

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Wolfgang Mueller conducted by Gail Schwartz on January 21, 1998 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is tape number one, side A. What is your full name?

Wolfgang Mueller.

And where were you born?

In Hanover, Germany.

And when were you born?

On March 10, 1919.

Let's talk a little bit about your family first. How long have they been in that part of the world? Do you know how far back?

Oh, yes. I actually have records of my grandfather's grandfather. And his name was already Karlmann Mueller. And he lived in a little town in Westphalia called Stormede. Stormede is near Geseke.

And as a matter of fact, my my Hebrew name is the same name as his son. His son, who is actually also my ancestor, was Isaac. And my Hebrew name is Yitzhak.

And what about your mother's family?

Well, they are also from the same part of Germany. And my mother's name was Anna Rosenthal. And they are descendant from a rabbi in Westphalia. His name was Hirsch Cohen. And he was a very important rabbi who took part in the conferences that helped to establish emancipation for the Jews when Napoleon first came to Western Germany in the early part of the 19th century.

Did you have a large extended family around you while you were growing up as a young child?

Well, my father was an attorney in Hanover. He moved to Hanover, which was the largest city that was fairly reasonably close by-- Hanover. And my father was born in Paderborn. These are all little rural country towns in Westphalia.

And the records show that the family was, for centuries, involved in the feed and grain business. And of course, the Jews were only emancipated late in the 19th century. And that was after my father was born, very late in the 19th century. And he was able to go to college and become an attorney. And that's the reason that he set up his practice in Hanover, a law practice in Hanover, Germany.

And of course, actually in Hanover, from my immediate family, there was only my mother, my father, my brother, and I. However, we would frequently go back to Paderborn and Neuhaus-- I'll tell you about that later-- where my grandparents lived. And we would spend a great deal of time there. And of course, we had millions of cousins. And it was always a wonderful time for us.

What is your brother's name? And what is the difference in age?

My brother's name is Dr. Klaus-Peter Mueller. He's seven years younger than I. And he lives in Palo Alto, California.

Now let's talk a little bit about your childhood. You said you were born in Hanover. Were you born in the central part of the city, on the outskirts?

Well, I was born fairly close to the central part of the city. And the apartment-- we lived in an apartment house. And we

lived on the first floor. It was a beautiful, very large apartment, very luxurious. And it was at number 18 Ferdinand-Wallbrechtstrasse near the Lister Platz.

And even though about 75% of the city of Hanover was destroyed during the air raids in the Second World War, that particular house is standing on that street, almost none of the others. And the other miraculous thing-- and I just seem to be very, very fortunate that way. The home that we moved to after that is also standing.

It sounds like your family was upper class. Would you describe it that way, or upper middle?

Yes. My father was a professional man. And of course, my grandparents on both sides were wealthy merchants, very wealthy merchants. So the Jews in Germany were somewhat different from the Jewish people that came more from Eastern Europe, because they had been emancipated for about 50 years. And they had very quickly worked very hard trying to become part of the mainstream of the life of a country.

My father served in the First World War as a soldier. He was very proud of it. He went to the university. And he belonged to, of course, a Jewish fraternity.

But he also fought with sabers. And he had these scars on his cheek. He was tall and quite handsome. And he had very good relations with the German people-- German officials, too.

Which university did he go to?

He went to-- he went to Fribourg.

In your neighborhood, was it a Jewish neighborhood, or non-Jewish, or mixed?

It was mixed. It was a suburban neighborhood, oddly enough, almost reminiscent of where I live now. And the interesting thing about my life as a young boy-- I find that there was great similarity between the way I lived and the way my grandchildren live now in this country.

Let's talk about your early life. You said you then moved. At what age did you move from one house to the other?

I think I was six or seven years old when we moved to the house, the second home. That was at 11 Wallmodenstrasse in Hanover, Kleefeld. And it was just at the time also when my brother was born.

And I had terrible whooping cough at that time. I was sick. And they had to take me out of school, because it was no good to have me around the house, because my mother was expecting my brother. And I lived for several months during the fall of 1928-- it was 1928, in the fall of 1928-- with my grandmother in Neuhaus. I have very vivid recollections of all of that.

Do you have any recollections up to the age of six, anything that you could talk about up to the age of six, before you moved?

Yes, I do.

What do you remember about that time?

Well, I remember being very small and living in the apartment in Hanover. I think I can remember-- I have a recollections that go back to when I was four years old, or even younger.

Such as?

Well--

Did you have friends?

--I remember, for example, my parents playing ping-pong. They set up a table in the apartment. And I was already trying to do it at that time. I'm an avid tennis player today. And I remember playing with my trains underneath the dining room table.

And a very big thing for also Jewish children in Germany was Christmas. And the German Jewish people in those days in the city-- they had a Christmas tree. And the children got presents at Christmas, and so forth, and so on. Christmas was an important thing.

Now, that doesn't mean that there wasn't any Jewish identification, because there was. And I don't want to give that impression. We knew we were Jewish. And we did many Jewish things. I was Bar Mitzvah, for example. But I do remember a lot of things about when I was very little.

And also, my mother took me to the beach. There was a beach resort that was not too terribly far in the North Sea. And a lot of Jewish people went there.

It was called Nordeney. It is an island of the Frisian-- one of the Frisian Islands. And you had to take a train to a little town called Emden. And then we took a steamer to that island. And I remember that when I was a little boy. I even remember getting seasick on the steamer.

