

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Alfred Schnog, conducted by Gail Schwartz on March 10th, 2001 in Washington, D.C.. This is tape number one, side A. What is your full name?

Answer: My full name? Alfred Schnog.

Q: And when were you born, and where were you born?

A: I was born in Cologne, Germany on January 25th, 1931.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family. How long had they been in Germany?

How m -- how many generations back can you go?

A: Well, I know for a fact that the Schnogs lived in the region in Germany, in the Cologne region for several hundred years back. How – how far back, I think probably somewhere in the 1700's is how far we've been able to trace them. I don't know the exact date and we don't know exactly the lineage, who – whose parents they were, but the family goes back at least that far, and probably longer.

Q: What a – what about your mother's family?

A: My mother's family lived in Germany, wa – i-in the region just near Poland. We don't know very much about them. I know only that her grandparents were there, and her parents and of course she was. She didn't know too much of the history beyond that, because her parents died when she was a young woman.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: Who made up your family, do you – did you have any siblings?

A: Yes, I had a sibling, an – a twin brother. There were just the two of us in our immediate family.

Q: What was your father's name?

A: My father's name was Ludwig, my brother's name was Norbert and my mother's name was Margaret.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father was in a trading business in metals and minerals, and during the important years that I'm concerned with in Germany, he was working for a large international trading organization. The name was – or the person who had founded the business, it was named Lisauer(ph). And they had offices in Cologne as well as in some cities overseas, over – overseas to Germany anyway.

Q: Did your mother work?

A: My mother was employed early in her life as a secretary. When she married my father she stopped working and raised a family, so she was generally a housewife, but she worked for many years as a secretary.

Q: Did you have a large extended family in Cologne or in other parts of the country?

A: We had family, we had certainly, uncles and aunts. My grandparents lived in Cologne, in a suburb of Cologne. Deutz was the name of the suburb and they owned

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

a house there and we were frequently over there, obviously. I loved my grandparents, we were very close and –

Q: These are your paternal grandparents?

A: Paternal grandparents. My maternal grandparents had died long, long before I was born, and the only member of that family that I remember was my mother's sister, who was about 10 years older than she was. She lived in Berlin at the time and we went to visit them, but only once and I remember that visit very well, I was quite young, must have been, oh perhaps four years old or five years old at the oldest and it was an interesting visit because as youngsters the two of us was very – were very excited to go to Berlin. We went there and when we walked to the house they had a little dog, and it was a Spitz, I think, terrier. And you opened the door and the dog jumped up on us and we were frightened to death, a fear that I had until I got my own dogs some many years later. But that's the only recollection I have of my maternal relatives.

Q: A-And their names were?

A: Let me see.

Q: It's okay.

A: I may not – I – I should know this.

Q: Well, we'll come back to it, that's okay.

A: Probably remember it later.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about your family itself. Was it a very – your immediate family, was it a very religious family, or a secular?

A: That's an interesting question. As far as I know, we were secular. My – my grandparents, my grandfather was not terribly religious, but my grandmother was, she was quite observant. My aunt, my father's sister, her name was Selma, was also, I think, religious. She – she was a spinster and lived with my gran – my father's parents. My – my mother kept a kosher home and as they have told me that during the Hitler years they became more involved with religion than they had been before because they were s – ostracized by the German community and therefore drew closer to the Jewish community and there was sort of a – a renaissance of religion during that period of time amongst Jews and they were a part of that. Were they – and my mother would not have kept a kosher home if it weren't for my grandparents. She did that for them and for – for my father and then of course, we were brought up in that fashion until we came to the United States much later, which time all that was – well, I wouldn't say all of that was dropped, I think for a few – a few years here I had religious education, and then we sort of drifted away from the formality of religion, and religion not a terribly important thing in our lives.

Q: Do you remember any specific holidays as a – in your early childhood in Germany? Any memories of those?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: Oh yes, I remember very vividly going to temple on Simchas Torah, and the temple is Conservative Orthodox, you know, where of course, the women sat upstairs in the balcony and the men were worshipping downstairs and as children we were with the men, as boys. And I remember that holiday so well because during the service, the mothers would throw candy down from the balcony, and my brother and I did everything we could to gather up as much of it as we could. It was a delight, and I remember it very fondly.

Q: What about home ritual, did you observe the Shabbat or Passover?

A: Yes, we observed Shabbat and it was a kosher f – kosher house, and certainly observed the Passover. And for any child, of course, Hanukkah was the m – was a major holiday and that was always celebrated. And one of the things that I do also remember, going to my grandparents' home, they lived in a – what I could best describe as a – looked like a browns – what a brownstone would look like today. They lived on the lower floors and there was a yard in the back, rectangular yard. It was walled in on three sides, but at the house. And in that little yard, which was just delightful, there was a – always a sukkah. So on the holiday of Sukkos we would go there and I would marvel at all the interesting things that were hung from the sukkah and the – and then we went to temple from there, and so those were my recollections really, of the holidays.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood or were there – was it mixed?

A: I would say i-it -- where we lived it was mixed, very, very much so mixed. My grandparents – Deutz was the – where they lived was a – for I guess going back many hundreds of years must have been kind of a ghetto for Jews, a Jewish – a Jewish area. I -- I don't think it's a ghetto in the common sense today, but it was an area that was populated mostly by Jews, and the synagogue with – the Cologne synagogue was there, the – one of the major ones was right in that area, very near by. So they were more – in a – in a more Jewish area and my parents and we lived in – in a more modern area of – of Cologne.

Q: What – what street did you live on?

A: I remember it very well, it – the name of the street was the univ(ri)ph) – Universität strasse, University street. And we had an apartment on either the first or second floor, I don't quite recall whether i – whether it was right on – no, it was on the ground floor, I'm sure of that. And across the street was a very large park, and – which was very interesting for my brother and I. We would look out of the window on – particularly on weekends and all kinds of interesting things happened. Hot air balloons would be – would be launched from there, and of course there were a multitude of parades, with military music and the – and the Nazi youth and all of that, which was for a child at least, an eye opener, interesting to see. We never really were

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

a part of that, as you would understand, but we could see it all going on. It was quite colorful, and – and interesting.

Q: You were obviously quite young then. Did it mean anything to you to see these Nazi parades with these flags and uniforms? Or what did it mean to you as a young – very young child?

A: Well, we were pretty well indoctrinated as to what the Nazis were doing. Our parents did not keep any secrets from us. And we were – it was there, we felt totally apart from it. We felt as though we were not welcome to join it. This was for Germans and that Jews were not welcome in these – in these circles, or at least in this crowd. And although we looked on it with interest, and possibly as a child with longing to be a part of something, we knew that it was beyond us to be able to be a part of it. Just wasn't possible, and did we feel ostracized by it? I don't think so, not in that way. I think my feelings were that it would be nice if we could be a part of all of this, but no, it was – it was not – it was not to be and there was too much fear attendant to trying to be a part of that. We knew we wouldn't –

Q: Because?

A: We knew we wouldn't be welcome.

Q: How did you know?

A: Well, we had any number of personalized experiences in that – this was a time when we started school, and we were – we went to a Jewish school, which I think

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

wa-was already at that time forbidden for Jews to go to the public schools or to the – to other schools, we had to be in separate schools. And in those schools, walking home from school, we were often chased by Nazi youth. We made it our business to stay out of their way as much as we could because we knew that they would taunt us as we went from school back to home. But it didn't happen all that frequently, just, you know, once – oh, it's so difficult for me to remember how often, but it did – it – all that has to do is happen once and you remember it, as a child. And we did, we just – my brother and I learned how to run very fast and we ran. We went – ran home, and that was that, when they bother us.

Q: You – you used the expression Germans and Jews. Did you not feel German in any way?

A: I didn't have a sense of nationality, not at that age. I kn-knew we lived in – in the country that we lived in, which was Germany, Deutschland, that was our country, but my association was that we were really not a part of it because of our Jewishness. My parents I don't think had that feeling so much. They felt themselves as being German. And – but they made it clear to us how unwelcome the Jews were and I – there were other incidents that I can relate to you where I was – where I recall how they tried to d – to keep Jews out. So, did I feel German? I knew I was there, I had no sense of nationality, I was perhaps too young to have that sense of nationality. I do know that I was very much interested in geography. My parents spoke often of America and

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

that was very interesting for us. You know, where is America and what is happening there, and why is it so great, and – because they made it sound very, very interesting, etcetera. And then we learned ab – all about – my father was – tr-traveled a lot. So when he was abroad and he – all those years, even during the Nazi period, he was traveling in Great Britain and in Holland and he told us about his trips. And this was all very fascinating for us. So, we were in – I never really had a – you – to get back to your original question, I never had a sense of nationality at the time. Fascinating interest with the world and different countries, but no sense of nationalism.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: We spoke German. That was the only language that we knew. Just to step back, which gives you an idea of the – the way I became aware of being a Jew, and how unwelcome we really were, not just from what my parents said, but you would go to shops or look, and you would see signs in the store windows, Jews ungerwurnscht(ph), not wanted. And you felt strange going into those shops, although shopkeepers often didn't care. They – they welcomed you because they – you were after all, a client, you were going to spend some money and they would happily sell you things. But the signs, nevertheless were in the windows and in the doors. One in particular I think goes back. We used to go to a beach on the Rhine and my mother took the two of us, Norbert and myself there quite frequently during the summers and we would enjoy bathing in the Rhine. I wanted to learn how to swim.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

The interesting thing is how they taught swimming in those days, they put the student on a long string attached to its waist and on a pole and just held them there in the water so that they'd learn how to swim. We were too young for that, but we had the wish to learn how and be a part of that. Anyway, we'd go to the – to the beach quite frequently, and it was a lot of fun. Kids love that, and we loved it. Then one day we went and there was a sign, Juden ungerwurnscht(ph) and my mother -- and I s-saw the sign and my mother pointed it out to us and she went to the proprietor of that beach and se – and said, what does this mean? I mean, we've been coming here for years. Oh, oh, no, it – she said, this doesn't apply to you, you can – you can come, but you know, we have to have these signs. So although we – we went, the comfort level of going there suddenly went down several s – degrees – more than several degrees, quite a lot and we learned at a young age that we were somehow different, that because we were Jews, we were not part of the general public in – in Germany. We learned it also when we took trips with my parents on weekends to go to – th-the Rhineland has got many, many interesting historical sites and castles etcetera, which children love to see, and we would go there and often there would be the sign, no Jews allowed. We sometimes ignored those signs and sometimes it was a little too uncomfortable and we just went – did not go there, or my parents chose not to go there. Perhaps they knew where they were serious about not having Jews and where they weren't. The Rhineland overall was not – I don't think the people in the

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Rhineland were all that much in love with the Hitler era, that administration, and many of them did not agree with what was going on. But nevertheless, they had to live their lives and they did what they were told, as all good Germans did in those days, but still found ways to tolerate the Jews who lived amongst them. Except for a few. Obviously there were always those who were rabid Nazis and who you had to stay out of their way of and – and for me as a child, particularly the – the youngsters who were part of the Hitler youth, who made it their business if they did see Jews to at least taunt them, if not physically assault them. I don't remember ever being physically assaulted, but we did lead fairly normal lives as children, aside from this discrimination. My brother and I used to – we found our way to the circus once. When we were supposed to be coming home from school we got on a train and we wanted the circus so badly we hopped aboard a streetcar and went out to the circus. And of course my mother was beside herself, why didn't the boys come home? But those are the kinds of events I think that most children do. You could do this and there was no fear that somebody would harm you and take you away or steal you, or what have you. You could – we – we felt no danger in doing those things. Perhaps my parents were concerned, but my brother and I were not. Then of course, things got a little bit more dicey and –

Q: Okay, we – we'll get to that in a minute. Talking about you and your brother, how would you describe yourself? Were you a – it sounds like you were a little

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

independent child there. W-Were you, or were you different from your brother, or how would you characterize each of you?

A: Well we were – we were close as youngsters, so we did everything together and when we had a desire to do something, at least we had somebody to do it with. So, we were adventuresome. I don't think that we were abnormally risqué. We did the things we wanted to, but we also hewed to being home and – and doing our studies and listening to the things that we needed to, listen to our parents, and when they said ja – do your homework, we did our homework and all those things. So we were not wild, as such, but we had our moments when we wanted to go out and have some fun, and we did.

Q: Were you an athletic child? A physically strong child?

A: N-Not at that age, we were too young. Athletics didn't mean very much at age six, seven, or five. Four, five, six, seven. [inaudible]

Q: I meant you weren't – you weren't frail.

A: No, no, no, by no means. I think we were rather normal in many ways. One of the things that I remember those – those years, was that it was always difficult for my parents to get all the things they needed in the store. Things were in short supply, particularly things like milk, eggs, all kinds of foodstuffs. Germany was not well supplied in those things and there were always shortages and of course we depended on the goodwill of the Christian shopkeepers, or the German shopkeepers and they –

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

as I said before, there were always those who made it their business to help out and we found that – my mother always found means to bring in what we needed to subsist on and all – often – I-I don't remember us starving, I don't remember us having any difficulty in – in getting the things, the substance that we need – the subsistence things that we needed. I do know, I remember my mother talking about how har -- difficult it was to get these things, and there was one event that I guess epitomizes, that we went – we were going to go to my grandparents in Deutz and we – my father loaded us in the car and he had gotten – apparently in – in Deutz my grandparents couldn't get all the food that they wanted and he had gotten some fresh eggs, which were also in very short supply, he got them in our area, or through his friends there. And we had set off and shortly, I think, before or after we got to the bridge that goes across the Rhine to Deutz, a – another car sides – hit us from the side. It was a major blow and I wound up with a cut on my leg and wound up in the hospital, my mother wound up in the hospital with a cut on her scalp. And the only ones who really got free from it – Norbert also wound up with something, but not very much. My father was not injured. But during the time, he was so concerned – you know how nervous one gets when something like that happens, his first thought was oh my gosh, the eggs. And he picked them up and he put them in his pocket. And of course they were all smashed in his pocket. But that gives you the idea of how scarce these foodstuffs were, that he would think of that in a m – in a moment of

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

panic or trauma, to save those eggs to get them to the grandparents, which was the important thing. And we wound up in the hospital at that time, in a Catholic hospital, and it was Passover, and I remember the – the nuns in white habit and also in black habit coming, taking care of us and they were very, very nice, we had a doctor, and I needed some stitches in my leg and it was all done. When they brought up the food, of course, it – I didn't want to eat it. It was Passover, we were taught that Passover has to be kosher and it has to be matzoh etcetera, so I spoke up and I said that to the nuns, and they understood it completely and took care of us and brought us what we – what we would need for that. I do think that the religious institutions, the hospitals, the Catholic church recognized, at least from that experience, recognized more that there were customs that other – others hewed to, and they respected that. I think they respected any type of religion, as long as it was religion. And so I've – I did not feel that we were badly cared for because we were Jews, it was – certainly didn't -- didn't have that feeling at that time.

