53,520 --> 00:29:54,840  
It's a story worth telling.

511  
00:29:54,840 --> 00:30:00,208

512  
00:30:00,208 --> 00:30:02,170  
That's it.

513  
00:30:02,170 --> 00:30:04,150  
Thank you very much for telling.

514  
00:30:04,150 --> 00:30:05,510  
Thank you very much.

515  
00:30:05,510 --> 00:30:08,090  
Thank you.

516  
00:30:08,090 --> 00:30:11,470  
This concludes the United  
States Holocaust Memorial Museum

517

00:30:11,470 --> 00:30:14,280  
interview with Peter Phillips.

518

00:30:14,280 --> 00:30:19,000