And then I remember spending a lot of time on the beach. And I think I was very fortunate. I think a lot of my good health comes from the fact that, when I was a little child, I spent a tremendous amount of time on the beach, more than average.

Do you remember at that young age having non-Jewish friends?

Well, when I was that little, of course, I don't remember what kind of friends I had. But when I was a boy, I had non-Jewish friends, plenty of them.

OK, let's move on then. Now you've moved to your second home. And let's talk again. Was that in a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

Yes, definitely.

And you had non-Jewish friends then?

Very much so. Very much so. The neighbors next door to us, their name was Von Reden. And the father was an official. Of course, he was an attorney, too, like my father.

But he worked for the government. But he worked for the provincial government there. And of course, I really didn't know that. His name was Baron von Reden.

And he had a brother who was my sister's age. My sister's older than I. And then he had another brother that was my age. And believe it or not, they had a small son that was my brother's age.

So you had a sister also.

Yes.

When was she born? And what is her name?

Her name is-- she's called now Trudie, but her name is Gertrude. And she was born in 1915. She was four years older than myself. She's in good health, thank God. She lives here in this area. She's also a big contributor to the Holocaust

Museum.

What kind of school did you go to?

Well, in Germany, children go first to the folkshule. And you start there at the age of six. Actually, your first day of school is a big day. I remember it vividly.

And it was also the custom always to give the kid a big thing with candy. It was a bag, a cone-shaped bag. And everybody got their picture taken with that. It was my first day of school. And you go to that school for four years. And I went to that school.

And then, after that, you go to the gymnasium. And I went to a school called the Leibniz School in the central part of the city. And I had to pass an exam. Everybody has to.

Some children never go to the gymnasium. Many children, or the working class children, they go three more years folkshule. And then they don't go to school anymore. And they take up a trade.

The young people take up a trade much younger in Germany. But if you plan to go to college or follow professional people, they went to the gymnasium. And in order to qualify for that, you had to pass a test, which I did. And I started in this gymnasium.

So again, this was with Jews and non-Jews in the--

Oh, yeah.

--all the way through in your school. Any problems that you noticed?

Well, there was very occasionally some-- somebody called you a Jew, or something like that. And I would fight, a lot of times, with the kids about that, a lot of times. But--

What do you mean you would fight?

I would have fights if they called me a Jew. I'd hit them and stuff like that. I had some really bad fights.

And what would happen?

Nothing. We would just have a fight, and it was all over. But then I think what we're getting at is what happened as we got towards the time that the Nazis came into power.

We'll get to that. I want to cover the part before that.

But outside of that, I was very much interested, much more interested, in soccer football in Germany than I was in my schoolwork. And I remember already, very early, I used to spend when I was still-- before I was in the gymnasium, I spent most of my time making up teams. So we couldn't wait till we get out of school.

And then I would play football with the other kids. And most of those kids that were my friends, they were working class kids. There were the kind that actually became Nazis later.

Did you have any other interests besides soccer?

Not too much. Oh, yes, I was an avid reader. And I don't think I had there so many disciplined interests. But I had many interests.

And I belonged to the Boy Scouts. And I learned how to ski. And I learned all kinds of athletics. I started to play tennis

in a club when I was already very young, 10, 11 years old.

And of course, there I associated with a better class of people. But they weren't necessarily Jewish at all, all kinds of people. I didn't know whether they were Jewish or not Jewish.

Did you run into any problems because of that--

No.

--there?

No, not that I was uncomfortable back then in those early years, not that I was uncomfortable.

You said you had a Christmas tree. How religious was your family? And how did you know you were Jewish?

All right. We did also have a Seder. But it was not as important as Christmas for the children. And I went with my father to the synagogue occasionally on the high holidays.

And then of course, as I got older, then I started to go to Hebrew school just like the kids do here. And then I started to get ready for my Bar Mitzvah. And then I was more around Jewish children. Also, then when I went to the Jewish community center, I got involved with Jewish young people's organizations. And I started to make some very good friends among the Jewish boys my age, and girls.

How religious--

There was another thing. My father was a member of B'nai B'rith. He was the president of the B'nai B'rith in that town, in Hanover. And I was very much aware of all these things, and all that it involved, whatever it was to be Jewish, and all that. I knew all of that.

And the B'nai B'rith had a summer camp on the same island at the beach. And I was a young child already, prior teenage. And after teenage, every summer, I would go to that summer camp. And I'd be only around Jewish kids there. And that was very Jewish.

I had kosher food there. And they sung "Hatikva." And they sang Hebrew songs. And it was very Jewish. And I met a lot of Jewish girls. So I had that mixed exposure. They're both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Were you proud at that young age of being a Jew? Or what did it mean to you at that time?

No, I can't say that I was proud about it. I can tell you that, as I got older, and as the anti-Semitism became more virulent in Germany, I thought it was a curse to be Jewish. I thought it was a terrible, terrible curse. And I thought it was very unfortunate that the-- I was envious of the non-Jew, that I couldn't be a non-Jew.

At the same time, I never had any ideas of not being Jewish. Don't get me wrong. I was too young to even consider that.

But later, when I was going to school in England-- and I'm getting ahead of myself now. And I had a very good friend from a very good family, very similar background as myself, from Frankfurt. And I would take walks with him on Sunday afternoon.