Q: You said you saw signs, no Jews allowed. What does that mean to a six year old, seven year old that knows how to read? Ho-how did – how –

A: Well, it – it means that you are somehow an underclass. You are not part of society as a whole, you are not seen as everybody else. You ask yourself the question why, but there's no answer. And you ask your parents, and the parents say your – you're Jewish. They explain to you a little bit of the history and of the pogroms and

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

of the many things that Jews have been – how – how often they’ve been the – the object of a pogrom or of discrimination everywhere, and that was in Germany. You know, there was a – there was always an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in Germany, that predated Hitler. So – and as a – as a Jew, you – what is – a Jewish child, you were made aware of that when you were very young. I’d like to compare it today, for instance in United States where you have, if you were a black, you would know from when you were very young, that you are different than the white community, and your parents would tell you about the discrimination, the things they went through. This is the way we were. We knew this when we were young, and so when we saw the signs on the wall, it was just an affirmation of exactly what we already knew or what our parents had already told us. They certainly didn’t hide it.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Alfred Schnog, conducted by Gail Schwartz. This is tape number one, side B, and you were talking about a child’s perception and how you knew you were different.

A: We – y-yes. We certainly were different and we knew also, during those Hitler years that times were changing. We knew that laws or regulations had been enacted, or had been promulgated, and –

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: How did you know, as a child?

A: My parents told us. They were very open. We had a household that was – they kept nothing from us. They assured us of our security and we relied on them for that, and believed that, but they also told us what was happening. They told us of many of the people who had been persecuted who were Jews, who – and there was a lot of persecution, there were people who lost their jobs because they couldn't – couldn't work any longer. Jews were not allowed to have Gentile maids in their homes. All these things happened and we were – we either saw it and we were – or they were – we were told about those things. And I remember as a youngster my father kept a revolver. And of course this was very exciting for two young boys, we always wanted to see the revolver, and my father showed it to us but he never let us touch it, which was terrible, we wanted to get our hands on it. But one day we took our car and we were visiting our grandparents across the Rhine and my father took that revolver with him and he stopped in the middle of the bridge on the Rhine river. And he took it apart and he started throwing pieces of the gun into the Rhine, one after another. And of course we were curious, why? And we learned that we were – Jews were not allowed to have weapons and if we did have weapons there would be dire consequences and he was getting rid of it, and that's it. He was just – he was not going to let the Germans have it, for sure, so into the Rhine river it went. And maybe that was one less gun that was used in the war, who knows. So we – we knew, and

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

we grew up with that, and we went – and when we went to school we – we knew we were in a Jewish school, we knew we had friends, obviously, in the Jewish school. In 1937 - 1938, things got really – they escalated, they – the Germans – the – the rules and the many laws they put forth against the Jews affected us more and more. My father's company was taken over. It was a Jewish company to begin with, Lisauer's(ph), and they – the Germans appointed a – a Aryan company to take it over. And the Jews could continue to work there to show them how to operate it. And my father, that's where my father's employment was, so he continued to work there. But obviously all opportunity for advancement etcetera was gone. And we knew that too. Then – it was at that – during that period of time that my parents said, you know, we can't continue to live here. Perhaps even earlier. And they started to inquire about how they could get out of Germany. It was very difficult. The quota for America was completely full, it was years to wait to get – to get to America, but fortunately my father had connections through his business, in England and in Holland. Particularly in Holland he had good friends, we did a lot of business. And so he started making arrangements to get permission to work and live in Holland, while he was still employed in Germany. We started hearing about concentration camps about that time and we knew people who were either living in the neighborhood, or – or who had come recently from Poland where they had sought refuge in Germany, that the Gestapo came and picked them up and sent them back. And where were they going?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

They were going to concentration camps. Everybody knew there were concentration camps. Certainly all the Jews knew. What happened there that time, we didn't know. They were just taken away. And this was kind of a frightening scenario. My parents, who – I – I – I guess most German Jews who had lived there for many, many years did not fear that they would be taken away one day. It was mostly – at that time, mostly the immigrants that came into Germany from the east, from – principally from Poland who were the subject of this. They didn't – the Germans just picked them up, put them on a train, sent them out. And one day I was in school and it really brought it home to me. We were in the middle of a class, and suddenly some men walked into the classroom, and they started calling out names of our fellow students, and they said come with us, and took them out. And my brother and I, when we got home that day, we asked our parents, this and this is what happened. What happened? And they explained it to us. These were the sons of Polish parents who had settled there and sent their kids to the Jewish school where we were and they had been called by the Gestapo and they had a few hours to get their things and their children together because they were being transported out. This was frightening for a child, you know, to know that you could be in a class, that somebody could come in and order you out, and with your parents you're going somewhere else. You're going out to some – someplace, and of course we knew then that they were going to concentration camps, or –

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: H-How did you know that there were concentration camps in the late 30's?

A: My – my parents knew, I knew it from my parents. And they – they had heard of, or known, I think, friends and acquaintances who had gone, some of them had been released and – at one period or another and they told of the ones that had not been released that had been sent to various camps. So we knew there were concentration camps. How? I only knew it from my parents.

Q: Did you talk about what was happening with friends, o-other boys outside your family? Was this a – a topic of conversation among very young children at the time, or –

A: No, it really wasn't. I don't remember having school friends at my house, for instance, or me being at another student's home. We had recess and we played in the schoolyard together and there we had ballgames and all kinds of things that kids do in the – during recess, but when we went home, we went home and we had our life with our family only. We did not have school friends and schoolmates whom we played with, not at that age.

Q: What about neighborhood children? You said you lived in a mixed neighborhood, did you play with non-Jewish children?

A: No, I don't recall – I don't recall that. I – our time was taken up in going to school, coming back, being with our parents, going with our parents to see our grandparents, going on excursions during weekends, that kind of thing, and I don't

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

recall having any other friends in – neighborhood friends that we played with or that we saw.

Q: As a six or seven year old, were you afraid of your non-Jewish neighbors?

A: No, we were not afraid of them. We were not afraid of our neighbors. We had some very nice neighbors, I know my parents spoke to the people who lived across the hall and as a matter of fact – I know for a fact that one of the – that family lived across the hall, the man was a member of the SA, but he was quite nice. He always made it his business to – he – he ran a grocery store or a butcher shop, I'm not sure which, and when he had something that he could bring, he brought it, gave it to us. So they lived – these Germans lived two lives. They lived one life in which they paid homage to the Nazi party and everything and the trappings that went with that and they heard the stories about how evil Jews were, and yet they could live across the hall from a family of Jews and still find them as decent and honest individuals and work with them. That's the strange part. And – that these people could have promulgated what they did to the Jews and be a part of that is a – something that will always be a mystery. Oh, I have lots of theories on that. [inaudible]

Q: We'll get to that.

A: Right.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: What did Hitler mean to you as a six or a seven year old? Did you hear his – see his pictures, hear his speeches, what – what impressions does that make then on a very young child?

A: Well, we saw Hitler in the way that our parents saw him and our grandparents saw him and their friends, and he was the object of ridicule in the Jewish community. As this – so we – we had zero respect for Adolf Hitler. He was a menace, I think, for all of us in the Jewish community and our parents and our friends. And I had no other thoughts, but you know, Adolf Hitler was not the – we – we knew that was somebody we should not like, and as a six or seven year old, that was about it.

Q: Did you have any nightmares, things like that about him?

A: No, none. None whatsoever. What scared us perhaps was the – th-the police, cause they were so unmoving and so – they had their – now, how can I describe them best? Autocratic. There was no appealing to them, you know, you – you – and in Germany, if some -- if a police officer or – or a [indecipherable] told you something, you did it. There was no appeal from it, it was a person to be feared. And Hitler was just the head of this whole establishment, created these people. Now, police were never the kind of people that I could warm up to, and perhaps it comes from those days in Germany. The authority figure – you know, if you feel that you're doing everything right and you're suddenly faced with a -- a policeman who's telling you, or giving you authority, you – th – there's always that apprehension, what is it that I

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

did wrong? And if I didn't do anything wrong, why is he standing here, you know?

Why is he poking his nose into my business? And that was pretty much it, we stayed away from the police.

Q: Did you see any examples of degradation on the streets, and when you were outside of – degradation of Jews on the streets, you personally see anything?

A: No, I did not. I don't recall seeing anything like that, except for when – well, now, even when they took the children out of school, they didn't forcibly tear them apart or what have you. I -- my first contact with that sort of thing where there was an assault on property or individuals was the night that we left Germany.

Q: Were your parents Zionists in any way? Had they thought about going to Palestine?

A: My mother was an very arch Zionist, she wanted very much to go pa – to Palestine. My father was not so much a Zionist. I think there was a period of time when they would have – they were looking to get out of Germany because they knew that this was not a place for Jews to be living. But their ties to Germany were so strong and so deep and so ancient that they could not – I don't think any – any of them could believe that th – it would lead to a matter of life and death. And as long as they could earn a living, this might blow over. After all, knowledge of assaults on Jews and pogroms had been common knowledge throughout history and this was just another period that they were going through. But as things got worse and worse, they

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

recognized they ought to get out. And then the search started, how do – how do we get out. And I know my parents tried to get out to any number of places, South America, America, even to Africa. I think they tried to go to Rhodesia once, but that didn't work either.

Q: Was this something they kept informing you of, or did you hear about this later?

A: We knew they were – sorry. We knew that they were searching. And my interest in geography I think may have arisen from that search. I don't remember specifically how but I do know that they were not happy. We spent time in Holland and of course that's where we escaped to, really, was to Holland.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And that's a different story. But that's generally what my life was like as a youngster.

Q: When you would see a swastika on a flag or a banner, did it evoke any feelings on your part?

A: Well, it was a sign of the authority, the German authority, and did it evoke any feelings at that time? I don't think so, not at that time. That came a little later, when people started wearing the armband. Then you would sense that they were part of the crowd that really hated Jews and made you feel uncomfortable, didn't – they didn't want anything to do with you, they didn't want you to be part of their lives and so it was a sign that these were – these were anti-Semites. I guess in our own way we

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

knew that the minute we saw that armband it was – they were part of that authority in Germany that we feared. Some time in 1937 – 1938 it became absolutely clear to my father that they had to get out. And my parents, because of his contacts in Holland, made arrangements to seek permission to work in Holland. And since his company had an office in Amsterdam and he had friends, his business acquaintances were very close friends in Amsterdam, that was a logical place to go. So they – my father had a – a – he's told me these stories. His company was involved in international trading, and as such, they had special permission from the Reichsbank to travel and to make deals in – abroad. And my father, being a young man at the – at that time was the one who was assigned that task, to go to Holland and to England, etcetera. And he used this permission, which was in letter form, to travel rather freely. And he would use that for – to gain permission to enter the -- England or Holland, etcetera. So while he was over there working, he made arrangements to obtain the permission to work in Holland, which he did. And when he came back they – and made the final decision that their – they were leaving, they said well, we have to go to Holland. We have to find a place to live. We have to see what's going on, let's take a month or so. We're going to go and we're going to make these arrangements, then we'll come back and wrap up everything we have and bring it to Holland. So in the summer of ni – of 1938, we went by car and my father had his papers with him, so we got – arrived at the Dutch border and we were stopped. Now, do you have anything to declare, this ca

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

– you know, at the German side. And the Dutch side was – they were standing, they were wide open, no problem over there, but – and my father said no, we don't have anything to declare and they said, how about the boys? Why are you leaving? And my father said to them, well, you know, they -- we have polio in – in Cologne. And it's the summer, we want our children to be safe from that, we – oh, so you have polio in Cologne? Well, that means your children were going to have to get a health certificate, because we can't let you go across the border. Obviously we can't allow polio to spread. Course they knew we were Jewish – Jews, the passports had all been stamped with a J, so they knew. And my father said well, how do I get these permissions to get across to Holland, th-the health certificate? They said oh, you can't get them, you might just as well go back. And he said no, how can we – then he insisted. He said, well you have to see the [indecipherable] I guess, the county executive or whatever in that area and he can do it. Well, where can I find him? And he said well, he's in such and such a town, whatever. And my father took off to get that. In the meantime we stayed there at the border with my mother and they tore our car apart. Literally went through everything to see whether we had anything at all. And as my mother tells it, we had – we had gotten some gifts from some friends or relatives in Switzerland, the coats and hats and my Aunt Selma had put some perfume in the hatband, and they found that, of course, and confiscated it, which made Norbert and I very upset that they would take that away from us. And my

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

mother said, don't you worry about it, whatever it is, we can replace it. Let them have it. And we waited for my father to come back. Well, as the story goes, my father told me, he said he went to see him and he was occupied somewhere and insisted he go in and see this county executive, and he walked into his office, and he gave him a quick heil Hitler. And he said, why can't I go across the border, I have my children, they have – we have polio in – in Cologne and they insist on having the certificate. And so the fellow said well, you know, if you don't mind, you know, they – they have polio here in Holland. If you don't object to your children being exposed to that, then why should we, and he signed it, gave it to him. So he came back to the border and there we were, everything had been stripped and taken and it was quite late by then. And the – the Germans were furious, of course, that he had come up with the certificate, they didn't want him to – didn't want to give him that opportunity that – to leave. And even though it was very late, the – and the Dutch border supposedly had closed. So they thought that maybe this was all over, we couldn't get in any more. And the German said, okay, you can go, with a smirk on their faces, I guess, knowing that the other side was closed. Well, lo and behold, they started drive across and the Dutch opened the border and they said, what was going on there? And they said, you know, we seen a lot of this with Jews. We kept the border open for you. So the Dutch were extremely decent and wonderful people and we went over and for the next month or

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

six weeks we stayed in a – kind of a resort town on the beach, and – in Holland.

