

This is an interview for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. We are interviewing William Hess. My name is Esther Finder. Today is August 15, 1997. This is tape 1, side A. May I ask you to please state your name for me.

My name is William Werner Hess.

Was this your name at birth?

Werner was my name at birth, yes.

When were you born?

I was born on August 8, 1921.

And where were you born?

I was born in Stuttgart in Germany.

Is that where you grew up?

I grew up in Stuttgart, and I lived there until the time that I moved into the United States in 1937.

I'd like to ask you a little bit about Stuttgart and your childhood. Was there a large Jewish population in Stuttgart?

The Jewish population of Stuttgart was approximately 4,000 people, which pretty much corresponded to the proportion of Jews within Germany-- roughly 1% of the population. Stuttgart had a population at the time of about 430,000.

What were relationships like between Jews and non-Jews?

In general, relationships were very good. And a lot of the Jews had many non-Jewish as well as Jewish friends.

Did you live in a Jewish area?

There really wasn't such a thing as a Jewish area. That is Jews, of course, tended to live in the better areas of the city, but they were pretty well spread around. The street that we lived on, there were no other Jews in our particular apartment house. But on the block where we lived, there were a number of Jewish families.

Did your family have a long history in Germany?

Yes, they did. I'm very lucky I have genealogical information on both sides of my family-- none of it done by myself. On my father's side, I have a family history that goes back to about the year 1700. And my ancestors lived in a village, really, not in Stuttgart-- the political unit of Wurttemberg. The Jews were driven out by 1492 by the then-ruler for all times.

And subsequently, there were very few Jews that ever lived there. If a ruler needed certain things like money and so, he would have a Jewish counselor. And of course, the most famous and the most important of those was a man who became known as Jud Suss. His name was Joseph Suss Oppenheimer. And he was hired by the duke at the time to raise money for his excessive style of living, which was pretty typical for most rulers who all thought they wanted to imitate Louis XIV of France by building palaces and otherwise living it up.

After the ruler died, Jud Suss was hanged publicly for taking advantage of the population. That happened about 1740 or thereabouts. It wasn't until the early 19th century that Jews were legally living in the state. And where my grandparents and my ancestors lived was one of the many little principalities that were scattered throughout Germany. And since they

allowed Jews to live there, there was a rather large proportion of Jews in that village.

At the end of the 19th century, most of them moved away and into the city where the opportunities were. So my ancestors on my father's side go back that far. And the same is true on my mother's side. My mother comes from a small town in Treuen, which is in central Germany. And we also can go back to about 1700 on my mother's side.

What was your father's name? And what did he do for a living?

My father's name was Wilhelm Hess. And he was in the wholesale textile business. He had a wholesale business that was founded by my grandfather and was then taken over by my father and my uncle. And it was in existence until 1930 when it was dissolved during the Depression. About a year or so later, my father started up again on his own and started, again, a small textile business.

What was your mother's name? And what work did she do?

My mother's maiden name was Elsa Simpson. She did not have any job. And this was very rare for Jewish women to work outside the house unless there was an absolutely dire economic necessity. In fact, until World War I, it was greatly looked down for a Jewish girl to be working.

Do you have any siblings?

No, I'm an only child.

What religious traditions did your family observe?

Actually, very few. On the high holidays, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hashana, and Yom Kippur, I didn't go to school. We never had a seder in our house. In fact, I only went to a seder once that an aunt of mine held, and I was very impressed by it. Hanukkah-- well, once in a while, we might have a Hanukkah celebration.

Well Saturday, of course, chametz-- my father, there was still some of the tradition. My father, who occasionally, or rather frequently, traveled on behalf of his own business from Monday to Friday, he would come home Friday night. And my mother would have a chametz dinner ready for us. Jewish cookery, of course, was very important. And we did have religious training, religious education. And I was bar mitzvahed. That just about sums it up.

Tell me about your religious education.

Well, religious education in Germany was at the time part of the school curriculum. In fact, twice a week in the elementary school, the teacher would talk about a Bible story-- either Old or New Testament-- and when I entered the second grade, we were informed that, henceforth, we would be excused from going through the religious instruction in school-- we could take that hour off.

But every Wednesday afternoon, which was traditionally a school-free afternoon, we would have to go to religious education in the Jewish community-building, which was adjacent to the main synagogue. And there, we would have an hour of Bible or Jewish history and an hour of Hebrew. And unless you opted out of that, you were expected to attend. And the report cards that were given to you there were incorporated into your public school report cards.

Now, if you flunked religion, that wasn't grounds for keeping you back. It didn't count, but it was shown. And you got grades, and they were reflected in your report card.

Can you tell me a little bit about your bar mitzvah?

Well, I was interviewed by-- we had two rabbis. Where I lived, we had one big, main synagogue. There was a small synagogue which was used by the orthodox-- mainly people who had moved into Stuttgart after World War I and had come from Eastern Europe. But the main synagogue had two rabbis and a number of canters. And they were the people

who gave religious instructions to Jewish children.