At that time, the Nazis had taken over in Germany. And we were already somewhat expelled from our homes. And we had to leave there.

And we talked about that it was some kind of a curse that we-- that we were cursed to be-- we were afraid. We were terribly afraid, terribly afraid. It was very, very scary to be Jewish.

Let's move back a little bit in time. Tell me about your Bar Mitzvah--

Well, I--

--which would have been in 1932.

Yes, it was in-- actually, I think it was very early in 1933. My birthday is on March 10, very soon now. I'll be 79 very soon. But it was in 1933, I think.

13 years would be '32.

'32? Maybe it was '32. Maybe you're right. Maybe you're right. Or maybe it was a little late. I don't know. It could be.

I'm not sure. It was '32 or '33. It seems that, in the year of my Bar Mitzvah-- but maybe it was a year later-- I left and went to England.

Let me--

I'm almost sure of that. I think I must have been Bar Mitzvah a little later. I think I was Bar Mitzvah in the very early spring of '33.

Any problems with that?

Well, there was no problem. But it became more evident-- in relation to what we're talking about, I remember listening to the radio and hearing Hitler talk. It was in '33 when Hitler came to power. It was just about that same time.

And it was shortly after that that the teachers in my school started wearing swastikas in their lapels. And in the morning, when we-- I'm not talking about Bar Mitzvah now. I'm talking about something else.

But in the morning, when we had to go to class in Germany, when the teacher walked in, you always had to go up and say, good morning, teacher. And after the Nazis came to power, you had to get up, and put your hand up, and say, heil, Hitler. But I wouldn't do it. And that probably saved my life. That's probably why I'm here today.

I wouldn't put my hand up. And the principal of my school, his name was Dr. Heyligenstaedt, and he knew my father. He was a fraternity brother of my father's.

He called him up. And he said, listen, Ernst, you better take that kid and send him out of the country, because he's going to get himself in trouble, and he's going to get you in trouble. And then, that summer, they sent me to England.

Before Hitler came in, was your father active politically?

No, I don't think he was active politically so much. But he knew everybody. My father knew everybody. And he was a very personable kind of a guy. And he represented-- he had some very big clients, banks, and places like that, and big business people. Well, that was horrible.

What kind of relationship did you have with your parents? Was it a close, intimate relationship or a more distant one?

I would say it was a normal relationship. I don't think it was very especially close. My father and my mother didn't have a good marriage. And they're a very different kind of people. And that put a strain on the family life when I was a young boy.

It made it easier for me to be comfortable when I left, too. But my mother was the one that had the vision. And I remember she already very, very early wanted us to learn English.

My mother knew English. She had been to England as a young girl. And she also knew French. She had studied in Lausanne. And she was a very unusual woman-- a very difficult person, but very unusual. And I always opposed her.

I didn't like what she wanted me to do. It's only lately when-- even when I thought about this interview, I think about her. And the reason that I am alive today is probably only because of my mother. All of us are alive.

And it goes further than that. They sent me to England in 1933. And they made arrangements with a family there.

Well, we'll get to that in a moment.

Yeah, OK.

I want to cover a little more.

OK.

What language did you speak? What did you speak at home?

German.

And what other languages were you learning as a child?

I learned French in school. And I knew-- they tried to teach English, but I knew very little English, very little English. I wasn't interested so much then. I was interested in Germany, and my friends, and my Boy Scouts, and my-- like a boy. I was a boy-- and sports.

So you felt very German.

Yes, I think so. I started to-- towards the end, during the time of my Bar Mitzvah, I became aware of it, that I was a Jew, that I was different than the rest of the Germans.

In what way?

It was already starting that Jews-- for example, I used to go to an indoor swimming pool with a friend of mine. And then they made rules when I was-- I was still in Germany then. The Jews couldn't go there anymore. So it wouldn't take very much to know that I was a Jew.

And I remember I went with my friend. And we put our swimming trunks on real fast that nobody should see that we were Jewish. And it was scary to be there, because we were someplace we weren't supposed to be. And I was already aware very much very early that there was danger there.

When did you first hear about Hitler?

OK. I was going to school as a little boy. I was still very little. I'm going back now, maybe to 1929, to 1930, '29 or '39. So I was 10, 11 years old. And in Germany, they had a [GERMAN] on every street corner in the cities.

What is that?

That is a kiosk, an advertising kiosk. It was a round column. And the [GERMAN], the--

Posters?

Yeah, poster. [GERMAN] was oil, what you wash your clothes with, soap powder. And all those companies, they had their big posters there. And there were also political posters there.

And the Nazis always had very prominent, very strong color-- red, or bright yellow posters-- with a tremendous amount of printing on it. And there are swastikas all over it. And I would stand in front of that [GERMAN]. And I would read every word on that poster.

And my eyes were popping out of my head, because they talked about the Jews, and what the Jews were doing, and Jews were ruining the country. And that's what was going to save the country, to get rid of the Jews. And the Jews had to be-- and this and that.

And it was about that time, very shortly afterwards, that I was with my father in the car. And we were in Paderborn. We were going to Paderborn. And we had the radio on in the car. And the news came on.

And they announced that they just had had an election. And the National Socialist party had gained a tremendous number of seats in the Reichstag, in the German parliament. I was worried. And I said to my father, what does that mean? What does that mean? It scared me.