Sunfort was the name of the reso – the – the beach town.

Q: While you were waiting for your father, do you remember that, and what did you

–

A: Oh, yeah –

Q: – and your brother do? Was it a fearful time? Did you think your father was maybe not going to come back?

A: I don't remember my feelings. I think we trusted our parents explicit – implicitly and had no concern that he wouldn't come back. We just waited. I had – honestly I don't remember. You know, those are things that they leave. I remember – I remember the – the searching and I remember the fact that they took these silly little bottles of perfume, and just waited, and then off we went. And we – when we were in Holland, my pa – we were at this resort and my parents put Norbert and I into a – I guess best described as a summer camp, my – which we enjoyed because it was beach, it was the ocean right there and –

Q: Did you know Dutch?

A: No, I didn't speak any Dutch. And my parents said – made certain arrangements, they got whatever necessary arrangements they needed to make in order to – to make their final move, and asked our friends to find an apartment for them. And they were going to go back to Germany and pick up their things and head off. And they said,

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

you know boys, I think you should stay here. Because at that time things were really getting bad, it was difficult to get money out of Germany, couldn't be done any longer. And they didn't want to put us in harm's way. But my brother and I became absolutely hysterical. We didn't want to be separated from our parents, and we raised quite a ruckus. So much so that our parents said well, we'll take you back, we will somehow manage. Something happens to us we'll all go through it. And we actually went back to Germany.

Q: You boys were seven and a half at the poin – at this point.

A: That was, that time seven and a half years old, exactly. So back we went to Cologne and my parents at that time wrapped up what they could. They sent their bookcases and some f-furniture, books mostly because they loved books, they loved reading, so this was very important for them that they bring their bookcases with them, and sent them off with the moving van. And my father got tickets for – no, he didn't get tickets there, they ... he made whatever final arrangements had to be made t-to – to get out. And when the furniture was moved, happened to be on November eighth, and out we went, the apartment was empty. So we went over to see – to – to live in hotel for one – for one night because the next day we were taking the train, and we were [indecipherable] we were going to Holland. So we went over to the Dome Hotel, which was right across the street from the cathedral in – in Cologne. And the Dome Hotel is situated on one of the main shopping streets in the city of

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Cologne, narrow shopping street. And we went to sleep that night, my brother and I. I remember that my parents were there in – in our room as well and at four o'clock in the morning my brother and I were awakened by my parents.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Alfred Schnog. This is tape number two, side A, and you were talking about how you were in the hotel.

A: Right. Well, we were in the Dome Hotel, my brother and I went to sleep. And sometime in the middle of the night we were awakened by my mother. And she said boys, come here. And we got up and she took us to the window of the hotel and stood us between the drapes so that we could look out on the s – onto the street. And down below was this noise of shattering glass and – and we looked down and we saw these uniformed individuals, the brown shirts, throwing rocks into the window of the store that was just across the street from the hotel. And there were others inside the store throwing porcelain and glass out on the street, just piling it up, just heaving it out. And I remember the – in the glow of the streetlights, in the yellowish glow of the streetlights and the cobblestone streets and all this stuff just shattering as it hit the floor. And my mother said to me – sa-said to us, boys, she said, take a look. Never forget what you see here. And of course we wanted to know what was happening and we asked what's happening, and she said, that's a Jewish store. One of the finest stores in crystal and everything and they're just destroying it. Well, we didn't know – what we didn't know was that not just there, but everywhere, this was going on in Germany and this was the night that the synagogues were all burned and the – what

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

we didn't see, the – the Jews being rounded up and being ostracized and as they were dragged down the streets and all these things. These were things that we learned only afterwards. But we did see the carnage that was taking place across the street from this hotel and down this – this whole street. And in – it's something that I don't think I can ever forget, the image of it is so vivid in my mind, the whole thing, it's – it was the first time in all those years that we actually saw violence. We had seen and we had feared all the other things, but this was true violence. And it – and you know, I've read a lot about these things since then. The Germans claimed afterwards that it was an uprising on the part of the German people against the Jews. Just remembering all those people in uniform, it was no uprising of the people in, I mean it was the – it was the – the Hitler youth, the – the SA, the brown shirts and whoever else wanted to participate in this, did this. Anyway, in the morning my parents took us to vi – say goodbye to our grandparents, who were just across the river in Cologne. And the grandparents said, my God are you still here? Get out, get out. And then we learned of the carnage that had been happening the rest of the city, and obviously what was happening all over Germany at the time. The synagogue had been burned, the people had been dragged out of their homes and they made fun of them as they – down the streets and what have you. Elderly people, and – and they sent us off. They shoed us out, but quickly, and said get out. And so my parents went directly to the train station from there and we got on the train to go to Holland. There were a lot of other Jews on

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

the train. Many of them had come from the east, finding their way through. And some of them had, as we found out a few days later, some of them who were actually on their way to emigrate to the United States were also on the train. And the train took off. What we didn't know, which we learned shortly thereafter is that the Germans has sealed the borders everywhere. And we arrived at the Dutch border. Police boarded the train. All Jews, out of the train. And we were all taken out of the train, all our baggage off the train, put on a cart, a horse drawn cart without a horse, and we were marched to a jail. Best thing I could describe it as, and locked up in a – in a room. I remember the room vividly, there we-were quite a number of people in that cell. And I remember the green door and the bars on the door and the window and the toilet in the open, which was to be used by everybody there and of course as children having to use the toilet in front of all these people was something we didn't like, and I remember the-they shielded us when we had to do so. And we were there for a period of time, I'm not sure how long. My father had some papers with him and in – it – and he was concerned that the Germans might see those papers and misinterpret them or find them, and he ate them. And for my brother and I, this was a marvel to see. I think maybe made a big impression on us more-so than even going to jail is that my father would eat paper. And these are – it's funny, the things that you rec-recollect. And sometime within that day or the next day – it seemed to me it was

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

just one night that we spent there, but my parents have often said it was almost a week, and I don't recall that. I think it was just – I think it was just that – that night.

Q: Were – were there other children, or were you boys the only ones?

A: I believe we were the only boys. There were a lot – there were other people in that cell, in that room. Some of them were single men and single women, you know, these were groups. Husband and wife maybe, perhaps families as well. And at one point I guess we had – my father had an opportunity to speak to the commandant there of – whoever he was. And he explained to him that he was traveling here on business. He had this document from – still – the Reichsbank, and that he had – was going to Holland to bid on some very important materials which were needed for the – the war effort in Germany or for the military, and they couldn't keep us incarcerated because he had to get on with this business. And the man apparently told them well, you know, I have to see – I – first thing I have to do is feed 3,000 Jews. He said, we'll take care of you after that's done. But apparently, coincidentally, the – there was a ship sailing from Holland for the United States which had booked passage for about a thousand Jews who had permission to come to the United States. The Aidam(ph) was the name of the vessel. And apparently this was made known to the German authorities there and they didn't want to create a situation – at least we think they didn't want to create a situation where there would become known that they prevented Jews from leaving. It would have been politically unwise, maybe created

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

too much of a public relations problem for them. So they decided to let those Jews who had that passage booked, and pay for us to go to Holland to catch that ship, it was sailing from Holland, to go. And my father said, well look, I have my papers for Holland. Didn't have any passage on that ship or anything like that. And somehow he managed to get us in with this group to go to Holland. And it was just, I think, good fortune. There was a point just before we went into this jail where we – where my mother and father were told by the – whoever was leading us to this ersatz concentration camp that they had put up, or that – this jail where they were going, where they were apparently separating or segregating people, where they were going to put them and what have you, assign them to some rooms. And they said to my parents, they said look, you will go to a concentration camp where you will be safe. Your children will go to an orphanage. And of course the minute Norbert and I heard this – and I recall that too – we started to raise the roof because we were not going to be separated from our parents. This was – we were just, I guess frightened. And I mean, really scared that we might be separated from them. And my mother said, children calm down. Nobody is going to separate us from anybody. Before that happens, I will take your lives and mine right here. And she made it known, she was very distinct about it, and she always carried a – through her lifetime she always carried a paring knife, which she used to peel apples, cause she loved apples. And she was fully prepared to take that knife and cut our throats and her own throat so that

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

that wouldn't happen. And it wasn't so strange, because there were people who attempted suicide in that jail because they had lost everything, they knew they were going to be sent to a concentration camp, back where they came from. And there were any number of suicide attempts, some of them perhaps successful, I don't know. Anyway, that was – in that moment, I don't know what made the Germans say forget about it, or go on with your – the way I heard it my mother said, go on, take your brats and get out of here. I'm not sure that that was the case, cause I don't remember that, but it could very well have been. And we went – we were then on the train with all these other people, or we went to the border with all these other people to cross to go into Holland.

Q: Do you know where the jail was located?

A: No. Oh, wait a minute ... I don't have a recollection of it.

Q: Okay.

A: It was on the Dutch border, obviously, I – I don't know where. But we got to the border, my father telephoned across and got ahold of his friend and said look, we're here, get over here fast. We've got to get out of here. And they – they came, they picked us up and took us to a – an inn, I guess, in Holland, where for – I remember my parents telling me the Dutch couldn't have been nicer. They saw us, they knew what had happened, they'd asked all kinds of questions about us. They laid out – they had a table of food, that was the food – the kinds of things they – my parents hadn't

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

seen in – in years in Germany. And their eyes opened and – and they had even put us in a hotel, they had drawn the water in the tub, hot water so they could take a bath because they apparently had been – it was a few days before we got out of that jail to get across, and it was just a tremendous relief to be out of Germany, and to f – and be in Holland and feel reasonably safe that this was not going to – that we were going to survive this – this thing.

Q: Had you brought anything special with you as a youngster, special possession?

Toys or books, or anything special?

A: I don't recall that we did. We had some toys and my parents, I'm sure put them onboard the moving van when it left Germany and I'm sure that it arrived in Holland and that we played with them, but it – I didn't – don't remember carrying anything with us of that nature. What I do remember is the – sitting in the hotel with – being fed this wonderful food. I'd never eaten fish or I didn't like fish and my parents were offering me Dover sole, my God, I'd – I'd kill to have that t-today, I still do, I love it, you know. But in those days, as a kid, you didn't want to eat that stuff. And you know, as – wonderful stories. My parents wanted us to learn Dutch as quickly as possible. And they had, in the period of time between when we came back from Holland the first time in Germany, and then left finally to leave, they had taken Dutch lessons from a teacher, local teacher who came over and taught them some Dutch. And we were sitting on a couch, and behind me on the couch, on the wall was

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

a – a string with a – that you could pull and it would ring, it would send off a bell for room service, or for somebody to come. And we had finished eating a meal and my parents wanted the hotel to know that so they could come and clear the dishes, and in – I guess it's in Dutch, the name for a bell is like English, a bell. And in German bell – belling is to bark, like a dog. So they turned to us, turned to me and they said bellmal(ph), or you know, ring the bell. And I looked at them kind of strange, I said, what do you want me to do? They said it again and I said bow wow. Which was the only thing I understood. Well, it was the hilarity of that moment and the relief of being – of having gone through what they had just experienced and gone through, that created a moment of just pure joy. And we laughed so heartily, all of us, and I – course I did – first I didn't know what they were laughing about, but then, you know, the explanation of it all was even – was quite a good deal of fun for me and – and – and that's how – that's how we got into Holland. And – and shortly thereafter we moved into an apartment which our friends had gotten for us in Amsterdam in a very, very lovely area. And – and we, my brother and I went to school there, a Jewish school in Amsterdam. Very, very strict Orthodox Jewish school. We – I remember my parents – my mother sent us off to school on the first day with sandwiches, and they had meat on the sandwiches. And so we got there and it was time to go out lunch to eat and they discovered that we had meat on the sandwiches and my brother and I were made to go outside and eat them there because they were kosher and God

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

forbid somebody would contaminate their kosher atmosphere with our meat sandwiches.

Q: Now, we're talking December '38?

A: This was in – probably November, or di – maybe December, yeah, by that time we were settled, it was December, or j –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so when I came home I told my parents never to send me to school again with a sandwich that had – I think it was pot roast, which I loved, on it, you know, i- it had to be vegetarian or – or some milk substance, cheese or whatever. And –

Q: Were there many immigrant children, you know, non-Dutch Jews – Jewish children in your school?

A: Not that I know of, no. There were – th-the children I came in contact with were all Dutch and we learned very, very rapidly the language from them. My brother and I spoke Dutch fluently within a matter of weeks. An-And Dutch is not such a difficult language for somebody who speaks German. So we learned it very rapidly and I remember having some of the struggles when you used to sometimes mix my German words with Dutch, but that was all gone very, very rapidly. And we loved Holland, because it – we lived in a – we lived on the Zuideramstellaan, which today is known as Rooseveltlaan. They changed the name. A big, wide boulevard, divided into four lanes, I guess, three or four lanes. And there was a streetcar in the front and

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

it was wonderful for my brother and I cause we could walk around the corner and rent bicycles. And, you know, for a child the first time to have a bicycle is a lot of fun and these were dreadful bikes when you think about it in terms of what a modern bicycle looks like, but they were, nevertheless, a lot of fun. And then it was wintertime and the canals were frozen and you could go and skate and we went to see that and I remember that so vividly, people skating as far as they wanted to. And not anywhere did we as – s-see a sign Jews were not wanted. No place in Holland. Didn't exist. [indecipherable]

Q: What did that do for you?

A: Hm?