And one of them then would also be responsible for guiding you through the bar mitzvah, giving you instructions. For that, we had to come in on Saturday afternoon for a bar mitzvah instruction. And then there was a youth service at the synagogue about an hour in length particularly geared toward young people-- I wouldn't say small children, but maybe sixth or seventh grade-- fifth, sixth, seventh grade and up.

And I was given the choice-- did I want to just say the berakha over the Torah or say a parsha. And of course, being lazy, I chose the berakha. The rabbi later told me he's sorry he ever gave me that option. I should have taken the time to chant the parsha for the bar mitzvah. And it was a fairly big deal. You invited all your family, and sometimes even non-Jewish friends too. And we had big family dinners. And of course, you expected and received many gifts.

Did you have a favorite holiday, either religious or secular?

I really don't know. Undoubtedly, if we had kept seder, that would have been my favorite holiday, because it is now. I think it's a wonderful family and religious institution.

Tell me about your non-religious education.

well it was a traditional middle class education-- four years of elementary school. At the end of four years, you had to take a test, which was no harder than what you would normally receive in the course of education. And if you passed it, then you could go to a higher school, which is now pretty uniformly known as gymnasium. In my day, the gymnasium was a humanistic education that you received if you would become a doctor, or a philosopher, or something like that.

So from the fifth year, which was the first year of high school, I went to equivalent to a gymnasium. And after four years, I was sent to a higher school of commerce, because the idea was, my father said, that, undoubtedly, like most of other members of my family, I would enter business. And this would be a specialized training where you would be taught specifically things that you would need in business-- that included languages, of course, English and French-- and in French specifically, writing a business letter in French, accounting, chemistry, and history, and all the other academic subjects as well. After one year in that school, I was 16. And of course, that was the time when it was decided for me it was time to leave Germany.

When you were growing up, what were some of the things that you did for fun?

Well, I had friends. Usually I had one or two friends. I didn't usually have hordes of friends. And we got together. And where I was living there were a lot of children-- most of them not Jewish. And we would play when I was small-- the usual games-- catch and hide and go seek.

We also had scooters which we used. And we go around the block or even downtown, downhill, and then push the scooter back up again. My bar mitzvah present was a bicycle which I dearly wanted, and which my parents didn't want me to have because Stuttgart is a little like Washington-- it's full of hills. And my mother thought it was bad for my heart to have to pump up these steep streets. In actuality, it helped me a lot even now, because I developed a tremendous amount of lung power and also leg muscles.

I would go with friends on bike excursions for the day or for the afternoon. And we had a lake there-- an artificial man-made lake on the river. And I'd go with a friend, and we'd take out a canoe or a kayak with what you'd call it here. And we'd paddle around in the kayak for an afternoon. Also after the Nazis came into power, the Jewish Veterans Organization organized a sports group. And I belonged to that, where I had the opportunity to swim, play ball games, and just do field sports.

Did that sports group have a name?

It was called after the organization. They let the initials are [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] RJF, which is the German Federation of Veterans.

Did you ever experience or witness any anti-Semitism as a child?

Yeah. Well, as I remember, there wasn't anything more than being called Dirty Jew, or why don't you go to Palestine, or something like that. There actually wasn't a whole lot of this that I personally experienced. But that was about the extent of it.

When you think back on your childhood in Stuttgart, do you primarily remember Germany with Hitler in power, or do you have much recollection of Germany before Hitler came?

Well, I was 12 when Hitler came into power. And I remember, of course, life as it was then. Actually, for me, it didn't change an awful lot at all. I continued to go to school, and I had non-Jewish friends. In fact, one of them came to a little dinner my mother gave the week before I emigrated. So actually, I had a very pleasant life on the whole.

Can you tell me what you remember about Hitler's rise to power?

Yes. The very first thing I remember in school-- that must have been about when I was in second or third grade-- so that would be about 1930-- and the teacher was giving some instructions on how to draw a face. And he showed a simple face on the blackboard-- the hair, the nose, and the eyes, and so on. And I remember one of the kids commented on it, he says, this what you drew there looks like Hitler.

And the teacher said, well, Hitler-- well, I don't really think so-- never heard of Hitler. So I think I asked at home-- who is this Hitler? Well, he's a politician now, and he's doing a lot of activity-- anti-Semitic and all that. And that's the first I ever heard of him. This was, of course, a time when the worldwide depression hit-- 1929.

And you heard a lot about the problems that the government in Germany had-- the emergency decrees. A lot of fund was made-- the emergency decree was something that the constitution that was in effect then, the Weimer Constitution that was put in effect after World War I, and it gave the president the power to rule by decree, which he would bestow on his chancellor who was the chief of government at the time.

And so very frequently, the parliament, the Reichstag, would vote no confidence, and then new elections would have to be held. And so in a little bit like here, there would be flags flying, and rallies, and so on. And you hear about parties. And Germany had, I think, something like 35 parties, of which only about a half a dozen counted for anything.