And he said, oh. He said, it's nothing, it's only politics, don't worry about it. That was my father. My mother was different. My mother was different.

OK, now it's 1933. And Hitler becomes chancellor in January. By the way, when you saw these posters, what thoughts went through your mind? Were you very frightened?

Yes. I was very concerned, very concerned. Of course, I was young. I tried to forget it. It was traumatic. It was scary. It was frightening.

There's something out there. It was very similar to, like, a child is afraid to walk by himself through the woods, or be in the dark, very similar. Something very, very threatening was out there.

Did you talk it over with your brother or sister?

No. I don't think I ever said anything to anybody about that.

Even your mother?

No.

Or friends?

No.

OK, now Hitler is chancellor in January of '33. Do you remember the parliament building burning?

No, I was in Berlin. I was in Hanover.

No, I know, but talking about it.

First of all, when that happened, I think I was already in England. And I don't-- I remember that it happened and all. But I was not intimately involved with that.

OK, let's go talk more about your trip to England and how that came about.

Well, OK. It was after my Bar Mitzvah. In this particular summer, they decided to send me there to this-- they were already then thinking of saving their firstborn son. And they sent me to this to learn more English for the summer.



It was also compromised, I think, between my father and my mother about what they should do about me. And I was the future of the children. And of course, some of this is a surmise on my part. I don't really know what.

I did what I was told. I knew that they told me that I had to be taken out of school. That was one of the things. I had to be taken out of school. So for the first, they decided to send me to England.

This is after the principal told your father.

Yeah. And then, because I already-- I was very uncomfortable about raising my hand, and all that, and saying, heil, Hitler, and he wants to kill the Jews. And that was not for me. You know?

So this must have been the summer of '33, 'cause--

Right.

OK.

So I arrived in England. And then and I stayed there. And I lived in a boarding house.

How did your parents know where to send you?

They made arrangement au pair. One of the girls from that family had been in our home the year before. My mother had sent away for college girls to come in as an exchange student plan. And she, my mother, arranged all that stuff.

So your sister was not sent.

No. I was sent. And--

What was it like for you to leave Germany?

It was a great trip. I was looking forward to it. It was exciting. I went on the boat. And then I had to take a train, a boat train.

Did you go by yourself?

By myself. And the lady picked me up at the Victoria Station. And I had to have a flower in my lapel. And she recognized me.

And you said your English wasn't that good.

No, my English wasn't-- I hardly knew any English. But she knew who I was. And she took me. And it was in Norwood. It was south of London.

Was it difficult for you to say goodbye to your parents, and your sister, and brother?

No, not then. That was not a final goodbye. We're just going for a vacation then. And it was no-- oh, I'm sorry. And then I was there.

And that's how I learned English very fast, because if I wanted to get anything to eat, I had to ask for it in English. All these people are sitting around the table grabbing the food. It's a boarding house.

Also, I went to the movies a lot. And in the movies, you learn English. And I watched the movies. And it was great in the movies. They had an organ, and you sing along, and all that stuff.

And I walked by myself around London. And I had to speak in order to find my way home, and things like that. And I walked from Norwood to London Bridge all by myself. They were worried about me. I just kept on walking.

It was a long way. And I saw London Bridge. And it was unbelievable. My eyes were popping. I saw so many new things. And I really wanted to learn more about the world. There was a lot to see. And--

How long did you stay there?

I stayed there for a month or so. And then what happened-- my mother, with her sister, came to London. And without telling my father, she enrolled me in the school over there. He was angry with her when she got home.

But she did it on her own. She enrolled me in the school. And I left. I never went back home. I went to school.

And actually, when I went to school, it was the Ewell Castle School in Surrey. And when they took me to school, school hadn't started yet. She had made all the arrangements. It was a boarding school. And--

What were your thoughts about not going back to Germany then?

That's what my mother said I was supposed to do. I did what I was told. I didn't have any thoughts about it at all.

You didn't feel bad about not going back--

No.

--to your friends and your family?

Not really. I made new friends. It was exciting, new things to do. And it was great. It was in a castle.

And there were kids there, especially one boy in particular I remember. It was a Jewish boy from Israel-- from Palestine, in those days. And he and I became bosom friends.

He was already there, too, before school started. And he also loved to-- I was a pretty good tennis player really by that time-- very, very. For a boy, I was an excellent tennis player.

Were there are many Jewish children in the first boarding house, that one that you were in for a month?

None. I didn't know any Jewish children. None. English.

Was that difficult for you to be the only Jew?

No, not at all.

Did they give you any difficulty?

No. In England? No, not at all. No, not whatsoever. I don't think they even knew the difference between Jew and not Jew in England. It was just very nice.

And on the contrary, it was very early on that I learned that people, even in different countries, if they spoke a different language, were very much like a people in my country. The young people, too-- the same things made them tick. And they wanted to do the same things.

And they loved sports. And they loved to do things. And they loved girls, and loved all kind of fun things, and cars, and things like that. And those were all the things I loved. So I got along very well.

This is a continuation of the interview of Wolfgang Mueller. It's tape one, side B. And we were talking about your time in England. And your mother had come over and enrolled you after that month in the school.

Right. And then school started. And it was a military type school. We ate there, wore uniforms. And we used to go jogging every morning across country. And I was a very good runner, and I loved that. And we did a lot of running.

And then I learned to play cricket. I learned all these new sports. And of course, I played soccer. I was a goalie for my school.

And then I traveled all over England and represented my school. And I played tennis. And I was a big shot. And I had a great time. And I learned English.

Now, all this time, things were happening back in Germany. How aware of those events were you?

I must tell you that I was not aware. I don't know whether it was subconscious, I didn't want to know, or I was just too busy with my life.

And as a matter of fact, occasionally during those times, I did go back to Germany on vacations. And I went back to Germany two or three times during this period that I was in England. And of course, by this time, I could speak English.

And then I pretended that I was English, and that I wasn't Jewish. And I spoke English. And that took care of that problem.

And did you see a change in conditions when you went back to Germany? Did you sense a tightening of restrictions?

There were-- I knew that it was more dangerous to be Jewish. I was aware of that.

How were you aware of that?

Oh, it was already-- the way the Nazis did it, they conditioned you for it. I got conditioned to it like everybody else. In other words, we just conducted ourselves in a way that we stayed out of trouble.

And of course, for me, it was very easy because I spoke English. And then I just-- I was English. When I was around Germans, I spoke English.

Did you pretend you didn't know German?

I don't know. Maybe I did. We spoke English, like my sister. I remember my sister and I were sitting in a restaurant. She knew English, too. She had been to England.

And we stayed in England. And they waited on us. And we were pretty sure Jews couldn't go in there. But we talked English. And it was great. We were foreigners.

Did you miss your brother and sister when you were at school in England?

Well, yes, no. Not that much. Not that much. I was busy. I was busy. Really, I was busy with my life. And so many exciting things were happening. You see, then the groundwork was laid in that time for me to come to America.

Well, what happened was I left Cranbrook. And I was enrolled in a better school. My mother took care of that, too. She came back to England, to London. I saw her in London. And she put me in the Cranbrook school in Kent, which was a very fine school.

Your previous school was called?

Ewell. Ewell. It was near Epsom. It was more of a-- for younger children. And this was more almost like a junior college-- very, very. As a matter of fact, they have a campus in this country somewhere, a very famous art place.

In Michigan.

Yeah, in Michigan. And that's where I went. And my mother wanted me to-- only the best.

What was your relationship with your father during this time? It sounds like your mother was making all the arrangements. What connection did you have with your father?

But I really liked my father a lot better than my mother. You see, my mother always made me do a lot of things that were a little bit harder to do. But my father, he-- even as a little kid, I used to go to my father's office, and play with the typewriters, and stuff like that.

And my father, he was a different kind than my mother. And he was much easier to be around. My mother was not easy to be around. She was demanding. She was a demanding person.

How was your father's practice affected when you would go back to visit and conditions were changing in Germany?

My father was unbelievably busy during those years. Because of the connections that he had, he started to become in the local area there the focal point of the whole Jewish community, because he was the one that could get them out of the concentration camps. And he could get all kinds of permits for Jewish people.

And they really rallied around him. And one of the reasons that it took him so long to leave was because he felt that he had a responsibility there. He was also making lots of money.

How did he get that position? Was he elected to that? Or he just assumed that position?

It was just his personality. And like you said, he knew the chief of police and the district attorney. And he had that way with him that he could get along terrific.

He was actually a country boy from Westphalia. But he was also very highly educated. He was an intellectual. So he really knew how to handle himself. And they all liked him. And he had a down-to-earth way with him.

And as a matter of fact, the chief of police of Hanover-- like I told you, the director of my high school called him. Everybody knew him. And the chief of police from Hanover-- my brother told me this. I didn't know.

My father told me. He said, he called him in 1938, I guess, or whatever it was. And he told him, Ernst, if you don't leave, we're going to have to come and arrest you. You better get your boy and get out of here.

And he called his relatives. I'm jumping ahead of myself. But he called his relatives in Paris. He had cousins in Paris. And he said, I've got to leave, and I can't take a thing with me. I don't have a thing I can take with me.

They said, just go. At that time already-- that was after the Kristallnacht-- my mother was already here. They said, just go, and take your boy to England. We'll take care of you. Don't worry. We've got plenty of business interests in England.

And he did go. And it was so fast-- the blitzkrieg, the war after that-- that the whole family in Paris was arrested before he really got settled in England. And he almost was interned as a German alien in England.

But he told them in London that he knew where all the airports were in Hanover. He went to the police. And they let him go.

A lot of my other uncles and things, and cousins, were interned in England. So my father managed also to survive. And

my mother was here at that time.

Back to before that time, you had said earlier, before you left for England, that you didn't want to say, heil, Hitler to your teacher. And the principal called your father. Why didn't you want to say, "heil Hitler"? What did it mean to you?

Well, I knew that Hitler was somebody that wanted to kill Jews. He threatened. The Nazis were singing songs about Judenblut should run in the streets, and things like that. But I was not that stupid. I didn't want to be killed.

Yeah. Did any of the friends, the schoolmates of yours, taunt you for not saying, "heil Hitler"?

Did they say, "heil Hitler"?

Did they taunt you? Did they criticize you, make it difficult for you because you didn't say it?

No. No. I don't know. No, I didn't have that kind of a problem. The friends that I had, the Jewish friends that I had, they were Zionists at that time. I was a little older then. And I was already exposed to Zionism then.

You see, I was in this Jewish Boy Scout movement from the Jewish community center. And a lot of them were Zionists and stuff like that. And I was active in that.

And so I started to know about Palestine and the other things. And one friend, the older brother of this one friend of mine, he had left on his bicycle, and going to Czechoslovakia. And he was going to Palestine.

Did he make it?

Yes. That's another story. Maybe that'll come later. It's a very exciting story.

Were your parents Zionists?

No, not at all. Just the opposite. Just the opposite. German.

How did they feel about your being in a youth group?

Well, there were no discussions, no political discussions in our house. Anyway, everything was what my father said. That's how it was. My father was the boss, what he said. But my mother, she didn't agree with him. But she did it behind his back.

I remember I was back in Germany on a vacation. And my mother wanted me to take some money out of the country, put it in a bank in England. And my father would have killed her. It was strictly-- he wouldn't bend a rule or something, Nazi regulation, for anything.

So I made a hole in my tennis racket. I took the back of my tennis racket, and I put the money-- I had a room upstairs in our house. And I put the money into the tennis racket. Then I put the back back on it, put the leather thing around it. And I carried the tennis racket in my rucksack.

And I was sure, when the guards came on the train and they asked if I had anything to declare that time when I was going back to England, that I was going to be-- like dogs can smell you when you're scared. I was terrified, but I made it.

And then, even after I got to school, I hid the money for weeks, months. I was afraid that spies would know that I had that money before I called this person that my mother knew in London. There was a banker that I had to take the money to.

How much did you give you?

I don't remember, but it was a few thousand dollars, I guess.

That was a substantial amount.

Yeah.

So you're now at school in England. And you're going back and forth to see your parents and your family.

No, not back and forth.

Well, I mean to visit.

Yeah.

Did your parents have-- or did your mother have any idea of sending your brother or sister along with you?

I'm not sure. There was very little discussion. My trips over there were so short. And then I would tell stories about England. And they would sit and listen to me. And they would laugh.

And I would travel to my grandmother's and to my aunts' [? And other parts- ?]. I had a good time. And I wasn't really too much into what was going on. But whatever it was, it wasn't any good. And I wanted to get out.

So it was not hard for you to leave Germany to go back to England after your vacation.

Oh, no. I loved it. I couldn't wait to get out of there. It was a terrible place then, the way they were with the Jews. And it was getting worse all the time. And--

Did you see any restrictive signs on stores?

I think I did. But I don't-- it wasn't-- it's very hard. I've read plenty of stuff since then. And all this has been explained in the literature. But unless you have experienced it, it's very hard to describe.

Like I just told you earlier, the Jewish people that lived there were conditioned to it. They had a way. They were so smart, those Nazis.

I have a lot of stories that I can probably tell you later about what happened to my grandmother who stayed there until they were finally sent to the camps, and how they still-- and I just read again in the calendar that I got from the Holocaust Museum about Theresienstadt, Terezin, and how they were told that that was really a good place. You're going to pay a little more, and they could, 'cause it was a very special place to go to.

And everybody rationalized everything, that it was really going to be OK. Nobody actually would believe rationally that their lives were really in danger, that people would actually take and slaughter people. And you know how people could rationalize that once they were discriminated against like we were.

And I was very much aware of the discrimination. And I don't want you to think that I wasn't. And I always-- just like my father before me, and probably for generations Jews before me, I was very good to deal with discrimination. I was very, very skilled. And I think I am still that way, even in this country in my daily life.

What do you mean, skilled?

I'm very skilled in--

What do you mean by that?

--getting along and trying to make the world think that I'm just like everybody else. That's what I mean. That's being skilled in dealing with discrimination. But of course, today, my attitude has changed totally.

What I felt as a little boy, I am that way very strong today, very, very strong. I am very, very right-wing Jewish today, very strong. I'm a hawk. I don't like Arafat. You know what I'm talking about?

Yes, I do.

OK.

Yeah. You're talking about the visit of Arafat to the museum. Is that what you mean?

Well, it's one of the things I'm alluding to. Yeah. And yet the Jews in Germany, they rationalized so much about what was going on.

My father was such an intellectual, such a reader. He read everything. He knew everything about Zionism, and about Maccabees, and about Jews, and about Jewish history. And he knew everything about everything.

But they rationalized. They rationalized how everything was going to be OK, and how we have to get along, and how we have to make it go, and how Israel is never going to-- that's never going to work, how the Jewish state in Israel never work, and things like that. I've heard all that stuff. I've been weaned on that. Believe me.

So you were in England until what year? Until when?

1936 I came to America.

How did those arrangements get made?

OK. In Cranbrook, there was tuition, a lot of tuition. And my father-- the Nazis had the Devisen regulations. It was not permitted to send German marks out of Germany. So even though my father was the way that I said, he was still a Jew. And he knew how to get along.

And he knew about a man in America who also was a very distant relative on my mother's side, and who also had been the son of the rabbi in Paderborn where my father had gone to cheder. When my father told me about it, he said, when he was a boy and he went to the rabbi's study to cheder, there was this German school cap hanging on the mirror. And that was Max's cap. And Max had gone to America, the rabbi's son.

So your father had a religious upbringing then.

Of course. Of course. He was a Jew. He was a Jew very much. Not religious, he was a German Jew. That's all the children. The Jewish religion, they pretended the Jews-- that it was a religion.

You're Jewish, it's like being Christian. You just had-- you just don't believe in Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ is very nice, too, and everything was all right. But the Jews don't have that. But they didn't-- [COUGHS] excuse me.

They weren't afraid, like Eastern Jews, of a program. You see, the Eastern European Jews were already persecuted. They were used to persecution.

During my father's lifetime, there wasn't any persecution. There was social discrimination against Jews. In other words, the people of the class of professionals that my father belonged to-- they really didn't like Jews that much.

But certain Jews, they had enough money. They could get along very well. And that's the way it was. That's just like it is here today.

So my father knew that Max Nordhaus, who lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico and was the president of a big company, was supporting two old ladies that had taken care of his parents when they had gotten old in Germany. So he corresponded with Max and made arrangements to send the money to the old ladies. And Max sent the money to me in London, in Cranbrook.

And when the check came, my father told me what to do. When the check came, I had to go to the office and endorse the check. And then my father says, you have to write a note to Mr. Max Nordhaus, and thank him, and acknowledge the check. And I did in English.

And the next time, he wrote to me with the next check. And he said, I want you to get finished in school, and come to Albuquerque, and work in my business. I couldn't wait. I couldn't wait. I was ready.

I was 16 then-- 15, 16 years old. I want to go right now. So my parents decided that was the thing to do. So they sent me. So--

How did your parents distinguish between you and your brother and sister?

Well, my brother was much younger. You see, he was much younger. He was still too young. And my sister-- the boy was first, the firstborn son. I think. I don't know. I don't know. I can't exactly answer that question.

She came a year later, my sister. She came to America a year later. But they wanted to get-- by this time, they knew that she had to go, too.

And I guess they knew that, eventually, they had to go. And my mother, she went. She left before my father. But my father and my brother were still there till the last minute. We were just absolutely very, very fortunate, very fortunate.

So you get this letter from Mr. Nordhaus.

Yeah. And of course, I told my parents. I think I even called them up on the telephone. And I went back to Germany.

So I saw my teacher in school, in English school. And I said, I want to immediately take the school certificate. That was the exam. I wasn't finished with my classes.

But I said, I can do it. I said, I want to do it. I want to take the certificate. And I told him I was going to take German. And math, I wasn't that good in.

But I'd take German. And I'd take English. And I'd take French. And I'm going to pass it. I want to take the certificate. I want to get out of school. I'm going to America.

And my teacher cooperated. He was a fabulous man, CH Osborne. And he took me out of class at that time. And he gave me-- he was an English professor, a fantastic guy. And he gave me reading. And he gave me schedules to do.

And I worked by myself in the library for about a month or so. And then I took the certificate. And then I got out of school and went home. I said, OK, I took the certificate, I want to go to America. See, when you want to do something--

How many other--

You had to be 18 years old to take that.

How many other Jewish children from other countries were with you at the school?

That school in Cranbrook? I don't even know for sure. I don't know for sure. I know I didn't--



Were there other Jewish--

In Cranbrook was this boy that I was telling you about.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Is this the one that you were talking about?

He was a different type of a boy than I was. He was not as athletic, and things, like me. And he was not so--

Is this the boy you were talking about that you would take a walk with and--

Yeah.

--talk about it was a curse to be Jewish?

I had an intellectual relationship with him, but I didn't really know what happened to him or anything.

Did he agree--

Maybe I was too selfish.

And he agreed with you that it was a curse at that time to be Jewish?

Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, there was no question about that. He was from this terrific family in Frankfurt. They were in the jewelry business, I remember. I don't even know what happened to him. I don't even know. I lost track.

What was his name?

I can't remember. I should know. I'm trying right now. I can't remember.

OK, so now you've passed your exam. And what happens?

I might remember his name tonight, but I can't remember it right now. I feel bad that I can't remember, but I can't remember.

We can always add it later. That's OK. So you've passed your certificate.

Yeah, I passed my certificate. Oh, we had to go get the visa. And right away-- it didn't take that long-- my number was called. Max Nordhaus sent the affidavits and everything, all the papers.

My father was very good in arranging all of that. And we went to Hamburg. I still remember sitting in the American consul's office in Hamburg. And they had-- what was the big magazine at that time?

Life Magazine?

No. They didn't have Life yet then. It was Look, I think.

Oh, Look magazine.

Or maybe something else even. But a magazine, and I opened it. And they had this double page of a white convertible Packard. I said, that's what I want. So anyway, I got on the boat.

You went back to your family first--

I went to--

--and then went to--

--Hamburg. And then--

Who came with you to Hamburg?

My father and mother. My mother was very teary and stuff. And she kissed me and hugged me more than I had ever been kissed in my life. It almost made me uncomfortable, kiss me so much. But I just wanted to go. And then--

What month was this?

It was in July, early July, very early, in the middle of the summer.

Of 1936.

Right.

And then, that night, we got on the boat.

Did your parents say anything special to you when you left them?

Well, my father gave me a lot of things. I even have some stuff that he gave me-- advice, and stuff like that, what I should do and things. One of the things he told me, I'll never forget. I always tell everybody.

He says, you're going to America. And you're probably going to be in business, he said, because you didn't go to college or anything. I wanted you always have a college education. And probably that's not going to happen for you.

But he said, you're going to be in business, so I want you to remember one thing. Don't lie to nobody, he says, because a liar has to have a very, very good memory. And he told me, you're not that smart. [LAUGHS] So that was one of the best things I ever got from my father. I never forgot that.

Was it hard to say goodbye to your brother and sister?

No. I hardly remember any of that. I can't remember. It was something that you just don't remember. I just left. They came on the boat, and we had dinner on the boat.

What was the name of your boat?

President Harding. I have a picture of it here. We had dinner on the boat in Hamburg the last night. They could come on board and have dinner. And I had a very good cabin class, or something.

And they left. And they waved. And the boat left. You know, it's really-- I must be a terrible person or something, but I wasn't sad. I kind of-- I don't know.

If you had been in camp and something over there, in school or something, you're kind of glad when your parents leave and you're on your own. At that point in my life, I was so glad to be out on my own. I wanted to prove myself. I wanted to-- you know.

Well, I was sad. They were my parents. And I waved. I stood on the boat and waved. And I was a little bit upset, but not very much.

How did you feel about leaving your homeland? Or did you, at that point, consider Germany your homeland?

Let me tell you something. When I came to America, I never-- well, first of all, I had an unbelievable time on the boat. I had a ball on that boat.

That trip was-- as young as I was, I already had a girlfriend on the boat. And it was wonderful. And she even got off with me in New York. And she showed me New York.

But when I got to New York, the first night I was in America-- I had had a little bit of that already in London, but it was different. When I knew I was in America and I had left Germany behind me, it was like a millstone was off my chest. I was free. I was in a world where it was different. I was free.

I had escaped. I knew I had. As ignorant as I really was of everything, I guess subconsciously I wasn't as ignorant as that. I guess I knew how dangerous and how terrible it was. And I guess I didn't think enough about my-- I should be worrying about my parents, and about my brother and sister, and about all the other people.

But you know something? Everybody-- you can't really worry about the whole world. You have to live your own life every day. You have to be focused on where you are.

And that's what I was doing. I was focusing on being in America and ice cream soda on the corner, banana split, and the gorgeous girls. I couldn't believe it was going on-- and the big buildings.

And we went to the American Express. My father had bought me this Pullman from New York to Albuquerque. But I had a coupon or something. It was paid for in Germany.

And I had to go to the American Express and exchange it for the ticket. Of course, my English was so lucky-- talk in English, with an English accent yet. I had no problem communicating with anybody after all that time in England.

And the girl says to me, well, you can take a plane to Chicago. And then there's a tourist Pullman out of Chicago that you can take into Albuquerque for the same money, which you already paid for. It's very expensive, this passage that you have on a Pullman from-- and you make better time.

And I think one of my interests was I wanted to stay a little bit longer in New York, another few days in New York. And I said, that's what I want. But she said, the only thing is you're going to have to send your bags. I had a lot of heavy bags.

She said, you can't take all that luggage on the plane. At that time, you couldn't do that. You'd have to send that express. OK. I didn't know the difference. It was express collected. My relatives really loved it when they got that big bill when I got there, to New Mexico.

So I did. I took a plane from New York, stopped in Cleveland. And on the plane was this guy with bushy eyebrows, white hair. And I was sitting here. And he was sitting there on the other side of the aisle.

And I could tell he must have been an important man, because there was another man that kept coming to him from the front of the plane. Apparently, he had a typewriter on the plane, writing letters and things like that. And the man started talking to me. And I told him, I just come from Germany. And he was interested in me.

He started asking me questions. And I answered him. And he wished me a lot of luck. He asked me where I was going. I told him I was going to Albuquerque, and all that, with my relatives. He was very interesting.

And then he got off the plane. And about three months later, I went to the movies and saw the March of Time. It was John L. Lewis. I told you the story. It was--

No.

It was John L. Lewis. I met him on that plane. I didn't know who he was, of course. And it was very hot that summer.

And then, when I was on that Pullman from Chicago-- and Chicago, I stayed at the Palmer House. I didn't know-- that's where the taxi took me. Oh, my, I saw Chicago. And I went to the burlesque and all.

And then I went to the American Express again. And I got my tickets. And I found the station that I had to go to catch the train. And it was a several day ride to Albuquerque-- very good accommodation, no problem. And it was so hot.

And I remember it was the election. And Roosevelt, I guess, was running against Lyndon. And the election was going on. And I didn't know anything. And they were shouting, election. And there were people electioneering around there. And I thought it was so cool.

And it was hot, though. And I never saw such heat. When I got off the train, I thought, my god, you could fry an egg right there on the platform it was so hot. But the compartments were not hot. It was nice. I don't know if they had air conditioning, or put fans, all that. It was fine.

So Mr. Nordhaus met you when you arrived.

When I arrived, there was somebody there at the station. His name was Rudolf Dreier. He was a cousin that was a little bit older than I. There was another German guy from Germany that had gone to the-- Max Nordhaus always took these boys as the ones he wanted in his business. And Rudolf met me.

And he told me, well, I'm going to take you over to the house. He says, but I want to tell you Max Nordhaus died. And I had to sent him a telegram when I was arriving. But I forgot to put whether it was AM or PM or something, and something on the telegram. But he was there anyway.

He told me I didn't send the telegram right. So I couldn't believe it. When I got there, he had died. And they didn't even know I was coming. And they were still in mourning.

And they didn't know I was coming. The only way that they finally found out-- because he had written a letter to my father. And they found the letter on his desk in his office. And he told my father not to worry. He was going to take good care of me.