Q: What did that do for you?

A: Well, it was just – I don't know whether I was – that I even thought about it. I think it was I just took it for granted, that this was Holland, that it was – we were – it was different. There were – there were no military marches, no – no police that – or Hitler youth that would march around and wave their flags. It was just – didn't exist.

Q: Did the Dutch Jewish children accept you?

A: Yes, they certainly did. We had no trouble getting along with the Dutch Jewish children. My parents were able still, in 1938 - 1939, shortly after they arrived in Holland, to get my parents – my grandparents out of Germany. Now, we know that they must have left without anything, because – at least my grandparents must have

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

left Germany with nothing in their pockets, to speak. We know that – well, the Germans made the Jews pay for all the damage they – they caused on Kristallnacht, that's history. And they weren't allowed to own property, they weren't – things became so oppressive for Jews that my grandfather, I'm sure, sold his house for a pittance at that time because there was nothing else he could do with it. Whether he could even take the money with him to get it out, I don't know, I have no idea. But they managed to get them to Holland, and they had an apartment in Amsterdam, not too far from where we lived. My brother and I used to bicycle down to their place. As a matter of fact, a-about 10 years ago it is now that I was in Amsterdam, I went to see where we lived, which I r-re-remembered. I've been there recently too, and I actually took some pictures of that. And I could find my way still, to my grandparents home, it's so well ingrained in my mind. My parents, the moment they arrived in Holland said well, we've got to start thinking about a little – getting even further away from Germany and finding a – another place to go because if it can happen there, it can – might happen here. We just don't feel secure. It was not just that, it was also, I think for economic reasons. You can imagine all the Jews that wound up in Holland, all seeking employment. And the competition for my father must have been extremely severe. He was the young man who arrived, he got the dirty jobs. He had to do all the traveling, which in many ways was f – was good, it helped, because he could – he went to – to England quite a great deal. Matter of fact, he even – he even walked into

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

the foreign office in England, offered his services because he was so much aware of where German industry was and what they needed and what they had to buy, because that was his business, this is what he did. And he ma – was able later to make use of those connections, when we finally left Holland to come to the United States, he was – that – that helped him a great deal. But they had – my parents, during the time that they were in Germany had applied for visas to come to America as did practically every Jew in Germany. And the likelihood of that happening was extremely, extremely slim. It was a lottery system and – and when he – and when they wound up in Holland, my father said you know, I'm going to contact the American embassy in Stuttgart and we will have our files transferred to Rotterdam. After all, we're now in Holland, doesn't do us any good to have that file in Stuttgart, why not? So he wrote them a letter and he got the file transferred over there. And I suppose that lot of things came that worked together at that time. There were a lot of people who just couldn't, even when their number came up for a visa, couldn't accept it any more cause they'd already been transported somewhere else, to the concentration camps, or what have you. And the quota suddenly opened up enough so that one day – we were in Holland I think for almost a year and a half, two years, close to that. Suddenly he got a call from Rotterdam, Mr. Schnog, bring your family here for a medical exam. If you pass the medical exam you will be able to come to the United States, you'll get your visa. So they had to make a decision as to whether to stay – of course they had

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

jobs and they were well settled in Holland, or whether to leave. And after everything that happened in Germany, and I think also because of the severe competition for jobs in Holland at the time, they decided th- there's no question about this, let's – let's get out, let's get as far away from this menace in Germany as we possibly can. And they went to the embassy, we had our physicals, and in two weeks they had a visa to come to the United States. All that excitement, you can well imagine. They started packing up their things and making plans. And because they couldn't – I don't know whether they could bring their money out of Holland or whether they had a problem with that, but they decided to book passage first class because they couldn't do anything else with the money, on Cunard. Cunard White Star line from London, or Liverpool they sail – sail from, to the United States. And packed up our things, sent them ahead and suddenly we were leaving Holland. Left f – said goodbye to my grandparents and we went to the airport, Schiphol, I think it was, pretty sure, and we boarded – and this was during the – this was already during the war, during the Phoney War between England and Germany, because in 1940 England was drawn into the war because the Germans had invaded Poland. There was a – an agreement that they would – that England would declare war, and they did.

Q: I-I was going to ask you about that, in September 1st, 1939, did your parents talk that over, were you aware of that?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: Oh, we – we were fully aware of world events and what was happening. Completely. My parents were interested in it, I was interested in it and – and this was, for us, listening to current events was what it was like for American kids our age following the baseball season. It was important in our lives. Obviously it had enormous amount of – of importance in our family. So we – w-we wanted to know. We wa – and war, it – you know, it was war and we a – we had gone through the – the Russians, I think, invading Finland, and this was in the news everywhere and as children you – you followed this. In fact, we weren't the only ones, I think all the kids in those days, followed that.

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 Alfred Schnog. This is tape number two, side B, and you were saying as children you were following along what was happening in the different countries and in the war. Did it – did that make you more fearful –

A: No.

Q: – knowing what was happening in other countries?

A: No, it did not. We felt very secure, very safe. We had no concerns. Indeed, my parents had no concerns being in Holland, Holland was a neutral and nobody expected that they would be involved or become involved in a war. They hadn't been

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

in the first World War and they were – certainly weren't going to get involved in this one. It was a very liberal country and we felt very, very safe there. But I do think that the economic opportunity wasn't there and this is what really proved to be the most important reason why my parents decided that they should leave and – and come somewhere else, or go somewhere else.

Q: Now, what about your grandparents? Was there any thought of bringing your grandparents to the United States?

A: Oh yes, of course. We – we felt we would go ahead, we would get settled and we would then bring them to the United States, they would follow right on along. \

Q: What did the United States mean to you at that point? What did it represent to you?

A: The United States was America, it was a – a dream, really. It was something that we had read about. Everything good was in America. This is w – the – the fame of America, of New York, of the skyscrapers, of everything was – was known to us. It was known to everyone in Europe. We – an-and it was everybody's dream to go to America at one time or another, to live there or to at least visit. So this was wonderful for us to – we're going to go to America. Was just marvelous to – to contemplate that. So as a child it was great.

Q: You had seen what, pictures in magazines or newspapers or movies?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: We had seen pictures in magazines. This was mostly what my parents had explained and told us about. It was our imagination working, perhaps overtime. I really don't think so, I think our imagination had it right. One of the things that was so interesting in Holland, so many things happened, as a child this would be interesting, apparently we had a friend, I don't know whether he was an immigrant from Germany or what, and we were very much into cars, my brother and I. My father at one time in Germany had owned a – a lot, a car lot where people would bring their old cars and he would disassemble them for the metals, the copper and the – all the precious metals that were inside and sell the rest of it off as scrap. And my brother and I often went there and played in the old cars, you know. We'd climb into the cabs and turn the wheels. It was a lot of fun, very enjoyable. So cars were a passion for us, we could recognize every automobile on the streets, what it looked like, whether it was an Opal or whether it was a – a Ford or a Volkswagen or whatever, we knew it all. And in Holland this man came over and he – was a brand new car, I think it must have been a Nash or something like that, as I recall and it was a very modern styling for that time and my brother and I were so impressed. Well it turned out this fellow had stolen the car and it wasn't long before they caught him and I guess put him in jail, I hope in Holland, not in Germany, but they – they did. So there were all these adventures. I remember my mother taking us to the tulip fields, and seeing that. We – we spent a week or two weeks of vacation sailing in the

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Zuiderzee, which at that time was open to the North Sea, which has since been dammed in. And we were there with some of my parents' friends and colleagues, acquaintances and we sailed from one town to the – all around this – this huge sea. And it was just marvelous and – you know, and then one of these old Dutch ships with the – what do you call them, the sideboards that would go down. They didn't have a keel, so they had sideboards and we would sail all around. My father was a wonderful photographer and he took some beautiful, beautiful pictures of that, some of which I may still have, I'm not sure. They're very wonderful.

Q: Did your family, your folks keep up their religious observance? Were you observing Jewish holidays when you were in Holland?

A: Yes, we were observing Jewish holidays. What became really less and less, the need to maintain a kosher home perhaps was still there in Holland because my grandparents were there, but after that, when we left Holland, that, you know, almost disappeared completely. Anyway, going back, we – when their number – the – when they won the lottery to come to the United States, and it was truly winning the lottery, we wound up at the airport there and we climbed aboard a DC-3 type aircraft, which was all painted orange and the windows were frosted. And the reason for that was this, Holland had declared itself a neutral and their airplanes, their commercial planes, they blocked – they frosted the windows so that they couldn't be accused of having spies on board the airplane looking down at the German fortifications and

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

then reporting that out. And we got on this airplane on which my brother and I immediately got sick because it bumped all the way across the English channel and we wound up in England.

Q: Now, what mon – wha-what month are we talking about?

A: We're talking about January 1939 – 1940. It was either very late December or very early – you know, I think it was January. January 1940. Yeah, exactly. And we arrived and went to stay at the White Hall Hotel on Speaker's Corner at Hyde Park. I remember it very, very well.

Q: Did you know any English at this point?

A: Not a word. Not a word of English. I was fluent in Dutch, I could speak German, of course. And what impressed me about England were the barrage balloons. England being at war, although the air raids had not started, they were flying these barrage balloons over London. They were not more than, I would say 200 yards off the ground, up in the air. So they – they looked like small blimps floating everywhere. And all the – at every intersection where the police had a traffic cop or something, their – their huts were all sandbagged in. And they were on a war footing. And this impressed us, my brother and I. The blackout during the night. Cars driving around without – with shielded headlights. And – so I remember that – that wartime London. And I – I remember my brother getting sick in the hotel, he had caught some – some something. What it was I don't know. But he was there, maybe it was influenza or

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

something like that, and we were stuck in the hotel. And my parents had to stay with him. My father was out – would go to the – to his office there in London, he had friends and etcetera. And they sent me out to purchase a bulb for a flashlight, because he needed it at night, everything was blacked out. And they said okay, now you go down Regent Street right here and down a few blocks and you walk into a store, it's about a block down and you go ask for a light bulb. Of course, they told me this in Dutch. And I said, well what's that in English? And they said, well we'll look it up for you. And they looked it up and they said, well you ask for a bulb. I said bulb? And she – yeah. And off I went, I couldn't speak a word of English. And marched down Regent Street, into the store and I asked for a bulb and managed to get it without any difficulty. I think it – that was a interesting and very formative experience for me. It taught me a little bit of independence, that you could go anywhere, and you didn't have to be afraid, that you could make yourself understood, no matter what. And – and for a young – for a young man that was, I thought, kind of maturing and I came back and we had it. Now, we had to stay, we had to get permission in London to stay a little longer because my brother was ill. And they had booked the passage with Cunard line but they hadn't – the ship hadn't been designated at that time. So my father had to go to the police there to get an extension. And he called his friends at the foreign office at the time and said here, you know, I need to get an extension, can you help me out? He was afraid that they wouldn't

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

permit it. And they said well, just go to the police, don't worry about it. Just go in there and ask them. And he went there and they said of course, you know, you don't have any problems here, you can stay as long as you like. This they didn't understand, or didn't – you know, they didn't expect it. I can't say they didn't understand it, they didn't expect it. They didn't expect that you could have so much freedom in – in any country and there wouldn't be somebody who would say no, you can't do this or you can't – you – you must have these papers, or you must go back. I'm sorry, you can't stay, you have to go back to where you came from. Not there. And these were very comforting for them. My brother and I didn't – really weren't concerned, cause we weren't aware that these – that this might be a problem or that they were – tha-that my parents were concerned about it. But eventually – of course my brother got better in about three or four weeks and in March, I guess it was, must have been March, we finally told that the – we would have the passage on the Cunard White Star liner, the Britannic, and to go to Liverpool on such and such a day and we board – they didn't tell us what the name of the ship was because they were afraid that there would be too many – too much information around and it would get back to the Germans and there was this submarine warfare going on. They didn't want anybody to know what ships were in port and when they would be sailing. So they just said, come to Liverpool and you'll be on one of the vessels, the ships.

Q: Were there many German Jews that you were aware of?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: Yes, there were. There were German Jews who were also setting sail for the United States at that time. We showed up at Liverpool and we w – boarded the Britannic, and my father had been told when he booked the passage that they would be traveling in convoy across the Atlantic because of the submarine warfare. And we expected that. So next day we set sail. My parents had bought these first class tickets and we were in first class. There were – and this is where it is, there were many Jews and people who were traveling in steerage, so to speak, and they couldn't even visit us. And we knew some of them, my parents knew some of them, but – but we as – we were ensconced in very, very luxurious quarters on the ship, and was – we – we – there'd be these easy chairs on the deck and they would serve bouillon and all kinds of goodies, and was wonderful for kids. And indeed, on th – on the voyage across I fell in love with English omelets, jelly omelets, they were wonderful. I la – had one every day my mother says and I – I still remember them, they were great. But we got – we were told that we would have to have a lifeboat drill almost daily because of the fear of being s – being attacked by a submarine. And my parents made us sleep in our clothes with our shoes next to the bed, and if we heard the foghorn three times, we were to get in – get those shoes on, don't tie the laces, just get them on, grab the life preservers and report to our lifeboat stations. Course, it never came to that, fortunately. But the first day out my father – we looked around and I was expecting to see this huge convoy of ships going across the ocean and I looked outside and

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

there wasn't a ship in sight. And my father went to the captain and said, you know, I thought we were traveling convoy, where are all the other ships? And the captain said, oh that's nonsense, we are so fast we'd outrace any convoy and we're going across the ocean. And indeed they did. As a matter of fact they zigzagged all the way across the ocean and I could stand on the tail of the ship and see the wake zigzagging across, to throw off any potential torpedo, I guess, that was directed in our – i – to – directed in our direction, so – and that was the voyage. I remember it and I loved it, as any child would, on a big ship. And we arrived in New York and were greeted by friends whom had – who had preceded us to the United States. Indeed, he was a partner of my father's in that auto wrecking yard at one time. And they took us to the – to the – to a hotel on Broadway, the Whitehall Hotel. Did I say Whitehall before? Is that the hotel in Great Britain? It's not the right – that's not the right name. The one in Great Britain was –

Q: What -- what – what --

A: No, it was the whiteh – Whitehall Hotel in New York.

