

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Wolfgang Mueller. This is tape three, side A. And you said you were offered-- it's the end of the war. You've been discharged, and you were offered a job back in Albuquerque.

Well, I came back to Wash-- First, I stopped in Kansas and visited my brother in the army. We had our pictures taken together in uniform, and then I made my way back to Washington. And I tried to-- I lived with my mother, and I wanted to get on a boat coming home and everything. I was going to be a writer or do something really fantastic with my life.

And I wasn't going to be a slave to anything and really do something really fabulous. And then my mother knew some really great people, and she introduced me to them, and I applied for all these different jobs. I never did manage to get any of those jobs. I did get one job. A guy promised me in the real estate thing, and that was going to then-- he was going to Florida. And he was going to get me a better job. And then when he came back, I couldn't get together with him. I didn't like what he offered me.

I didn't want to do that. So my brother-in-law, he was in the meat business. But he had rented the slaughterhouse during the war to the Giant food. He got me a job in the Giant food and road and rail cars. So that's the first thing I did, and I got a car. And then the Giant food decided that they didn't need the slaughterhouse anymore so I went to work for my brother-in-law. So that's how I got into the food industry. And while I was working for him, I met my wife, and I got married.

Is your wife from Europe also?

No, she's from here. Her great grandfather is buried in Washington. Unusual, really Jewish. And my Jewish identification got much stronger after I married her. And then I don't know what the hell she married me for. She thought I had money. She liked my accent. I fooled her about that. I didn't have any. So then I worked in the slaughterhouse, and eventually, after both of my children were born, I quit there, and I went in business for myself.

And then I was in the wholesale meat business for myself, and I retired from that in 1976, 1977. And I didn't have much to do so I decided to real estate. So real estate for about 15 years. And then my son-in-law, he stayed in the meat business. My daughter's husband, and he did really well with it. And he sold his partnership in the meat business, and he signed a covenant that he couldn't sell meat for 10 years.

He got paid for that, and he had a chance to buy a fish company. So we were very close, and he said, dad, you have to help me. He was a partner in this other company. If I do this, you think should I do that? Yeah, let's do it. So that was six years ago now, going on seven years. And we bought this fish company in Jesup, Maryland. And we're doing absolutely fantastic. It's very exciting. I'm very, very busy selling fish.

Wonderful.

Because fish is not meat.

[LAUGHTER]

Before we finish, let's talk about some of your feelings. What some of your thoughts are. Do you think you have changed religiously since what you were as a child and a young person? Because of what background you come from?

No, I don't think I've changed very much about anything that way. I think what has changed now is I'm really proud of being a Jew. Really proud.

It's no more a curse. It's no more a curse as you thought when you were younger.

I don't have to be-- and I know I will never be afraid of anything or anybody again. I've been afraid. I mean, in that respect, I've maybe learned something. That's a great feeling. And I think after I went through what I did, and I think

from the stories that I've told you and my feelings, I was never scared of going into business, taking huge risks in business, and making a pile of money, and losing a pile of money. That's never bothered me.

Finding a girl that I wanted and just going ahead and marrying her. Or do whatever I wanted to do. I've done those things. And I really am living a great life, and I think that's the way to live. And as far as the religious part is concerned, I mean, I'm a Jew, and I'm very comfortable in a traditional, Jewish environment. But I'm also a modern person, and I know that I'm not hung up on ritual and stuff like that, on what somebody says you're supposed to do this and supposed to do that. I don't go for that at all.

And like for example, I give you for example. My mother died on January 10, 1970. It was just a few days ago 28 years ago. So I said my mother died 20 years ago. I want to light a candle. So my wife says, well, it's not her yahrzeit. You haven't got a card from the shul. I said it is her yahrzeit. I'm lighting a candle. That's the extent of my religion. I do it my way.

Is it painful for you to think back about some of the sights and smells and sulfur that you saw when you were in these labor camps? Is that painful for you to think about that?

Any kind of stuff-- it's a detached feeling. It's not personal. I personally didn't experienced that, and I think it's an interesting question that you ask. Like for example, when we read my grandmother's letters before she went to the camp and stories in the books, my sister goes to pieces. And she can't stand it. She doesn't want any parts of Germany. I don't feel that way.

I'm not built that way. It doesn't touch me that way at all. It's something that happened, and we have to deal with it. You know what I mean? Whatever it is, it's painful. It's painful. My mother died. My father died. Terrible things happen in life. I've been fortunate. I mean, I have always avoided personal suffering to a very large extent. I've always gotten along really well. But I'm not that way. I'm hard.

Are you hard--

And honest about it.

Are you hard because of what you had to do as a young teenager to leave your family? Do you think that led to it as a contributing factor?