And you voted not by individual, but by list. And the lists were determined on the basis of the strength of a party how many delegates they had. And so you could watch. And the first thing I remember about parties, there were these national socialists, and they were number two. I learned much later that they had come up very rapidly from a very much lower position.

And so in 1930, I think there were two or three elections-- the parliament would be turned out. And so you'd hear a lot of election propaganda. And of course, at that time, you heard the speeches and you read the articles in the newspaper. And it was at that time that I really became aware that there was a Nazi movement and that there was a danger.

Now, one of the things happened that the parties, the Nazis-- but the communists, who were number three, and the social democrats who were number one in position in 1930-- they had militias-- uniformed militias. And they would march through the streets. And I remember one time my father took us for a ride in the evening on a weekday, and we passed through one street. And we saw the social democrats marching. We turned the corner, and we saw the Nazis marching.

And my father said, let's get out of here. Because when those two met up, there'd be some sort of a battle. They would draw knives, and there might be people injured and so on. And of course, the election campaigns, there would be disorders to with people trying to break in and so on. So at that time, of course, I became aware of the political struggle.

And then the following year, either '31 or '32, the Nazis moved into the number one position-- reversed positions with

the social democrats who became number two. And so at that point, of course, I paid attention to the elections and who the candidates were. When the election, the results would come in the evening. And they would come in, since you ran on the list not as an individual candidates, the election would be determined by strength throughout. And then they would give you the figures at 8 o'clock in the evening.

The Nazis would have so many votes and so many delegates in the Reichstag. And my father would get very upset when he saw that it was shifting and that the Nazis were taking over as the major party. It was worrisome. And of course, in addition to it, you had the economic situation. The unemployment was proportional to that in the United States. Germany had half the population of the US and half the number of unemployed people, which was something like 6 million out of a population of 66 million people at the time.

And people were nasty. They wanted jobs. And of course, the Nazis were very adept at promising. They were going to close the Jewish department stores so that people would go again to the specialist stores. They would do away with the socialist unions and honor German workers again. And of course, people who were out of work and who had gone, most of them at the time through World War I, and felt that Germany was badly treated-- which it was, that they had suffered through the war and the subsequent inflation.

And now when it started it looked like things were going to go better comes this depression, and you're out of work. And is there no end to this thing? And Hitler, of course, took advantage of this with his message.

Were you or your parents alarmed by these events? Were you all alarmed, or intimidated, or frightened?

Of course, you were somewhat alarmed. But there was no precedent to look to say, well, this has all happened before, because it has hadn't. And you figure it's going to be too bad-- if he comes into power, there'll be increased anti-Semitism and god knows what else. But nobody dreamt that he would go to the extent that he initially and, of course, eventually did.

I'd like to go through some of the changes step by step, one at a time. You mentioned some of the propaganda. Can you give me some specific examples of the propaganda that you remember?

At that particular time, I don't think I remember anything specific. I know that it was being made. Later on, of course, I became more aware of it. I'm sure that the anti-Semitic paper that Hitler's party leader, Gauleiter Streicher in Nuremberg, put out in his really filth paper, The Sturmer, which was devoted to insulting and denigrating Jews. And every issue had on its main masthead the caption, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] The Jews are our misfortune.

This was spiced up with caricatures of Jewish faces with big noses-- fat, very hairy, very unpleasant, unsavory looking. But I don't know whether I was aware of that particular aspect at the time.

What about the speeches? What can you recall about the speeches?

I really didn't listen to speeches at the time. I know they took place. They were pretty raucous affairs. They were in big meeting halls-- beer halls and so on. They were filled with Nazis. And when Hitler spoke, there was always either spontaneous or stoked applause. There were people seated throughout who would jump up in applause.

And we knew that these people were not gentle politicians, but they were mass-oriented and geared to the lower class of the population, particularly the unemployed and, of course, many others too.

Were you aware of things like book burnings?

Yes. Of course, we heard that announced, because that was always presented. At the time, of course, there was no television, and a lot of people didn't even have radios. We didn't get our radio until 1932. That is the year before Hitler came to power. And one of the things he installed was a very efficient propaganda apparatus.

And so when there was book burnings, that would be on the news. And of course, it would be in the newspapers too.

Because once he came in, while the press was still locally or independently owned, they had to carry certain news items. And they were checked for their attitude. And some of the less Nazi-oriented papers would try to go as far as they could.

But they would have to carry certain articles. And of course, when the speeches were printed, you would see that the book burning took place. And of course, the speech that went with it is that the people demanded it. This was filthy literature which poisoned the German spirit, and we wanted to purge Germany from this. And that's why it was being done. So yes, you knew about that.

How about the Nuremberg laws?

Well, that was in 1935, of course. At that time, I was 13. And we were immediately affected by it, because one of the clauses was that no Jewish female under the age of, I believe, 42 or 45 was allowed to work in a Jewish household in which there was a male present. So we had a maid at the time who my father had hired-- after times got a little better. We had a maid before the Depression, but we let her go because of the times.