Q: Okay.

A: It was on Hundredth Street and Broadway.

Q: Wh-When did you – when did you land in the United States?

A: On April 1st, 1940 we landed in the United States, and –

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: What – what was your – were your folks still in communication with – to your grandparents?

A: Yes, yes they were.

Q: By – and how?

A: Well, they could communicate, there was certainly correspondence by letter and you could even telephone still, or – Holland was a – still a neutral at that time and it was certainly possible to communicate with them. And when we moved into the hotel on – on Broadway and Hundredth Street –

Q: Okay, ju-just a moment. When you were on the boat, any other children? Did you play with other children?

A: No. There were no other children that I remember on the boat with us. Just other passengers from any number of places. I don't remember really any of them particularly, we were [indecipherable]

Q: Did people exchange stories? Other – other passengers exchange stories about their backgrounds?

A: They may have, but none that I recall. I – no idea. Anyway, we came to the States and we were ensconced in the Whitehall Hotel on Broadway and Hundredth Street and my mother took us right away over to the nearest school, enrolled us in school and we didn't speak any – a word of English, again. And –

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: What was it like to arrive in the United States? The boat docks and you got off.

Did it mean anything to a – a youngster of nine years old?

A: I remember being on the side of the ship and my parents said look, there's the Statue of Liberty. And I looked, and so help me, I didn't see it. It was the – must have been right under my nose, but I didn't see it. I don't know where I was looking, maybe they were pointing awkwardly and I just looking around at all the other ships in the harbor, etcetera. It's skipped, completely. And we pulled into the pier and we cleared through customs in – almost instantly.

Q: Did you notice any change in your folks when they put their feet – foot – put – when they put their feet down on American soil?

A: No, th – I think everybody was smiles, that I remember. It was a happy time. We – we were met by the – our acquaintances here and they said come, we take you to your hotel and they took us with all our luggage on the subway. Through the turnstiles. Now, I don't know whether you remember the old fashioned turnstiles, but they were – in the subways – but they were these wooden affairs that looked like very big, huge, heavy propellers that you would push around. And we'd had to drag through these things. But be – but even bef – before that, we – we had to get something to eat so they took us to the automat. Well for us, we've never seen anything like this. First of all, there was so much food of everything, every kind that we could ever want. And then, to be able to just put coins into a machine and have

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

these things pop out was marvelous. We – we enjoyed that. And we wound up, as I say, at the end of the subway ride in the – in the hotel. My next recollection I think was mostly in the school where I could – was way ahead of the rest of the class in mathematics and way behind in understanding anything that was going on, because my Dutch didn't help me much, my English didn't help me much. And – but we – we managed. We got along for a couple of months. It was, I think April, May, then school – June and school was out and – and that was that. Now, lots of things happened in between. We arrived on April first here in the United States. In early May I believe it was, the Germans overran Holland. And that happened so quickly that we did not have time, my parents did not have time to get my grandparents out of Holland. And although we didn't know it at that time, they were, shortly after the Germans walked in, they were taken on the train and transported to, as I finally learned after visiting the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, they lost their lives in Sobibor. And when that happened, we don't know. Some time in the war years. Whether it was early on or later on, we just – I just don't know. I know my parents became aware of it sometime during the – in the period between 1940 and 1944, that they were gone. Actually maybe – no, it was just about then, I guess.

Q: So they lost contact with –

A: Yeah.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: – your grandparents right away?

A: Yes, as soon as the Germans were in, that was almost impossible to communicate. There was still some correspondence coming through because he – America was not at war with Germany. So you could still get some mail and they did, I think, until the – until the war broke out in 1941. So there was still some correspondence for a period of time and then after that. So it must have been in either 1942 or '43 that they were grabbed with all the other Jews who were in Holland and deported. My brother and I were sent to summer camp in the United States and shortly after we – that summer, the year that we arrived, we went to the YMHA camp. Funny. And it was Surprise Lake camp was the name of it. As it turns out, Anita, who I'm married to right now also went to that camp. Of course, we didn't know each other then. She was younger than I. But –

Q: Was it in the country?

A: Yes, it was in the country, and – Cold Springs, is it? Or something like that. And they left us there in – where the – for – for I guess six weeks, for the summertime. And we were old enough at that time not to object to being without our parents, I guess. And we – and I guess two or three weeks after summer camp started, they came up to visit us. And they came and they went to our counselor and they said, how are the boys doing? And the counselor said well, what do you mean how are they doing? They're fine. No, that's not what we mean, I mean how are they getting

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

along with the other children? He said they get along okay. Well but, my parents said, they don't speak English. And the counselor said, of course they speak English. He never knew that we couldn't speak English. And within a matter of literally weeks, we learned enough, learned English sufficiently so that no – nobody ever knew that we didn't sp – that we weren't English speaking to begin with. And I always feel that such submersion for young people is probably the best way to learn a language. It really is.

Q: So you didn't have a German accent or anything like that?

A: No, no, no accent. Well, I – certainly not a German accent. Well, I think one of the reasons that we picked up the language was – so quickly was because we moved from Germany to Holland, we learned Dutch in a relatively short period of time because Dutch is also very similar to German. But Dutch also has a huge number of English words in its language. So the transition was an easy one. Go from German to Dutch to English. It was quite easy, at least for me and I think it helped enormously to – to have that progression. So here we were in the United States and we could speak English and shortly after that summer my parents –

Q: Were there other immigrant children in the camp?

A: No, not that I know of. Oh, there may have been, but I didn't know about it. I had no – no knowledge of it.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: Di-Did you tell the other children where you were born and some of the things you had lived through?

A: Don't remember recalling or saying anything to them. My brother and I were in the same bunk. We spoke to each other, obviously and we just kept our ears open to what was going on and what was being said.

Q: In German you spoke to each other?

A: No, no, in – in the bunk, in here. Th – in German, I – no, we spoke Dutch. If we did speak, we spoke Dutch. We didn't want to speak German.

Q: Why not?

A: Ger – Germans were anathema in the United States at that time and we didn't want to have the kind of discrimination experienced against us because we were German and German speaking. We wanted – we didn't want anything to do with Germans. Germans were a pariah and we didn't want to be part of the pariah. If people noticed that we spoke German, they might take offense.

Q: That's quite sophisticated for a nine year old.

A: Not if you're accustomed to – not if you've been accustomed to having that sort of thing done to you as a Jew in Germany. You were accustomed to it. You would know that if you were just different than anybody else, if you wa – if you were different, you better be somebody different who everybody liked, not somebody different whom – whom everybody despised. So being Germans was not on the top of our list,

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

but we spoke Dutch, and that was okay. See, Holland was still very friendly, they weren't tainted with Nazi persona, so we said okay, we – we were speaking Dutch, and that was at that time our major language. We came back from camp – because my parents didn't speak Dutch at home and we no longer spoke Dutch, we spoke English at that time. We promptly dropped Dutch and now I recall very, very little of Dutch. Very little. I've been back several times. I can probably read some of it and understand a little, but I don't speak it at all the way I did as a child when I was very, very fluent in it. But German, strangely enough, being the mother tongue, I remember and I can understand it. So that was that.

Q: So they you came back after the summer and you started school again?

A: Yes. By that time my parents had moved to Forest Hills.

Q: Queens?

A: Queens. And – an apartment there and we went to school there. I guess it was there, for the first time in America that I experienced that anti-Semitism was not a phenomenon that afflicted Europe alone. Because we were in the – I guess the third grade in the school, public school in Forest Hills. Very lovely school, P.S. three. And I remember that it must have been one of the national holidays and my parents had pinned an American flag to my lapel and my brother's lapel and we went off to school. And I'll never forget it, but the teacher, knowing that we were immigrants, had made a remark that you shouldn't be wearing that flag, you are not really

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Americans, or what have you. Something along those lines. And my mother took tremendous offense, she went to school and really – she was a very outspoken woman, and she was quite outspoken about that sort of thing and said so. But more than that, during our growing up years here, we had occasion to go with our parents. When we were a little bit older we went on holiday with them. And one of the trips that we took was up to the Adirondacks.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Alfred Schnog. This is tape number three, side A, and you were going up to the Adirondacks with your family.

A: My parents had arranged to rent a cabin on Trout Lake, near Bolton Landing in – in the Lake George region of the Adirondacks. And they had packed provisions to take up with them, put them in the car and we headed up north. And when we arrived at the cabin it was truly a horrible place. The place was overrun with bugs. The mattresses were rotten and it was the kind of place that it would have been difficult to stay at in any circumstances. So my mother said, I don't care what we have with us – and in those days we didn't have such great refrigeration, so we said we – we'll just have to go find someplace else to stay. They didn't realize is that every place there was jam packed and during the summer you couldn't find a place. What we didn't realize til we saw it were the restricted signs. And there were – came in any number of forms. There were either just plain restricted, a sign that said restricted, which everybody knew meant no Jews, or churches nearby which meant essentially the same thing. And it came as a – a surprise to me, or perhaps not as a surprise because of what we'd been through. But my parents managed to ignore those things and live with it and possibly they could ignore it because they had so much experience in Germany ignoring it. But it left its mark. Certainly left its mark on me, that anti-

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Semitism in whatever form, perhaps not as virulent as it was in Germany could exist anywhere, and indeed, it does exist almost everywhere. So –

Q: When did you take this trip the Adirondacks?

A: When? Do to the – I – this must have been in – I must have – I was – I was older.

Q: Was it still during the war?

A: Oh yes. It was still during the war. We had saved gasoline coupons and whatever to – to make it, because gasoline was severely rationed during the war. I think I must have been about 14 years old at the time, which would have been in 1900 and – well, maybe 13 or four – 1945 – '44 - '45, in that – in that period of time. I think maybe in – I must have been 13 at the time, I'm pretty sure it was. And we – we traveled around trying to find a place to stay, and not because of the restricted signs we couldn't stay, it was just simply they were full, couldn't take anybody. And we wound up at a – right opposite where we had rented this cabin at a – at a – turned out to be a Jewish camp, summer camp. And we walked in, the camp hadn't started yet, but the owners were there and my parents asked whether they could stay there over the ni – overnight and they said oh, stay as long as you like. They saw two boys and obviously it was – they could sign up two campers, which indeed they did, so we wound up spending our summers there for the next four or five years and it was wonderful experience for us, and a nice part of the country and we got to know a lot

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

of interesting people and made a lot of friends, some of whom I still see today, and – went to camp with us.

Q: What was the name of your camp?

A: Camp – name was Camp Waldman and I don't think it exists today. I think it's been sold, I don't know who owns it or what. But the owner was a fellow named Charlie Garland who lived in Glens Falls, he was a baker. And they were wonderful people, very friendly and so here was this really strange combination of anti-Semitic signs on the roads going up to Lake George, and here this tremendous welcoming of a camp that it was run by Jews and obviously these people were extremely well accepted in their community, because we got to know them quite well, they were known all over the area. So all these things happened together and i-i-it was a strange mixture, really, and it – it -- it puzzled me at the time and it still puzzles me today, how these two things can coexist.

Q: Speaking about being 13 or 14, did you and your brother have a Bar-Mitzvah?

A: Yes, we were –

Q: Could you tell a li – a little bit about that?

A: Oh yes. When my – when we moved in here and we became – we were 11 or 12 years old, my parents said, well boys, you – you know, you have to think about your Bar-Mitzvah, and we went to a Jewish synagogue in Rego Park. Today it's a very large synagogue, at that time it was a small shul, very Orthodox and we went to

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Sunday school, and we – and Hebrew school and like every good American boy we hated it. Despised it. In fact we – we spent our time doing mischief rather than paying attention to the class. I remember sticking a girl's bobby pin in the light socket and blowing out the lights in the whole place, in the synagogue. But it was – and no – and what amazed me most was the teacher came over to me, are you okay? She was more concerned about me than I was – she thought something had blown out of the wall, you know. Aft – and I was totally responsible for the whole thing. But, it was about that time that my father learned about the death of our – of my grandparents. And he, having been brought up very religiously, he went every morning and every night to – to the minyan to – to the shul, and Norbert and I accompanied him. We went every single day with him for that – for that year of mourning. And we learned our Bar-Mitzvah lessons and had a – went through a regular Bar-Mitzvah at that shul. It was a very nice time, we all – we loved the day, we loved being there, we loved – you know, when you're – when you go through a Bar-Mitzvah, it's a wonderful thing for a child. It's a – it's not – the learning and the stepping up to it is horrible, you hate it, every minute of it. But when the day arrives and you manage your way through it, the pride that you feel, and the – is exhilarating. And we – we really did enjoy that immensely.

Q: Was it hard for you to go through it without your grandparents and knowing what happened to your grandparents?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: I don't think I gave it very much thought. It may have been very hard for my parents to realize that this was happening without their parents being there, but we had accepted the death of the grandparents and didn't even think about the fact that they weren't there, or – we didn't look back. I think that's more of an adult thing. You – you do that when you have more [indecipherable] we were more concerned about how well we would do in reciting the Haftorah and the Torah portions and how – and what might happen afterwards because we had – all my parents friends would come over to the house afterwards and we would be on display, obviously for them and – and we'd have to recite the blessings before the meals and the – and after the meal and all of this, which was important to our parents that we know those things, and – you know, and we did know them and have long since forgotten.

Q: Were you very devastated when you found out about your grandparents?

A: Well, we – I had very fond memories of my grandparents and yes, I was – I can't say that it was devastating, it was a loss. And I've thought about it many times, you miss them. But it was probably the first time that – you know, there was so much death that you heard about in those days, so many stories of how people died. And by that time we were old enough to understand, and to know that this was happening. And so it wasn't a – a total surprise and it wasn't totally devastating. You sort of knew that they were going to be caught up in it and that was that. I – I – I remember that we – none of us held out hope that they would ever get out. Perhaps

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

we hoped because they were in Holland that they somehow might be safe from the – from what was happening in Germany. But it was just a hope, and didn't turn out to be the case, and that wasn't all too surprising, because we had – we had heard of other case, of other people in Holland who had lost their lives, who'd been sent to concentration camps and were no – no longer alive. Not just that, but people had committed suicide because of the struggles they were going through and they just couldn't live with it any longer. There were many who did that.

Q: Did your parents keep in touch with other relatives?

A: Yes, they did, they kept in touch with those relatives they had, we had. There were – we had – my father had some relatives who had moved to Holland as well, who had managed to escape because they were – had become Dutch citizens, they escaped to Aruba and Curacao and still live there. And it's quite a large family that's down there and they've done very well. They – I think they own the agency to distribute Toyota cars on those islands. Nice people, I've met some of them. We haven't been down there but we've – they've been in New York and when I – certainly if I go down there, the name Schnog will be all over the island, as it is, you know. So yes, we've managed to keep in – somewhat in touch with those relatives.

Q: So now you're a teenager, did you have many American friends, were you totally accepted, except for that teacher who commented about the flag?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: Oh, no, we never had any trouble with that, our – our – many of our teachers were Jewish themselves and at that stage nobody knew any longer that we were immigrants. We spoke English without too much of a trace of an accent. And we were good students, we had a lot of friends, very close friends. And wa – I guess we were almost normal teenagers that time, we – I don't remember – I remember that I did very well in school, I loved my teachers. I think the next most troubling thing in my life was the fact that some of my teachers were involved in the McCarthy si – era situation, that thing. You know, when we grew up in those days, we were very liberal, almost Socialistic – I would say Socialistic. And we – a-and our teachers were very liberal, very bright. Well, we admired them and they were – enormously. My math teachers, my science teachers, there was – th-those were the classes I really adored, I loved them, and the – and they taught us so much and taught us a love for learning. I had a Latin teacher who I was very fond of, who was very fond of me because she passed me despite the fact that my brother was the one who did all the work and I did all the copying. And –

Q: Did you stay in public schools?

A: Yes, we stayed in public school, went to Forest Hills High School and graduated in Forest Hills High School. And then went to – we were – went to college, went to Cornell University, where we both took an engineering course. Which was probably the first big mistake I made in my life, but nevertheless, you know, in those days you

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

stuck with what you started and you finished it. And if you changed, somehow it was an admission of failure in one direction. At least I perceived it that way. I was maybe too immature to realize otherwise. So I stuck with engineering and got my degree, but might have been much, much happier in a liberal arts environment.

Q: Let's go back a little bit. What was it like when you were 14 and a half and the war was over?

A: Well, there was tremendous joy when the war was over, and – you know, we joined in every celebration that – that had anything to do with destr – destroying Nazism and Hitler. In every way, we just – all of America did and we were in the forefront of it, we did it just the same way, we hated this dictator. And we laughed at all the comical songs that were written at the time about Hitler, etcetera. And when the war was over – you know, we'd – we'd – as children at that age, we dreamt about going into the army and fighting. We wanted – that was – that was very important to us. We were too young and our parents probably would have been horrified at the thought of it, but we'd have dreams about this. We wanted to be in the army, to be a part of this, to fight as a soldier in – in America. Not – not that we had any feeling because we immigrated and we came from Germany we had to do this, but simply because we were patriotic Americans. Extremely patriotic, as was everybody in those days. I mean, there were kids in our school, in our high school who lied about their age to get – to go – to get into the Marines, or to get into the army, or what have you.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

My brother and I were very young, we looked young. We could never have passed 17 or 18 to be able to get into the army, so we – it never dawned on us even to try. But if the war had gone on, we would have au – we – I'm sure we would have been in the forefront of volunteering to – to go into it, and we felt it was an obligation that we had, to serve in America. So when the war was over, it was quite great. We wanted to know all about what was – what had happened, where – what was left in Germany.

My parents actually went over and they saw what was left. This was [indecipherable]

Q: When – when did – when did they go back?

A: They – shortly after the war, it was either in 1940 – it probably was – I would guess it was in 1946, I would guess. Might have been 1945, but I think that might have been too early. It must have been early in 1946, and Europe was devastated. And they went to Cologne and saw all the devastation that had been wrecked on the German cities by the continuous bombing. And they saw – they saw some of the people who lived there, or recognized them when they came back. A story that my mother and father tell – told, they went to Cologne and they looked up a couple who was – they had run the grocery store, I guess, there. And they went and asked about them, and they still were running a grocery store. And they went over there to – and they looked in the window there, I guess they were running a pastry shop or something like that. And the woman who ran the shop, and my parents knew, looked out the window and saw my mother and she turned pale. She said, Mrs. Schnog, Frau

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Schnog, is that you? And my mother came in and said yes, it's me, we're back. How are you? Tell me, how did you survive? And they were, as my mother said, very decent people caught up in this horror story with the Germans, they – many of them couldn't do anything out of fear that something would happen to them. Indeed, my father tells the story about a man who couldn't keep his mouth shut, he says, and he lived in Deutz near my grandparents. He was Christian, he hated the Nazis. He let everybody know that these – Hitler and these Nazis would ruin Germany. And what'd they do? They caught him, they cut his head off. So that kind of terror visited on a population brings about so much fear, that people shrink away. No wonder they put signs in their windows, no Jews. If they didn't, God knows what would have happened to them, in their own minds. So there were a lot of – a lot of Germans who didn't willingly participate in this, who did so I think out of fear, and what reprisals might be visited on them. There were some of course, who went right along with it, who – who thought Hitler was the last word and you know, this is – this is the new Siegfried, the – the hero of German mythology is going to – th-the vag – the Wagner people, all this romanticism that really isn't romanticism, it's just pure Germanic. And those are the ones who Hitler really appealed to.

Q: How – when did you become a citizen and what was it like for you?

A: Oh, interesting, yes. When my parents arrived here they immediately applied for citizenship and it was a five year waiting period. Five years passed and they were

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

called before a judge and I re-remember going with them before the judge and the swearing in. And they were just thrilled, as I was, and – to become an American citizen. This was a dream that had come true for them. And shortly thereafter, we – my brother and I became citizens by derivation. So we also were called and we were sworn in. And I, of course, have that certificate and it's something we're all very proud of, and we – listen, this country saved our lives. The fact that we got over here may have been pure luck, or it may have been God's doing. I don't think it was that, I think it was just plain luck and a little bit of fortitude and a little bit of courage on the part of my father, and seeing what was happening and – well, but to escape so many times from – slip though at the last moment, always the last to arrive before the doors shut, is something that amazes me. I am now probably the only survivor of my immediate family because my brother passed away at 54, he had pancreatic cancer and died. My mother died in – when she was 90 – 91 – 90 years old. My father died of the Alzheimer's disease in – when he was 84. But I often ask myself, you know, why am I here longer than the other? Why are – why aren't there more of us who managed it? But you -- when I think about some of the stories that you read about people who don't believe or who refuse to accept the fact that there was a Holocaust at all, it's something that I don't – I – number one, I don't understand it. Number two, I guess – these are the kinds of people – the kinds of people who – who – whose thought process is so shallow, the same one who Hitler was able to – to inveigle to

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

bring into his party. That's – that's a horror and so anything that – you know, history is something that lives only with people who have lived it themselves. Those that haven't, except for the few who educate themselves, who will read history and will be able to understand it, for – except for those, people not only forget, but it has no meaning for them. They read a history book. There was World War II, it lasted from this date to that date. This is what s – took place, but it means nothing. It means absolutely nothing. When I was a child I talked to my grandfather and I asked him about World War I. My grandfather served in the German army in World War I, and he told me stories. He told me the story one day of an airplane that came and dropped two bombs in Cologne, and I was impressed. But World War I had no meaning to me. Not from what was relayed to me. It meant nothing. World War II, yes, had every meaning. I was too closely involved. You know, look at our children today. They look back and they come to me and they want to know a little bit about World War II, I can tell them certain things about World War II, but it won't have any meaning for them. They are much closer to the last war we fought in, the desert or in perhaps Vietnam if they're a little older and went through that era. But even that passes, and if they don't inform themselves and don't reach back and read the history and in – get involved a little bit more closely into what – perhaps into people's lives, or into – there have been some wonderful books written about World War II. If they don't read that, or if they – if you haven't read "All Quiet on the Western Front," you

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

would not really understand the abhorrence of war that came out of World War I. And I think that's missing today and much of that is missing and it's too bad, it really is and I think this is the kind of thing that fosters the thoughts that the Holocaust never happened. And it sure did. There was one other vignette that's rather interesting. A few years ago, here in America, my parents were living in Florida and my mother – I came down to Florida to go to attend an affair of some sort. I've forgotten whether it was a formal affair or whether we were just going out for – for dinner. And I was over at her apartment, we were chatting and I was getting dressed. I was staying with her. And I had forgotten to bring my cufflinks. And I said, Mom, you know, I don't have any cufflinks, did Dad have any? And she said yeah, yeah, wait a minute, I have something for you. And she brought out a pair of silver cufflinks. She said these – these will do fine. And I looked at them and I said, yes they will, where'd Dad get these? She said, well, it's an interesting story, I have to tell you about it. And she said, when your father was young, about to be Bar-Mitzvahed, 13 years old, there was a – your grandfather, Arnold, rented a room in his house to a German soldier, an officer. And he used that room to entertain his girlfriend. And he was a very nice gentleman and he knew your father was being Bar-Mitzvahed, so he purchased those cufflinks for your father as a Bar-Mitzvah gift. And, she said to me, you'd be interested in knowing the name of that German officer. And I said, yeah, well who was he? She said, his name was von Stauffenberg. And I

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

star – I was startled; von Stauffenberg was the general who took part in the assassination attempt against Hitler in the latter stages of the war. So history touches you, no matter where you are, at one point or another, and here in a pair of cufflinks, it reaches back and it touches you. And it's these kinds of stories that make history alive. I hope I can pass all these things on to my children that they'll remember it. I don't know whether I – I have myself been back to Germany on several occasions. I've been there on business and I've met people in Germany. And you can't help, when you meet one of the older generation, my generation, you can't help but wonder where they were in those years between '38 and '44, what they were doing, whether they took part in any of the atrocities that were visited on the Jews. But you hesitate to ask. Maybe my parents weren't so afraid. Maybe they did ask, a few times. But I've never asked. I've met some of the younger people and they don't really have a recollection of it, and in that case perhaps it's good for them, for Germany. One of the interesting trips that we recently took, we went a cruise and wound up – up in the – in the Baltic. And we wound up in Rostock. And there they had a bus trip to Berlin. Well, for the people who were on the cruise, and there were a group of Jewish people on the cruise who wanted to see – particularly see the synagogue in Berlin. My wife and I didn't have an overriding interest to do that, but they needed to gather enough people together to – to put a busload together and we volunteered to join them. And so we went into Berlin.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

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 Alfred Schnog. This is tape number three, side B and you were on this trip going into Berlin.

A: Right. So, as I say, we volunteered to go along with them, and we went into Berlin and we had a German guide, a young woman, very knowledgeable, who took us around and showed us the highlights in Berlin and the tour. And the tour a – the centerpiece of the tour was going to see Checkpoint Charlie, and what used to be East Germany and the wall, this small section that they preserved for histo – for history. And very little was remembered by the guide of – or was told to any of us about World War II and what happened in Berlin during that period of time, period of years. It was interesting observation for me, because the young Germans were more – much more affected, and understandably so, by the separ – the – the separation of east and the – Germany and West Germany and the hardships that the eastern Germany – Germans experienced, and the fact that they were separated from their families and couldn't see each other, and the – the wall and the suicides that resulted from that, or people who were killed trying to escape. And this was foremost in their minds, this was how horrible things were during those years. They didn't look back to World War II and what happened then. That was not part of their being, their

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

substance, their – their memory, and – except for one instance, which I found highly interesting. She told us, the guide, that she was taking us to the university in Berlin. And we got out and there was this very large square, quadrangle in the center of the university. And we marched out to the middle of this square and mostly cobblestones and in the middle was a square. I don't know, I would say it was the size of, oh, maybe three meters by three meters, so about – roughly about thr – a little more than three yards by three yards square, and glass, right in the ground. You kn – you know, it was part of the – the ground, it wa – it wasn't raised in any fashion. And she gathered everybody around this glass square that was cut into the ground and she said, would you please look down and tell me what you see? And we looked down and what we could see under the glass were empty bookcases around the square and she asked whether we knew what that was. And of course being all Jews, many of us did know exactly what it was. It's a representation and a memorial of the book burning, where the Nazis had burned all the books. An – and that that would be there in – at the University of Berlin, well I thought was extremely interesting. The fact that she knew about it and that she was willing to tell us about it, even though it was not on her tour and that she wasn't expected to show us this, was very interesting for us. Then we wound up – which they clearly avoided because they saved it for the last part of the day, we wound up at the Jewish synagogue there, which was burned by the Germans, probably on Kristallnacht, and – and restored. Now it's no longer being

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

used as a synagogue cause it was violated as religious ground. But we stood outside. There's a museum right next door to it where we could go in for a few minutes and see what there was, we really didn't have much time. But there were two plaques on the outside of the synagogue explaining what had happened and how it was restored, etcetera. And most of my fellow cruise members couldn't read German etcetera, so I wound up being the one who read the plaques for them and translated it for them, and they were quite moved by it. And I was pleased to be able to open their eyes to this and to be able to read them. Now I think they were, strangely enough, more affected by it than I was, because I had been through it, I had seen it. I think it was more of a shock to most of these people this actually happened and that this is where it took place and these are the – the memorials to it. So I – I found that trip very enlightening and I guess more so from the point of youth that the Germans today are, just like everybody else in the world, they are obsessed with the history of today and not with the history of yesterday.

Q: Can we get back to your life? You finished college –

A: Yes.

Q: -- as an engineering student.

A: Yes.

Q: And then what happened?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: Well, I was an engineering student and I had at that time – during my time at college, the Korean war broke out. And we – obviously we wanted to finish our education, so we joined the ROTC program at college. And we finished our engineering degree and graduated as lieutenants in the United States Army and went right away into service. We had an obligation to serve at least two years of active duty, at which time –

Q: This is 1953?

A: This was 1953. '54, actually. And we – we thought we might be able to get a nice plush assignment, maybe go to Japan, which was very interesting, or I thought, my goodness, you know, I'm fluent in German, maybe they could send me to Germany, you know, I could – would be a wonderful opportunity. Well, of course the United States Army doesn't think in those terms. Nor did they know or did they think in the terms that I was an engineer, a graduate, they could have put me into any number of positions where that would have been useful. No, I was in the ordinance corps and I was going to be – and I had that – you know, they had all these electronic things, they could have easily put me into that and helped, but no, no, I'm going to Korea and that's that. So off we went, my brother and I both went to Korea. Fortunately we went shortly after Eisenhower had made his historic visit to Korea and the war was – the fighting had stopped. And we were there just shortly afterwards. So the country was extremely poor, Korea, and it was – had been destroyed and we wound up at the –

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

at an army depot near Incheon, [indecipherable] city. I've since been back and you can't recognize it any more, the country has boomed economically and – of course not in North Korea, but at least in South Korea it has. And we spent – I spent two years there. My brother was stationed up on the DMZ, the demilitarized zone at the time, and we'd see each other occasionally, I would fly up with friends of mine who were pilots and – and in – in the army. They would fly me up in these small planes and I'd visit him or -- and he would return the visit. Sometimes we'd – got our Jeeps and drove up through these rutted roads and dust and – and it was a – it was a boring existence cause there was nothing to do, and Korea was cold and miserable. The rats were the size of – well, pigs. They were huge, and you'd live with them. There were a lot of – there were a lot of people who had been displaced by the war, a lot of orphans in orphanages, which you know, just tore your heart out. And as soldiers and as officers, we did what we could to help out these orphanages. We collected from our troops and from the rest – other officers to help these people, and they were very grateful, they were – for everything that we could do there. They're a tough people, the Koreans, they really are and they manage to survive. But it – you really – it was not the kind of service that I expected in the United States Army. I expected, you know, World War II, you're going to go out, fight, right? But no, no, no, nothing like that. Met a lot of people and learned a little bit about the average American, and how much – how important the average American is to America's

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

life, and how basically good they are, despite – da – it doesn't matter what their level of education is. It really didn't matter and there were people – I was – one of the jobs that was assigned to me, I was a commander of a depot supply company there and one of the other jobs I had was to – was for the education, I was the education officer for the battalion and we had many, many sergeants, people who had worked their way up through the ranks, who barely had an education above a grade school level. And we furnished them with additional – with – with schools and tried to bring them and as well as many of the – the enlisted men up to at least a grade level or a high school level education. But it didn't matter how educated they were, they were basically very, very good people, very honest people. I had a group of sergeants who I got along with extremely, extremely well. They did things for me – at that time there was absolutely no accountability for supplies in the United States Army. And when I was – when I signed – when I took over the command of my company, I signed off on things I didn't know I had, or didn't know existed and – and when it finally came time for me to turn the company over to the next officer that would take over, I had to do a – an inventory really, what th – what the heck did we have and what did I sign for, and you know, I'm responsible for this, have to sign it back. And there were – there was a Jeep in there that I remember that I never even knew existed. And – and we had – and we had some things that we had so much in excess of that it shouldn't have been there, but I se – I said to one of my sergeants, I – what – what

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

are we going to do about this, or where's this Jeep? He said oh please lieutenant, he said, don't worry about it, just bring the guy over tomorrow morning, we'll take care of it. So in the morning I came over with a new officer and I introduced him to my staff and I said okay, would you – here is our inventory, would you sign off on it please? And we start looking around and when he checked it off and we went outside and there is this Jeep sitting there and I look at the inventory list and the serial number, everything is just exactly the way it should be. And I said hm, I guess it must have been somewhere, but – and the fellow signed off and everything was just perfect. And when he left I pulled out a bottle that I had there and I said, look gentlemen, the s – the sergeants – well, you know, I guess this is goodbye. I want you to have a drink and – and we exchanged pleasantries, had a drink and I said, now wait a minute sergeant, I said, where the hell'd that Jeep come from? And he said sir, he said, in about five minutes we have to return it to battalion A, and we've got to repaint the thing. So it's that kind of thing. Everybody would help everybody out.

Q: Did putting on an American army uniform bring back any memories of German uniforms?

A: No, not at all, not at all. The way I saw and perceived the Germans were almost like the – theatrical costumes, theatrical people. They were so outlandish in their style of dress with their epaulets and their – and their polished boots and their – you know, you don't get this in the United States Army. I hope not, I hope we never will.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

And it did not, it did not – I – I – I never even thought of it in that fashion, never equated my service in the army with what – what I saw in Germany, never. So then we were finished with our service in the army after 14 months, came back to the United States and I at that stage had a choice to make in my career as to whether I wanted to be an engineer for the rest of my life, or whether I wanted to try something else. And I knew – had known really all along that engineering was not my calling. And I said – I said, well you know, it's something I can always go back to. But I went to see my father and I said dad, you know, can you get me a job with your company? I want to get into sales or something where I deal with people. And just to see whether I like that. I can always go back to engineering. And he said sure, and he got me a job. I essentially went to work for my father's company. My brother, who graduated Cornell as an electrical engineer as I did, was pretty close to being top in his class. I – I was, I guess, the goof off and he was the one who applied himself. Not only did he apply himself, he had a calling for engineering. He was a lot like my father, my father always wanted to be an engineer and never had the opportunity. My brother had the opportunity and made the most of it. He immediately went to work as an engineer when he got out of the army and wound up in the – in the optics field in engineering. Interestingly enough, one of the highlights of his career was that he testified before Congress. Malcolm Wallop's committee, which at the time was looking into the feasibility of space and using space for military purposes. And my

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

brother, along with four other engineers, or three other engineers, I guess, were called before the committee to testify. They were known as the Gang of Four.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I have a book that actually states that. And I think he had a lot to do at that time in persuading Ronald Reagan to go ahead with his space missile programs. So here you have a young man who was brought up in Germany, who escaped with his life testifying before Congress, I think it's amazing, and – that he accomplished all of that. He was instrumental in designing the mirrors and the optics for the first space – astronomical space obs – observatory, which they shot up into space, it worked very well. He was working on the Hubble when he died and my nephews and nieces say, you know, if Norbert had been around to finish that job with everybody, they wouldn't have had the trouble they did with the Hubble. Well, you know, that may be, it may not be, who knows, but he – he spent his career doing that and was quite, quite proud of it, and he should have been.

Q: Did you keep up a close relationship as you all became adults?

A: We kept up a relationship. Was it close? My brother and I are totally different personalities – we were. And it was difficult for him to express his inner thoughts and to open up to people. And I think also difficult for him to open up his feelings toward me, or with me. We certainly kept up contacts through all those years. His children

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

are now as close to me as my own children are, particularly his son, who I think has more in common with me than my own son. Their –

Q: Did you used to –

A: [indecipherable]

Q: – did you used to talk about your early childhood when you were adults, about what you boys went through?

A: Not terribly much, no. I think he had his recollections and I had mine. No, I don't think so. We – more – we kept up more with the kinds of things that happened later in our lives when we came to America. Our camp experiences and the time there, let's say, perhaps the – some of the years that we spent in the army together. Not so much as to what happened in Germany and – and in – in Holland prior years.

Q: So you went to work for your father?

A: Went to work, yes.

Q: And did you stay in the long – a long time?

A: I worked for my father and we – I was stationed up in Boston for awhile learning how to become a steel scrap trader. And it was very difficult. I had problems dealing with New Englanders because they were so difficult to talk with, you know, they didn't open up. I – I think one of the things I learned there was that sometimes it's good to keep your mouth shut. I never forget the time I had to persuade a New England scrap dealer to sell me a carload of scrap, because we were going to ship it

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

off to – on a ship com – sailing out of Boston. And he was selling all his scrap to a competitor. And so I went in to see him – Leroy was his name. And I said – I introduced myself and I told him who I worked for and I said, I'd like to buy your scrap and I gave him my sales pitch, this is what I want, this is what I'm ready to pay for it and I really would like to start and I hope you can give us a chance, and what have you. And then I had made my pitch, I said, what do you think? And he didn't answer. He just sat there. And for awhile I said to myself, well, should I say something, or shouldn't I? And I said, you know, I've just said everything that I need to say. If he's not going to reply to me, just keep your mouth shut, sit. For once in your lifetime, don't say anything. So I sat there what was an interminable amount of time and I don't know how long it was, maybe four or five minutes or so, which is ridiculous, you know, you're sitting there and you're wondering what you're going to do, and beginning to sweat. Should I get up and leave, what? And he suddenly said, yup, okay. Now, I don't know what he was thinking about, I have no idea. And I won't ever question it. But that was that, I said thank you and I left and I sent him the order and that was that. So I learned a lot from that experience. I stayed with that company, I wasn't happy there in New England, and moved back to New York and met Ben Livingston, who was an elderly man, was my father's partner for some years. And we – and I got into the import and export business in – in – in steel. It was in the new steel business. And in 1962 he retired from the company. And I know he

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

was – he was not happy retiring, he was an active man. He was in his 70's, but wanted to continue to work, which is very interesting because I feel exactly the same way today and I'm probably about the same age he was when he retired. And so, with my father's help, I spoke with Ben Livingston and we put together three people and we said, let's go out in business and start the business. And I figured that Ben Livingston had a good reputation in the field. If he stayed active in the business for just three years, we'd have enough grounding in order to be able to – to run the business without him. Well, we did. We went out, found a small office in the Lincoln building in New York and went to work with three of us, myself, an associate of mine and Ben Livingston, the younger associate. And we started to build the company. And in three years Ben Livingston showed no signs of retiring and he was as – he's – he was – h-he lived until he was 89 years old. He came into the office every single day. He was no longer active in the daily trading, but he became a very close friend of mine and we were able to talk to each other and pass information back and forth f-for – for many years. We – I finally took over as the president of the company and it was extremely successful, it worked out quite well. Into – one of the interesting incidents I'll never forget with Ben Livingston, he was in his 80's already and found it difficult to get around. He was using a cane. He was a big man, heavy, and he would start losing some of his agility. And I was in the office talking to him, I was going to take a trip to Argentina, a business trip and I sat down and I told him

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

what I was going to do, and how we were going to get around, we had a problem there, and discussed the problem with him and how best to solve it. Suddenly the lights went out in the building and we were on the – that time on the 21st floor of the Lincoln building. And I said okay, let's sit around, let's see what happens. And half an hour passed and the lights didn't come back on. And I said, you know, something's going on. We called up and we found out the whole east coast was blacked out. I don't know whether you remember the big blackout. And I said Ben, I don't know whether we're going to get home. The trains aren't running, everything is closed down. I just made a telephone call, the whole east coast is blacked out. I don't – can't – don't think I can leave you here. And he said well, you know something, I – if you'll help me I – let's go up to my club. He was a memory of the Harmony Club up on Fifth Avenue, which was up on 60th Street. And I said, all right, come on, I'll help you. And we – poor fellow, he walked down 21 flights of stairs with his cane, and we started walking uptown. It was an extraordinary night. You know, people didn't know what was happening, it was the height of the Cold War, people thought that the Russians were sending missiles over and bombing America and we were going to be attacked any moment, and there were all kinds of fears everywhere. People were praying, it was just unbelievable what was happening in New York City. And we were walking up Fifth Avenue, straight up Fifth Avenue. And Ben got pretty tired. We were up near 50th Street and he was kind of exhausted by this time, and

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

there was Saint Patrick's Cathedral right there next to us. And I said Ben, you know, why don't we go inside and sit down, you know, you can use a spell of rest, and I – and he said you know Al, that's a good idea, let's go. So we went to Saint Patrick's cathed – Cathedral, which was amazing. It was lit up by candles and people, you know, they were afraid, they didn't know what was happening and they were praying and i-it was an extraordinary sight. And we sat down, we just sat and relaxed for awhile until – and I observed all this, the people crying, people in fear, people not knowing where they were going to go, people just resting like we were. And finally Ben said okay, I think I'm up to going a little bit further. And we marched from there the next 10 blocks to get up to the Harmony Club. We walked in and he said, come on up to the second floor. We went up to the second floor, wherever it was and there were these huge leather chairs. And we just plopped down and he said okay, now what will you drink? And we had some scotch and really just enjoyed that evening. And eventually I think I found my way home by – I left Ben there, I knew he was taken care of and I found my way home with a group of other guys in a taxi that night. That's what I remember about Ben Livingston then.

Q: So you're still in this – in the same business?

A: Yeah, the business was – went quite well for many, many years and in 1991 we had some very bad luck, we – we had a – an operation with, or a – a joint venture with an organization, we started a company in Puerto Rico with a man who would –

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

we thought we could trust and as often these things happen, we couldn't. The – the trust was not – was not well placed, and we lost an awful lot of money na – in that particular year, so much so that we had to go out of business [indecipherable]. And we joined – we – what we wound up doing was set – discharging our employees, which I think was probably one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do, let people go, tell them that we just couldn't carry on. And we went – we joined a – another organization, Stemcor at the time, whom we sold ourselves to for practically nothing because they didn't believe we could do anything. So we said okay, we'll make a deal with you. Here's what we want to earn and if we don't earn it, you don't pay us anything. So we were at risk and if we lost money we were prepared to make it up to them. And so we went to work for them and it didn't take very long, we hit it just right and in three years we had recovered practically everything we lost on the other company. It was – we did exceedingly well. And it came time to renegotiate the contract and we renegotiated it and then – for two – for two more years. And then they got kind of jealous by how much we were making, and you know, th-these things happen. We got into arguments about why aren't you paying us and they wanted to create all kinds of reserves. Well, you – you – we're not going to pay you now and we'll pay you later and we said no. And after two years we closed that up. Actually, there was a lawsuit that resulted from the – the closing of the Livingston organization. The banks has lost some money in that transaction as well.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

End of Tape Three, Side B

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Alfred Schnog. It is tape number four, side A, and you were talking about your professional career.

A: Yeah, so we – we were working for this organization, the name was Stemcor and we had, when we joined them we did exceedingly well, we had renegotiated our contract. And we were also involved at the time, together with Stemcor in a legal matter, which stemmed from the old business. And I remember the president of that company, Ralph Oppenheimer came over to see me and we went to see – talk settlement with the opposing parties, who were the banks. And the judge demanded that we settle for, I think a million dollars was the settlement – would be. And I remember taking the train back with Oppenheimer from the – from the courthouse to New York City. And he said, Alfred, you are going to pay your share of this. And we had had an agreement that we would not, if there was such a situation we would not have to participate in it. And I said no, we're not. We have an agreement and we're going to stick to our agreement. We stuck to ours, now you stick to yours. And he said well, you know, if you don't, I will not renew your contract. And I said all right, if that's the way you feel. So I – I believe I said, that'll suit me just fine. You know, I was sick and tired of that – running into that kind of an argument with him. And I kind of felt I must have a lot of my mother and father in me, because they would

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

have done the same thing. They would have said no, a deal's a deal. Let's live by it. And so we left Stemcor. We then proceeded to have three more years with another British company where we managed for them the organization. And as of the beginning of last year, Anita and I have been conducting the business on our own. We – th-that business end that they didn't want – that they had to pull out of the organization because they had problems in Russia because of the economic problems that the Russians had. So the English really said th – we need to get out, we need to have somebody buy us out. And we couldn't find anybody to buy them out so they decided well then we'll – we'll leave you and we'll run it ourselves and maybe close it up, though I don't know what they planned to do with it. But we started our own business as of the end of – at the beginning of this year. And we're – just the two of us are operating it. That's very, very – it's a lot of fun, and we enjoy it, it's our life and – and we continue to carry that on. That's been successful, so – you know.

Q: Do you take any business trips to Germany?

A: I – no, not now. I did and – but it's been some years now since I've done that. I'd like to take Anita to Germany, I'd like to introduce her to the things that I saw and take her to some of the places that I remember. Where my grandparents lived. The Rhine where I went swimming, which I don't think you can do today. It's like putting your silver spoon into a cup of coffee and watching it melt, you know. And of course

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

to Holland, Anita has been to Holland, I took her there. But I would like to do that, yes, an-and I will.

Q: And when did you get married?

A: Well, I've had – this is my second marriage. My first marriage, I married in – when I was quite young, 22 years old, 1953 and had two children and divorced after 35 years of marriage, then married Anita after the divorce became final, about three years later. And we've been married now exactly 10 years, and happily so.

Q: And your children's names?

A: Well, Andrew, who is now 44. And Nancy, who is now 42.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: And we have – I have five grandchildren. Andrew has three children, two boys and a girl, and my daughter has two children a boy and a girl and we love them dearly. Anita, my wife, has two children as well, and one of her children has four children and one of – and the other child just had his first. So we have 10 grandchildren altogether between the two of us. So there's a lot to be thankful for.

Q: Let's talk now a little bit about your thoughts and feelings. Do – do you think you would be a different man today than if you had had a different childhood than you did and ha-had to go through the things that you did? The difficult times.

A: Absolutely, I think I would be very different. I think that history and your upbringing, your experiences as a young – as a young man do form your later life.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

You know, you can't purge yourself of the knowledge and the feelings. They stay with you all your life. And no matter how young you are when you experience these things, they remain with you. They remain with you. I don't think that I would ever feel entirely comfortable or at all comfortable in any place where Jews were looked at as inferior or being something less than what the rest of the citizenry of whatever country that is, was. I don't think that I would have formed my feelings of social justice if I had not gone through what I went through. Perhaps I would have. I guess a lot depends on the kind of education you have, on your parents and how they feel. I am enormously offended by people who unfairly oppress others in – in any manner, and object to it violently when I – when it's so. I – so all those things come from, I think, my past. I have no patience for people who try to bully others in any shape or form. I think that also stems from my childhood. And I have a deep sense that history somehow will repeat itself someplace in the same way, and my God, we have seen it in our lifetime. We've seen the oppression that are visited on people everywhere in the world. They may not be oppression of – of the Christians against Jews or – or the Nazis against – committing genocide against any number of people. But you do have it, you have it – you had it in – in Bosnia very recently. You ha -- it's happening all over the world, it's happening in Indonesia now. It's – and I have no patience for that. I – a-and – and I know what people come away with who live through such times. How we had it in our own hemisphere. Y-You do have to feel for the Cubans

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

who were displaced by Castro. Certainly some of the things that happened to them were totally unfair to them. So all those – all those things and how I feel about them came about by what happened in my lifetime.

Q: When you were young, you – you had some experiences where you, you know, saw th – you saw parades or you saw symbols that were very repugnant to you. Is there anything today that triggers that in you? Any sights, or any sounds that you sometimes hear flash back to your very early childhood?

A: I think them – that kind of militarism, certainly it exists. It existed in Russia under the communist regime. It probably exists in North Korea today, etcetera. But it – it existed in Germany in a very, very special way, and I don't think it's – i-it's exactly the same thing. The Germans made a specialty of it, and they did so historically for many, many, many years. I mean, you go back to Bismarck and even back further, the – the Prussians and their – y-you can go back to – to Middle Ages and the – the Germans and their – their mythology of – was always the – the hero worship and the loyalty to – to anything but – but a democratic society. They just didn't have that in them, they were – th-they – they were st – they were the strong, the – the people made of steel, the ones who would show the rest of the world exactly how – how it would operate and I don't know whether it was – i-it sort of looked Wagnerian. I'm sure it is in many ways. German philosophy is replete with this sort of thing, of – of the super race, which is what Hitler really played on. I don't see that elsewhere in the

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

world, I am not seeing it elsewhere in the world. Sure, people think we're better than you are. There's a group in the – in Africa, when one ethnic group tries to annihilate another, sure they think they're better than they are, but they don't try to set themselves up as a super race, as somebody that could dominate the world, and the Germans always managed to do that, or they have in the last 150 years anyway. Or maybe not so right now, but they did before that. And so this militarism that I saw there and experienced there, I think is unique, or was, at least in my view, was unique to Germany.

Q: When your children were growing up, and they were five, six, seven, eight, when they were the age that you were when you had to leave, di – was that a difficult time for you? Did it bring back those times?

A: No, no. Never thought about it. Never, never thought about it. We've told our children what I experienced, but I think it was very, very far removed from their lives. Now –

Q: Was your first wife born in America?

A: Yes, she was. Nancy has talked at great length to my mother, and they were very close. So she has had the opportunity to experience first hand from her, at least, or let's say secondhand, what transpired, and I think it has affected her. Also, her life in Israel, she has certainly come across many, many people who experienced much more traumatic events than I did, and whether they were all relayed to her, or

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

whether she learned anything from them, I don't know, but the opportunity certainly was there for her to do so. My son I don't think really thinks about it. He knows that his grandparents came from Germany, that they left on Kristallnacht and that they had to get out and that many of the family was caught up in the Holocaust and lost their lives. But I've never questioned him about it, how he thinks about it, and maybe I should, but maybe it's a failure of parenting on my part, that this is not such an important thing in his life or such an important thing in the grandchildren's lives. I'd like to make it that way but I'm not sure that you can. I really don't think you can. I think there has to be a – an interest and if that interest is spawned at some stage or another by them, by their education or by what they experience, then it may be meaningful and then they'll come and ask. One would hope they would, and I'd be prepared, of course to discuss it with them in any way they wished. But I'm not sure that that will ever happen. It's not likely.

Q: D-Do you feel German in any way now?

A: Not at all. Not at all. I grew up in America. My – I feel as American as anybody who has been born here. I don't feel German. People ask me where I'm from, I'm more likely to say that I grew up in Forest Hills, I'm not likely to say that I'm from Germany. Sometimes when I'm abroad and people ask me where I'm from, I ee – I – I might say that. I don't know why, I guess maybe it might impress the people that I'm talking to, so it depends who the audience is and what I choose to let them know,

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

or if I feel it might make an impression, but it seldom makes an impression. I think they are much more likely and – to look at America the way I did when I was a youngster, and they idolize it. It's a culture that has, the American culture has – has gone all over the world, much, much more so than it was when I was in Germany. So we Americanized the world. Well, that's a good thing.

Q: Are you angry that you had to go through what you did as a very young child because you were Jewish and that you lost all these relatives because they were Jewish and there're other people who didn't have to do that, people in America your age, who were born in America. You angry about that?

A: I don't harbor any anger at all in that respect, no. I understand that people go through – have different experiences. There are many Americans who have gone through very traumatic experiences of their own. May not be of the s-same nature, but certainly they – not everybody lives an I – an idealistic life, they have their own – they have problems, etcetera, and they – they're very meaning – meaningful in their lives, just like my adventures in Germany, and my leaving was very meaningful in mine. So, do I have an a – do I have anger? No, none – none whatsoever, none, none. The only anger that I harbor are those people who deny that it ever happened. And those who by their ignorance want to propagate that sort of thinking. The Fascist groups that arise, the intolerance that you sometimes see in people, that angers me. But I think it angers many Americans, not just those who left Germany.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

Q: Mm-hm. Were you in any way active in the Civil Rights movement here in the 60's and 70's?

A: No, no, I didn't participate in any active fashion there. We saw what was happening, of course, and I think we rooted for the right side, but aside from a rooting interest and a – a-and looking at some of the things that were going on and abhorring it, the – the – the standoff at the colleges and etcetera. These were – that it was happening was probably very good for America, that it – that all this existed, that that kind of discrimination existed here was not a surprise to me because I had known it existed, and here a country was going through it and was purging itself of it, hopefully. You see, I think the difference between American society and German society is that in Germany under Hitler, institutionalized discrimination and hate and made it a government policy. I don't think that can happen here, not under our Constitution and under our laws. And not only can't it happen here, the country was founded on the basis of exactly not allowing that sort of thing. The Constitution was written with this in mind, by people who were very farsighted, many years ago. This wasn't the case in Germany. So there's a tremendous difference here, there and – no. I don't – I really don't think that there is a parallel to be drawn between what has happened here in the Civil Rights movement to what happened in Germany, there is no parallel.

Q: What are your feelings about the state of Israel?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: Well, I'm a Jew. I believe that the state of Israel was a – was heaven sent for the Jews all over the world. I'm fully in support of a Jewish nationality and a state, totally. I don't like what I see is happening. We can't make peace with our neighbors in the Middle East, which is a sad, sad state of affairs. I'm concerned that there will never be peace in the Middle East. There are just too many hatreds dating back too many years that these things cannot be forgotten by the people who are involved in it, for them. For the Palestinians, this is their Holocaust. May not be of the same magnitude, but it's not any easier for them. And I don't think that the state of Israel has done what it can to relieve that. I think they can do more. Now, whether the Arabs will allow them, you know, these are the questions that are tearing at everybody today. You know, we can blame each other back and forth for a thousand things and find all kinds of excuses why it isn't done, but some – somewhere, somebody has to sit down with somebody in the other side and they have to talk sense to each other. And will that ever happen? I don't know. I sure hope it will and I'm an optimist and I think eventually it may. Maybe not in our lifetime, but hopefully it will, although, as I said before, I'm an optimist there, but I'm a pessimist as to whether it'll ever happen.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial?

A: About what?

Q: During – during the Eichmann trial.

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: I think these people epitomized the hateful Germans. Eichmann was a – a murderer. So were so many others, so many who escaped to Argentina and lived their lives out in luxury in the – in the – the resort towns of Bariloche and in Montevideo and places like that. I am sorry that we couldn't put them all on trial the way we did Eichmann. And do I resent those people? Yes, I do. I'm sorry we can't put them all to death, even today. And if we find them, we should shame them in every way we possibly can, no matter how old they are. They murdered a – a whole people. Genocide. I have no patience for that. And if I harbor hate, it's against people like that. People like Milosevic too, who was just a incarnation of a – of – of these types. They should be put on trial as quickly as we can get our hands on them. Now whether the world as a community can do that, who knows?

Q: Do you feel that you lost any part of your childhood, you were so young when you had to leave?

A: Honestly no. My childhood from my – from my formative years was spent here in America and didn't lose any of it. I was a happy child. I was – my family made sure that I was secure, despite the fact of what we were living through. And despite the fact what I observed, I never, never felt a personal threat. So no, I didn't miss anything in my childhood.

Q: Before we conclude, is there any message you want to give to your grandchildren on the tape? Anything you want to say?

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

A: Yes. It would be wonderful if all, or even any one of them took an interest in those years, those very important years. I'll speak directly to them, you certainly came from at least one parent who lived through history. And it behooves you to know a little bit about your background and where you came from and why you are here at all, cause at any time in those early years, when I was younger than you are now – or maybe not, maybe some of you are just about the age that I am now – that I was then, anything could have happened that it would have made life very, very different, it would have – you would never have been born if it weren't for the fact that your great-grandfather had the foresight to find his – and the struggle and the ability to find his way out of Germany. And there's another thing I think that you should remember. What happened then was the act of a government in concert with its people. You have an obligation to look, and to take part and to observe your government in action, to be certain that something like this can never happen where you live. You have that obligation and you must use whatever effort you have, or whatever influence you have to see to it that justice for all is a part of your life and is a part of the national life wherever you may be living at. So do that.

Q: Well that's a wonderful note to end on unless there's anything else you wanted to say before we finish.

A: No, I think you – you well covered everything. Yes, there is one other thing I have to say. I said we stayed at the Whitehall Hotel in London, it was not the Whitehall, it

Interview with Alfred Schnog
March 10, 2001

was the Cumberland Hotel on Speaker's corner and the Hyde Park corner. And that's important, I don't like to make mistakes.

Q: Well, that's – I'm glad you am – remembered that. Thank you very much for doing the interview and this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Alfred Schnog.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Conclusion of Interview