

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Gerald Schwab
November 18, 1997
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PREFACE

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GERALD SCHWAB
November 18, 1997

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Gerald Schwab**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz**, on November 18th, 1997, in **Alexandria, Virginia**. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses, who are also volunteers with the museum. This is tape number one, side **A**. Could you give us your full name, please?

Answer: **Gerald Schwab, s-c-h-w-a-b**.

Q: Is that the name you were born with?

A: Not quite. The first name was **Gerd, g-e-r-d**.

Q: Do you have a middle name?

A: N – I used to have one, I gave it up, and that was **Abraham. GAS** just didn't sound – wa-wasn't the right set of initials.

Q: Where were you born, and when were you born?

A: I was born in **Freiburg im Breisgau**, southern **Germany, Baden**; February 19th, 1925.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family history. How long had your family, either on your mother or your father's side, been in – in that locale?

A: Well, I can't tell you exactly, I – well, my – both my parents were born and grew up in a place called **Breisach** on the **Rhine**, and th-their families go back for quite a while in that area.

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Q: What were your parents' names?

A: There was **David**, my father. My mother's name was **Paula**; her maiden name **Kleefelt, k-l-e-e-f-e-l-t**.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: Well, my father was – ha-had in **Europe** a plumbing supply business, which at one time arranged over parts of **F-France, Switzerland** and **Germany**. My mother helped him, worked with him in the business, or was at home.

Q: D-Do you, or did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I have one sister, **Margot**.

Q: Is she older or younger?

A: She is five years older.

Q: So, would you describe your family as upper class? I mean, your father sounded like a suc-successful businessman.

A: I guess everybody more or less describes themselves as middle class, and I'll go along with the same thing. Yeah, I would say solid middle class. Both my parents came from rural town – from a rural town, and – but then, as I say, had this business, which was first loca – was initially located in **Freiburg**, in – where I was born.

Q: Did you live right in the city, or on the outskirts?

A: We lived on the edge of the city, let's put it this way, in a re – in a residential area.

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Q: Was this in an apartment, or a house?

A: It was an apartment, it was an apartment in a – one of the typical houses, cou – la- large houses, in which there were, I think, two or three apartments.

Q: Was the neighborhood a mixed neighborhood, made up of Jews and non-Jews?

A: I really don't know, it certainly was not a Jewish neighborhood. Since I left there by the time I was about six or seven, I really don't know very much about the religious make-up of the area, but I would say it was – it was a – a typical urban area, and certainly not a Jewish area.

Q: So you say you moved from that location at the age of six, so that would have been in 1931. Do you have any memories up to the age of six of the friends there, or anything that happened at that – you know, up to the age of six.

A: Let me amend that, actually was 1933, so by that time I was eight years old.

Q: Did – and so you started school in that location?

A: I did start school in that location, went to primary school there, yes. I remember quite well, I – I do remember c-certain bits and pieces. I can vi-vividly recall the area, of course especially so since I've visited it since then again. It was – it was a good life. We – we had household help, and as I say, my parents – my dad used to be traveling quite a bit as a – selling for his business, but my mother was home all the time.

Q: How religious was your family?

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A: I would say nominally so, for the holidays, and went to the synagogue occasionally, or on Saturdays, regular Saturday services. So I would say sort of – well, how would you describe it?

Q: So did you observe the Sabbath, did you observe Passover?

A: Oh yes, all the holidays were observed, yes.

Q: Did you have any Hebrew school training before the – up to the age of eight?

A: No, I don't – not – not that I recall, no, I didn't.

Q: Was there a large extended family, either on your mother or father's side?

A: Well, there was a fairly sizeable family, not in a town where we lived, but where my parents had come from, and that – since that was only about 20 miles away.

There was, by today's standards, a very close, nearby extended family. Of course, in those days 20 miles was a fairly substantial distance.

Q: So did you get together with them at special holidays and so forth?

A: Oh yes, we often did. And in addition to that actually, one of my uncles, at times worked with my father in his business.

Q: Was your father very politically oriented, or your mother at that – at that time?

A: No, neither one, I would say, was either p – was really politically oriented or – or active.

Q: And were – were your parents Zionists?

A: No, they were not.

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Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: We spoke German.

Q: So from 1925 to 1933, you were in this location. Is there anything else you wanted to say about that time, before we move on? Wh-Wh-When you were in school, up to the age of eight, did you have any unpleasant experiences, or any unpleasant experiences in the street with other children?

A: Ye – well, some, not very much. I mean, we're – we – since we left in April of 1933, this was very shortly after **Hitler's** actual rise to power, there wasn't really all that much. Yes, there were the – there was the occasional bully, but actually I ran into that later on, much more so.

Q: Okay, well, let's now move into 1933, and in January **Hitler** came into power as chancellor. And so, how did that affect your family?

A: Well, on April 1, 1933, there was a boycott of Jewish business in **Germany**, which was actually one of the – the first centrally orchestrated anti-Jewish outbreak or outburst of activity. And we packed up and went off to **Switzerland**, where by that time a major branch of the business was located in **Basel**. So in 1933, we went – went off to **Basel, Switzerland**.

Q: So from 1933 on, you were in **Basel**, or did you return?

A: Well, it was – it wasn't all that cut and dried. We stayed in **Basel** for a while. As best as I recall, we did not get permission to stay permanently in **Basel**. I remember

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we lived in a hotel for quite a while. And then we moved to **France**, across the border into **France**, into **Saint-Louis**. Again [**indecipherable**] across the border from **Basel**.

Q: Okay, we'll get to that in a minute. When you had to move, what did your parents say to you, why did you have to move? Here's an eight year old child, how did they phrase it to you?

A: I really can't recall. I really don't know. But to my – well, it was an interesting adventure. I wasn't that wild in – being in school, and I was being pulled out of school, and off we went to **Basel**. So I really – I must admit, I do not know. I do not recall.

Q: Did this man **Hitler** mean anything to you at age eight?

A: Oh, I'm sure – I'm sure he did, but exactly what he meant to me at that point, I mean, I'm sure it was not – I wa – I mu – I must have picked it up from – I mean, I wa – I was receptive enough, I think, to pick these things up from my surroundings, but if you asked me what I thought of them exactly, and – and what way it came to me, I don't know.

Q: How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you very independent, or –

A: That depends whom you ask. No, I don't think I was really all that independent. I had a – well, I – I liked being by myself. I was probably rather introspective, and like at that point already, and this came out much later, we liked reading a great deal,

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liked playing with construction toys. In other words, activities that are usually singular – done by one person. I can't recall ever having though, certainly at that time having a – a circle of friends. I mean, I knew people, but none – no big circle of friends.

Q: So you packed your bags to go to **Switzerland** with your family. What is – what is your sister's name?

A: **Margot**.

Q: Oh, **Margot**. So you and **Margot** and your parents. Any extended family, or just the four of you?

A: No, just the four – no, just the four of us.

Q: And you don't remember this being particularly upsetting, having to leave friends?

A: No. As I say, I don't think I had a very large, or a circle of friends at that point.

Q: And **Freiburg** is – is not that far from the Swiss border. So what about the journey there, do you remember anything about that? And then where did you first settle?

A: Well, we settled for a while in the hotel in **Basel**. And after that when – apparently my parents did not get permission to stay in **Basel**, or they – or thought it appropriate otherwise. I must admit I never did find, never did ask. We moved across the border to **Saint-Louis**, which is in **France**, and lived there. And I went to school in **Saint-Louis**, both my sister and I did, in a local school there.

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Q: What was that like for you? Did you have any idea of the language in the beginning?

A: None whatsoever. Well, you know you, a-at that age if you get thrown into this sort of environment – the people there obviously do speak German or a Swiss dialect, or a Swiss type of dialect, or whatever you want to call the **Alsace** – the Alsatian manner of speaking. And so – but French obviously was – was – was difficult, and we had a – we spent a limited amount of time in **Switzerland** – in **France**.

Q: How long were you in **France**?

A: To the best of my recollection, un – until late – sometime middle, late 1934. In other words, about – I would say about a year.

Q: Any – any unpleasant experiences there where you would – did they know you were Jewish?

A: No unpleasant experiences to the extent that I know now – that I can recall, no.

Q: And were you very close to your parents, did you have a very good relationship with them, or were they open with you about what was happening?

A: Well –

Q: Or did you not question?

A: **A**, I probably didn't question it too much. **B**, I guess at that time already, my parents were under a great deal of strain, certainly a lot more than I was. And while

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one develops a certain type of closeness as a result, it's – it's not quite the same as a – as a closeness which develops in – in transcending – peace and tranquility.

Q: Were you able to voice your fears to your parents?

A: I don't recall that I had any fears. I suspect that my parents probably were anxious to – limited my fears to the maximum possible, so –

Q: Did you talk things over with your sister?

A: No, we were a little bit – we were apart – five years apart. I would say that communication is probably – was probably more – even more difficult than with my parents, because the – the – the five year age difference between the youngsters is – is pretty substantial.

Q: So, after the year was over, then where did you go?

A: Well, in 1934, I believe it was, the French, having received a large number of refugees – at this point we had largely given up our business in **Freiburg** in **Germany**, and still had the business in **Switzerland** and in **France**. At that point I believe it was that the French authorities basically said to the refugees in – many had settled along the border here, that it was necessary for them to go inland a certain distance, or to leave. In other words, residence along the border was not – was frowned upon, or in fact, forbidden. And so my parents really had a choice to make; do they want to go inland? And is – if I remember correctly, I think the closest they could go to would be the city – the town of **Merceuil** or, do they want to leave – and,

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which would of course made pretty well impossible the business – maintaining the business in **Switzerland**, and while he – to a certain extent, the business in **France**, which was also very close to the border.

Q: So your father was still actively working at this point?

A: Oh yes, we – we still had our business. And so we packed up and moved back to **Germany**. And we did not move back to **Freiburg**, we moved to a town called **Loerrach, l-o-e – double r-a-c-h**.

Q: Is that near **Freiburg**?

A: That is – well, everything is n – well, a-again, it's one of those things that today it's very close, in the old days it was quite far. It's only about two miles from the Swiss border. It was about three miles as the crow flies from **Saint-Louis**. In other words, they were all [**indecipherable**] or not, at the point where the – the **Rhine** River makes its bend, where the free countries meet. It was about, oh I would say, 40 - 50 miles from **Freiburg**. So we – we got back there fairly frequently, but it – it still – in those days it was a fairly long distance.

Q: Was it hard going over the borders at this time?

A: No, it was quite easy. A-Again, for a time we lived in a guesthouse, a – a local hotel near the swi – again, very close to the Swiss border. I would say – as I say, about the mile. And then eventually moved into an apartment in the center of town.

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And that must have been either 1934 or early 1935. By that time my sister did not come back, or came back and then she was sent to a school in **France**, a – what is it?

Q: Boarding school?

A: Boarding school in **France**, and she went there. A place called **Remy Achmont**(ph). And I started going to school in **Loerrach**.

Q: And things started to tighten up, and **Hitler** was gaining more and more power.

Did you have a sense of this tightening up?

A: Yes, at that point things obviously started tightening up i-in – in many different ways. The business was still going, the German business was still going, although by that time I – I think the – the main part – we-well, the – or no, I'm sorry. There was no more business in **Germany**, the business was largely in **Switzerland**, and probably to a much lesser extent in **France**. But we lived. It was a nice, large apartment in a big apartment house.

Q: Was your father able to go back and forth to **Switzerland** and **France** at that time?

A: Yes. To – whether or not he went – yes, I'm quite sure he went back to **France** as well, but I do know he went to **Switzerland**. And he would travel in **Switzerland**. I would sometimes go with him, and we often went to **Basel**, it was the ni – the closest large city.

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Q: Well, now you're getting older and it's, as you say almost 1935, so you're 10 years old, and you di – when you would see signs on the street, derogatory signs or anything anti-Jewish, how did that strike you as a 10 year old?

A: Well, you – you – you – you begin to notice things like this, but one of the things, I mean, in – in that part of **Germany**, anti-Semitism wasn't probably quite as virulent as it was in other parts of **Germany**. In other words, the – in the s – in the southwest of **Germany**, I think people were slightly more relaxed, and I think this was true for quite a bit of time. And – but yes, there were obviously signs. I knew I was Jewish, I went to a German school. I went – first finished sec – f – well, by that time I guess I had – I'd finished secondary school – primary school, I was then in the **[indecipherable] schule**, secondary school. I had a number of friends, but it was – it was obviously noticeable. One didn't count the certain problems. You had the normal sort of bully.

Q: Such as? Can you describe an incident?

A: Well, I guess bullies are probably pretty well the same all over. No, not – nothing particular. I do know that after the war I went back looking for him, but he wasn't there any more.

Q: Did they call you names?

A: No, not that I recall, not that I recall. I was not, you know, a – it was, again, I was probably rather introspective, I was not very good at sports, so even if, you know, if

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you – if they chose sports teams or teams for games and so on, I was usually one of the last picked. However, I do not attribute that necessarily to my being Jewish. I suspect I just wasn't very good at it.

Q: How did you feel about being Jewish at that point, when you know it meant difficulties?

A: It was no – there was no resentment or anything like that on my part. I felt I was Jewish, and that's the way things are, and I was perfectly – perfectly satisfied and no – no s – no special feelings about it.

Q: Did you have any hobbies? You said you liked to read. Anything else?

A: Well, actually, at that point, mainly I would say I liked construction toys. We – the family often went out for walks, that wasn't necessarily what I would have chosen to do, but that's what we did. No, no other great hobbies. I did have a – at that – during this period, I ha – which actually lasted for a long time, I had a neighbor, next door neighbor, a – a young, a friend, an Aryan, German, with whom I was friendly until we left eventually **Germany**, and he joined eventually – he – I think he became a **Hitler** – member of the **Hitler** Youth. But you know, that was just one of those things that one had to do, or did, and –

Q: So you felt comfortable in his house –

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: – did you go play with him?

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A: Oh yes, oh yeah, he felt comfortable in our house and I felt comfortable in his. I had some Jewish friends.

Q: Was the school a mixed school? This was Jewish and non-Jewish children?

A: Well, yeah, it was – it was the local –

Q: [indecipherable] public?

A: It was the local public school, and there was not a very large Jewish presence in that town, yes. So it was – it was – I mean, I – I don't know how many – I suspect you had less than one percent or two percent Jews in the school.

Q: And the teachers treated you well?

A: Some – I would say yes, I had a couple of teachers who were, I felt probably went out of their way to be nice. That actually came, I guess a bit later, but I had one teacher who, if you wanted to, I mean – I don't know what – you know, I – I – maybe I'm – I'm in a minority. I – you can find anti-Semitism anywhere if you look for it hard enough. That assumes that nothing bad ever happens to anybody who's not Jewish. In other words, you know, a teacher can be mean, or – or you can attribute to anti-Semitism. On the other hand, they're mean to other kids as well. So, to answer your questions, it wasn't terribly bad, in th – I had some teachers, a couple of teachers that I would have preferred not to have. On the other hand, I had a couple that in retrospect, I think went out of their way to be nice.