And my father thought it would be nice for my mother to have a maid. And usually maids came from small towns and served in the city, because that was how they learned how to run a household. They were frequently peasant girls or from other blue collar occupations in small towns. And to learn how to run a household, they would go into the city.

And they liked working for Jewish households. They were well-run, and they had a chance to learn something. And one maid told my mother once that she came into the city to be a maid because she was told she couldn't get a husband if she hadn't worked in the city even if it was for only two weeks. And that's exactly what she did. But to get back on track, my father hired this young woman-- I guess she was orphaned, and a customer of his asked if my father didn't know of a place where she could work.

My father says, well, maybe we can employ her. And she came to work. She was very happy. She worked hard. Of course, she had it pretty good. It wasn't unpleasant work. She got plenty of time off, and she was pretty well-paid. And when the Nuremberg laws were passed, we had to tell her that she couldn't work anymore, and she cried. But there was no choice. It also, of course, reduced our status as German citizens. Full citizens rights were now officially abrogated considerably.

For you personally, were there any changes in your situation at school?

No. The Nazis wanted to throw the Jews out of public schools initially. And I understand that a Jew who was a soldier in World War I went to the then-President Hindenburg who died in 1934 and complained. He served his fatherland, and now his children can't go to school. And reportedly, Hindenburg said that no child of a veteran will lose his rights to education.

And that was being honored until the Nuremberg laws, I guess. Anyway, since my father was a veteran, I was in the public school until I emigrated in 1937. I believe in 1938, if not even earlier, that was terminated.

What kind of military service had your father seen?

Well, all Germans, including Jews, of course, were required to serve for one or two years in the army for training. Now, if you had a certain educational level, you could then volunteer for what was called a one-year service. And my father did. He was militarily trained in the cavalry in the nearby garrison of Ludwigsburg. And he served his here. And then, of course, he was available in case of war.

In 1914 when World War I broke out, my father immediately received his mobilization order on August the 2nd, which was mobilization day. And he was called in and he served until November 1918, the end of World War I.

Was his service recognized in any way?

Yes, he did get a medal for bravery and loyalty by the king. The various German States had their own military

decorations from the days when the sovereign was completely sovereign. He has this medal. I have it upstairs here. And I don't know whether he earned an Iron Cross. I don't believe he did.

I have his military passport in my possession, and I have just recently reviewed it, and the only thing is this medal that I mentioned that he received. He did serve in what you would call the logistic service on the Eastern Front in Russia, Lithuania, Poland. And after the collapse of that front at the end of the war, he served in France.

What about the boycotts of Jewish businesses? Did that impact your family?

It didn't. It was a strange situation. The boycott was on April 1, 1933. And I'm not sure, but it seems to me it was a Saturday. My father's business was on the fourth floor of an office building. He had a small store room in his office. And in the morning, he went to work on the elevator, and he got out. There was nobody standing at his door. He went to work, and he came home in the evening.

And of course, he told us he saw stores that he passed being boycotted. But he wasn't, by some strange perk, however, two floors below there was a lawyer by the name of Kaufman, which could be Jewish or not Jewish. They thought he was Jewish. So they put a couple of SS or SR men in front of his store and told people not to go in. The man was a reserve officer in the German army. He was furious.

He went home, and put on his uniform, and read those guys the riot act. And of course, they apologized. He wasn't boycotted at the time.

Can you remember a change in the atmosphere during the 1936 Olympics?

No. Again, of course, we listened on the radio to the Olympics. And we knew what was going on. In Stuttgart, we were particularly interested because there was a young athlete who lived nearby who recently has been in the news. Her name's now Margaret Lambert. She was known as Gretel Bergmann-- who was a champion high jumper.

And she was of Olympic quality, and she had trained for the Olympics. And at the last minute, they disqualified her from participating. At the Holocaust Museum, we did have an exhibit on the Olympics. And the letter she received was exhibited at the museum. The letter stated that she wasn't Olympic quality anyway, so she wouldn't be acceptable to them.

Here, again, ironically, the person who won a gold medal at the Olympics-- I believe she was Hungarian. She was half-Jewish, but since she was from a foreign country, they couldn't keep her out. And I think she jumped exactly the same height as this woman would have jumped and got the gold medal, which went to Hungary or whatever country she represented. Whereas if Gretel Bergmann had competed, she would have won it for Germany.

Of course, we were very much aware of that, because she lived not far from where we did. And we were all hoping that she would qualify and show the Nazis that the Jews are not a bunch of wimps.

We're going to pause so I can flip the tape.

This is tape 1, side B. We are interviewing William Hess, and we were talking about the 1930s in Germany and your experiences as a child and into your teenage years.

And you were telling me about the Olympics in '36, and I had asked if you'd noticed a change in the atmosphere. Was there any change in the propaganda that was coming out at that time or social policies that were enacted? Anything like that?

Well, I wasn't aware of it. Of course, the Nuremberg laws were the great change, because it officially abrogated the citizen rights of Jews. And we were also, of course, aware of the fact that right from the beginning, from 1933, the Jews were being displaced wherever they could be-- first of all, from official positions.

