

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Erwin Deutscher. This is tape number three, side A. And now let's talk a little bit about your thoughts and feelings about what you went through. When your children were the age that you were when you had to leave Vienna and leave your family, did that bring back any memories for you or affect you in any way?

Well, here I have to say the way I always felt. I knew that I am a part of this generation that has suffered so much. On the other hand, I was one of the lucky ones. Not only did I, myself, was able to survive-- the immediate family.

The broader family is a different story, because we just didn't have contact anymore with my father's siblings, especially with my father. On my mother's side, it was different because of the American situation. So over there was, probably, everything lost.

I know that my grandfather from my father's side-- he was 86 years old when he died. He died in '39 just a short time before the war. But all the others perished.

So I have to take into consideration those people. They suffered without having a chance to create new families, and so on. So I knew their sadness. In our home, I brought up the situation.

I heard sometimes that survivors did not mention too much about their past. It's either because of my nature, or I saw it really had to happen. I was pretty open on what it is. Maybe certain details didn't come out, as I expressed now in my writings. But they knew clearly what was going on.

And here, because you had the chance to meet my daughter, you see how she's involved. And the other daughter's even interviewing people in the Spielberg action. And Michael, my son, went even to Israel a few times alone. Apropos, the girl studied at the University of Cincinnati, one one year, one two years, and were even in a kibbutz for a short time.

Their Hebrew-- they can communicate somewhat. They don't speak what we call good Hebrew. But they can communicate. So the house was Jewish. On the other hand, I had plenty contact with non-Jews.

So today, of course, we are trying to reflect why it happened. My personal philosophy-- as much as it would have been nice to skip this chapter, I still have to say it. I want to say that the Nazis, the anti-Semites, could not have done what they did if it would not have been carried on for a couple thousand years, the path of Christianity. They failed very badly.

And if you already bring it up, let me tell you what happened once on a trip from Cincinnati to Washington, because I was flying first class. Next to me was a short man, sitting, and getting a lot of attention from the stewardess in the plane. I was a little bit surprised that one person would get more attention than the other one in the same class.

I found out that it was the archbishop of Cincinnati, Archbishop Arthur. And for some reason, he started talking to me and telling me his functions in Washington, that he has to educate young priests, and what problems he has with them. And after that story went on, I mentioned to him that I'm on the other side of the fence. I don't belong to that same group.

He said, well, I had a feeling like this. But I got encouraged by his easy approach to me. So I asked him-- I probably did say, Your Excellence, whatever it is-- could I ask you a couple of questions? And he said, shoot. And I brought up the major question that we have.

If Jesus Christ had to die, why do you-- and the man plural, not him himself. Why do you accuse the Jews of having killed him? That was his function to be killed. In the beginning, he tried to interject that maybe the Romans did it.

But let's say, if the accusation is as the people understand, let's say that the Jews did it. So what did they do wrong? It had to happen to him. He did not reply to this question. But he said, didn't you say that you have a couple questions?

Then I said very plainly, tell me, how can a god, how can divinity, be killed? He just glanced at me, didn't answer, didn't say a word. He just lifted my elbow. And that was the end of the conversation.

There's no question that that had to be-- that whole subject has to be clarified. And people have to start understanding it, because any religion-- Christian, Jews, Mohammedans, Muslims, what they call themselves, or others. If God created the world, he created those, and those, and the others, all were. Why would God create one group to kill the other group? If he really wanted to do it, why shouldn't he do it himself?

Well, this is the philosophy I have after this. The only thing that I am probably dealing different than many others-- I was always proud. I was always strong that what I am thinking is a healthy outlook. And I never let others depress me, or diminish my standing, or whatever it would be.

I have never felt one second in my life that history, or whatever, has endowed me with the wrong path, with the wrong way, with the wrong philosophy. I like what it is. I'm not proud that we have to suffer all the times. But I am proud of the nucleus of our being. And--

Do you think that you are the way you are because of what you went through as a young boy?

I didn't tell you too much from my childhood. There was not an anti-Semite in the classrooms I participated that he would have enough nerves to attack me. So I think I had the strength already then. Yeah.

Yeah, I would say maybe it strengthened later. And of course, look, my knowledge in Hebrew and my participation in Israel, it cannot be evaluated. It can't be, because it's so great. And it gives me so much purpose of life, so much purpose to transfer to the next generation, and the next generation that I stand on strong feet.

If I would not have made it, I would not have made it. I even had this discussion once with my father. Is this survivor more privileged by God than the not survivor? We cannot say this. So for some reason, I'm here.