Q: Was there a picture of **Hitler** in your classrooms?

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A: Oh, there must have been. I'm sure there was. Can't recall, but I'm quite sure.

Q: Did you have to salute him, or say **heil Hitler**?

A: No, no, we di – we didn't.

Q: So when you would look at a picture of **Hitler**, any specific reaction on your part?

A: Gee. Well, I don't know. It's kind of difficult to – to – wha-what one felt like at that point. Obviously I knew my – my folks were having increasing problems. This became very obvious, a lot more obvious as my mother became more and more tense. My father was perhaps somewhat more relaxed, but my mother certainly became increasingly tense. So one picks it up, it's not very difficult.

Q: How did it manifest itself with her?

A: Well, a nervousness, a sort of a – she, I think, developed stomach ulcers, had other problems. But for instance for – I remember for stomach ulcers she went to **Switzerland** to get treated. So it was still quite possible to go back and forth.

Q: And now it's, let's say 1936, and you're just leading your life as it is. Did you hear about the Olympics then?

A: Oh heavens yes, that was – I may not have been very good at sports, but I'm a great spectator or listener, yes.

Q: What were your impressions?

A: Well, I – I sort of had, I remember I sort of had mixed feelings. On one hand, I was still interested in the German athletes. On the other hand, you liked to see them

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occasionally get beaten. I – I didn't – I looked at it purely or primarily as a sports event, not as a political event at that point.

Q: Did you sent – sense any anti-Jewishness among, you know, permission of athletes to compete.

A: No, at that time I – since I knew nobody – what I found out in the meantime, learned in the meantime is one thing, but at that point I did not know. I mean, no.

Q: What is it like for a 10 year old boy to see people on the streets in uniform? Did you admire them, were you frightened of them?

A: Well, no, and obviously didn't admire them. But one had a healthy respect for – you can call it fear, or whatever it is, yes. And of course, starting about 1936, then things started getting tougher. As I say again, until 1936, it wasn't all that bad in that part of the world.

Q: In what way did things get tougher?

A: Well, then of course things started with '37 - '38.

Q: What were some of the restrictions that you lived under?

A: None that I can recall, that we had particular restrictions.

Q: Did you have any curfews, or were you restricted to going to any places?

A: No, but I suspect they was somewhere my parents felt they weren't – they weren't welcome, and we wouldn't go there. I certainly didn't know of any place. I mean, I –

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I – I was aware of course, then came the **Nuremberg** laws about then. I was aware of those.

Q: How did that strike you?

A: Pretty weird. You – you – you begin – I wouldn't say one begins to accept it, but one lives with it, and it's amazing one does.

Q: Did you think **Hitler** would eventually just go away?

A: I don't think I had any particular feelings about that. I mean, I would – I suspect, as I know a lot of people did, as perhaps my parents or my father did, and – but even that he – no, I can't recall him expressing that, but I would – I wouldn't have been – would – wouldn't be surprised if he had.

Q: Jews were then classified as second class citizens. Did you feel second class?

A: No, no, I didn't. I was living in a slightly different world, let's put it this way. A world that was not in the mainstream, but it was still at that point, normal enough to feel that, you know, one – one – one just lived in a – in another group, which obviously was being – was disadvantaged to a certain extent, or being – being – oh, how should one say? Considered not quite on the same level, but I tha –

Q: But you didn't feel yourself inferior?

A: No, I definitely did not.

Q: Any particularly frightening experiences in '36 and '37?

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A: No, not that I can recall. Things did happen in '38 which were obviously frightening, but '36 - '37, not really, no.

Q: Okay, now comes 1938, and it's the **anschluss**. Do you have any mem –

A: Well –

Q: – recollection of that, or anything preceding that?

A: Actually, preceding that, I guess I should say, I was sufficiently aware when the **Rhineland** was being – being occupied, that my antenna sort of perked up, and at that point began to realize that there were certain problems in the air. In 1938 of course –

Q: Before we go a little further into 1938, I – I just realized that your Bar Mitzvah would have come in February '38. Did you have a Bar Mitzvah?

A: Yes, I – yes, yes, I did. I had a Bar Mitzvah.

Q: Please talk about it.

A: Well, it was a Bar Mitzvah, it was in – in **Loerrach**. I remember I got a bicycle. Now this was obviously not the most important thing, but it's one of the things I still remember. Yes, and the other day actually, somebody showed me a picture of me at my bar – taken at my Bar Mitzvah. So yes, it was the relatives, to the extent that they had not yet left. Now, in the meantime I should say this: in 1936 or '37, my sister – I guess 1936, my sister left from – came back from her boarding school, and then went off to the **United States**. My parents sent her to the **U.S.**, and she –

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Q: Ho-How did they get the – th-the papers to do that?

A: Well, we had relatives – by that time we had certain relatives that had in the meantime, left **Germany**. And we had relatives who lived here long time, and she got her affidavit that way. And so she came to the **United States**, I believe it was 1936. We had some other relatives, an uncle who left there. I think they probably left in 1937. My mother's stepmother – in other words, my grandmother, she left and joined two of her – one of her daughters. So the family at that point was leaving. In fact, the only ones that were le – staying behind was our family.

Q: Did your parents say why they weren't trying to leave? Or were they trying to leave?

A: Well, they were trying to leave. I think one of the key problems, of course, was having a business. The Germans were very reluctant. They were – they were perfectly willing to let them go, provided that they were sure that all foreign exchange had been repatriated to **Germany**, and exchanged into good German marks. And to convince them of that, of course took a long time. So I would say my parents probably applied for a – for emigration to the **United States** probably in – I would – my guess would be 1937 or early '38. One of the problems, of course at that point is my father had been in the German army, had been wounded in the army, earned str – in fact, he had been wounded three times, he had earned the Iron Cross, etcetera, etcetera. And as the Germans were wont to say, the thank of the Fatherland,

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you can be assured of the thanks of your Fatherland. And a great many actually, I think, World War II – World War I killed a lot of people, and that World War II people, who felt that they were safe, because of the big to-do that the Germans always made about their World War I soldiers. In fact, the other day I ran across, in going through some of my father's things, a certificate. In 1936 he received a special medal, which apparently at that point was being given to all former front line soldiers in World War I.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the interview with **Gerald Schwab**. And you were talking about your father's experience in World War I.

A: So, in World War – as I say, perhaps among former German frontline soldiers, the urgency, the feeling that they had to get out of **Germany** was not quite as great as it was among the general po – Jewish population. But anyhow, by that time, of course, then in 1938, a great many things happened. By that time the – I think it was probably in 1938 that the French – the Swiss started restricting access to Jews. This is when passports were stamped with a big **J**, although that may have been in 1939. I do know that my father started encountering problems of driving – of going into **Switzerland**. About that time, and again I can't recall exactly whether it was before

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the events of November 1938, or after, Jews, the – the use of cars was restricted. In other words, things started getting pretty rough. In 19 no –

Q: Can we back up a little bit. I just was asking about your Bar Mitzvah. Were there any problems, did you feel any restrictions there, or were you able to celebrate it?

A: No, no restrictions, we celebrated it. It was not a big festivity, but it was – there was – I mean, one – one didn't – you certainly didn't do anything ostentatious at that point. But as I recall, it re – it was celebrated and it was – we had a –

Q: So you felt comfortable going to the synagogue and participating in the service?

A: Oh yes. No, no question about that.

Q: All right, now – then **Hitler** marched into **Austria**. Do you have any recollection of that?

A: No – well, I have a recollection of it happening, and –

Q: What was your parents' response to that?

A: I'm not sure we talked about it. I'm not sure we did. Keep in mind again, parents at that point were somewhat wary as to what they said to their kids. They really didn't know – I mean, you were always – at that point, it had gotten to – by '37 - '38, it had gotten to the point where one watched very carefully what one said, and had to watch carefully what one said. Things change really substantially after around '36 - '37. And therefore – well, parents obviously alerted their children, as my parents did me, what I should or should not do.

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Q: Such as?

A: Well, I mean, just watching what you do, where you go and what you say.

Q: When you say watching where you go, such as?

A: Well, you – you – you – you obviously did not go to large demonstrations or marches through town an-and – and things like that.

Q: Were there many of those?

A: No, not too many. No, not too many. Except the regional **Hitler** Youth headquarters was about a half a block from our house, and I remember **Baldur von Schirach**, who at that point was the head of the **Hitler** Youth. Yes, I remember seeing him from a distance. The next time I saw him was 1946 in **Nuremberg**.

Q: Was it frightening to see uniforms on the **Hitler** Youth?

A: Yes, at this time you became more wary, you – you did. I mean, you started associating it obviously with – with certain events, things that took place, fears. Whether you yourself experienced them, or others did. At that point you started seeing “**Der Stürmer**,” **Streicher’s** newspapers on display all over town – various parts of town. And so yes, at that point things started getting – getting a lot – lot tougher.

Q: Did you see any physical incidents on the street?

A: No, except, as I say, my one personal bully. But even that was limited. But yes, I would – I can’t really recall any physical problem. I do know that fairly frequently I

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would take different routes home, to get home, get out of his way and so on. I cannot recall they were being attacked, and I'm sure I would remember that. So – but you know, the-there was a definite fear there.

Q: Did you feel German at that point, or just Jewish, or both?

A: Well, I felt both, I would say. Yeah, I would say you – you – you feel both. You do – you – keep in mind, we did not have that large or active a Jewish population. There was no Jewish area in the town. The number of Jews living in – in town, you could count on – on – on a couple of fingers. I did have, as I say, I had one Jewish friend. He and I got together fairly frequently. I would say I – actually I had two friends, one German, one – one Aryan and one Jewish.

Q: But there was a synagogue that was supported by the Jewish community?

A: Yes. The synagogue was supported, and we would often go to Saturday morning services, certainly every holiday, etcetera.

Q: What was Passover 1938 like for you? Do you have any recollection of that?

A: Now you're asking something that I really don't –

Q: I was just thinking it was such a pivotal time.

A: Well, it couldn't have been terribly good, because at that point my sister was in **New York**, most of my re-relatives had left the country. My dad's ability to earn a living had pretty well shrunk to probably virtually zero, or certainly not much more than that. So it could not have been a joyous occasion, let's put it this way. And I

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guess we said next year in **Jerusalem** probably with a little more fervor than we had in the past.

Q: And then the summertime came, what did you do in the summer of '38, anything special?

A: Gee. I don't recall any particular time. I was still going to school, I was still going to the German school. As a small child, when we were living in **Freiburg** and probably early **Loerrach**, I used to go to a – a Jewish summer camp. But certainly not at that point any more. So I probably got into a certain amount of mischief and spent the summer that way with my friends.

Q: You said you had a Jewish friend at the time.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you and he talk about what was happening? Was that something the children talked about, or were you just involved in children's activities with him?

A: Well, I'm – again, I'm quite sure we were talking about it, but it was – I don't – I w – I would say it was one of the subjects, it was certainly not the subject of conversation. But he – he and I got along quite well.

Q: What was his name?

A: **Peter Wyle**(ph). **Peter** and I got along quite well, we – we played together, we met after school, etcetera. If I recall correctly, he went to – I can't recall whether – he didn't go to the same school I went, I can't recall where he went. But anyhow.

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Q: Were you a – a strong child? I know you said you weren't that much into some physical activity, but were you – were you small for your age, or were you – look older than you did?

A: I was a shrimp. No, I was very small, yes. Actually I was – any picture you – I have, it's hard to believe at this point. I was very small, yes, and very – and actually the only – I only started growing about 1941 - '42, yes.

Q: All right, and then you started school in the fall of '38, and then comes kris – **Kristallnacht**?

A: Then – then, of course, comes **Kristallnacht**, and the day my parents went off, having heard – I'm sure having heard that men were being picked up, being arrested at that point, my parents left town.

Q: How much damage was done in your town?

A: In our town not very much. The synagogue was – the synagogue was burned – was – I bel – yes, the synagogue I think was destroyed, it wasn't burned or – damaged, trashed.

Q: When you saw that, what did that do to you?

A: Well, at that point, of course, one was getting used – not getting used to it, I mean, this was just one of many. But more importantly, my parents left **Loerrach** to go to **Freiburg**.

Q: With you?

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A: No, without me. I was staying in **Loerrach**, I was staying at home. And my mother came back alone, my father was recognized on the street in **Freiburg** and arrested. And he was then off to **Dachau** concentration camp. Now that – at that point, things were obviously very bad, so I was at home with my mother. Of course, at that time we were – school was no longer – you – Jews were no longer welcomed in – in – in – in the local schools. So that didn't particularly bother me, I wasn't that great a student anyhow. In fact, if I remember correctly, I probably would have flunked Latin in that year, if it hadn't been for that. And, but then yo –

Q: So you didn't feel cheated out by not having to go to school?

A: No, I did not feel cheated at that point, but as I say, my – my dad was now off in concentration camp, and my mother and I struggle along at home. I –

Q: How – how did she cope with that?

A: Well, under – under the circumstance I guess she coped very well, but she was not easy to live with, and I don't see why she should be. I mean, you know at that stage of the game, the – the woman had a pretty tough time. I mean, I had it tough, but she had it a lot tougher.

Q: Did she have enough money to – for living expenses, for food –

A: Yes.

Q: – was tha-that ever a problem?

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A: Yeah – no, that was not a problem at that point. And then of course, probably – well, it was about the middle of December, about five weeks after, we – I remember vividly at getting a phone call at 11 o'clock at night, my father saying he's at the railroad station in **Munich**, and he's coming home. There's certain things that one remembers vividly, and this was one of them.

Q: Had you any communication while – with your father while he was in **Dachau**?

A: No, we – we knew where he was – I mean, we – he may have written once, but we knew where he was, in other words.

Q: Why had your parents originally gone back to **Freiburg**? They said – you said they left you in the town and then the two of them went to **Freiburg**. Why did they make that trip?

A: To get away – presumably to get away, in the event – because word was around that they were picking up Jewish males.

Q: So they thought they'd be safer in **Freiburg**.

A: So they thought – so they thought they'd be safer in **Freiburg**, and of course, having previously lived in **Freiburg**, somebody obviously pointed them out to somebody, and he was arrested on the street. And as a result, my mother, who was not a very good driver – we – well, actually, she was, she had to drive home by herself. Come back by car, driving home, which must have been quite a – quite an experience. About that time my father was no longer able, even before then, if I

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remember correctly, he was not – no longer able to go into **Switzerland** occasionally; my mother and I would go. But of course, after that, no, that was the end of that.

Q: What did your father look like when he came home?

A: My father was in pretty bad shape. He had frozen le – his legs were frozen, his hands were – had frost – heavy frostbite. He looked in pretty bad shape, I remember that. And –

Q: How old a – how old a man was he at that time?

A: Well, at that point he was in his mid-50s. No, mid'40s, late 40s. So –

Q: Did he talk about what happened at **Dachau** at all? Did he tell you anything?