I think in every person's life, there's all kinds of trauma. There was trauma in my life because of the terrible marriage my father and my mother had. And I think that was much stronger to me personally, and these are the things that you're talking about. Of course, all of it contributed to it. And of course, it was a trauma to be a Jew in Germany. But I think it did toughen me. I think I'm so hard because of all these things.

I think that has made me very, very hard. I went to the-- they had a Holocaust thing at Frostburg College, and my granddaughter was a manager of the whole thing, and they had hundreds of people there. It was a huge success. And they had a couple there that was from Schindler's List, and they spoke. And she's done it for several years.

As a matter of fact, the year before, Regina, next door, had been there and talked to them and everything. It's like a terrific thing that she does. Because she's a great girl, my granddaughter. And they did all this stuff, and people talked. And I talked to them. We had dinner with them. And then I found out that they were getting \$5,000 for coming there, and they were getting all the expenses paid, and they do it all the time. And that's how they make a living. What can I tell you? (LAUGHS)

When your children were the age that you were, 14, 15, 16 when things were getting bad in Germany, and you were then-- when conditions were getting bad, and you saw the Hitler posters and so forth. Did that--

You mean, when I was little? My children weren't little.

No, no, no, when your children became the age that you were.

Yes.

When you were going through a difficult time. Did that bring it back to you in time? Did it make you think of your childhood again when your children were that age?

No, no, at that time I was very busy making a living. Very busy. I was working day and night trying to make some money in order to support my family. And I didn't think about that. But I did notice one thing about my children. My daughter in particular. We were in Glen Echo once years ago and they didn't allow Colored people in Glen Echo, and my children were furious.

And they feel like they had those kind of feelings, and my daughter's very, very active in [? Washington ?] Hebrew Congregation. She's on the board of directors and all that stuff. My son-in-law, he's a great guy, but he talks like a terrible bigot. He hates Blacks, and he talks about them all the time. And you should hear how my daughter lies into him. She doesn't stand for that stuff. And my children have a lot of me.

Are your political--

You don't have to tell them. They know. My children know.

Are your political views today influenced by your background?

Well, obviously. How could it not be any other way? I'm certainly for freedom, and I don't believe in vested interests, and things like that. And I believe in a lot of opportunity. I believe in a free country. I believe in everything that the American Constitution believes in. And I would fight anybody for that. And I will not stand for anything, anybody, to step on any of it. Not even a little bit.

You said earlier that you've become more right wing as you've gotten older.

Yeah, I am. I am. I'm definitely for Israel. And I'm for the rights of the Israelis to have a country over there, and I support it in every way I can. And I'm for the Holocaust Museum, and I went to the-- maybe we should finish up on this note. I'm a contributor, and everybody in my family is. We all are strong contributors to the museum.

I had the opportunity to go to the dedication. I was one of the people that was there. The dedication was a terrible day. Were you there? It was raining and awful. And I saw those seven presidents and their wives sitting on that beam there, on the platform. And it was a great day for me, and I said to my wife, you know something? I can't believe it, but we won. And that's how I feel.

Are you comfortable--

At one time, it didn't seem like we would ever win. No, we did. It was a lost cause. I was part of a lost cause. A lost people. A lost cause. For [? Phalen, ?] but it turned around. So now I know that things do turn around.

Are you comfortable when you go back to Germany?

Yes, no problem. No problem at all.

So you don't bring any preconceptions?

No, no, sometimes I think, the first trip in '65 I had twinges of that. I think maybe another trip and my wife and I went for the first time to a little town. And we went to some of these restaurants, and we saw twinges of it. But I see, in this last time, there was this guy that had a bakery shop. And his grandfather already bought his flour from my grandfather, great grandfather. Big, big fat guy. Looks like Jerry Snyder.

So I became friendly with him. We kidded around and laughed and drank together. And then the morning-- I'm an early riser because I'm in the food business and very early in the morning there, I left the town. I went back to the little village, and I looked for him, and he was back in his bakery place baking bread. And we were talking. We're talking German. We talked about a lot of stuff. He traveled all over the world. With a lot in common. And then I thanked him for coming to the dedication the day before.

And he said, yeah. It's very, very lot of insight about what you saying, he said to me. He said, I wanted to come. A lot of the fellows here said that you shouldn't go there for that. But I didn't care. I wanted to come. I wanted to come. And I hugged him, and I thanked him, and I left. But you see, all the people are like that. People have killed.

Do you feel German in any way today?

No, I don't feel German, but I still like a lot of German things. I like good white wine. I like salami. I like it when I'm in a German hotel. I like the service. I like the European way. I feel very, very good with a lot of those things. And yeah, I do. I like a lot of positive things about it that I like. My wife can tell you more about it than I can. But, yes. We have to go.

OK.

We have to terminate it now.

Yes, well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

OK, I enjoyed it. Thank you for taking all this time and trouble. I hope it was worthwhile.

It certainly was. This concludes the interview of Wolfgang [Mueller].