It's not only with the Nazis. I have to tell you, the War of liberation had a few casualties, too. And I was involved with them. So I didn't get it. The others did-- friends even, real close friends, even one relative. He came, too. So that's the way it was.

And I have even seen in those fights, where I was involved, the one who died wouldn't have to be always the real hero. Sometimes, the hero survived, and the not-so-hero died. There's no rule on this.

Or opposite, too, of course. Some people were very aggressive and had to die, too. But survivors were good heroes, too, sometimes. They did a good job.

When the Eichmann trial took place-- and you had said before that you had met him-- what were some of the things that were going through your head at the time?

I want to tell you, when I met Eichmann, I didn't think too much about it. It's just another Nazi in that uniform. And for some reason, because I had a certain way to pull my father, he reacted. Maybe to 99% of the other people, he wouldn't even pay attention.

They only thing that, for some reason, came up then was, when I saw Eichmann talking with those Jewish girls who helped him-- this, I couldn't put two and two together. He was a very unique individual. I found out that, for example, an Israeli policeman didn't do a correct things, even to separate him, or something like this. He reminded him he has to do it this way.

It's a typical Nazi who has always to get command from up to the lower ranks. And he was a lieutenant colonel. That was his rank again. So he was used to get command.

But he was cruel. If he was born cruel or not, this I don't know. I did even hear that he knew some Hebrew. If this is

true, then who knows?

But of course, I was relieved that he was caught, not only because this one particular Nazi was caught. It should show to the people that some have to get it for us. I know that so many were able to escape all their punishment.

And it's sad, too. And maybe there were some people even crueller than Eichmann. But it's good that it happened. And I did not feel bad that he got the punishment from Israel as he did, although it would not have made any difference if, for some reason, they would have just jailed him. It would be the same punishment.

Did you feel any connection to him because you had met him?

No. I just want to add here-- at least that was said-- that Hitler himself, his greatest fear was that he could be caught alive, and they would put him in a cage like an ape, a naked ape. And people would view on him. And if this is true or not, I don't know. I heard this story.

So they were afraid more, I think, from jailing than for being killed. That's my understanding. So the short killing is probably not always the greatest punishment on a person anyway. But anyway, that's the way it happened. And that is the end of it.

Do you feel Austrian, or Israeli, or American? How do you feel about that?

Yeah, the question should-- well, Austria, we really can put aside. I was born in Austria. I like to run around in that city sometimes for all kind of other reasons, because it connects the past with the present.

The Israeli in me is in. There's no question. Why I am in the United States? I try to make it clear to a point. That was not fully planned.

But on the other hand, I don't feel guilty that I left Israel, because life sometimes comes out this way. And nothing is new in this. We had great Jews outside Israel. And we had great Jews in Israel.

If you really want to know, to go into history in Babylonian, which was outside of Israel, was a glorious period. And so it was in Spain. Of course, you can say, in the 20th century, because it's a rebuild of Israel, the connection should be different.

But we have a different world now than it was just a few hundred years ago. The world is, to a certain point at least, is one unit. And that's the way it happens.

Do you feel that your commitment to Judaism is different, or affected in any way, because of what you went through because you were Jewish?

I see. I would say, no. But on Judaism, I have to tell you something very unique-- that sometimes people try to continue their Judaism in order to keep the continuity. This is not the right outlook, because when I go back to parents, grandparents, and even before, their behavior as Jews was not so much for continuity's Judaism. It was, that's the way it had to be done. And that's what they did.

When they observe the rules, it's just for that reason, and not just because to keep Judaism forever as a continuity. So I do it just the way I feel doing it. I cannot do more, because then it wouldn't be me. And if I do less, then it would be negligent. So I just leave it the way it is, the way I can understand it.

We have a few explanations. Habakkuk, one of our prophets, he brings it in this manner. [HEBREW]. That means, the just shall live by his fate.

By the way, they had something similar in the New Testament that says, the just by faith shall live. But our says, the just shall live by his faith. Apparently, he shall live the way he develops his faith, and the way he can accept it.

And I like that sentence very much. It could be that some of the very Orthodox ones would not want me to have it expressed in the same manner. But I think we are entitled to interpret our thoughts the way we want to.

You said you had continued your education when you came to the United States. When was that?

Oh, constantly. Constantly, as soon as I entered the business world here. First of all, I studied economics. And I got a CLU, if this means something. And then I get a master. And then I go a PhD, just during my work time.

What did you get your PhD in?

In Hebrew letters.

And where did you get your degree?

Hebrew Union College. So--

And why did you go to get your PhD in Hebrew letters?

That's an interesting story. I was 55 years old. And the company wanted to transfer me to Pennsylvania to a higher position. But I didn't want to leave any more Cincinnati, because to connect with my family, I told them, if I leave Cincinnati, I go to Israel. I'm not going to Pennsylvania, to Philadelphia. That's where they wanted.

For some reason, I had a very large deal with the University of Cincinnati. And that professor was-- well, I probably don't-- he was from Scandinavian parenthood. And that deal didn't develop. And I saw that he had a-- he was feeling very uncomfortable letting me know that whatever was planned cannot be consummated.

And in order for him not to feel so bad, I said, don't worry about me. I'm doing very well. And I have no special desires to have anything else. And I am not envying anything. Just feel comfortable that it didn't work.

And when I left his office and turned back, I said, well, I still do envy some people. And he said, what do you envy so much? I said, the academic world. And he called the Hebrew Union College. And that's what happened.

Did you-- do you belong to any organizations? Or do you keep up with other people who are survivors?

Well, B'nai B'rith, for some reason, is not as active as they used to be, at least not my age group. Some are already gone. And ZOA is even less. So I don't.

The only thing is, with the synagogue, I'm involved with. And others are just health groups that I participate in. That's all.

Do you feel any connection when you meet somebody else who came from Europe?

Oh, yeah. We have friends. We have plenty of friends. Yeah, all kind. But I want to tell you, we have some Chinese friends, too. And we feel very comfortable with them-- and non-Jews, too. So I cannot say that I'm just hanging with that one group. That's definitely not.

But what I meant is, when you meet someone who was born in Europe in that time span, do you feel any kind of relationship with that person?

I would say it's almost the-- they have reached my stage, too. It's a part of life. We accepted it. And that's the way it is.

And we try to be good citizens, as far as we go. And we participate for Israel a lot. But I have never missed an election in the United States either. And I do appreciate it. I sometimes say what is wrong here and what is good here. In this

way, I express myself.

You see, I am already nine years-- more, almost 10 years retired. And they now invited me to a convention in Vienna. So I'm involved with them. And they try to invite me as often as possible.

What kind of convention in Vienna?

It's from the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Not only this. The last time we had a regional meeting-- the [INAUDIBLE], if that would be. Who knows what? So I have a connection with them, too.

But I would say I'm a regular citizen. And I'm involved in whatever has to be involved. And I skip what I don't want to see. And that's it. Even sports-- we bike a little bit, or horse riding-- is still going on even though I am closing pretty close to 75. So that's the way it is.

Is there anything else you wanted to add before we finish?

I would say that the story, it was told as true as possible. I don't think that it stretched too much. It might not be everything. But sometimes, people would say, too much. Then I would have to explain more other things.

But it's a whole story. It's a life story. Of course, in retrospect, I can smile that everything came out good. But I know that others cannot. And it's sad again and again.

The Christians didn't do the right things. And in Europe, in the 20th century, to develop such a stupid hatred still doesn't even make sense. And then that America did not have more sense to help to pull the people out-- that they could have put them to Alaska, or wherever, or in South America, South Africa. Everyone would have benefited from this.

The world has failed. There's also the German-- the Hitler crime was great. But we cannot say that the Poles didn't fail, and many other nations, including the United States, and so on. I think that's all I had.

What inspired you to write down your life story?

First of all, the children are one. But as soon as I start writing, UC jumped on me. And I had pictures all hanging around. Do it. Do it.

And one more thing. When I started the Hebrew Union College, the writings other had, I wasn't too satisfied. It wasn't covering-- it did not cover what should have been covered. It was to concentrate, either on the bad things only.

And I didn't like it, because I wouldn't sell even my childhood for anything else, because it was good. It had a few bumps, of course. But it was good.

And the relationship with my parents that I have was outstanding, because I see what others sometimes write. And I'm a little bit sorry that I did not think about that subject when my father was alive, because he really would have broadened that whole thing to a point. But I have to be satisfied with what I am doing.

And I am even satisfied to have a chance to have met you. It was very charming. Really, I cannot say any more. I could not have met a better interviewer.

Maybe I have to say sometimes to others, too. But in your case, it was charming. There's no question. Thank you.

Well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

[BOTH TALKING]. I mean it.

This concludes the interview of Erwin Deutsch.

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