A: Not at that point. Again, that's – you know, they wer – they – they used to be – there used to be a standing joke in **Germany** that where one man meets somebody who has just come back from concentration camp, and he said, how was – his friend asks him how was it. And the fellow who was there says, it's great. You know, they woke us every morning with – with **Beethoven's Third Symphony**, and then we had a leisurely breakfast, etcetera, etcetera. And of course his friend said, gee, that's not the way my other neighbor tells it. He says yes, but he's there again. So, you didn't talk terribly much about it. This of course was the – th-the word – at that point things became terribly oppressive, and as a – as a – as a youngster you – you – you – you knew it, and you started – you lived with it, and you – that was – that was the – you

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knew you – one wrong step might be dangerous to you or to your family and so on.

An-And that's – that's pretty tough.

Q: Did you feel like a child then, or did you feel very old because of that tension?

A: Well, I feel I've really – to go to – in retrospect, I mean, we lost much of our childhood, after, I would say from – from age 10 on, there wasn't all that much of a childhood – normal childhood, of course. We had one interesting experience about that time, and that is we had the Gestapo in our house. Now my experien – this is an experience that this was actually – may have been shortly before or after my dad was in **Dachau**. We had our books at home, and we – they came in and started going through our – our books. And they acted just like **CPAs** did, and it was perfectly – I mean, it was a –

Q: The-These are financial books you're talking about?

A: Yeah. Our fi – I mean, this is what – this is what the Germans were interested in, of course, in our family. And so, you know, th-they were in our house, and they were – I mean, I can't say pleasant. They were – they were – there was no problem, I mean, other than uninvited **CPAs**, let's put it this way. So, it's another phase of what the secret police did, you know, it's – it was the financial secret police, let's put it this way.

Q: Did they take the books with them?

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A: No, they just sat there and went through them, went down there. They may have very well taken some along. But then –

Q: So now your father's back from **Dachau**. Did his health improve after he got home?

A: Yes, we – we did have a non-Jewish doctor, if I remember correctly, who treated him and his health did improve, but – and actually, I think he survived that – both physically and psychologically, extremely well.

Q: Was that against the law for that doctor to treat you, the non-Jewish doctor, it was still okay?

A: No, I Don't think so, not at that point. And then in 19 – comes 1939, and about mark –

Q: Wha-What did you do with yourself, since you couldn't go to school?

A: Well, I guess the same thing I did during vacation. I mean, I played, I maybe went to a certain extent, etcetera. There wasn't – I – oh yes, I did go to – I went to work. There was a Jewish printer in town, and I did – did some part time work over there, trying to ki – my parents obviously try – I – tried to keep me busy, which was pretty valid. And so I remember working – working there. This was a f – a family that I worked for, they had this print shop.

Q: So this Jewish printer was able to keep his business?

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A: Yeah, at that point they still were. This however, may also have been earlier, just may have been in 1938, but I suspect it was probably in early 1939 that this happened. And then in April of – about April of 1939, I went off on the Kindertransport to **Switzerland**.

Q: How did your parents arrange that?

A: You know, we're still try – I'm still try – I'm currently trying to find that out. It was a – not a large transport, it was – especially since we lived right on the Swiss border, I remember I was picked up, I was taken by my mother, I believe, to the railroad station, somebody there on the Swiss side, picked me up, took me on to **Zurich** and so on.

Q: How did your parents prepare you for that, t – and tell you that you were going to be leaving them?

A: I really don't know. I don't know. I do know I – no, I – I really – I really don't know. I have no idea.

Q: And you –

A: We must have talked about it, they must have said this is probably the best thing you can do. It isn't – since you can't go to school, there is no Jewish – no Jewish school locally. There is – was no really that – terribly much choice, if you had a choice, you know.

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Q: And how does a 14 year old boy react to knowing that he's going to have to leave his family?

A: Well, knowing that I've – I – I don't recall that. I know how I reacted after I left. I ended up in a small, Swiss town, and I'm – well, that's not even a good size village [indecipherable] in a tiny little Swiss village with a Swiss farmer who had just a little before that, lost his boy in an accident.

Q: Had you taken anything special with you?

A: No.

Q: No special toys, or books, or whatever. Did your mother and father say anything that you can recall when they – when you had to leave them at the station?

A: No, I don't recall. Chances – well, at that point, of course, we all were trying, I knew w-we were all trying to get out. And so anything I could do to get out, and I have just recently found something that somebody gave me, a postcard I wrote from **Switzerland** saying please, check on – on – on the – the affidavit, which my parents needed, etcetera.

Q: How many children were in your group, leaving **Germany**?

A: That we – we were not a group, I was an individual. I was all by myself. No, this was not a big transport, this was arranged – in fact, just a few weeks ago, I ha – had a chance to meet with somebody else, whom I got to know there, and they are currently trying to find out under what auspices – I don't even know under what

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auspices I went to **Switzerland**. All I know is I all suddenly found myself in this little Swiss village with a farm family. And that – that was – that was tough. Here comes – I mean, here comes – comes the city boy, and he suddenly finds himself in this tiny Swiss village with a – out – out in the – out in the country, and it was different. It was difficult. I was not – I mean, for a while there I – this must have been about April, March - April I joined them, and they treated me like their son, and it sort of reminds me of the old story, I treat everybody same, like dogs. Not quite as bad as that, they meant well. They meant extremely well, and they were very, in their own way, quite kind, but they weren't quite attuned to me, and vice-a-versa.

Q: Did they have any other children?

A: No, they had lost their one child.

Q: Wha-What village was this?

A: This was a little town called **Munch Altdorf** on Lake **Zurich**, about 20 miles outside of **Zurich**. And –

Q: And they spoke German?

A: Well, as good as the Swiss – German Swiss talks German, yes. Yes, they did talk a certain type of German, which I picked up and have retained. I stayed wi – lived with them, and then it came fall, I re –

Q: What – what was the family name?

A: **Fuerst. F-u-e-r-s-t.**

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Q: And did they – how did they respond to your Jewishness?

A: As best they could. I mean, they knew I was Jewish. I was probably the first Jew they'd ever met. And there was obviously no Jewish family nearby. In fact, I don't think that – well, there was a Jewish family, these are the people I met again not too long ago. They were about 10 - 15 miles – 10 miles away.

Q: But when you got on – you said you were the only child traveling, and you traveled alone to **Switzerland**. Who met you when you got into **Switzerland**? Or was there anybody on the t-train with you?

A: Oh no, there was somebody on the train, there was somebody who met me and then arranged for me to go on. I don't recall whether they went with me, and I was sort of passed on from one to the other.

Q: So you were never by yourself until you got to the family. Did you have communication with your parents while you were with the **Fuerst** family?

A: Oh yes, oh yeah, I would write, occasionally I would call. My parents had the telephone yet. And we would be – we would be in touch. And it was – it – that summer, I remember I agitated for going back to school. The **Fuersts** weren't particularly – I wouldn't say anxious, but they – they weren't – they – they just hadn't given it too terribly much thought, and I didn't – did go to a school locally, starting that summer.

Q: Did you work on the farm, and if so, what did you do?

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A: Oh God. Well, let me put it this way, yes I worked on the farm. We did – it was – it was a dairy farmer, he had cows, a few cows, about 15 - 20. And so it was dairy, we lived across the street from the dairy co – the milk collection point. And yes, I was supposed to watch the cows out in the field, wasn't very good at it. Couple times they got away from me, and of course they knew where home was, and they just – the fee – and the Swiss village, the village in the center, and then fields around it, and like most European farms, the f – the – the fields were sort of divided up. In other words, your farmer would have one field east of town and maybe another one north of town and so on. So we had these cows out there and every now and then when the cows wanted to go home and nobody came to get us, the cows just went home. I mean, I was not terribly successful as a cow herder. And every now and then I would trail the cows into town and shoo them in the other way around. I was supposed to lead them back. But, every now – and of course when they go, they won't go in a straight line, which means they go across the fields of the neighbors and so on. We did a certain amount of damage. I was not – I was not a great asset to the family, let's put it this way.

Q: Did you miss your parents?

A: Yes, very much so, obviously. I mean, as I say, these people tried very hard, and I – I – you know, you – you – you – they – they did it, they had received no pay, they did it purely in order – and I don't think they did it in order to get another farm

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helper, I mean, that was not their – that – that was definitely not their reason. If they did, they sure lost out. No, they did it for humanitarian purposes.

Q: Were they a very religious family?

A: No, they were not. She was more religious than he was, but no.

Q: But they didn't try to convert you in any way?

A: They definitely did not try to convert me. And then of course it was there that the – the ki – the social center of a very small Swiss village at that point, was the collection po – the dairy collection point, the local dairy, where everybody came every morning and every evening to deliver their milk. So if there were any announcements of anything, this impor – of importance, this is where it would take place. People didn't have telephones. And, in fact, I used to have to go to the post office to make phone calls home. And it was – I'm – I must say also, I had relatives in **Zurich**, so I had somebody that I could be in touch with, it wasn't that I was completely alone in that respect. One of the most – the things I remember most distinctly, and I guess from that I assume that I must have started really becoming interested in history and politics and so on, cause I remember when – when the German Russian non-aggression pact was signed, I prin – I announced that this means ya – war in **Europe**. Then of course I few week – couple weeks later, it actually started. And the announcements for – mobilization announcements of course were posted at the milk collecting station. This is where everybody came to. That

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was early in the morning when we got up and by noon everybody was getting on the local streetcar in a – in a uniform. So, you know, Swiss – Swiss males took their uniforms home and their wife will sew them after doing their military service. So it was a matter of – within a matter of hours that they had – could mobilize the troops. Actually, the kids were mobilized too. I remember that at that point the swi – the kids were organized through the school, and I think I was part of the group that was supposed to help drive the cattle into the mountains. Judging from my experience in cattle driving before that, I'm not sure I would have contributed very much to the Swiss war effort, if it had of come to that. But it – fortunately didn't. So I stayed there, but as I say, there were certain – the – we – we – we had certain, how shall we say, there were cer – a certain amount of friction between the family. I'm not – I don't know who – to whom to attribute it, I'm sure I shared it, I probably was a disappointment to them. I was not being ruralized very quickly while I was there. And so I think in December of 1939, I was move –

Q: What – were you still in contact with your parents once war broke out in September?

A: Yes. Certainly by mail, prob – also later on certainly, but I remember making at least a couple of phone calls, yes. And then I was moved to another family, they arranged for me to be transferred. And I was then moved to a family, about December, on the other side of Lake **Zurich**, up in the mountains. A fundamentalist

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Christian family. They li – he was a – he was a gardener, and sold flowers and sold – an-and raised flowers and so on. And that was a totally different experience. This was a refined family. And again, absolutely no effort made to convert me. They bent over backwards to respect my Jewishness. And I stayed with them until May of 1940.

Q: Were you hearing what was happening during – during the war at that time, what was happening in **Poland**, and others?

A: Oh yes, I became an avid newspaper reader. Have be – have been one ever since, yes. No, no, I ke – I kept pretty well up to date.

Q: Did that put you more on edge, knowing what was happening?

A: Oh yeah. Well, you didn't need that, but – but obviously then. Of course, one had no – what was happening to Jews was not at that point front page news. It of course hadn't – also hadn't started that way, you know. Germans were still – at that point were still encouraging emigration. And – but what was happening, yes, very definitely.

Q: And also, while you were with the second family in – in meeting other people in their town, did you sense any difficulties cause you were Jewish?

A: Oh no, no.

Q: You were fully accepted?

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A: Oh yeah – well, I wa – I wasn't there that terribly long, but the family certainly fully accepted me. And I did not – at that point I did not go back to school once I – having been up there. I think I helped them in – in their business and so on. I knew I would be leaving quite soon, or I assumed I would be leaving quite soon. But no, it was – it was my f – in neither place did I encounter the slightest anti-Semitism or – or feeling of – of – of not being wanted or anything like that.

Q: So you felt safe in these two homes?

A: Oh yes, oh yeah. First one not necessarily very happy, but safe, yes. And as I say, the – the second family was totally different. In fact, I think they continued sending me “**The Watchtower**” for about 20 years. No, they – they – they – they were a lovely family.

Q: What – what were their names?

A: I was afraid you were gonna ask that.

Q: Okay, it'll come to you. So you stayed with them until?

A: Well, then came – then came the next thing, and that was in May of 1940, my parents were called to **Stuttgart** to get their American visa. And I went back to **Germany** to also get my visa. We got back – I got back to **Germany**, it must have been about the sixth or seventh of May. We went off to zi – to **Stuttgart** where the American consulate was located. I remember reading on the morning of May 10th, a German newspaper in – while sitting in the American consulate. There was a

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newspaper it said that a silly be – it was a German newspaper, obviously. But this silly rumor was circulating that Germans were amassing troops f – aga – against the western front.

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a **continuation** of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Gerald Schwab**. This is tape number two, side **A**. And you had returned from **Switzerland**, and you had gone with your family to **Stuttgart**.

Q: Well, as I say, sitting in the waiting room of the American emb – American consulate in **Stuttgart**, I was reading the newspaper, which said that foreign sources had reported that German troops were massing on the western front, and the German news agency had obviously said this was ridiculous. That was the day in which the Germans invaded the lowlands. So that was May 10th, 1945 –

Q: 1940.

A: 1940 is right. 1940, and that's the day we got our – our visa. We then scooted back to **Loerrach**, stayed there I believe about two or three days. In the meantime, **Freiburg** had been bombed, the first German city to be bombed in response to the invasion of the lowland; I think three planes came over. And we were then, I believe, about the 15th of May we were in **Genoa**, in **Italy**.

Q: Wai-Wai-Wai-Wait, let's not go so fast. You heard that **Freiburg** was bombed, and you had been born there. Any thoughts, any reaction?

A: Well, actually, we knew **Freiburg** had been bombed because the train took us through **Freiburg**, but you couldn't see anything. No, not – not particularly, at that

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point I think I felt this is a pretty good idea. It was not much of a bombing, as bombings went later on, as I say. Three planes apparently came over, and since any time a place in **Germany** was bombed, it was bound to hit a hospital or a school, if you listened to that, and I think they said a school had been hit. But anyhow, very few people, very few casualties. But it wa – it was – it was – I didn't feel any particular regret, let me put it this way. Interesting –

Q: You didn't feel regret about what?

A: About the bombing having taken place [**indecipherable**]

Q: Why?

A: Well, at that stage of the game, I certainly no longer felt like a German, let's put it this way.

Q: What did you feel like?