If you were a judge or any public employee, you were immediately fired. If you were an artist employed by the city in the municipal opera or something, you were fired. Jewish music, that is music by Mendelssohn who was baptized, Meyer, Behr, Gustav Mahler, and so on was not played anymore. And there were a lot of Jewish playwrights and operatic composers-- Romberg and others. All these were removed from the public domain.

And large businesses were synchronized, as it's translated. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] meaning that if you had a large enterprise that were less important or maybe not even important, a Aryan business manager would be put in. The Jews would or would not be allowed to remain. But the say-so would entirely devolve on the Aryan business operative.

So, yes, that we were aware of right along. I had an uncle who worked in a municipal savings bank, he was immediately furloughed and eventually fired, and never found employment again. Because in that field, it was impossible. So that was pervasive from the beginning. And at first, Jewish personnel was retained.

Eventually, it was, especially the managerial positions, removed. And eventually, they were completely eliminated. I had an uncle who was a doctor, and one of the things that doctors very much depended on was the health insurance, which was state-operated for employees who had to pay a certain amount, like here in social security for which they had medical insurance.

And doctors made a good bit of their living handling these patients. Fairly early on in '33 or '34, they would not allow Jewish doctors to participate in that except, again, if you were a veteran. Now, my uncle was in World War I-- was a military physician, served on the front, and he wasn't injured but his health suffered greatly under stress because with a lack of doctors and many, many injured people, he was kept on duty for days on end.

And he was allowed to keep that-- I don't know how long. But these things came in right at the beginning. And then, of course, there were individual policies where customers of my dad would say to him, well, I'm sorry, we can't buy from you anymore because the Nazis now we're doing business with a Jew, and they've threatened me, or they've threatened my business. It actually didn't happen too much to my father.

He did lose customers. I guess everybody did. But he was able to maintain his business until he sold it in May of 1938. Other things that happened-- well, municipalities or local governments acted on their own. They would deny use of a swimming pool to Jews. As I remember it, I could go to one swimming pool in Stuttgart-- one that was a little out of the way-- just until before I left in '37.

But I think at that time, I could not go to the municipal main swimming pools anymore. We could also go to the movies. But again, in some towns, they would not admit Jews. And many restaurants would put signs in their window-- Jews will not be served. Or sometimes they were a little more subtle. They didn't put any sign in the window, but you went in, and when you sat down, and you ordered coffee, they would serve you a cup in a can. And the cup with have a note inside-- we cannot serve you here.

So that depended on where you lived. And as I've stated, Stuttgart, you had it too. You had it everywhere-- but a little bit less so in Stuttgart. So that, I would say, accounted for the fact that I was not myself immediately affected so much by what went on. I didn't go to the opera, a lot of things I didn't do so I wasn't turned away.

I had one or more Jewish friends at the time. And that's why I'm saying that I personally did not suffer greatly. If you lived in other towns, especially small towns, it was a different story. As early as 1934, my father talked once to a neighbor who had moved into the house across the street who lived in a small town in Hesse who told us terrible stories of what happened.

The man was in business, and he had sold some goods to someone, and the man refused to pay. And the neighbor then tried to pressure him to pay. And the man finally said, well, OK, I'll pay you. Just sign my release, and I'll give you the money. So the man signed, and the guy took it, and took his money, and said, so, you dirty Jew, now I don't owe you a cent anymore. And when the man protested, they beat him up-- beat him up quite severely.

And they finally had to call a doctor. And the doctor came into the room and says, where's the man who fell down the



steps? This man said, well, I didn't fall down the steps. And the Nazi in the room said, if you know what's good for you, you fell down the steps. So this is the sort of thing that did happen.

My aunt lived in a small town in Hesse, and these small towns in Hesse were particularly bad, as were towns in Franconia, and even my own state of Wurttemberg. This would happen, but my aunt, she had to go to the grocer. She had to take a detour because there were kids in the street who were on after her and yelled, dirty Jew, dirty Jew-- and maybe even tried to trip her or something.

So I'm not trying to gloss over and say everything was rosy and it wasn't so bad. It depended a lot on where you lived. And I consider myself fortunate, because there were incidents that people were severely beaten up. I understand that in Berlin as early as 1933, the new chief of police there on Rosh Hashana had his rowdies stand in front of the synagogue and when Jews came out dressed for the holidays, had them beat up.

So it happened. It happened early on. And it happened many places. I'm aware of one incident in my high school, the year after I left-- I wasn't in this school anymore, but there were still three or four Jewish kids in the school. It was customary that every year in the summer, in June or so, there'd be a class excursion. You either hire a bus or take the train someplace and then hike. And you took a picnic lunch along, and maybe there were some sightseeing point you would visit, and then you came back.

That year at the excursion, some of the Hitler Youth leading personalities, who I had in my class, ganged up on these Jewish kids. They found some abandoned shack, pushed the Jewish kids in there, and piled straw, grass, or paper around the openings, and set it on fire so these kids were inside choking. I don't think they tried to burn them at the time, but I think they try to make them sweat and hurt them.

And that was told to me by a friend of mine who was still going to class there. So it did happen in my own surroundings too. That was about the most serious thing that I came close to at the time-- at least that I can remember.

Did you speak with your parents about some of these things that were happening around you and try and make some kind of sense or some kind of--

No, I don't believe-- not that I can recall. Of course, my father was very much politically alert. Oh, you asked me how we know about a lot of these things-- we did have a radio. And we did listen to foreign broadcasts in German. There were radio stations in France, in Strasbourg, in Luxembourg, and Moscow had a very strong transmitter that we could pick up.

Now, you weren't supposed to listen to it, but we did. That's how we found out what was going on that they wouldn't tell you. I was a little incautious at the time. One evening, my parents weren't home, and I tuned in the Moscow transmitter. And at the beginning, they always play the music. And it was on, and I had it on fairly loud.

I found out later on there was the Internationale, the communist anthem, that they played. And you could hear it outside. I thought, my god, if anybody hears we're listening to a communist broadcast, we'll be in real trouble. But again, we were lucky-- nobody apparently did or knew what it was. But this is one way in which people are kept informed as to what was going on at the time.

And my father was usually pretty pessimistic. And he would say, I don't know what's going on-- what's going to be. Business, as I had said, was very good, because people were working-- mostly defense-related or defense triggered the building of the highways, the drafting of people in the labor service, which did the kind of work that the Civil Conservation Corps, the CCC, did in this country. This brought money into circulation.

And so people had a little more money to spend. The problem, then, was the shortages, because the rearmament cost either foreign currency or gold. And Germany had very little gold reserve and foreign currency. The mark was soft, and Goering made that famous pronouncement-- cannon are more important than butter. So there were shortages.

And since my father had an old established business, he did have some very good connections. In fact, one of his main

vendors, a cotton manufacture in the Nuremberg area, the local representative during that very period turned from being just a business friend to a very good and loyal personal friend who stuck by my parents until the very day they left.

They were welcome in his house. He even helped them get some of their treasured gold jewelries like rings and watches out of the country by suggesting that relatives from Switzerland who came and visited would come to this friend's house where they would pick up my father's watch, and my mother's gold rings, and so on. My parents did, and so they were able to save some of their most precious little jewelry items. And after the war, we helped them-- we, my parents and I too-- Shirley and I-- by sending them packages for already a year or so to tide them over the shortages.

I'm going to try and go back to what I was trying to ask you before that I don't think I phrased well. What kind of guidance could your parents give you, given the times were very trying, and there was no precedence, as you mentioned before. What kind of guidance to handle these things did your parents give you?

Oh, yeah. Well that, of course, that's true. Keep your mouth shut, watch what you say, and watch what you do-- everything is being watched. The Nazis to have their stool pigeons out. They'll try to involve you into a conversation to draw you out, and then you get arrested or I get arrested. So that, I was very much aware.

Walls have ears. And you were careful. You either didn't talk-- I had a couple of friends, and maybe I was careless, but I talked to them. And eventually they all had to join the Hitler Youth, but the very fact that they continued to associate with me, and themselves would complain about the situation-- but you had to be careful, of course, what you said and to whom you said it.

You mentioned arrests-- what did you know about the fate of those people who were arrested for being incautious?

Well, at the time, usually you would be sent to a concentration camp. At that time, they were in death camps. Dachau was, of course, one of the first ones that was organized. In addition, there were other smaller camps that were established. Occasionally, if you were prominent, you might be killed. There were times-- not so much early on, but let's say after '37 or '38-- yes, you were beaten up, and you were, of course, very badly treated.

Did you or your family consider leaving Germany? And if so, when?

Well, the classic story-- my father said, I'm a veteran of World War I. They're not going to bother me. I don't have a big business. I'm getting old, I can stay. You have no future, you're going to have to get out.

So when I was 13 or 14, my mother had an uncle in New York who had left Germany after the Franco-Prussian war because his older brother had died in battle. His mother didn't want him to be drafted. And he helped a lot of family members. My mother wrote to her uncle and her uncle said, don't worry, I have a friend who always made something. And when he's old enough to work, which is 16, he can come to the United States.

Your parents didn't think about leaving themselves at this point?

My parents didn't think of leaving. I don't think my uncle at the time-- or rather, his wife-- were inclined to send any more affidavits, which you needed in order to get in. Fortunately, I guess by 1938, I think it became clear-- my father sold his business in May, and I think after the Austrian annexation, which ratcheted up the anti-Semitism by several degrees, it became plain that maybe you can't stay after all.

So my father applied for a visa number for the United States. And of course, you needed a visa. And since the United States only gave out a certain number, which was actually only half the number that legally could be given out, at least he had a place in line. So by that time, they started to make some preparation.

It was very lucky they did when they did, because they were just about among the last ones to leave Germany before World War II broke out. They left in July of '39.

I want to do this with your departure, because your departure was before theirs.

July '37, two years before.

What arrangements did you have to make for you to get out of Germany? What problems did you have to overcome? And how did you overcome them?

Well, actually, there were no real problems. The only thing is I had to have a lot of different papers. And my father thought it'd be a good idea for me to do it myself, which I greatly resented-- to traipse from one office to another, go into the first one, they said, you have to go somewhere else first. I finally got the hang of it, and I was able to make the rounds.

And what I essentially needed was birth certificates, then statements that my father wasn't in any debt that could be lost somehow-- passport, and visa, and all that sort of thing. And then, of course I was allowed to take things out with me-- clothes-- I think all of probably \$10 or \$15 in cash-- but clothes and other things you could take out-- so shopping for these things. And that's what took up a good bit of time.

Do you remember the date that you left Germany?

Yes. I left from Hamburg on an American ship, the Manhattan, and my parents accompanied me to Hamburg. We stopped on the way to visit relatives who lived on the way. And I sailed on the 31st of July of 1937, and arrived in New York on the 5th of August-- almost to the day 60 years ago.

Anything eventful happened on route?

Other than I got seasick, no.

Tell me about your thoughts when you left Germany and were out of Nazi Germany?

It's a little bit hard to realistically talk about. It seems to me I wasn't really greatly concerned. I always thought I was a rather independent person, because every vacation I spent with relatives who lived about 300 miles away. And I went there by train-- went to the station, got the schedule together, traveled by myself, stayed there, and came back.

And so to me, this was really just another face of it. I'd come here, and I had glowing pictures. I was told I was going to be taken care of, I was going to have employment, and would be paid, and so on. So I looked forward to it. And I don't think I was greatly worried about this thing, at least not that I could recall.

It didn't really hit me until I arrived in Danville, Illinois and was shown to a small room, which was my room, among total strangers with different customs, habit, language, and all that that all of a sudden it hit me like a ton of bricks, you know? This was for real. This wasn't like going to visit relatives and having a good time.

In New York, I had a wonderful time. I was there for two weeks until the people were ready to accept me in Danville. And my relatives took very good care of me-- wonderful accommodations-- I went to the beach and all that. So it wasn't hard at all until the reality set in that I was not totally on my own.

Did you ever have any thoughts that you might not be reunited with your parents?

I was worried about my parents. At that point, especially then, of course, after the Kristallnacht, I was worried. And I felt when I was there that I had to prepare the way for them-- work on my uncle and also possibly on other people to give them an affidavit. And also I was aware that if they came, they would not have any money with them. So--

I'm going to hold you back for just a second. We'll get to Kristallnacht and your parents coming in just a minute. I wanted to try and get a sense from you that when you left Germany, did you have any feelings of relief or a lessening of anxiety because you were no longer subject to all the things that were happening in Germany?

To be honest, I can't recall that I did. I probably had some mixed feelings. I very probably did because I've had a good life there. And I knew things weren't going to get any better. And so I probably had some mixed feelings.

What were your first impressions of America and Americans?

Well, arriving in New York, I thought it was the greatest. New York, especially in the '30s, was a very exciting place, and lots of things to see and do, new impressions, and so on-- then visiting relatives, going to the beach, seeing movies, and so on. It was great. It was wonderful.

How were you received by Americans in general-- not your relatives, but just the average Americans that you met?

Reception was friendly and curious. In a small town in Illinois, most people had never been that far away, let alone in Europe. They didn't have any idea at all. Yeah, they had heard of Hitler. They've heard of some of the things he did. But the first question usually was, how do you like it here in America? And they always expected to hear, it's wonderful, it's great.

And I liked America. I liked being there. I didn't particularly like the kind of life that I now led when I was at my destination. But on the whole, I was treated friendly and well.

Did you experience any anti-Semitism, either New York or in Danville?

No.

And how exactly were you able to support yourself?

Let me just go back to your previous question. I knew who the Ku Klux Klan was, and I also was aware that the Midwest was a stronghold, particularly in neighboring Indiana. I had heard that they had marched in those areas. I personally never saw or heard them.

Now, I had heard of Father Coughlin, but for some reason I never listened to his broadcast. I didn't know where he spoke, so I never heard him. I would have been greatly angered and alarmed, of course, if I had heard him give the kind of Nazi talks that he did. I'm sorry to have--

Let's follow up on what you were saying. Did anybody ask you about Hitler and all that stuff that was going on in Germany?

They did, yes. And I would tell them what happened. They were surprised. People without the background of what life is in a total dictatorship couldn't understand why couldn't you buy a foreign newspaper, or a magazine, or listen to the radio, or that-- well, yes, to the radio. You could listen. A lot of people didn't have radios, unlike here.

So it was hard for them to understand why did you put up with it? Why didn't you shoot one of them people in Germany didn't have guns and you didn't shoot people. And if you did, with the Nazis, you couldn't go and hire a lawyer who would get you out. The Gestapo didn't respond to that. To them, it was just incomprehensible.

The question I had asked you was, how were you able to support yourself when you came here?

With very great difficulty. I was hired at the minimum wage of \$12.50 a week-- \$0.13 social security, which just then had gone into effect. The man who hired me, he was an older man who was himself an immigrant who had been helped by mother's uncle in New York. His son was a rich kid who had gone to college and who didn't have quite the sensitivity and understanding.

When I came there, I had had two years of English in school. And in anticipation of emigrating, I had additional English lessons. But of course, I spoke with a thick accent, something like Kissinger. And Danville was so hard hit by the Depression. There was a lot of unemployment, and here comes this foreigner who gets a job and he speaks with a

foreign accent. That doesn't look good.

So he said, we've got to work on your English. You've got to get rid of your accent. He says, I've hired a woman for you who is a teacher, who because she is married, under the law, couldn't teach anymore since she had a husband who was earning a living. And you go out to her, and she will work with you on your accent.

Now, this was a very good thing, because my education had been disrupted. And this woman was great. She used the English lessons to teach me American literature, and history, and so on. But I had to pay her. The people where I lived were employees of this friend, and I had complete room and board. I was a member of the family in a lot of respects. And it cost me \$9 a week, which was, again, not a lot of money.

The lessons were \$1 apiece. That makes \$12. And I had to take the bus to go there. That makes \$12.30. That left knee \$0.07 out of my pay. Now, fortunately, it was possible for my parents to send me a maximum of something like \$8 a month. But, you see, I felt that my parents might have to come here, so that wasn't really my money. So I had to conserve that.

But of course, you can't live on \$0.07 a week, even if you have room and board all that paid for. So I had to go into that money, and I managed to do it. But I don't know if I was able to save anything at all out of what they sent. But I would walk to save a nickel. I would go to the movies early to save a nickel and so on. So it was very difficult to live on what I had.

Apparently you were able to have communication with your parents, if they were able to send you money. Were you able to have free and open correspondence with them?

Open? No, because any correspondence was subject to-- what do you call it--

Censorship?

Censorship, yes. So you always had to expect that somebody would read what you wrote. I wrote weekly. My parents bought me a little portable typewriter that fit into a briefcase. And I think I still have it. It used to be a marvel at the time. And so I was able to type the letter to them. They were also able to send me stamps.

And every week, I wrote to them-- and of course, what I wrote is what I did, what I saw, and so on, and health, and all that. But of course, you stayed away from the political aspects.

What were they able to communicate to you?

Well, of course, I heard about the Kristallnacht. And my mother and my father both always wrote to me. And then suddenly, only my mother wrote. My father was away on a trip. So I guessed something went on-- I didn't know or didn't want to know. And my father is still not home yet, we hope he'll be home soon again and so on.

And then after a while, he did write again. And so I surmised that he had been in a concentration camp. Do you know how long your father was interned.

Yes, he was picked up the day after the Kristallnacht, which is November the 10th, and he came home just shortly before Christmas in 1938. That is about five weeks. He was in Dachau.

Do you know the conditions of his internment?

Well, it was pretty much standard of what they did at the time. They picked up people, hauled them away on trucks to the local police station, kept them overnight, and then put them on a bus and took them to Dachau, where they were issued prison uniforms. First, you weren't fed for quite a while. You were poorly fed. And of course, most of the time was spent in roll calls where you stood in your prison uniform without winter clothes for hours three or more times a day.

My father caught serious bronchitis, which was with him as long as he lived. People in the barrack where he was, some of them were mistreated. They told me one case where a father and son-- a young son who was 16-- were in the same barrack, and the Nazis made sport of having the son beat up his father so that they had something they could amuse themselves by.

My father, he never mentioned of being beaten or anything. But one of the sports that the Nazis did was when they had to take a shower, they would shut off the hot water so that suddenly in the middle of November, you'd stand in the ice cold water, then they shot the cold water off so you'd have practically boiling water come down-- that sort of thing is what he was subjected to.

And then they were also made to run double time around a parade ground there. And these were people who were middle aged, and some people died as a result of the treatment.

Under what conditions was he released?

Standard condition. You sign that you're going to leave the country, you bring proof that you leave the country in a certain length of time, and you would immediately be released. So my mother wrote to her uncle again and told him that my father had been arrested and would be freed only if he could leave the country. So he immediately sent the affidavit. And of course, that's what saved their life. Yeah.

They had some other little nice things. For example, for the privilege of being transported from and to the concentration camp, you were also made to pay the cost of transportation. And those who were too poor, the others had to make up for it. This was sort of standard Nazi chicanery to make people just suffer a little bit extra.

What mode of transportation did your parents use to come to the United States?

They emigrated legally after they had the papers. They left Germany and went to Belgium to be with relatives for a week and to Paris, where we had relatives at that time. And my father, my parents, and my father's brother and sister-in-law, and sister and brother-in-law, then came by a Dutch ship from Boulon in France to New York. And from New York, they came to Danville. They arrived one week before World War II broke out.

We're going to pause so I can change tape.