A: Gee, I don't know. I couldn't – I d – I don't know. But anyhow, what was interesting was tro – taking the train from **Freiburg** or from **Loerrach**. The train goes a – went along the **Rhine** River, going north before it turned eastward to **Stuttgart**. This was the border between **France** and **Germany** and of course this was before be – this being the ninth – May eighth or ninth. This was during the days of the – of the so called **Sitzkrieg** and nothing going on. And you could easily look into **France**. And the French obviously saw the train on the German side, and nobody did anything to anybody. Going back, it was quite different. Going back,

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whenever you ca – when you came to – near the **Rhine**, the train stopped, and then you were bused to a place where the **Rhine** – no longer the border, or the train was no longer within view of the tra – of the – the – the French military. In other words, they finally started shooting at each other a little bit. And this started on the 10th of May, of course. But anyhow, we went back to **Loerrach**. Presumably – I can't recall, but we collected some effects, things had been packed already and so on, and – what hadn't been sold or given away. And we went off, over the **Brenner Pass** to **Italy**, to **Genoa**, and I think we arrived there about the 15th. Now one of the things that had been – we also did while we were in **Stuttgart** was, my father went to the Italian consulate to get a visa for **Italy**. He speeded things up by making a quote, charitable contribution, unquote, to some Italian charity, and he got his visa the same day. This was on the 10th of May. And by the 15th we were in **Italy**, and by the 18th we were aboard ship, on our way to the **U.S.**

Q: Was this a very stressful journey for you, the wa – going through ital – you know, the **Brenner Pass** in-into **Italy**?

A: Stressful – well, until you were – you were across the border, obviously at that point, I mean, yes. You were stressful if – and –

Q: What were the border crossings like?

A: I – nothing. I mean, it was – it was like any border, it was a border crossing in **Europe** in the old days. It was a fairly careful control, but that was – that was

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something one was used to. In other words, the – the days of easy – this was not the days of easy border crossings for anybody. And so they would check the luggage, and they would check the passports, etcetera.

Q: Did your parents give you any advice about what to say, or what not to say?

A: I'm sure my parents did. I don't recall what it was, but I'm sure they did. But you learn, by that point, not to open your mouth unnecessarily, even though that was difficult sometimes.

Q: So you said you were happy to leave the country of your birth?

A: Oh yes, very much so. Yeah, at this point, I mean, it may have been the – the country of my birth, but I certainly had no warm feelings towards it, that – that's the nature of the game. Th-The events of the past two or three years had pretty well taken care of that.

Q: Had your awareness of being Jewish intensified at this point?

A: I don't think that there was any need for that, or – or – I mean one – it was part of one's make-up, and I would say no, probably not. But it hadn't decreased either, I mean, it hadn't – it had stayed pretty – pretty well the same.

Q: So now you get on the boat to come to the **United States**, which boat was it?

A: Which what?

Q: What was the name of the boat?

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A: The **George Washington**. Good name. And of course, while we were in the high seas, **Italy** –

Q: What – what line was it?

A: It was a **U.S.** line, I guess **United States** line, I'm not sure, but – and while we were in the high seas, of course, **Italy** declared war on **France**, which would have cut that route off, so it was the last ship, or one of the very last ships to leave **Italy** for the **United States**.

Q: Were there many other Jewish refugees on the boat with you?

A: Yes, I believe – well, there were quite – I would say there were a number of them, yes.

Q: Did you all stay together?

A: No, no. I wa – I was too busy exploring the ship and so on. I mean, I was the – I was rather inquisitive and there was – there was too much to be – to be explored, too many things to be done, and so on.

Q: Were there many other teenagers? You were 15 years old, were there many other children your age bracket?

A: I don't recall. I mean, we were not – we – I – I believe there were, and – but I don't – really don't recall any specific group or people or so on.

Q: What countries did the other refugees come from?

A: No idea. Don't know.

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Q: And so how long was the voyage?

A: Well, in those days it probably was seven to eight days. Got to **New York** –

Q: What was that – what was that like to put your feet on – what – what had you – been your thoughts on the **United States** by the – at that time?

A: Well, it was – it was recognition of a new beginning, it was a recognition of it being something totally different. And it was – it was an on – a – a new adventure, let's put it this way.

Q: Was it very emotional for your parents to put their feet down on – on the American ground?

A: You mean at the very beginning?

Q: Yeah, o-on – upon arrival.

A: No – yeah – no, I think at that point they had cut their – they – they had emotionally cut their ties with **Germany**, with – you know, completely. I mean, they – they did not pine for the old country, let's put it this way. No, they – they were ready to make the change and they – they – they were ready.

Q: What was your first sight of the **United States**?

A: I think it probably was the Statue of Liberty or **Ellis Island** or whatever. But – and then of course it did – it was – it was all a – a – sort of a blur at that point. Of course, we were met by all our relatives, who in the meantime had gotten together in **New York**. They als –

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Q: This is wha-what day in May 1940?

A: Pardon?

Q: What – what day in May of 1940?

A: Well, it must have been around the 27th, 28th of May. And they met us, and then we moved in with one of my uncles and aunts – one of my uncle and aunt, who they had come to the **U.S.** earlier, and that's where we went first of all.

Q: This is in **New York**?

A: In the – in **New York City**, in the **Bronx**. Very much in the **Bronx**, yes. And then it was a matter, of course, getting acclimated, or getting acclimated and getting used to this city. I mean, you have to keep in mind, **Freiburg** is a sm – is a town, **Loerrach** is a small town. The places I was in **Switzerland** were tiny villages, and then you had **New York**. So it wa – it was – it's a shock to the system, but not a negative one, it's just a plain shock.

Q: Did you know any English at that point?

A: Yes and no. I did try out a new word on one of my cousins, took me down to the street and I can't recall what it was, we met some kids down on the street in front of the house, in front of the apartment building, and I tried out another word, and that's when I discovered that that probably was not the appropriate one, because he just hit me in the side of the head. I got a nice big lump on the side of my head. My mother almost fainted when she saw it. It looked a lot – I'm sure it looked a lot worse than it

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was. But anyhow it – he taught me very quickly that words and language, necessarily – just because you know the word does not necessarily mean that it's appropriate. Then of course, I think we stayed there about two weeks and then something happened to me that was probably of great value to me. I had another uncle and aunt – an aunt. She had come to the **United States** already in the 20s, so they both had come to the **States** in the 20s. And they were great outdoors people, they loved hiking. And they took me, within about two weeks of arriving in the **States**, they took me out for a two week hike in the mountains, in the **Adirondacks** or someplace, and told everybody, or every one of their friends to talk only English to me. So this was what we would today call deep immersion, and it was great because after two weeks I had a fairly decent command of the language. That – you know, the – it was – it was a little rough at the time, because you get frustrated in going through it, but in retrospect, or even at that point, I mean, immediately afterwards, or even at the time, you recognize that this is the way to go. And then things happened fairly quickly after the – went in fairly rapid succession. I remember my mother went to work in one of the **New York** sweat shops as a sewing machine operator, and where one of my aunts worked, and she – that was her first job. That's one the real, I wouldn't say untold stories, but it's one of the things that I must say we have not given quite enough recognition to it, although I'm sure it happens even today that some of these people make these changes and they're tremendous. I mean, adapted in

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ways that is unimaginable perhaps to us today. Although I'm sure that a lot of ref – other refugees, refugees today, who may be doing the same thing I do. Anyhow, my mother went to – did this – did – became a sewing machine operator. And then we moved to **Long Branch, New Jersey**, where I went to school, and my mother and father worked as a maid and a sort of a handyman-butler with a family, with a **New York** lawyer. And, now, it was amazing that my mother could do it, but the fact that my father suddenly became a sort of handymaid – handyman-chauffeur and jack-of-all-trades was also quite amazing. And we stayed there, I remember I went to school there. I –

Q: Were you accepted by the other children?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, I mean –

Q: They didn't tease you about an accent?

A: Well, well, no. One reason of course was when you enter a school at the middle of the year and so on, and most of these schools, there are already groups and cliques, you're – you're pretty well on your own. Kids don't really take terribly much notice of you, unless you want to be noticed.

Q: Were you hearing about what was happening in **Europe**?

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah, at that point I certainly did. I was an avid newspaper reader, listening to the radio and so on. Beside going to school, I worked. I became a – setting up pins in a bowling alley. Those were the days before the automatic

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pinsetters. Broke a finger in the process, you catch it between two bowling balls. It was a fairly dangerous sport. I worked on the beach in **Long Branch**, dishing out ice cream during the summer. That sort of thing. And then my parents, I think this family no longer could afford a couple – he – they were – he had once run as ri – congressman in a – for congress in a heavily democratic district in **New York** – of course, he was a republican, so he only ran, he never did get – he didn't get elected. He was – they were – seemed to be very nice people. And at that point my parents then went and went to a training school, run by either the **Joint** or somebody like that, and they became farmers. They became in poultry farming. Now this wasn't quite as wi – far removed as being a butler and a handyman, because my parents, the town they had come from, the parents, the – their parents were involved in – in cattle dealing and so on. So it was a farm community. And lo and behold, after they – they did this and I think they went through training, there was a training unit near **[indecipherable] New Jersey**, and – or **Bound Brook, New Jersey**. And after that, they – with the aid of – of the **Joint**, they bought a poultry farm in a place, in **Cranberry, New Jersey**, which is next to **Hightstown**, which is near **Princeton**. And that was in 19 – that must have been in 19 early '40 – I guess late '40 – middle '41. And they then – I went to school there, and they had the poultry farm there. I went to **Hightstown** first – well, now I actually – I guess I went to **Hightstown High**. Must have been in the fall of 19 – hm. No, we – yeah, must have been in

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spring of 1941, because we were already there when the war broke out. Well, it – certainly in '41. I went to high school there, had a – you know, I was – I was a new kid in town, it was pleasant enough. I went to **Hightstown** High. Had no untoward experiences there except apparently the English teacher told another class that she didn't believe what I was saying about having left **Germany** in 1940, because my English was too good. And we were then there in June of – I remember in June of 1941 when the war broke out with the Russians. The German-Russian war broke out. I believe that's where we were. Anyhow, in 19 – some time in 1941 because I do remember distinctly where I was on **Pearl Harbor** Day. And my folks then ran this farm, which at that time – this was the days before the cholesterol scare, and reduced meat production, so the egg business became a very – quite a good one.

Q: And did you work on the farm with them, or did you just go to school?

A: Oh no, I – I did work on the farm.

Q: And any connection with family back in **Europe**?

A: No. At that point we really had – no, we were very fortunate. We had no close family in **Europe** any more. We were basically the last ones to get out. I mean, there were obviously family and acquaintances, but no close family, and there was no contact with anybody any more, but –

Q: So then life continued on with you til you graduated from high school?

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A: No, I actually had two years of high school. I – til 1943. At that point my father prevailed upon the local draft board not to draft me because I was needed for farm work. And before too long I decided I looked like I was gonna miss the war, which I did not want to miss. And I went to the draft board and says, I'm ready. And actually then was called up and went – went off in – in middle of 1944. Joined the briga – joined the army, basic training, Camp **Blanding, Florida**.

Q: Were you a citizen at this point?

A: No, I got my citizenship I think in **Jacksonville, Florida** while in the army, while in basic training. It was a – a-any day that you could get out of basic training was a day won. So, you know, it was great becoming an American citizen, it was equally great to get out of one day of basic training.

Q: How did it feel to put on an American army uniform, after you had escaped from **Europe**?

A: Oh, it felt great, it felt absolutely great. I later on wore it back to – even though it – well, we'll get to that later, but anyhow I – I did wear it back to **Loerrach**, in the – even though that was in the French zone. I wore it in **Switzerland**. Oh yes, it was – it was great.

Q: So you've completed basic training, and then what?

A: Well, then I c-completed basic training, I was supposed to go out and suddenly the army just ad – I was asked, just as we were shipping out to basic training, I was

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a-a-asked where my second pair of glasses were. Well, the army had issued me one pair, but I had never gotten a second pair. And I was heartbroken to find that I could not ship out with – with the people I trained with. They me – they were sent overseas and before long they were caught in the Battle of the Bulge. I, on the other hand, stayed around for two more weeks. At that time they didn't have this one hour eyeglass service, otherwise I would have also been probably in the Battle of the Bulge. And I got, about two weeks later, I – my second pair of metal rimmed glasses, and I was off to **Italy**, and became a member of the 10th Mountain Division. And as I say, joined the 10th Mountain Division and was in the 87th regiment, **E** company, and saw combat with them in northern **Italy**.

Q: So y-y-you were actually in combat, you said.

A: Yes, yes. [**indecipherable**] We ended up, after the war, or when the war was over, we were in northern **Italy**. We were in – on Lake **Garda** when the war was over. And about five days later, while sort of trying to recuperate from what had been a fairly strenuous few weeks, I got orders to go down the **Fifth Army** headquarters, where I became an interpreter.

Q: What was – do you think your experience in combat was different because of where you had come from, what you brought with you – you know, your experience with the Germans.

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A: Well, my experience in combat was different because we had a crazy command – battalion commander, who decided that patrols going out at night would be greatly enhanced by having a German speaker with them. And regrettably, we only had two men in the battalion who spoke good German. So either he or – or I went out in most patrols at night. I mean, I – I would go out and patrol with our own comp – for – for me – patrol for my own company, and for other companies. And then he had an accident and shot himself, or shot ca – shot himself through the hand, so then there was one of us. So I never needed to use – or never did use my German in patrol at night. But the experience, yes, I had a few interesting incidents. I mean, one particular thing, we were the first unit to cross the **Po** River in northern **Italy** and marching along either side of the road with the – in – in – sort of in a ditch, and I was at the head. I must say, I didn't volunteer for these things, I usually was volunteered. And a bicycle rider came down the middle of the street, uniform, and coming towards us. And he came and came bef – I thought somebody was going to shoot the poor guy, because he obviously didn't know what was going on. And finally I jumped out of the ditch and went up and in my best German stopped him. And he started arguing with me in German because the 10th Mountain uniforms were very much like German parachuter uniforms, and he thought he had encountered another amer – German unit, and he was telling me that he had a very important message for the commanding general. Well, we were obviously very interested in that. And –

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Q: So you captured him?

A: Oh yeah, sure. And so we – it was – you know, there were some incidents like that, but – but –

Q: W-Were you involved in actual fighting?

A: I –

Q: Were you involved in actual fighting?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, I – I ended up with the – with the – with the – with the infantryman's badge, and all this sort of thing. Which was actually the nicest thing you could get in the **U.S.** Army, in – if you had to be in combat, because it meant 10 dollars a month more in your pay.

Q: Did you take any German life? Did you take any German life? Did you shoot at any Germans?

A: Did I that I know of? You know, war very frequently is, except for hand to hand combat, which we did not get into, war is very impersonal. So to answer your question, I don't know. But that wouldn't have bothered me one iota. But no, we then, as I say, after the war was over, I got transferred to – I was told to go on detail to **Fifth Army** headquarters and there I became the – one of the interpreters in **Mark Clark** – General **Mark Clark's** staff.

Q: What city is this?

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A: Well, the – this was on – in **Gardone Riviera**, right on Lake **Garda**, one of these great big magnificent hotels. Three months of it, a real tough life. And they had a German general staff unit there. The Colonel **Schweinitz** was in charge. This was a German unit that was responsible for getting the Germans out of the northern Italian **Alps** to surrender, and to organize it. And so they had – they had a staff there, and I was basically the interpreter between the Americans and the Germans there.

American units and German units.

Q: You are what, 20 years old now?

A: Yeah, I was –

Q: And you are interrogating these German officers?

A: No, I was –

Q: Or transla – translating.

A: Oh yeah, I was translating actually. I was – I was interpreting between them and you know, they're pretty high level in the German army, and they often wanted to know why I spoke such good German. I made absolutely no secret of it, and it was an interesting sp – probably the funniest experience there was, sitting once in the car between two – two generals, and at that time I'm **[indecipherable]** I mean, I had been promoted at that point to private first class. And I suddenly burst out laughing. Now, one doesn't do that when one is a **PFC** between two generals, but I – I burst out laughing, and they both wanted to know why. And I said, well, it's a pretty silly

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– funny situation, because the one man on my left was the German chief cha – chief chaplain of the German army in **Italy**, and the guy on the right was the chief chaplain of the American army. And I basically said, you know, it's kind of [indecipherable] to have a little Jew in between you, and you need me to get together. So that was one of the more – that was – that happened during that period. My German was good, but it was certainly not technically all that great. It was, you know, 15 year old boy's German. But it got me into some interesting places like the German underground communications facilities in **Verona**, where all the German telephone lines and so on came together. Then one side you had the chief American engineers and the German engineers and I was in between. Fortunately, when it came to technical terms they were able to – to communicate without me. I sort of filled in the gaps in between. But I was there for three months, and then was transferred to a – to something called **USDIC, United States** Detailed Interrogation Center. This was a – an interrogation group, which at that point was located in **Verona, Italy**, and from **Italy** we then transferred and we moved to **Austria**, town like – the name of **Gmunden** in upper **Austria**, where we set up an interrogation center. And most everybody in that unit spoke German, or a great many spoke German. And –

Q: Were many of them refugees like you?

A: Oh yes, oh yes. I mean, the **United States** didn't have all that many people at that point who were pro – sufficiently proficient in English and German, and knew

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something about German army, you know, ger – you know. And the **USDIC** in **Gmunden** was set up to this interrogation center, held **VIP** or medium **VIP** prisoners for interrogation. They were interrogated there, and we had a large number of cells. And I guess I'm not revealing any mo – anything that's secret any more, but at that point, we had concealed microphones built into the individual cells, and I spent most of my time sitting with earphones, listening to these conversations, or recording them. Some of them were – some of them were quite interesting. And so I spent – that started about July 1940 – or must have been August, I guess, 1945, so – in **Austria**.

Q: When you say they were interesting conversations, can you say anything about that, or you'd rather not?

A: Well, it got pretty crude when you have two female German youth leaders talking about their sex life, for instance, or – all sorts of things.

Q: Did they talk about Jews at all?

A: No, at this point they didn't. Not – not really. There was nothing – it was basically material that you wanted to give – provide to the interrogators, to probe, and so on.

Q: What was your response after the war when you learned of what had happened to the Jews, and the camps had been opened?

A: Well, at that point of course, we had – near where we were, we had **Ebensee**, the camp. **Mauthausen** was not too far away. Oh, I guess, what can you describe it?

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Anger, frustration, rage, you name it. I must say that this – I had great problems as far as the Austrian concerned. In my book I once wrote that what took Germans six year – t-t-took six years to establish certain measures against the Jews, the Austrians were able to do in six weeks. And it was – w-we got – the whole unit, I would say, got pretty sick and tired of being told how glad they were to see us, and how they had suffered under the Germans, and so on.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Gerald Schwab**. This is tape number two, side **B**.

A: In fact, we had a theater in town, in **Gmunden**, which was alternately being used by the Austrian population, a movie theater, and also for plays, and as a movie house for the American troops, the 10th Armored Division was in the area. And we finally in – in – in – in the **USDIC** we finally got sick and tired of being told of how the Austrians had suffered, that we found a newsreel of Germans – troops marching into **Gmunden**, and we told the projectionist to play it in connection, without any comment, in connection with the next time he was – had a movie showing for the local audience. And it was interesting, it – word got around town very, very quickly, and we didn't hear this for quite awhile any more.

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Q: Then you stayed in that location for how long?

A: Well, I stayed there until December 1945. At that time I got, on two days' notice I was told I could go back to the **U.S.** on **R** and **R**, rest and recuperation. I had the requisite number of points. You – you were given points by – for – for overseas duty and combat and so on, and they were taking people back to the **States** for rest and recuperation. So off I went and came back to the **States**, surprised my folks, and then went back. In the meantime I had decided I wanted to go to work at one of the war crimes trials. And –

Q: You decided this? Y-You say, y-you made the decision. Why? What brought you to that decision, or what factors entered into that?

A: Well, I decided it would be a fairly interesting closure. I mean, it would be an interesting experience. And it would be the sort of thing I wanted to do. Now, I did ha – well, I –

Q: Was this from a historical prospective, or emotional prospective?

A: I would say both. It was both. But when I got to the **States**, and I remember I got back to Fort **Dix**, ready to get on the next ship to go back overseas, I was told, I'm sorry, you will re – you can't go back overseas. Why not? He says, well, the – with the war over in the Far East, and all this sort of thing, the only way you can go back overseas is if you re-enlist. Otherwise, you can't go back. Well, I wanted to go back pretty badly, I wanted to go back to my unit. And so I did something in a moment of

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youthful exuberance, I re-enlisted, and signed up, and they changed the orders and they – I said, you – they – go back. And I went back, came back overseas. Got to **Cherbourg**, and there they had me going to some other unit in northern **Germany** or someplace, and I screamed and yelled as much as a – at that point I'd been promoted to corporal – as much a corporal can do. And they said all right, they finally – I remember, I think I had to change a couple hundred orders, because they had about a hundred, couple hundred people on – on these orders to a certain place, and I had to go through each and every one of them and rule out my name; they let me do that. And so they sent me back, they said fine, you can go back to your unit in **Austria**. And I got to **Paris** and in **Paris** I stayed at the enlisted men's billets in **Paris**, and this was – the gods really took kindly to me because when I was – I stayed there for two days, and I was then ready to go back to **Austria**. I tried to get my duffel bag, and lo and behold, it had been stolen. Now this wouldn't normally be a tragedy except all my personnel papers were in there. So I got some temporary papers, went back to **Austria** and of course I forgot to tell them that I had re-enlisted. So I guess I'm a fugitive from – from – from military justice. And got back to – to **Austria**, stayed there until – in the meantime I – I traveled to both **Dachau** and to **Nuremberg**.

Q: This is traveled on your own? Was this your first time back in **Germany**?

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A: Oh no, oh no, I had – my first time back in **Germany** was in – when I was still in – I guess probably when I was in **Verona**, so it must have been about August. I traveled to **Germany**, and I traveled to **Switzerland** in uniform. At that point you could go to **Switzerland**. And –

Q: You – you had mentioned that earlier, so if you can expand a little bit about coming into **Germany** wearing an American army uniform.

A: Yeah, I sort of strutted around. I went back to **Germany**, to my old haunts, met a few people who knew me. Noticed that there were a lot of people behind curtains looking at this weird American walking in the street. Keep in mind you're in the fr – I'm – I was in the French zone, I did not look like a French soldier. Wandered around, went to **Breisach** where my parents had lived and were born, and went to **Freiburg**. Met – as I say, met some people. And then –

Q: Do any of them – any of the Germans whom you knew – who knew you before say anything to you, especially?

A: Oh yeah – well, you mean, before?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh yes, oh yes, especially in **Breisach** and in – in – in **Loerrach**, oh yes. These were people who knew me.

Q: Were they welcoming to you?

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A: Oh yeah, those people were. The others stayed out of – I assume stayed out of the way because I didn't run into any of the others. The one person I looked for, I couldn't find.

Q: Did you feel like you belonged in these places?

A: Oh heavens no, I wa – I felt like a conquering hero. No, I felt anything but.

Q: Did you feel very – very American?

A: Yes, very much so. About 150 percent. Yeah, it's – it's pretty heady for a 20 year old, you know, I mean, it's – when a want – when you sort of run at age 15 and come back as – as a member of – of – of a victorious army, oh yeah, it feels very good.

Q: Did you go about it – back to **Dachau** because of your father's experience?

A: No, I went to – because the set of trials were coming up there. And I went there and then I decided I would rather go to **Nuremberg**.

Q: Why?

A: Well, it seemed like the more interesting, more – historically more interesting sort of thing to do.

Q: Was it painful for you to be at **Dachau** when – knowing your father had been there?

A: Yes, well, painful n – well, I don't know whether you would call it painful, it was – it was emotionally wrenching, but not – you know. But anyhow, I went back to my unit, arranged to get my army discharge in **Vienna**, and off I went to **Nuremberg**.

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Q: So you went as a civilian to **Nuremberg**, oh.

A: Yep. I left the army in – in – in – in **Vienna** and – in May of 1946, moved to **Nuremberg** as a civilian.

Q: And what happened when you got there?

A: Well, you know, you were assigned billets, you were – they had previously gi – tested me, they had decided that I probably wouldn't make a terribly good – which I agreed with – a terribly good court interpreter, or an interpreter in the court, but they did decide to use me as an interpreter where you had consecutive interpretation, and I basically spent all my time either as a translator, which means on written documents, or as an interpreter working – well, here I should digress. The **Nuremberg** Trials actually had 22 main defendants, but in addition to that, it had seven organizations which were on trial. Things like the **SA**, the **SS**, the general staff, the **Reich's** cabinet. The idea being that if the members of the organization, if the organization were declared as guilty of war crimes, then members above a certain level, or maybe at any level, would automatically be considered as – as guilty. And now, since however there were too many people that either wanted to testify, or provide affidavits, or statements in connection with these things, separate hearings were held, in a separate room, before a public, but they were done in German and English. And so you had, there you had, before a commissioner, the chief commissioner was an Englishman who later on met an untimely death as being a – he was a secretary for

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northern **Ireland** in the British cabinet, and his car bl – got blown up. And so you had th-the – you had four, actually four commissioners; you had an American, you had a Britisher, you had a Frenchman and you had a Russian. But all the discussions, all the ti – the – the testimony was in English and German, and instead of having immediate translation, simultaneous translation, you had consecutive. But you had only one interpreter, so you – you had one person doing English to German, ger – and German English.

Q: Wa – were these additional trials called the subsequent proceedings, or that was something else?

A: No, this was part of the first, main trial, where you for instance had – and you had actually then, decisions of guilt and innocence of these various organizations, like the German general staff, and by virtue of sort of concentrating, these were the people that were on – were being heard at that point. I spent much of my time working with witnesses for the German general staff. People like **von Rundstedt, Kesselring, Manstein**, etcetera. And –

Q: So what kind of contact did you have, or was this strictly during the hearings?

A: No, this was one of the nice things in this, because **A**, the interpreter sat right next to the witness. These were not defendants, the main defendants never came. These were people that testified. Some of them were subject later on to subsequent trials. And others then were, for instance, **[indecipherable] Dieter Wisliceny**, who was –

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was what's his name's deputy. **Heydrich**. No, not **Heydrich**, **Eichmann's** deputy was one of the people that testified, and he later on was sent off to **Poland**, where he was executed. One of the nice things was that the interpreter sat right next to the witness, you weren't separated by a glass wall. There was no microphone or anything like this, and you had – could have conversations with him during the break. In addition to that, your work as a – an interpreter usually, maximally you could do this for – it was for about an hour and a half. It was fairly strenuous. And you would sit – either you'd sit in the room itself, in the courtroom, or you would sit in a waiting room, and that's where, usually, the next witness was waiting with a guard. And so you could sit there and talk and – yeah, had some interesting conversations. I had – **Kesselring** once asked me, Field Marshall **Kesselring**, he and I, we – we sat there waiting to go – go onstage, and he wanted to know where I – well, first – first we – where I'd been, and I'd been, of course, in **Italy**, and he had been in **Italy**. Now, slightly different positions obviously, but we discussed military strategy in **Italy** to the extent that I was able to. He then wanted to know where I'd learned my German, and I told him. And his reaction was, well, that must be a great satisfaction for you to be here. And I said, it certainly is, Field Marshall. So, you know, some of these – **Rundstedt** once talked – gave his testimony, and he talked for – we had – we had told him, look, I can take about four minutes, five minutes maximum, but after that I can't do any more. And so he made a 10 minute speech,

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and then turned to me, and I sort of shrugged my shoulders. And I turned to the judge, who in turn said, well, we can have the court reporter read it off, and then we'll translate it from that. The court reporter said, I couldn't follow him either, I was hoping the interpreter could. So we all turned back to Field Marshall **Rundstedt**, who then said – gave the exact same speech, broken into two parts. It was amazing. This man – I mean, he – I wouldn't say it was rehearsed, but he gave exactly the same thing all over again. So anyhow, so it was – there were some interesting experiences, the – the last head of the **SA** gave testimony about **Crystal Night**. And actually, I prefer to call it pogrom of 1938. And he was telling how the **SA** really was a, more or less a social organization whose main task was to protect Jewish lives and property during – during this period, during **Crystal Night**.

Q: And his name?

A: **Miller**. Good German name. And he was – was going on, and then came the break and then this man really was hiding behind the door when brains were handed out, because he turned to me, and he says, you speak excellent German. I say, thank you. And you have to be – you have to try to be neutral. I mean, you can't, obviously your – your – your job is to translate. Well, you speak excellent German, thank you. Where did you learn it? Or when did you learn it. So I told him when. Where did you learn it? I says well, you know, I sort of learned it. Where did you learn it? I said, in **Germany**. When did you learn it? At that point I couldn't take it any longer, I said,

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up til 1939. Which of course was after the period – and he finally, I think the lights finally went on. This man had no idea. He had no idea what I – who I was, or what I was doing, or where I had learned my German or anything like that. He just probed until I really couldn't evade the answer any more. But anyhow, so the –

Q: This man's name?

A: His name was **Miller**, he was – no, no, wait a minute now –

Q: No – was it not **Max Jüttner**?

A: No, not ma – who? **Jüttner**? Yeah, well, it-it-it may well – in fact, a-as – I'm checking with my book. It must have been **Max Jüttner**. He was – he was the – the former head of the **SA** was **Lutze**, who died in 1943 in an automobile crash probably caused by a strafing attack, and he sort of followed it.

Q: How – you said you had to be neutral, that was part of your directions. How could you be neutral after what you had been through?

A: Well, your job was to translate, it was not to make, at that point not to make judgment. And you had to –

Q: H-How did you keep your distance then?

A: Well, you – you concentrated on – on – on translating and translating correctly, and that was difficult enough without making either sneers, sarcastic comments, or faces, or anything like that. You – you had to, I mean, there's a certain professionalism involved an-and I don't think you – well, I didn't find that terribly

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difficult. I mean, I may – might have had my own thoughts about it, but that was about the only time that I ever would reveal this to somebody who didn't ask me. And even he did, actually, in a way he did too, but –

Q: Did you – did you ever feel that you just had to release your anger at these people?

A: No. Privately, to my – within me, yes, but certainly not that ti – no. But then – but then, you know, at that point, they looked – they looked – how should I say, I – an example was in 1940 – end of 1946, I went to **Paris** to see – to I – I – at that point I was already working on the subsequent trial – let me just digress a minute – and I went to see – went to **Cherche-Midi** prison, the French prison, which a number of German war criminals were being held, or potential. And I had to get a deposition from two people. One was General **Stülpnagel**, who was the commander in **Paris** from 1940 to 1942. He – there were two **Stülpnagel** gen-generals, **Stülpnagel**; one of them was involved in the – the attack on **Hitler**, this was not the one. And I think the French eventually probably even let him go. The other was hama – **Helmut Knochen**, head of the **SD**, who was **Klaus Barbie's** boss; probably one of the most hated men in **France**; the man who implemented the Night and Fog decree, etcetera. Now I saw **Helmut Knochen** before that, in **Nuremberg**, and in **Nuremberg** it was very interesting because in **Nuremberg** the French prosecutor had a number of questions to ask him. And he would ask **Knochen** and **Knochen**, who, by the way,

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had it – a **PhD** in linguistics, would deny that he ever heard of this, and the French prosecutor, man by the name of **Monterey**(ph) would pick up a piece of paper and say well, is this your signature or not, and the man would say yes. And he'd ask him another question, **Knochen** would deny it, **Monterey**(ph) would hand him a document, says, is this your pre – piece the – is this your signature? Yes. Well, after that it was almost like **Pavlov's** dog, because all that **Monterey**(ph) had to do is pick up a piece of paper and **Knochen** would admit everything. Well, when I got to **Paris**, here was, in **Cherche-Midi** prison – **Cherche-Midi** Prison looks something like a – we sort of imagined French prisons to look in the 18th century. You – when you knocked on the gate, somebody would come with a key about a foot long, and there wasn't very much oil in the lock, and they would open it, and then you'd walk in, and then there's a room full of French prison guards and one of – couple of them were getting haircuts, in another part they were – some were playing cards. And so you finally get to this guy, you get to the prosecutor's office, and they would bring in **Helmut Knochen**. This was in 1946. Well, they'd given helm – it was cold, it was December. **Helmut** – they had given **Helmut Knochen** – they must have given him one shaving – one razor blade a month there, because he had a stubble beard. He had a French army overcoat that was about four sizes too big. He looked pretty sad at that stage of the game, let me put it this way. He did not look like the sort of Aryan

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superman, you know. So now many of the – you – you could – you could – you had to maintain your distance.

Q: Did you have to do a lot of research to do this kind of translating?

A: Only on German military trans – when I did the general staff on – on things like military matters. And there was a certain amount of it, and of course, the German language being what it is, where you can take any two words and make a third word out of it, you were very often – and in my case it was a lot easier than in the main courtroom, where they didn't have time to think, but, you know, you – you – when – when a group like the **SA**, the Stormtroopers were up, and a word like **wehrsport** comes in, **wehr** means defense, army, military. Sport means sport, it's things like hand grenade throwing, and forced marches with packs. These were – these were like the – the military pentathlon in – in – in – in the Olympics, these were semi – quasi military activities now. And then you were forced to make a translation of that into English, and the translation is extremely important. I mean, you translate as military sports, and they don't like it, because – but that's what you come up with. But there is no such word in the English language. So, you know, you try to prepare for it, but you never could for everything. I mean, you would – you would be blindsided every now and then by some phrase.

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Q: Did you have any contact besides the – wi-with these witnesses or defendants, besides the – the – the two incidents that you talked about? Did you have any other out – outside contact with them?

A: Outside, or inside? I mean –

Q: I mean, when they weren't testifying.

A: When they were not? No. No. No, the-th-they were – they were locked up when – and I had no dealings in the prison itself. We did have one interesting case, and that was when one man came up and that's where I get s – blindsided by the prosecutor who didn't warn me in advance, because they asked him, do you know anything about the **Gleiwitz** radio station attack? Well, **Gleiwitz** – **Gleiwitz** radio station was a German radio station on – right on the Polish border, and just before the war broke out between **Germany** and **Poland**, there was an attack on this German radio station by Poles and **Hitler** gave it as one of the main reasons for attacking **Poland**. And the witness, who was a member of the **SD**, German counterintelligence, said yes, I know something about it. Says, what do you know about it? Says, I was in charge. Well, no – there are times when you wish that the prosecutors would let you know something like that. They knew what was coming up, I had no idea. I knew from history what the **Gleiwitz** radio station attack was, but you know, this was the first indication I ever got that it was – it – it was a German a – attack. I mean, you suspected it, but

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you never suspected to meet the man that was in charge of it. So, there – those times it's difficult to keep a straight face, but you try, you do your best.

Q: Did you ever hear any testimony regarding Jews and actions against Jews?

A: Oh yeah, certainly with **Dieter – Dieter Wisliceny**, as I say, who was **Eichmann's** deputy. There were a number of them, but **D-Dieter Wisliceny** was the – the – was the – the most important one.

Q: But then, what did he talk about?

A: Pardon?

Q: What were some of the things he talked about?

A: Ah, there I have to go back to my notes. But they were talking about that the – the – the **Wannsee** Conference, of course, the protocol – I'm not sure whether the protocol at **Wannsee** Conference had been found by that time, or had been located by that time. But he talked about that. At that point, **Wisliceny** knew exactly what was going on, the court knew that he knew, and so on.

Q: And again, were you able to just keep your emotional level down when you would hear testimony about Jews?

A: Yeah, you did. You have to. I mean, there's a certain professionalism involved, you're – you're there for – to do a job and it's up to the court to make the decision, and regardless of how you feel, you have to maintain your – oh, how should I say, equilibrium. You have to be straight and translate it just as it was, you know.

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Q: Is your translation then, a part of the official records, part of the official testimony?

A: Some of it is, some of it is what was retained. The – the – there wa – it was a record made, of course, at that point, of the – four commissioners then made a recommendation to the main court, and some of those witnesses that we heard, were then heard in open court as well. Yeah. No, it is, but many more da – many more things – things that I did subsequently, the next – working on the subsequent trial where I abstracted documents for future trials, and I still run across those in my research every now and then.

Q: So you – you were working on the documents, and writing the abstract?

A: Well, this was after I left – I left **Nuremberg** on the day – on the main date – the main defendants in the main trial were executed, and went to **Berlin** and then worked there as a junior research assistant in **Berlin**, in the **Berlin** document center, working on subsequent trials, on prep-preparing subsequent trials. And there, of course, you tried to identify mater – at that point your job changed, you were no longer neutral, you were trying to help the prosecution to the maximum extent possible. And you identified documents, and wrote abstracts.

Q: How – how did – what were your thoughts when these wit – when these defendants were executed?

A: Oh gee, great.

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Q: Was it a cause for celebration?

A: No, I wouldn't say of celebration, no. No, it was, well, fine. I mean, you – you had your own ideas about some of them, you were surprised at some of the – the – the trial – the outcome, but no, I don't – I wouldn't call it celebration, but you – there was a certain degree of satisfaction.

Q: Did you sit on any of the **Nuremberg** – the court proceedings at **Nuremberg** – of the big – of the –

A: The main court?

Q: The main court.

A: Yeah, I sat in the main court whenever I – whenever I wasn't working myself, I would sit there and watch in the – in the gallery, oh yes, oh, quite frequently.

Q: And you felt justice was being done?

A: Well, you wondered whether justice could be done. I mean, how can you – what – what – what does justice mean? Justice means that an appropriate sentence or decision, or something appropriate to what had transpired, what they were guilty of, and that obviously wasn't possible. But no, I recognize – I mean, the reason I went to **Nuremberg**, I re – I recognize that this was something which history would, rightly or wrongly, or – either applaud or not applaud, but would consider a major historical event, and there was – it was interesting being there.

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Q: Are there any particular defendants that you – that – that you remember, anything specific of any of these particular people?

A: No, I mean, I remember all of them – I mean, these were people whose name I had heard for a long time, and so with the possible exception of **Fritzsche**, who was the propaganda ministry de-defendant, who really didn't belong in this group, because the people who did belong in this group either were dead, or they were hiding out, masquerading as farmers in the Bavarian mountains. He didn't really belong, and he's the only person I hadn't really – couldn't identify immediately as to who they were or what they were and so on.

Q: What was it like to, again, live in **Germany**? You were living in **Nuremberg**, what was that like?

A: Oh no, I was living in the – in an American or in – in a foreign co-cocoon there. It was not living in **Germany**, I mean – it was delightful, I mean, the thing I went back – we – you know, when, for instance, I went to **Freiburg** or **Nuremberg**, you know, you stood on the – on the – on the – an apple crate, and you could look over most of the town, and you didn't – you felt this – this is just the way it ought to be.

Q: You're talking about the destr – destruction?

A: Yeah. But, no, you didn't – you didn't live on the – I mean, you – y-you mixed obviously more than many other people. I remember while being in the army in **Austria** I went to – I was in **Vienna** one time, and there was a show in one of the

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parks, and there was a – especially one of the things, one of the – the acts was a comedian who was telling jokes about the war, and half the audience was watching the stage, and the other half was watching me. Well, I was in an American uniform, what was he do – this was in **Germany**, you know. So you did – you did have a certain amount of contact with local population, but it was on a totally different level, I mean you – you did not feel you're home. There was no – no such feeling whatsoever.

Q: So then you said you went to **Berlin**, to the documentation center?

A: Then I – then I went to **Berlin** to the documentation center, and I started – we started working, I remember, on the subsequent trial. And the first one I think I started working on was the justice ministry trial. And after working on about three months from the Ministry of Justice, we discovered that he had committed suicide two months earlier, but they had forgotten to tell us. So that was a waste of time. But

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End of Tape Two, Side B

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Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Gerald Schwab**. This is tape number three, side **A**, and you had said that you had arrived in **Berlin**, to the documentation center.

A: Yes, and –

Q: Th-This is October 1946.

A: October 1946, and for the next number of months, about six months, I was looking at documentation, at documents, abstracting things for the use in some of the subsequent trials. This is where I came across, personally came across some of the devastating materials. I mean, there's the – the register, I remember distinctly the register from a – one of the – the German quote, hospitals, unquote, which were – were the mentally deficient or mentally ill people were killed, and I remember seeing the death register. This was in the case of the – I think it was the justice trial, where the head – at the top of the page it would list the name, and it would list the time of death, and then it would list the place of death, and the cause of death. And then under that you had a list of maybe 30 - 40 names, however long the register was, and ditto marks under everything else. So everybody died at the same time, of the same heart failure.

Q: Was this **Hadamar**? Am I pronouncing it right? **H-a-d-a-m-a-r** building –

A: I don't re –

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Q: Hospital.

A: I don't remember which – which institution there was, but it was one of those things that, you know, they – they had to fill out a death register, and this was the way to do it. I mean, Germans were very precise and practical. Law requirement was to have a registry. And they had one, but they didn't want to spend all that much trouble, to invent a new cause of death for each case, so they make ditto marks. They gave the name and then a ditto mark under it. This is where, as I say, so many of the – some devastating materials of that type were found. Orders which were signed by officials. One of the nice things the Germans did as far as the prosecution was concerned, was that every leading official had his own – had – had an initial. Well, those are very frequently difficult to decipher. But what was nice, they all used different colors. So if you saw a blue initial, let's say, in the – in the Ministry of Justice, you know exactly who saw it, and if you saw a red one, you know who saw it. So it wasn't just you – you could identify the individual, and we're talking here at the top level obviously, at the sub-ministry level, and the sub-minister level. And this is where, in going through the Ministry of Justice files, I had an interesting experience, because having lived through **Kristallnacht**, I decided this was a good time to look at some of the files having to do with **Crystal Night**. And the document center had a lot of German employees, who we would indicate from registers what documents we wanted, or what folders we – what folders we wanted, and they would

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bring it. And one day this gentleman brought me some files, I started getting some files having to do with – with **Herschel Grynszpan** and the – the **Crystal Night** events and afterwards. And he said to me, I see you're interested in the events in **Paris** in 1938, and I said yes, I certainly was. And at that point I had in front of me a – the future – the trial schedule. The Germans had planned to put on trial **Herschel Grynszpan** after he had been turned over to the German authorities in 1941, after the fall of **France**. And two of the witnesses were going to be members of the germ – the embassy staff in **Paris**, namely – I mean, low level staff; one was a clerk who was at the front gate when he came in, when **Grynszpan** came in to – and the other was the clerk at the information desk who, in fact, took **Herschel Grynszpan** to see **vom Rath**, the German third secretary who then – and he subsequently went and shot him. And this, of course triggered, or was used as an excuse for the events of **Crystal Night**. And I – the trial preparation called for these two clerks to testify. I asked them whether he knew **Amski(ph) Hilfa(ph)**, clerk so and so, and he says yes, I knew him quite well. I said, well, what about **Amski(ph) Hilfa(ph)** or clerk **Nagorka**? He was the man who – to whom **Herschel Grynszpan** said whom he wanted to see. This was a fairly important bit of evidence because of some of the – th-the arguments being made whether or not **vom Rath** was the actual intended victim, or the accidental victim. And the clerk said well nag – clerk **Nagorka**, that's me. So that was a rather startling bit of information, but anyhow, he provided me the information

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that I wanted. And this was a – basically the beginning of the – the beginning of my research for a book which I finally finished about 40 years later.

Q: Well, I guess we can talk later about what kind of information he gave to you.

Well, what did he tell you at that point?

A: Well, he confirmed – well, let – let me go back. The question was, did – at that point **Grynszpan** was asking – this was in 1942, after he had turned over to the Germans of '41, he claimed that he shot **vom Rath** for personal reasons. And so the question was, the key question was, did **Herschel Grynszpan** ask for **vom Rath** in person, or did he just ask for a German clerk – a German officer. And the answer, according to **Nagorka** was, he asked to see an embassy official. And this was a key bit of evidence.

Q: We'll talk some more about that later. What else did you do at the documentation center?

A: Well, we spend all the time going through documents, every now and then finding something of interest, identifying, writing abstracts, and sending them on to – to **Nuremberg**. The – some of them were – at that point in **Nuremberg**, the medical trial was going on, but subsequ – they were looking for materials for subsequent trials, the Ministry of Justice, and various other ministries. And you just sort of – either you were told, or you were given advice where to look, or you sort of followed a hunch, or you followed something, so – something followed a trail which suddenly

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opened up. By far and away the most – well, almost the most interesting or comprehensive trail led to the **Reich's** Chancellery, **Hitler's** office. Because every time one minister wrote something to another minister, especially if they had a fight, they would send an – a copy to **Hitler's** Secretary of the Chancellery. So there you would have both the letter being sent, and the letter being coming back. I mean, when a person – person like the Minister of Post got mad – or the Minister of Agriculture got mad at the Minister of Post, and accused him – accused him of having an illegitimate child, he would send a copy to the chancellery and then the Ministry of Posts would then re-reply to the Minister of Agriculture in a rather nasty letter, and also send a copy to the chancellery. So that – there was a lot of information obtainable there. But mainly, you would stumble across something. Or, they would – somebody would identify a certain event, and he – you would dig into it.

Q: How did you get that kind of training, to do this kind of research?

A: I have got no training whatsoever. Let's face it, I mean, the **U.S.** government's just terribly short of people. So you – you got into it. You – you had a more than rudimentary knowledge of the German government by that time, and you just sort of – there was no training for this sort of thing. I mean, you couldn't afford to have somebody sit there and translate this stuff to – for somebody else to analyze it. I mean, some of it – obviously the – some of the people at **Nuremberg**, some of the

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prosecutors spoke no German. So you translated relevant documents for them. But you know –

Q: So you didn't translate everything you read?

A: Oh heavens, no. You only trans – you made a judgment and you translated what was import – what you thought was important. But you know, as they say, in the land of blind.

Q: So that was a big responsibility you had going through that kind of information, and trying to decide what was relevant.

A: Yes. I mean, sometimes you would – you had this supervisor whom you could ask. We had a – a former German, who is now a professor of political science at some college in the east coast, and he was our supervisor. So you could go to him, and – and say well, what do you think of this?

Q: How big a group of – of translators or – or researchers were doing this?

A: I don't know how many people were doing that. I mean, we – we were a group, I would say that I immediately worked with about 10 people.

Q: What other areas were you doing research in?

A: Well, as I say, it – it – whatever the trials, whatever subsequent trials, I mainly – we mainly did the Ministry of Justice, where, as I say, we found out after three months that two months earlier, our main defendant had committed suicide. But then

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his deputy was still alive. Then you had the – you had the ... I don't remember. I don't remember who.

Q: Okay. When you were in **Nuremberg**, did you see any of the well-known names, like **Goering**, or –

A: Oh yeah, of course, they were sitting in the courtroom, sure. Well, every time you went – I mean, they didn't have much of a choice, they were all there. You had – you had – you saw them, obviously, on the dock. The only people I really got to know outside was **Hoffmann**, who was **Hitler's** personal photographer, whose daughter had married **Baldur von Schirach**, the head of the **Hitler** youth, who was on the dock. And she often – so she was with her father often, and I had the opportunity, I had permission a – permission to carry a camera in the courthouse. And so I would often talk to him.

Q: Is this a personal camera, or for –

A: Yeah. Yes, personal camera. Came up, had qui – made quite a few photographs.

Q: Do you still have those photographs?

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: Do these people look bigger than life, or less larger than life?

A: Well, you saw them in the context that they were – were there. I would say for the most part they were certainly not big in life any more. I mean, you knew that they were prisoners, you know they were on trial for their life. I would say the only one

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who – whom you might – not larger than life, but – was **Goering**, who – whose presence was – was – he wa – he was an imposing presence, let's put it this way.

Q: What was your reaction when you, let's say, heard he committed suicide? Were you angry, or –

A: Too bad. I felt –

Q: Too bad what?

A: – that he cheated the – the hangman. No, I mean, it's – it was not anything – it was – I – I – I sort of felt sorry for the prison staff, who – obviously somebody's – somebody was going to be blamed for it. No, not – no – I mean, how he went really wasn't all that important to me.

Q: Well, let's jump back to **Berlin**. Oh no, you had also said that you had seen – you had said that you had seen **von Schirach** when you were younger, and then a second time in the dock. Did he look any different?

A: Well, he was a lot closer the second time, because the first time, obviously he had no – I mean, I wasn't looking for trouble. I just saw him out of the – out – looking out of the apartment. And he was down at that – must have been about 1937 - '38. At that time he was head – head of the **Hitler** youth. He subsequently then became **Gauleiter** of **Vienna**, and so on, and it was in that capacity that he ended up in – in **Nuremberg** and got 20 years. He was a lot closer then.

Q: So how long did you stay in **Berlin**?

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A: Well, I stayed in **Berlin** until about March, I guess, March or April 1947, and then decided it was go – time to go back, to quit.

Q: What made you decide that?

A: Well, I decided I couldn't quite go on having only two years of high school, it was time to go back to school. And of course, I came back about the time a great many **G.I.s** came back, or were back, and had decided with the – thanks to the **G.I.** bill. And so there was a great deal of competition for places in school, and American colleges, which of course the attendance exploded as a result of that. But I – so I – as I say, nineteen – early 1947, I figured I better go back, finish high school. Well, do something. And –

Q: You had not had a high school degree?

A: No, I had two years of high school, that was it. And then I applied to a couple of places, and I remember I applied to **Rutgers** University, and – but the one that I applied, that I finally went to, was the school which would admit me without finishing high school; they didn't care, and that was the University of **Chicago**. So in fall of 1947, thanks to the **G.I.** bill, because without it I certainly would – oh, I'm certainly would have gone to **Rutgers**, which was out of state college or university; I was off to **Chicago**. And spent three years there.

Q: And what did you study?

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A: Well, in **Chicago**, the old days of **Robert Maynard Hutchins**, you didn't – they told you what you were going to study, you didn't tell them. It wa – it was an interesting situation. They – you took 28 ou – battery of 28 hours of tests, and then they said here are the courses you have to take, and when you finish these courses satisfactory, you get a **B.A.** degree. And I did, and in 1949, I got my **B.A.** Obviously I picked up something in between. Then spent a year taking – well, let's see, I spent one semester, after finishing the college of the University of **Chicago**, I spent one semester in the School of Social Service Administration, and decided that that was not the appropriate career for me. I had nothing against the School of Social Service Administration, I just couldn't quite see myself working with some of the people that were taking courses with me, and then switched back to political science, until the end of 1949 – '47? No, no, 1950. And in 1950 then decided to go to **Stanford** University in order to – I wanted to – to do some research on the **Grynszpan** case and the **Hoover** Library of War and Peace had the best materials. So I went out there, and then spent a year there gradu –

Q: Do-Doing research on that?

A: No, no, no, I was – well, I got a second **B.A.** there. **Stanford** University looked at my – the fact that it took me two years in **Chicago** to get a **B.A.**, they were horrified enough that I didn't finish high school. But the fact that I only spent two years

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getting my **B.A.**, and to **Stanford**, in order – the way to get your **B.A.** is to be in school for four years. So I got my second **B.A.** there, in political science.

Q: And then?

A: Well, then something happened which – you know, you hear these stories only in **America**, something that I still consider amazing, and which I tell some of my friends – especially my European acquaintances about. The State Department put out a call to all the colleges and universities for a special intern program. Every school in the country was invited to provide – to designate somebody for an intern program – or nominate somebody. And eventually, in early – you'll have to pass something called a **JMA**, which was a – this was during the time of the Korean War, there was a freeze on federal hiring, except if you passed this exam. And you – the prerequisite was passing the **JMA**. Well, to make a long story short, out of the 22 people picked by the State Department, I was one of them, from **Stanford**. And I still find this amazing, because there was certainly no need for this – the government agency at that point to pick somebody who'd been in the country only 10 years. It was just – I just found it absolutely amazing, because it was a special program. And so we came together, there were 22 of us from all over the **United States**. And that's how I then entered my first job, State Department.

Q: And your career after that?

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A: Oh well, let's see. After that I joined the Foreign Service. I joined the State Department in 1951, joined the Foreign Service in 1955 – four – '54 – no, '55. 1955 to 1957, I was assistant cultural officer in **Vienna**, then back to **Washington** for two years, 1960 to '62. The ama – new American embassy at **Lomé Togo**. **Lomé** at that point was so new that most of our mail went to **Lima**, because nobody in the State Department mailroom really had heard of **Lomé**. Then from **Lomé** back to **Washington** for two years. Then to eastern **Nigeria** for two years, which at that point was on the verge of becoming **Biafra**, just before the civil war. From there a year to **Sierra Leone**. You ca – as you can see, I – I hit all the beauty sp – actually we di – we liked – we very much liked all of **Africa**, with the exception of siera – **Sierra Leone**. I guess we got a little satiated at that point. From there, three years to **Tunisia**. From **Tunisia** then a year and a half, almost two years to **Bangkok, Thailand**. Now, there was quite a switch. From **Bangkok, Thailand** onto a year at **Cornell** University for a sabbatical, where – I guess you call it a sabbatical. Then back to **Washington** from 1973 to 1976. And at that point I was sent to – I was detailed by the State Department to an organization in which the **United States** at that point was not even a member, namely the International Labor Organization in **Geneva, Switzerland**. We went there for one year and stayed 10, and retired in 1986.

Q: And when did you get married?

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A: Woop. Well, I got married while – in my last year in **Chicago**.

Q: And is your wife also from **Europe**?

A: Yes, she is from **Berlin**, and I met her through somebody with whom I'm – I worked in **Berlin**.

Q: Let's talk a little bit now about your book and your research on **Grynspan** and what – what – again what inspired you in – in the course of your research.

A: Well, it was an interesting case. I don't – I don't catcha – I – I – the book, eventually I named, "**The Day the Holocaust Began**," because I do feel that the beginning of the Holocaust, or – was with **Crystal Night**. It was used by the Nazis as an excuse. But it was the beginning, it was the first time, really, with a couple of minor exceptions of centralized – centrally directed anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish activities in **Germany**. And while there were obviously earlier ones, like the boycott of nine – April 1933, the book burning of May 1, 1933, but after that it was really these – most of the things that happened were locally inspired, or locally activated. This, the events, once they got going, and even though **Crystal Night** was not centrally directed in the normally accepted term of the word – the wor – yeah – afterwards, it certainly was, and that was the beginning, to me, of the Holocaust. I – I found this young man – the story, of course, is that somebody, his parents – a young Polish Jew, living in **Germany**, born in **Germany**. His parents had lived in **Germany** since 1911, walked into – heard – heard that his pare – he was living in

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Paris, heard that his parents had been shoved over the border into **Poland**. In – in late October 1940 – no, '38, they sent him a postcard in **Paris**, where he was living illegally with his uncle. He walked into the German embassy, shot the third secretary. The third secretary, after having what to the ra – to those of us in the foreign service can only call a meteoric rise, within two days he became first secretary. But he died. And that was then the beginning of the events of November ninth to 10th, the night of the ninth - 10th of November. He was held wi – in **France**. Subsequently he said he had killed **vom Rath** because of the postcard he had gotten from his parents, and so on. He then was subsequently turned over to the Germans. They were going to make a major propaganda trial for – in which there were two defendants, world jury and in an – in the form of **Herschel Grynszpan**, and they were going to try to prove that the shot of **Paris** 1938 was the same as the shot of **Sarajevo** some 20 years earlier, in other words, that they had caused World War II. The Foreign Ministry was behind it, they hav – had to have some excuse, they were desperately looking for an excuse for the outbreak of World War II.

Q: So how did you do your research?

A: Well, the research of course, I – I did a lot of it – I got a lot of it at – at – at **Stanford**, materials. I got a lot of zer – not **Xerox**, **Photostat** copies of documents in **Berlin**. And then in th – read an awful lot and research, got a lot of materials; for instance, as an example, the full **Goebbels** diary was at **Stanford**, or the – the

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Photostat of the entire microfilm was – was at **Stanford**. Worked there, and over time, eventually actually, later on went to – met with his – with **vom Rath's** brother, who was a lawyer in **Wiesbaden**, when we were living in **Geneva**. Did – found the Frenchman who had done a great deal of work on the same thing, and exchanged documents with him, and this was basically how it worked. I mean you – it's a never ending thing. And actually I had my first chance to publish my work in 1952 or '53, when somebody in **England** heard about it, and I was offered that they would publish it, and in the State Department, being a very junior officer at that stage of the game, I had to – at that time it was necessary to submit manuscripts to a review committee. And after talking to these people, they said send it over, I sent it over to them. I had a document written. And about four weeks, five weeks later I get a call back saying this is a very interesting – we've just made a couple of suggestions where we wouldn't – since you're now a member of the State Department, where it would not be totally appropriate, but we've marked the place. Well, the document came back and it weighed about twice as much as it did before it went out because they put paper clips on all those places. Well, they had a paper clip almost on every other page. And what had – had happened was that the French Foreign Minister, **Georges Bonnet**, at that point was go – who had been the French Foreign Minister, he was going to testify for the Germans, or at least so the documentation said, was going to testify in this big trial against **Herschel Grynszpan**. Well, by this point, mis

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– **Georges Bonnet** had become – 1950s – **Georges Bonnet** had become [indecipherable] to Franco-American Friendship Society, and it would just not do, saying that he had collaborated with the Germans. And without it, the story wouldn't have made quite as much sense. So I put it away and kept it – kept it packed up for 35 years.

Q: And then what prompted you to wer – t-to bring it out again?

A: Well, when you – when you work and you – the people usually ask you what are you going to do afterwards, you say you'll write a book. And then when finally it comes you retire, you gotta put up or shut up.

Q: Did you learn a tremendous amount by doing this research? Did you come to conclusions you didn't think you'd be coming to?

A: Yes, very definitely did. The biggest conclusion – first of all yes, you obvi – I obviously did a great deal of research into the era, into the life of the Polish Jews in **Germany**. I mean, here's – here are – here are people that came to **Germany** in 1911. In 1938 they're shoved across the border as Poles. You learn about why they were pushed across the border, and here you can attribute that to the actions of the Polish government as much as to the German government. It's a story that's not too well known, but the fact of the matter is, it was – it was provoked by the Poles. But the biggest thing that I think I learned is that to me **Herschel Grynszpan** to start with, was an assassin. I don't like assassins, for any reason, regardless. And I was not

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terribly favorably well disposed towards him. I learned two things. One, before his probable death – in other words, we still don't know exactly where he died, although we have a pretty good idea – this young man, from becoming a young, hot-headed assassin, became a true hero. Secondly, whatever damage he did an – to Jews, which resulted in **Crystal Night**, I think he saved many more lives, or his act saved many more lives than the – the – the death that he caused; for the very simple reason that immigration of Jews from **Germany** and **Austria** started high in 1933, went down through 1937, early '38, and then immediately after **Crystal Night**, immigration shot up. So a lot more people left **Germany** as a result. So in the end, he really – his act really saved lives, even though 110 - 115 people died in the immediate aftermath of **Crystal Night**.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Gerald Schwab**. This is tape number three, side **B**. The book, and the research on the **Grynspan** case, and when you did your research, did you interview his lawyer, or did you interview other people, and – and did you interview other people?

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A: I interviewed a number of people, I interviewed the psychiatrist, the German psychiatrist who examined him on behalf of the German government. In fact, I visited him in a hospital in – in **Berlin**.

Q: His – his name? Okay.

A: [**indecipherable**] there.

Q: That's okay.

A: I interviewed his lawyer –

Q: Did – did you learn anything from the psychiatrist?

A: No, I got his medical opinion, which was reinforced by the documentation we found. He found – he found him a sla – somewhat o – more than average intelligent young man. Quite mature for his age, but at that point, of course, he had been in German hands for quite a while. I should say this, that he was treated very well by the Germans, because he was a special prisoner, they wanted him for a big show trial. He – and while in prison he was allowed to keep his hair. He usually worked in – worked in the kitchen on food distribution, which means that wherever he was imprisoned, he had enough to eat. He was not, as far as I can tell, mistreated. And when the trial finally opened, a decision finally was made to postpone the trial indefinitely. **Hitler** personally described him, or said that he was his personal charge. In other words that nothing was to happen to this young man without **Hitler's** personal decision. Now, it probably – whether it – whether it finally did happen,

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happened with **Hitler's** knowledge or not, a – chances are he died at the – towards the very end of the war. He survived most of the war. But let's see, we interviewed – or I interviewed **vom Rath's** brother, I interviewed **Moro-Giafferi**. **Moro-Giafferi** was the French criminal lawyer who was hired by **Dorothy Thompson** and a journalist group to defend **Herschel Grynszpan**. And him I saw in **Paris** in 1946 – 40 – late – in December of 1946.

Q: Did he give you any insights?

A: Oh yes, yes. He was, as far as I'm concerned, he cracked the case in – as to what the – the subsequent argument or this – the – what the – the argument that **Grynszpan** used to avoid a trial. Basically, what happened, **Herschel Grynszpan** avoided trial, or when the Germans were all ready there to put **Herschel Grynszpan** on the world stage, on trial – for this they had already invited, or were ready to invite the main newspaper people from around th-the – the neutral **Europe**. They – it was a big to-do – was to be a big propaganda trial. They had built a special courtroom [indecipherable] new telephone lines. It was to be a big to-do. And **Herschel Grynszpan** finally announced t – before – shortly before the trial was to take place, that he had killed **vom Rath** because **vom Rath** had made homosexual advances to him. Now, obviously homosexuality is not what major propaganda trials are made of, especially if the victim was supposedly involved. Well, when I finally did speak to hersh – to **Moro-Giafferi** in **Paris**, he – by the way, he was a – a man about five foot

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tall and five foot wide, who when I saw him the first time, greeted me with the statement that he had ever – only ever lost one man to the guillotine, and that was **Bluebeard**, and – which I said could be forgiven. And he was the number one criminal lawyer in **France** in – in the 20th century; certainly the first half of the fu – 20th century, who had really been the lawyer for just about every – every major criminal trial, especially murder trials. Well, **Moro-Giafferi** smiled, laughed, and he says, well, let me explain where he got that idea. He says, when I initially took up his defense – and he had been hired, as I said, by **Dorothy Thompson**, who at that point was a major figure in American journalism, foreign correspondent in the days when foreign correspondents were still major figures, in – in the days when you didn't have instantaneous **CNN** coverage and so on. He said, I told – I asked **Herschel** why he had killed **vom Rath**, and he said, because had gotten this postcard, and what happened to his parents. And I explained that this matter – **Moro-Giafferi** speaking – I explained to him that French juries are not terribly friendly disposed towards political crimes. However, in a case of crimes of passion, French juries are much more lenient. And since there had been rumors, which I have certainly not been able to confirm, that **vom Rath** had homosexual tendencies, and had been rumors in town that he had visited homosexual places, he suggested that he may want to argue that there was a homosexual connection between the two. Well, according to **Moro-Giafferi**, **Grynszpan** rejected this out of hand. But then a few years later

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remembered it, used it, and basically said to his cellmate, they're not going to make me – make another show trial out of me, they've done enough damage already.

Q: What did you – what did you want to accomplish by doing this research and writing this book?

A: Well, I just wanted to put it on paper, and put it in history. I don't think it's that terribly important, because if that hadn't happened, something else would have triggered what happened subsequently, where there would have been a **Kristallnacht**, it probably would have happened differently. But I certainly don't think that **Herschel Grynszpan** caused it; he was the excuse. And so I don't consider this book as you know, that terribly important. It's – to me it's an interesting footnote to history. I don't over – don't want to overdramatize the importance of it. It's – it's an interesting – it's a fascinating life, it's an interesting individual, certainly the way he turned out to be. And as far he – he – I have the utmost respect for him, and I felt his story needed to be told.

Q: And is your book the definitive book on this?

A: Until the next one comes out, yes.

Q: Can we talk now about some general questions? Do you think you're a different person today because of what you went through as a young – young boy?

A: Oh heavens, yes.

Q: In what way?

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A: In every which way. I mean, you – you – you – you can't help but be affected by these events. I mean, if I had had a normal childhood, if I'd had different acquaintances, yes, of course we're all – we're all changed a great deal. I've no idea what we would have been like otherwise, but there's no question. We're more – I think more introspective. We – we have a different view of life, more serious view of life. No doubt about it.

Q: You had said earlier that you lost part of your childhood. Do you think you ever got it back?

A: No, I don't think you can – there's no way that you can get it back. And you know, it's gone, but nerit – you – you – you – it – it – it affects you and it changes you and – and then also, keep in mind it's not just what happens to you, it's also what happens to the people who – that you associate with. For instance, the people that surround you. I mean, as an example, my wife lost both her parents at **Auschwitz**. Being associated with some – with these people, the more immediate victims, undoubtedly affects you. On the other hand, at the same time, of course, you appreciate much more what you have. And I think that's of – that's a positive side of it, that you – you are much more appreciative. You realize what life can be like and what life is like now. So there are both negative and I guess, in a way, indirectly certain positive aspects to it. But change, a change that, for all of us, are – are profound. Or the – the – that the attitudes, or the – the – our feelings and so on.

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Q: You went through a difficult time when you had to leave your parents and you were in **Switzerland**, and you were by yourself with those two families. When your children became that same age, did that bring back that time to you? Is that a difficult time?

A: Yes, it – it – it certainly – it certainly affects you, you certainly think about it. I remember sitting, of all the – of all the places, it really hit me when I saw “**Der Ring**,” **Wagner’s Ring**, where **Wotan** leaves his daughter surrounded by a ring of fire. It really hit me right then and there. So yes, there are – there are many times, and you try to guard your children, of course, from that sort of thing. One of the things I do when I do inscribe my book on the Holocaust, or, “**The Day the Holocaust Began**,” I usually write, may our children never fully understand what is written in this – what is written here. So you try to protect them, but i-it undoubtedly affects your life, your attitude, your habits. The whole – your outlook on life, oh yes.

Q: What kind of habits are affected?

A: Well, I we – as I say, I would say mostly – habits maybe is not most – best word, but your – your – the way you view life and the way you live life and the way you take it. The way you either appreciate it – appreciate it, or the attitude that you have to life, it affects, i-it’s – it permeates everything.

Q: Is it always on your mind?

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A: No, not necessarily. No, but it has shaped your mind, it has shaped your thought, and that is where the change then comes in. No, it's not constantly on my mind. If it is I would be at – then it would be primarily negative. But it has changed your mind, and that is where it comes in.

Q: Are there any other sights or sounds that trigger your childhood experience?

A: No.

Q: You mentioned the opera.

A: Yeah. Well, no, not really. It's – it may very well actually, you know, you do think of it at the – strangest times, of course. But to – to – you can't really describe it. It's something that happens. It's not the same thing that triggers it. But yes, it – it's brought forth by all sorts of things, whether it's a – a book that you read, a – a picture that you see, a – a – a story that you hear, all sorts of things can trigger. Because it – while it may not be foremost in your mind, it certainly is very close to the surface, it's bound to be.

Q: Did you join the foreign service – did that – did the inspiration to join the State Department Foreign Service come from, in any way, from your experience of being born in **Germany**?

A: I really don't know, I don't think so. I developed an interest in international relations and –

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Q: What was that – what I meant was it – was that purely intellectual, or because you had seen tyranny firsthand, did it inspire you to try to make a difference?

A: No, na – na – I wouldn't – it can't – I don't think it's possible I – my case, to trace it to that, no. It's – it was – it was an interest in – like intellectual interest and knowledge of – of European history. And interest of – well, I mean, it's – I – I – I don't think – I haven't really thought about this, I don't think that it is traceable back to my experiences as a youngster.

Q: If someone asked you – whom you met would ask you, are you German? What would you answer?

A: No. Then it come – then it depends what – what the next question – no, the answer is no. I will, depending on the questioner, respond and tell them what I am, or who I am. But I don't – I cannot recall anybody – I mean, keep in mind I'm – I'm fortunate. I don't have a distinguished accent –

Q: I just meant someone knew that you understood German, or in some way knew you had some kind of connection to **Germany**.

A: Well, it depended who it was, the answer would be no. I mean, basically, essentially, the answer is no. I do not feel German. I do not feel any special affinity for **Germany**. I have no special affinity for **Germany**, no.

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Q: Let's now talk a little bit about the museum. I know you've done a lot of work in the historian's office and so forth. Could you describe your first encounter with the museum, and when you began work here, and how you learned about the museum.

A: Well, I got involved with the museum when I went to see **Sybil Milton** in the historian's office and wanted to see what – whether I get any comments or a blurb for the back page of the book, and I've been paying for it ever since. I did get the blurb from **Sybil**, and she made some very nice remarks about it, but as I say, from that point on, I've bil – I've worked with the historian's office.

Q: When did you begin working there?

A: Oh, this must have been about eight years ago. It was – well, si – it must have been – well, when the book was in its former state, so it must have been about '89, so we're talking about eight years.

Q: And what kind of work do you do here?

A: Well, on the Days of Remembrance book, it depends. I haven't right now, since there's a change, I'm not working with them now, but we have been doing various things on the Days of Remembrance book that's on the chronology, for year by year chronology of what happened where. Then we have recently done some work in connection with the claims by American soldiers at – or Americans who are seeking restitution from **Germany** for incarceration in concentration camps. And so there's a question of definition, what is a concentration camp, because it's not always clear.

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So we've been making – this is the Justice Department, we've been helping the Justice Department on that. So there's a wide variety of things.

Q: I-Is this something you're doing now under the auspices of the museum?

A: Yes.

Q: And so what do you directly do?

A: Well, right now I don't. I mean, we finished that particular job. It's usually either going – doing some research and documentation in the library, writing up the materials. It depends which one you're doing. I'm – I've done quite a bit of writing for them on these Day of Remembrance books that they put out every year. As I say, for a while there we were doing, in those books there's a chronology, and – so you go back and try to find things that happened, or where they happened, during year X and so on.

Q: You said **Sybil Milton** had asked you to start working there, but really, why do you work there?

A: Oh, I find it stimulating, I find it interesting, I find – I f – one of the things, of course, I appreciate there in that office, is that they have usually a number of young people, young Europeans; German, Austrians, who are working there. For instance there's some Austrians who work there in lieu of their military service. And it's interesting to be around them, and to exchange ideas and see what they think, and so on. It's a fa – I find it interesting, challenging, I mean, I ge – I get a lot of intellectual

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stimulation from my computer, but not that much, you know, they can't do everything.

Q: What is the response of these young Austrian interns when they hear your story?

A: Oh we – I don't normally tell my story. It – it – there's usually somebody needed around there who puts a little bit of balance. And I mean, you have the, on the American side, you have, for the most part, a number of people who know what was going on. Then you have these young – relatively younger people. And then they – the – there needs to be, or it's helpful occasionally to have somebody who either was there or was directly connected, who can put a little bit, slightly different perspective on it.

Q: So you feel you bring a special insight?

A: Yes, I hope so.

Q: Has working at the museum affected your memories of what you went through?

A: Well, it jogged it every now and then, yes, it certainly does. I mean, you come across documentations, or things certainly, when you go back, you go back and do research on stuff that – things that happened, or came out during the – during the **Nuremberg** trial, or – yes, it – it – it obviously keeps it – it keeps it current, it keeps it alive. Yes, very much so.

Q: You – you said a moment ago that you do bring a special – you do bring special insights. What – what – can you give us an example?

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A: Well, you can talk about the abstract – in the abstract about certain things going on. We're –really we're talking about the **Nuremberg** trials, an insider's view. Not necessarily a – a – well, a – a sort of – a – a – well, a – how should I say? An ide – whatever – well, I don't – I – I – I really don't know how to describe it. Basically, what comes with actually having – having experience that – or being around a lot of people who have experienced it. I think – I think it – of some help.

Q: You can flesh out the picture a little more.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: If you have friends, or – or have you encouraged other people or survivors to work at the museum?

A: No, it's – it's ga – that's a highly personal sort of thing. I've encouraged a lot of people to go there, both friends and acquaintances. And I guess I think there are even – there are a couple of them that either are working there, or have in the past worked there as a result. But I wouldn't – I would not want to recommend somebody to work there, if it doesn't come to them themselves. It's – it's not the sort of place, I mean, that – I mean, it took me long time to take my wife there, for me to – for my wife to go there. It depends – it depends on the individual. And it has to come out of them, I don't think that it is nece – certainly somebody who is closely involved with it, who has a personal experience and so on, I've encouraged people to go to visit, but I

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would – I would not encourage somebody to work there if they didn't get that idea on their own.

Q: Do you have any kind of special relationship with other volunteers who are survivors?

A: No. I – I don't really have too much of a contact with too many others, no.

Q: Do you have any impressions of the museum's non-survivor staff and non-survivor volunteers?

A: Well –

Q: Both Jewish and non-Jewish.

A: Well, let me say this way. I – I have the feeling that being – I n – I know there are a number of survivors – first of all, of course, I have trouble with the word survivor. I do not consider myself a survivor. I know people who've been in **Lódz**; they're survivors. Then of course then, I am not a survivor, I'm a – I'm a refugee, you can call any sort of thing, but survivor, I don't feel I am. Then, of course, then there's the – the group in between, and that is, for instance, my wife, who is out – who was never in a conce – went to – to **England** in a – in a children's transport. Had a much tougher time, and of course, most of all, lost her parents. Does she belong in the survivor cat – she doesn't consider herself to be a survivor. It's – it's very difficult, but to me, the – I don't think there's any question. To my wife's cousin, who was in **Lódz**, or was in – in **Auschwitz**, no question either. It's that in-between, gray area.

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That's one point. The second point is, I don't think that by virtue of being a survivor, you become an expert. No, quite frankly, I've – I've made myself very unpopular already. I mean, I've only attended one survivor group so far, and I've made myself unpopular [**indecipherable**] by basically saying, just because somebody's a survivor, they don't – does not mean that they're necessarily the best guides. So I've been accused since then of being an academic, or being too – too feeling that you have to have university degree and so on. Which isn't, of course, at all what I'm talking about. I'm just saying that, being the best – being the best guide, or a guide, it's interesting to be able to say to a group, this person lived through it, but that does not make that – that's important, but it doesn't make necessarily a – a qualified guide, or the best guide. There might be somebody who had no connection with it, and yet still is able to do a great job. So, I have a – perhaps a slightly different point of view than some of my fellow volunteers.

Q: Have you had any memorable experiences working at the museum?

A: No.

Q: Are there any particular parts of the museum, the exhibits, that you identify with?

A: No, I'm affected deeply by certain areas. Obviously, like some – everybody else be it the – the picture gallery, be it the – the shoes. I mean, you can't help but be affected by. But not – it – it – it's a – and I'm sure different things affect different

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people, although there's certain things like these, that **aboundly** affect just about everybody who's – has any feeling whatsoever.

Q: Well, is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude the interview?

A: No, I think you have been very – this has been rather exhaustive, and I don't think I've ever talked quite as much as this in my life.

Q: Well, thank you very much for doing the interview. This concludes the interview of **Gerald Schwab**.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview