

Interview with Frank Liebermann
September 24, 2003

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Frank Liebermann**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz**, on September 24th, 2003 in **Bethesda, Maryland**. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is tape number one, side **A**. What is your full name?

Answer: **Frank Nathan Liebermann**.

Q: And what was your name at birth?

A: **Franz Natan Liebermann**.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: January 19th, 1929, in **Gleiwitz**, on the main street, **Wilhelmstrasse Funf**.

Q: Let's first talk a little bit about your family, about your parents. L -- can you tell me their names first?

A: My father was Dr. **Hans Liebermann**, an ear, nose, throat specialist who practiced medicine in **Gleiwitz**, and we had an office attached to our apartment on the main street.

Q: And -- and your mother's name?

A: Yeah. My mother was born **Lotta Flora Olgala** in **Opin** and married my fa --

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was introduced to my father at a -- a fraternity dance when she was only 16 and they were married four years later in 1928, February 28.

Q: How far back can you trace your family i-in that part of **Germany**?

A: Back to about 1650. The family **Olgala** and **Bloch** were in **Lanendorf**, apparently having emigrated from **Alsace-Lorraine** during various pogroms there and settled in **Opin**. In fact, one of -- one of our foremothers married **Michael Gratz**, who eventually -- whose -- I think granddaughter became **Rebecca Gratz** in **Philadelphia**. And my grandfather was very proud. He made a family tree, which we have, which showed the family and that branch.

Q: What kind of a neighborhood did you live in, and was it a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

A: Well, **Gleiwitz** was a town of little bit over a hundred thousand people, with probably about a thousand Jews, primarily merchants, professional, and of course also others. We lived, and as I said my father had his office on the main street with a connected apartment. I considered myself very middle class, in the respect that a -- my mother had for the time a nursemaid for me who stayed almost until we left, and was active in the community. They had bil -- were quite active before 1935 also, in the general community, but that changed drastically with the coming of the Nazis, to be limited really, to Jewish activities.

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Q: How religious was your family?

A: My father came from an Orthodox home, my mother came from a barely religious home. My grandfather was kosher, my parents did not keep a kosher home, except when my grandfather moved in after my grandmother died. He moved to **Gleiwitz** from my father's birthplace, which was in **Boyton**, about 20 miles away from **Gleiwitz**. At that time we went to -- we had a kosher home and my grandfather, even though he had a separate apartment, usually came to us for meals, really until we left.

Q: Did you celebrate any holidays?

A: Yes. I mean, we celebrated all holidays. I also remember -- rather my father was fairly observant in that I n -- I remember him taking me to the service for the first born, I think at six o'clock in the morning, I guess when I was about seven or eight years old. I only have one memory of doing it, but that stays in my memory bank.

Q: Any other holidays that you can talk about, that you have memories of as a young child?

A: Well, we always -- oh, by the way, our -- oh, we lived about one block from the Temple -- rather, the synagogue. I particularly always remembered -- sh -- oh --

Q: Are you thinking of a holiday, or --

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A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: Pa-Passover?

A: In -- no --

Q: **Rosh Hashanah?**

A: The [indecipherable]

Q: Su --

A: Where the old age home, which was right next to the Temple, always had a **Sukkor** and a had sweets for the kids, and that was of particular interest. We also always had, obviously Passover, **Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur**. I remember the Temple. The women sat in a balcony, but it wasn't closed. There was no curtain. It also had music in terms of the boy's choir, conducted -- and I still remember him, by **Lira Fleischer**, who is also the head of the Jewish school, because the public school became closed in 1933, before I started, and the Jewish community had four classrooms within the school, where the instruction took place. The main negative I remember, and this was after 1936, was we had to leave the school grounds -- or not the school grounds, but the classrooms during lunch period. And we more or less had to draw a fine line of being in the schoolyard, between the boys and the girls which were separated, because there were fights and so forth and it became more and more dangerous to be in the

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schoolyard. Toward 1937 - '38, we were dismissed five minutes earlier so that we could be away from the grounds by the time school was open, so that we could get home safely.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about that. How did you feel about that? Is it something that you would confide in your parents? Did you have any fears about this kind of situation? You were very young, of course, but what can you remember about that different treatment that you as a Jewish child got?

A: I just realized I had to be careful. I was given quite a bit of independence. I was able to ride my bicycle wherever it was in town. In fact, when the public swimming pools were closed in 1936, at that time I was seven, there was an old rock quarry which had water in it, kind of a small lake, which became the Jewish pool probably about three, four miles out of the city. And friends of mine and I used to regularly bicycle out there and as long as we weren't in groups, we didn't feel particularly vulnerable.

Q: What about the teachers in your school? Wa-a-a -- were any of them Jewish?

A: They were all Jewish. In other words, we had no contact with the regular school teachers. I remember my first gir -- first -- I went through first, second and third grades, and it was strictly -- it was a German curriculum, but we had our own school within the school. **Upper Silesia** had been protected by a treaty covering

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minorities when parts of the area were given to **Poland**, and therefore, during the transition minorities were protected, the German minorities were protected in **Poland** and any other minorities were also protected in **Germany**. So that the effects of the Nazi government really started in 1936 when **Der Stürmer** was at every street corner. **Der Stürmer** was the anti-Semitic paper published by **Goebbels** and they had them behind glass for the public to read, virtually everywhere. I also recall that in beginning of 1936, my parents insisted that I immediately take swimming lessons and be able to pass a swimming test of 20 minutes, because it may be necessary to take an ocean voyage. When I was afraid of the test at the time, I remember my grandfather went with me and said, I'm not leaving until you do it, because the pool is going to be closed very soon and I want you to be a competent swimmer. And that was bef -- before the summer of '36. During the time when the treaty was over, everybody was afraid of riots and there were some broken windows and similar things. My parents had the foresight to take a vacation in **Bornholm**, which is an island in the n -- nor -- the **Baltic Sea**, whi -- during these times, and when we returned the atmosphere changed pretty substantially. In other words, the so-called treaty expired and the community caught up with the rest of the country in a few weeks.

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Q: Were you a very fearful child at this time? Were -- how aware were you of the growing threat?

A: I was pretty aware. I was never particularly fearful. I think I have very good nerves and that goes back to those days, I just learned to kind of mind my own business and do whatever I wanted to. I had no real limitations except what I mentioned for school. In 1937, after my mother had taken a trip to **Israel** in -- actually, I think late '35, and determined that a doctor had no chance of making a living in **Israel**, my parents decided I'd better take English lessons and I remember I had an English teacher and I did this probably about once or twice a week.

Q: This was a private English teacher that came to the house?

A: It was not a -- it was not taught in school.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: German. **Upper Silesia** was strictly a German area. We did not -- people here were surprised that we did not speak any Yiddish, because Yiddish is really medieval German which combined with the local dialects. And since the language of our area was German, there was no -- it didn't stay stagnant and didn't get mixed with any other language, so that it wasn't used.

Q: Did you feel very German?

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A: Yes. In other words, the philosophy of my parents was that they were Germans, but happened to be Jewish. Like we're Americans, but religiously we're Jewish.

Q: Did you feel very Jewish?

A: Not particularly. In other words, except that I did go to a Jewish school and after 1936, we couldn't go to movies or other children's activities, and it -- were restricted to certain areas. I remember among the safer playgrounds was an organization which was the non-zia -- the co-community was pretty much divided between Zionists and non-Zionists. The non-Zionists being called the **Schild**, or Shield Organization. And there was an old -- there was a mansion pretty close to the middle of town, which served as our playground, and that was a nice place to meet and of course, at that point we only played with Jewish kids. My parents also shared what was called a **Schrebergarten**, which is a piece of land set aside a little bit at the edge -- kind of at the edge of town, into garden plots, where we had fruit trees and **[indecipherable]**. It was shared by about 10 families. And that was a place where we could safely congregate and that was actually a private parcel, which was our other playground in summer. In winter the **Schild** building was a place where we could go inside. The Temple really was just for worshipping. There was no Sunday school, as such.

Q: So did you get religious training at the school itself?

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A: Wi -- a -- a little bit of Hebrew. Not very much because I was -- it was too early to prepare for **Bar Mitzvah**. I was nine years old when I left, and --

Q: Wh-When you played with your friends -- and I -- I realize you're quite young at the time, did you talk about the difficult times with them, or were you just children that played regular childhood games?

A: We did pretty much -- we knew what -- what our limitations were, but within that -- I don't think I was, as I said, particularly either worried, scared in an everyday way and we just continued to do what was pretty much what we wanted. But there were limitations of things. We knew what not to do.

Q: You had mentioned that you learned how to swim. Were there any other sports that you got involved in as a young child?

A: Oh, everybody played kind of sandlot soccer. That was probably the main game. That was about the only one because anything that would be more formal was really prohibited because you couldn't go to parks, you couldn't go to places where that existed.

Q: So you did not have any contact with non-Jewish peers?

A: Very, very little.

Q: What about the non-Jewish neighbors of yours?

A: Just no contact. We minded our business and that was it.

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Q: Were any of them pleasant to you?

A: I don't really remember any contact with neighbors because living in an apartment building, we were in the first floor. Therefore -- the f -- no, wait a mo -- fir -- it was actually the second floor. There were stores on the bottom. The first floor is what the Europeans call the f -- one flight up. And I didn't pass anybody except when I went out. So we had the whole floor. Our apartment had four bedrooms plus an office, so that I'd have people over, we stopped using the playground area in the apartment, because was considered a good idea. But there were enough things to do that I didn't consider myself deprived.

Q: Did you have a lot of toys and games, and did you read books?

A: Yes, yes. I had -- I felt I had just about everything that -- I wasn't missing anything.

Q: What were your favorite games to play?

A: Probably trains. I had my -- I had model trains from as long as I can remember, and in fact, when we were ready to leave **Germany**, my grandfather gave me two presents. One was an **HO** gauge, which was new at that time. That was the small gauge model train, which could be set up on a table, that in case we were in a small apartment, it would fit on our dining room table. The other thing I got was a golden watch for my **Bar Mitzvah** when I would have it, wherever we were.

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Q: Did you have any or -- or -- brothers or sisters?

A: No, no. My mother had a couple of miscarriages and I was an only child.

Q: Le -- I -- again, I realize you were very young at the time. Were you -- do you have any memories, being a four year old, of the boycott, or any stories about the a -- the April 1st, 1933 boycott. Family stories.

A: We were not affected by that. In other words, due to the treaty, what the boycott was in the rest of **Germany**, 1936 was in -- was when it hit **Upper Silesia**.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: As far as memories is concerned, the only thing I -- I do remember my father's parents had a small hardware store, again on the main square, and I remember their house, which was above the store and I realize they did not have -- they only had one area in the kitchen with running water, and for washing they still took a basin with a jug for the hot water. So this must have been around 1934, because my grandmother died of a stroke in 1935, after which my grandfather closed up the store and moved to **Gleiwitz** to be near my parents.

Q: So at the time, let's say, of the **Nuremburg** rally in 1935, your parents didn't talk about this with you.

A: It was -- it didn't affect us, therefore a lot of -- a-also, my father didn't lose his hospital privileges until 1936. Many other physicians left **Berlin**, for instance in

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1933 and 1934, because after the boycott, they saw the handwriting on the wall. It didn't show up til much later in **Silesia**, so that it also had the fact that fewer people really saw the urgency of leaving.

Q: So when were the first restrictions, besides the school, that you remember?

A: Mainly that we couldn't go into certain stores and that we more or less were given maps of what we could and what we couldn't do. But it didn't stop our movement, but rather, there are just certain things which one doesn't do.

Q: Did --

A: And we took it in that sense, that same as parents said you don't -- you don't cross the main street.

Q: Did you ever question any of this to your parents?

A: Just that as si -- that it wasn't safe and that there are en-enough things for me to do without it.

Q: When did you see your first swastika?

A: Probably quite early, because it was on every stamp, it was on every government -- government building, but it was taken as something that -- that existed, but didn't have the same connotations --

Q: Same connotations of what?

A: -- that we see now, of -- that it was a serious threat. And, in fact, most people

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felt it would blow over and wouldn't last, particularly my mother's parents, who had celebrated the hundredth anniversary of a wholesale leather business with a tannery in 1933, and survived in very good shape through the hunger of World War I, when they could always barter leather for food at the local -- from the local farmers. And felt they were pretty much immune from anything that would happen. They really didn't appreciate what ha -- what was going on until **Kristallnacht**.

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 **Frank Liebermann**. This is tape number one, side **B**. When did you first hear about a man called **Adolf Hitler**?

A: Probably around 1935, because one did listen to speeches and the fact that he was able to arouse almost riotous reactions, and people started talking about what was going to happen next. Again, wa -- how political is a five year old, and I couldn't really absorb what was going on in the same way as my parents, who obviously were quite concerned, as I said, whether it's a ocean voyage, learning English and so forth. That became pretty clear even before the end of the treaty,

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and I'd say around 1935. By the time I started school, which was in 1935, it was already fully segregated and I just thought that's the way it had to be.

Q: Now, 1935 is when you said your mother went to **Palestine**.

A: Yes.

Q: Were your parents already Zionists?

A: No. No, it's -- they were always su -- very supportive of Zionism, mainly as a refuge, and especially after the conclusion that a doctor couldn't make a living, they eliminated the thought of moving to **Palestine** as one of the possibilities, pretty early.

Q: As things moved on, what about food? Were your -- were you able to get enough food? No -- any problems with that?

A: No, there were no problems with food except there were certain regulations, that on certain days -- I believe it was Friday or Thursdays, you had to do everything in one part in order to conserve fuel and I really don't know if these were restricted -- restrictive laws for the Jewish community, or for everybody. Oh, one other comment, which I think it interesting. The synagogue covered all degrees of religious activities, from what we would say very Orthodox to quite Reform. And there was only one synagogue. However, virtually all of the families bought from the kosher butcher, because he couldn't make a living on only the

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people who were kosher. Consequently, we ate kosher food as a **mitzvah** for the rest of the community.

Q: Did you observe **Shabbat** every week?

A: We drove and I had my -- I once got caught with my scooter, and -- by my Sunday school teacher, who objected, but I wasn't punished for it. And it's really a question of what is work in Biblical times, compared to what is work today, so I have no strong feelings on the subject.

Q: Did you have a family Friday night dinner?

A: Yes, in fact for many years while my grandparents were still in **Boyton**, we always went there for Friday night. My father had bought a car in 1933, which was a major luxury at that time, was a convertible. Something like a **VW** convertible, except smaller. And every Friday night we would go to **Boyton**, which is -- as I said, it's about 20 miles away, and be at my grandmother's for dinner. And one of the foods which I happened to have liked, which my kids could never understand, was a liver soup. But she made a very good one.

Q: Were -- did you have any childhood songs that you remember, that -- were you musical? Was that something that gave you comfort?

A: I would say most of the ones we had we learned from the maids, which were

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mo -- almost semi-Nazi songs. Bu -- rather war -- not Nazi, generally, but warlike, about a comrade and things like this and **[indecipherable]**

Q: Ca -- can you sing any?

A: Huh?

Q: Can you sing any of it?

A: Yes. I had a comrade -- I mean, I'm translating it -- we marched together in step. Then a bullet came flying, I didn't know if it -- would it be meant for me or for him? It was meant for him. He was tr -- he was shot down, he's lying on my feet. I mean these ca -- and all kinds of militaristic th-things about the German forests and tha -- the songs were very nationalistic. Like -- almost like the army songs that we learned here from the academies. Over hill, over dale, at -- and etcetera.

Q: How did your parents feel about you learning those songs?

A: I don't know what they knew or did anything else, but that was -- that's also what you heard on the radio. So that was almost pop culture. And I still remember quite a few of them.

Q: Can you sing one or two lines from some of them?

A: Like over hill, over dale, what was it? Just a second. **[speaks German here]**. In other words, hello, hello, what -- we're -- we're driving -- we're driving into the

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world. Kind of suggesting the world is our oyster. And the re -- what you heard on the radio was more and more that as it progressed. But I di -- again, as a six year old, I didn't understand the significance, except that I still remember some of them.

Q: All right, let's follow through now. When did you realize you were leaving, or what did your parents first seriously begin to do?

A: First of all, my grandfather was a genealogist and when he -- when my father were thinking of the **United States**, he looked up relatives. There were a couple of other relatives who had left and he gave em -- as I said before, he traced the family back to pretty early times. During my father's trip finally to the **United States** to try to find affidavits for the family and the affidavit being to guarantee that whoever comes over will not be on welfare, and would be supported for a year, he fou -- he sent my father to **Philadelphia** to check the **grates** records.

Unfortunately --

Q: What year was this?

A: This was January, 1938. After correspondence, he took the trip an -- as a visitor and it happens that **Rebecca's** brother married a non-Jewish woman and emigrated -- rather, and went west to **Louisville**. There's some correspondence with the brother, but only for the first generation, and then the family records were lost.

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And of course **Rebecca** never had any children, so that the family tree kind of stopped there.

Q: Your -- your father did not have difficulty getting passage and a -- and a visa to visit the **United States** in 1938?

A: He could pay for it with German marks. The big problem was that you could only spend German money, you couldn't take anything out. And visitor's visas were granted. That isn't the same -- like you can go to **Switzerland**, but God forbid you should live there. At that point there was also a brother-in-law of my grandfather's father. No, wait a minute, it was a brother-in-law -- in-law of my grandfather. Borrowed a substantial amount of money for a week and disappeared to the **United States** in 1935, almost causing -- causing a major business crisis, but they averted bankruptcy. He found out that he was in **New York** and had a very good job. In fact, he was vice president of **Bendix** aviation in 1938. And my father got a vi -- an affidavit from him, on which we came over that July.

Q: What was his relative's name?

A: **Charlie Marcus**.

Q: Was he willing to give your father the affidavit without any problem?

A: He gave my -- my father got the affidavit and immediately left. I mean, he got the affidavit in January. It took awhile for it to come through. We got a number

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and in fact I don't know if it's in the other records. Nothing was happening and everybody was getting kind of anxious. So a friend of theirs said look, what you have to do is to get a box of candy for **Fräulein Schmidt**, who's the secretary of the consul in **Berlin**. My father dutifully went to **Berlin**, got a box of candy and about four weeks later nothing happened. And he called his friend again and what can I do? And he said, well, what did you put into the box of candy? And he said nothing. I said, that was your first mistake. You have to put in a hu-hundred mark bill, and then you'll get action.

Q: Now, this is from the American consulate?

A: American consul. That was minor corruption compared to some of the smaller countries, who took huge payouts and then very often issued fraudulent visas as happened with the **Saint Louis** in **Cuba**. Virtually all the smaller countries made major businesses of giving visas with bribes. Some were legitimate and some were not.

Q: Now, were you aware at the time that your parents were making this effort to leave?

A: Oh, definitely. I was aware that when I had to learn how to swim, that we'll probably take an ocean voyage.

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Q: And how did you feel that -- where you said you felt German, what were your thoughts before you left, about leaving **Germany**?

A: If that's -- if that's what we had to do, I had no -- I'm adventurous.

Q: But you would be --

A: [**indecipherable**] the question. I had no, basically at that age, the roots are with the parents, not with the community. You're thinking now fo -- you're suggesting the thoughts of a teenager --

Q: Say you --

A: -- who doesn't want to lose his friends. I had friends, but they were kind of playmates. I had no -- I had no hesitation.

Q: What did you know about **America** at that time?

A: Just that it was a fabulous country.

Q: How did you know it?

A: That's what my parents told me. I really knew very little, but that they had friends there and they -- who've gone before, and that they're sure I'd like it.

Q: Did you have a large extended family in **Germany** and therefore you'd be leaving them?

A: Primarily my mother -- my father had one brother who was in **Austria**, who emigrated to **Austria**. My mother's family was partly in -- was mostly in **Opin**,

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some in **Breslau** and some in **Berlin**. The ones in **Berlin** were making plans to leave and another aunt was staying, and finally got to **England** around 1940.

That's about it -- that was about it of the content. The ca -- those were the major contacts that we had.

Q: So your father comes back and then applies for the visa with the candy and the --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and the money and then what happened?

A: It finally came through, we had to go to **Berlin** for a physical in June, 1938 and then we -- my father went on the next ship and left my mother to close the household, because the visa was good for 120 days, so it was good through October. And we therefore booked in October, in order to pack what had -- d-deci -- my mother had to decide what belongings to take along. At that time we could still pack what was called the lift, which is a container which, providing a tax was paid for the hundred percent value of whatever you're taking out. So that we did take most of our furniture that was pack-able, most of my father's office equipment. We also -- he also bought the latest equipment that -- for state of the art and I also remember my mother bought the laser -- latest **Singer** sewing machine, so that in case she had to sew our own clothes, and would -- she was

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quite good at being -- that was a way of eventually making money and surviving, because of course one couldn't take any money out, except the small amounts that they were able to smuggle out by going to **Czechoslovakia** regularly and sending it forward. But that was necessary but quite dangerous and that was for bare subsistence. Also, we went first class on the ship because you could pay for it in German money and first class pa -- allowed -- allowed you amount of spending money per person. So that spending money was our subsistence, because we used it and convert it in the -- in -- into dollars when we arrived here.

Q: Why did your father go before you? Why didn't you three go together?

A: Because he had to ta -- he had to study for the state boards, and he rented a room for five dollars a week and signed up for the state boards in December, so that -- and had to be a resident of **Ohio** in order to be eligible. If we w -- he would have arrived in October, he would have lost six month. As it was, he signed up in January on -- while a visitor and then took it in December. So for all appearances he was a resident for almost a year, and he passed his state board. **Ohio** passed 50 percent of those people taking it, and he passed it on the first try. And --

Q: I-In English?

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A: In English. He had taken French and some English in high school. And of course medical terminology has quite a bit of Latin roots, which made that somewhat easier.

Q: So you and your mother were left in **Germany** to get ready to leave.

A: That's correct. In other words, my mother basically sold the car, sold whatever she could, had everything packed and in fact, we had an incident during that time, that on the way -- that a -- while playing at the **Schild** area, I -- we were playing tag and I broke my arm. And when my mother called the hospital, a colleague of my father, with whom they had -- not socialized, but with whom they had had dinner at various times in the early 30's, said I'm sorry, I don't treat Jewish children, I can't help you. And she started making calls to have it set and found a doctor in my father's hometown of **Boyton**, who agreed to meet us at the back door of a Catholic orphanage in **Boyton**. My mother took a taxi there, he set it and put it in a cast, and I -- this must have been in July and I -- by the time we left I was out of the cast and it had pretty well healed.

Q: We-Were there no Jewish doctors who would set it?

A: Not in gli -- in **Gleiwitz** there was no -- there was no orthopedist. Remember, it was a pretty small community. So --

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Q: And then, o-on your way out of the country, how did you -- what was your journey from **Gleiwitz**?

A: From **Gleiwitz**, first we went to **Opin** to say goodbye to my grandparents, who, by the way were quite -- I won't say angry, but were not happy with my father taking their only daughter to this strange country where we may not see them again. My mother's brother -- one a -- one of the brothers, went with us. And I remember we had to stop in **Berlin** to get our passport stamped with a **J**. I think I gave that passport to the Holocaust Museum. We had to stand in line about four hours in the police station in **Berlin** before going on to -- to **Bremerhaven** from where we left.

Q: Did your parents have those middle names that were assigned to Jews, **Sarah** and **Israel** on their papers?

A: That -- no, that -- that was after -- I believe that was after Crystal Night. Oh, one other incident. During the month of September, we got cable after cable from my father to go on an earlier ship. We really didn't know why, because there was almost complete censorship on what was going on at **Munich**, and that **Hitler** had called back the **Europa**, on which we were scheduled to sail from **Cherbourg**, as a wharf rat. And when we finally arri -- ar -- my mother couldn't get an earlier sailing because it was -- it wa -- it was booked, and we needed to take a German

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ship in order to take money out and to be able to pay in German money. When we arrived in **Bremen** there was no ship. It was then that we found out that it was -- it lost, originally, two days, of which it had made up one, due to being called back. And the next day it arrived and we left one day late. And that was the first time I saw my uncles cry, because he took us to the ship. That was my mother's brother, **Walter**. We had a pretty rough sailing, it was hurricane season and I was pretty much alone on the ship, most times, watching the bow go under the way -- go into the waves. But my mother I think, had partly a breakdown from all the strain and partly was seasick. We had a couple of other rather scary incidents. In the packing -- quote unquote friends said they wanted to help by packing my bicycle in a box and preparing it to use the least possible space. And they delivered the bicycle to us and it was packed, and -- with all the other things. And they had -- when we packed our bags, they had a customs inspector check all of the luggage to see that nothing illegal went in and put a seal on it. When we arrived on the ship, all the seals were broken open by the Gestapo, to check on the customs officials, because the customs official said yes, I'm going out for lunch now, don't touch anything. And -- but my mother didn't take any chances and left things **copacetta**.

Q: Wha-What was it like for you to see people in Gestapo uniforms?

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A: By that time they were pretty scary and you just kept out of their way. My father had quite an incident with an armed Gestapo coming into his office. As a result of the -- there's a tra -- the way that you have a long term lease in -- or had a long term lease in **Germany**, you gave a mortgage to the landlord, so it's basically you lent him money. And for that it was a long term lease. When we decided to leave, he -- the landlord had to pay back the mortgage. And that was tra -- ordered transferred to my father's bank account from the landlord's bank account.

Somebody at the landlord's bank called the Gestapo that a large sum of money is being transferred to Dr. **Liebermann**, and consequently the two agents came in -- into the office while somebody was there and said we're here to arrest you. And he said, for what cause? You withdrew a large amount of money. I said, excuse me, this was transferred to my account at such and such bank, which is frozen. I suggest you call the bank. It's daytime. And fortunately the president of the bank who knew him answered and said that they money is on deposit, and they left.

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Frank Liebermann**. This is tape number two, side **A**, and you were telling the story of the money being deposited in the account.

A: So that was shortly before he had left, but it is typical of the so-called small bureaucrats all trying to endear themselves to the party. And I'm just giving that as an example. When -- as I mentioned, when we got to the ship, all of the seals were opened, but fortunately nothing was found and we were met -- we arrived here on October 20th.

Q: What -- what day did you leave?

A: On the 13th.

Q: Were there any other people in your position on the boat?

A: I really don't know. I -- at -- there were times when I was probably one of about half a dozen people in the dining room, mainly because I didn't get seasick. So I spent most of my time just watching.

Q: Were there other children?

A: No. I didn't see anybody. Anyway, we stayed in **New York** for three days.

Q: Do you -- and what was it like for you to land in **New York**? You would have been told about why --

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A: Well, the first thing -- the first thing that I was introduced to is the American drink is a **Coke** and I thought I was getting cocoa. So that was my introduction to the **United States**.

Q: Did it have any meaning to you when you got off the boat and stepped on American soil?

A: Well, it looked gigantic. I had come from a small city, and **New York** is an overwhelming sight. One of the Americans on the ship showed me the Statue of Liberty and the **Empire State Building** before we landed. And --

Q: Did you know what that was?

A: Oh yes. I mean, he was very nice. He explained -- I think we left -- he told me about **Columbus Day**. I got my first history lesson.

Q: This was on the boat?

A: On the boat, from an American passenger.

Q: And you were speaking English to him?

A: I have to -- I could speak a little English. I told you, I took English lessons. But of course I probably spoke it about as well as I speak German now, which is not very good.

Q: Were there many Americans on the boat?

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A: Again, I didn't see many people on the boat, because just a -- it was an extremely rough crossing, and as I say, it -- th -- most of the time there were maybe -- between 10 and 20 people in the ma -- in the dining room. And that's a -- the first class section wasn't that big, but we had a lot of room to walk around on the promenade deck. So I spent most of the time just being interest -- of course, I was wondering why I wasn't invited to the Captain's table, since everybody -- in other words, I was about the only one who wasn't sitting on it. But I accepted that.

Q: So then you -- you come to **New York** and your -- was your father at the dock?

A: My father was at the dock. He splurged -- we had a room at the **Hotel Taft** for three days, and then took the **New York Central** to **Cleveland**.

Q: What was the reunion like between your mother and your father and you?

A: Oh great, great. And in th -- **Cleveland** he rented one room -- one bedroom apartment near **Cain Park** where I slept in the **Murphy** bed. That was my introduction to the **United States**. And on the first Thursday we had a feast. We bought -- there was a deli downstairs and he bought a corned beef sandwich and a loaf of bread. And that was the first **notaful** American meal -- th-th -- the American meal that I got. We had one other funny incident, we had a German super, who -- and I remember my parents commented that he spoke terrible English and terrible German, saying in other words something was wr-wrong with

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the faucet and th -- who answered [**speaks German here**]. In other words, I'll fix it for you, in other words sil -- and I remember my mother saying gee, I hope we'll be able to learn at least one lang -- to speak one language well. They -- my parents went out the first time, I remember -- I believe it was a Saturday, they went out to a movie, and I believe it was -- it was a night of **Kristallnacht**, or rather the -- at three o'clock in the morning on -- and they had left somebody in the next apartment to look after -- t-to look in on me. And I know -- and I remember getting a call, a desperate call from my grandparents to talk to my mother, that the two brothers had been arrested and I think everything was -- and I just took messages, who the operator was, and when they came back, the world changed. So that was -- I said -- they got through to them and from that time on there was a -- first of a -- the primary objective was still, the state boards were in December. And right after the state boards, after he got notice that he passed, which was, I think the end of December, he had arranged to go to **Philadelphia**. Somebody had been recommended, a professor at **Hanneman**. He wanted to learn American meth -- methods. That was a fraternity brother. He said, why don't you go there, and he did that -- he wa -- he was at the pe -- their house, and he was particularly nice. And as he was leaving, he said, by the way, you mentioned that this Dr. **Seiderman** recommended me and I really don't know, who is he? So it turned out

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that this colleague of his, a fraternity brother, basically wanted to get him out of **Cleveland** because he shared an office with an ear, nose, throat surgeon. So he made the suggestion that **Dayton** would be a good spot. And even though it wasn't well meant, it turned out to be a very, very good recommendation, because it was - - there was no -- the reason he went there was that there was no Jewish ear, nose, throat doctor in **Dayton**, but [indecipherable] he built up a very successful practice, partly with the help of the medical society in vetoing his admission by passing an **expos facto** law on a Friday night, sometime i -- after he made the application requiring citizenship. Somebody leaked that to the newspaper and the **Dayton Herald**, to which he was eternally grateful, had a Sunday editorial on freedom of opportunity in the **United States**. And the following Monday he had 11 new patients. So that was -- what do they generally say -- so anyway, the next Monday he had 11 new patients and that really established his practice. And oddly enough, his main practice was not Jewish. In other words, he was fair -- a fairly brusque individual and -- who said what he wanted and didn't have the be-bedside manners for Jewish pa -- that some Jewish patients preferred. By the way, another side. After the war, he was the recipient of the 75th anniversary award for international **HIAS**, for his resettlement efforts. He gave over a hundred affidavits

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personally, to sponsor people after World War II. He received that together with President **Truman**, and I think three others.

Q: This is the Hebrew immigrant aid society award.

A: Yes.

Q: Let -- let's go back a little bit to when your parents heard the news about **Kristallnacht**. Did they take any actions? After that you said they called the family.

A: Well, when he went to **Philadelphia**, before going to **Philadelphia** -- oh, first of all, they fi -- they all wanted to leave at that point. In other words, they realized that it was much more serious than they had believed at first. And he -- they made every effort to try to get help. On the way to **Philadelphia** he stopped to see **Charlie Marcus**. And by the way, we had bought him a large crystal ash -- ashtray as a matter of thanks when we arrived. But on his second visit he said he can't take any more responsibility and it was my parent's belief that this was a little bit too close. In other words, my father was once removed. My grandfather -- now it's -- they had -- he may want repayment for the debt, and he said he can't take any more responsibility. This was, by the way, a man who filed, with the affidavit, his income tax return of 1938 of 38,000 dollars. So I just say that for perspective. You know what 38,000 dollars was in 1938. They did --

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Q: How did your par -- how did your parents handle this news?

A: They did manage to get som -- my father's father, who had signed him into an old age home in -- or what would be called assisted living in **Breslau**, figuring that he didn't want to be a burden. He was able to get an exit visa for him and he got sick on the way to the ship, and was taken directly to te -- **Theresienstadt** and never got out. My mother's brothers were finally booked in 1940 on an Italian ship to **Shanghai**, which left, I think on the day of the breakthrough of the **Maginot Line**, which caused **Italy** to declare war on **Britain** and **France**, and the ship had to turn back because it didn't get through the **Suez Canal**. And that was the brother that took us to the ship and my mother's other -- his twin, and his wife and four year old daughter. My mother also had a younger brother, who was 11 years younger, who was running constantly to **Berlin** to try to get every embassy for visas. And at the age of something like 19, unfortunately was not successful. We never knew whether it was a question of age or just that they were hitting their heads against a wall. But the next thing we heard that they were t-taken to **Theresienstadt**, I believe in 1941. And they had been married by **Leo Baeck**, who was a ra -- the rabbi in **Opin** before he moved to **Berlin**. After the war, my mother contacted him when he visited **Cincinnati**. And he confirmed that they had been sent to **Auschwitz** in 1944.

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Q: So y --

A: During this war -- during this time I got -- we got a few postcards through the Red Cross, heavily censored, only knowing that they were starving because they said, you know, they -- they gained weight and were -- and now we're up to 130 pounds. And -- typical correspondence, which the Red Cross was totally ignoring, because those conditions must have been apparent and nobody did anything.

Q: So even after the **anschluss** in spring of '38, your -- your extended family did not make an effort to leave, it was only after **Kristallnacht**?

A: It was really only after **Kristallnacht**. In fact, my grandfather offered my father that if he moved to **Breslau**, there was enough of a Jewish community that he could continue to practice medicine, and if he needed any help -- he had been the family patriarch. If anyone in the family couldn't make a living, he could open a leather business and get credit. And he just felt that he would be able to survive from his previous experience. Not particular -- not very atypical of a lot of other people, unfortunately. I do remember o -- during the war period my mother helped my father try to keep busy. She didn't stop wearing black until I asked her to stop in 1946, because from not knowing and basically --

Q: Sh-She wore black all through the war?

A: Yes. That was her way of coping and that's -- that's how I remember it.

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Q: Did she talk about her feelings to you?

A: Look, every time we were -- every time the mailman came, you looked if there was any news. Because once they were in **Theresienstadt**, there was no free mail, it could only go through the Red Cross, and as the war progressed, it beca -- it came -- it became more and more convincing that things looked bleak. They were very active -- my f -- during that time and for the rest of his life he was head of the professional **UJA**. They also went to **France** under the -- on an inquiry, for example, when the **Algeria** -- during the Algerian times, when the Jewish community was in severe trouble, for the **UJA**, finding out that the French were of very little help, and they went -- as I say, they were very active, went to **Israel** regularly. In other words, they became strong Zionist supporters, even though they were never Zionists.

Q: Let's get -- go back a little bit. So you -- you're in **Cleveland** and your furniture has arrived?

A: No, it was in storage until we w -- got to **Dayton**. In **Dayton** we di -- oh, my **[indecipherable]**

Q: How long -- how long were you in **Cleveland**?

A: Til **Valentine's Day**.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: Or til the beginning of -- actually, til the beginning of February. He opened his office on **Valentine's Day**.

Q: This is 1939?

A: 1939. And --

Q: What was it like to open the box and see your bike?

A: That was quite an experience, because shortly after we arrived, we got a letter from the bicycle dealer saying that they should be very careful in unpacking the bicycle and they should look inside the frame, that there are some very valuable gold pieces inside the frame and they should keep it for them. My father was furious, because that was a capital offense and my mother and I could have been sent to a concentration camp for it. And he kept those gold pieces. After the war they wanted a refrigerator from the **United States**, which he sent them pre-paid and my kids and my wife and I each have the gold pieces, which are of a Kaiser who only served 90 days, and therefore very few were minted. And th-that's one of the family heirlooms. But it came at a very, potentially high price. And those are the people -- those people then escaped to **Israel**.

Q: So you've moved to **Dayton**?

A: We've moved to **Dayton**. As I said, he st-struggled very much for the first year, and with that incident of the medical society, the next day after this came out, I

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think a Dr. **Hallas**, who is Chief of Staff of **Good Samaritan Hospital** came to see him and offered him privileges due to the circumstances. And he basically served in **Dayton**. He volunteered for the army, but was rejected at that point -- this was in 1941, because **Dayton** became a very critical industrial area with a shortage of doctors. They had a major influx of workers from **Kentucky** and **Tennessee** for various war plant -- **Dayton** was both a **Chrysler** and **General Motors** town. And we went through the war in -- in **Dayton**, and as I said, he became very active -- he became the conduit for all immigrants coming in, because he had his connections in the Jewish community as well as being able to relate to the immigrants. And he was head of the Jewish Family Service, which was a volun -- as a volunteer, and my mother's chief endeavors were in **Hadassah** and child welfare. Pra -- I would say again, thinking -- she thought of adopting a war orphan, but then decided that she probably was not in a men -- mental condition to really do it well, and was in char -- was mainly active in **Hadassah** child welfare.

Q: Uh-huh. Let's talk a little bit about your experience. So you come to **Dayton**, did you feel -- I assume you started school right away -- did you feel different than the other young students?

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A: I started in **Cleveland** being put back to -- a year. I started a -- I was put back in the third grade, as when I was 10 years old. But as soon as we moved to **Dayton**, I was moved up a year and then again I skipped the fifth grade, so that I was -- got back to myse -- to my level pretty quickly. I didn't have any problem with friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish. I had an interesting experience in our Temple, since you asked about being religious. In **Dayton** the only tem -- the only synagogue which had Sunday schools, had a Sunday school and a full time English speaking rabbi -- was a Reform Temple, which at that time was ultra-Reform. And I remember the first time we went -- I went to Sunday school, we had an assembly which was -- they ran out of money during the Depression so that the assembly hall was made into the Temple, a dual purpose with a -- with an everlasting light. And I did -- having been used to having something on my head, when I went into the Temple, I kept my baseball cap on and I remember -- I forget his first now m -- his name -- name was **Shapiro** and he became a rabbi, said to me, **Franz**, it's impolite to wear a hat inside th -- rather, inside the Temple. So -- but he became very -- my father became very active in the Temple and was probably pushing toward the more traditional side, because it was pretty much realized that it had gone too far. I was never **Bar Mitzvahed**, because the Temple didn't have **Bar Mitzvahs** in those days. Confirmation were thought to be a more

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appropriate age, especially since most kids stopped going to Sunday school after **Bar Mitzvah**. And this was a way of continuing the education through at least the 11th grade, or the end of the 10th grade.

Q: Did you talk about your life in **Germany** with your American friends?

A: In the beginning I was asked to talk a little bit, but my parents really -- I think after one or two, tried to reduce that because item number one, they didn't want to get into any subjects which were controversial. Which was part of how we had been brought up. And any real f -- thoughts were only self-centered on what one should say and shouldn't say.

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 **Frank Liebermann**. This is tape number two, side **B**. And you -- I had asked you about whether you spoke about your experiences.

A: Really, that some -- I would say we kind of closed that chapter. I would -- that's also partly of the philosophy, whatever happened, you've got to look forward. We made very strong effort -- I feel from the minute we stepped on American soil, we considered ourselves American and kind of pushed anything

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that we had before out of the picture. I -- we -- I learned to play **one o' cat**, which was the su -- the game in -- in those days of playing baseball with half a team. We didn't have Little Leagues, or anything like that. I had to learn what football was because nobody here played soccer. And I became a -- an avid **Cincinnati Reds** fan. And I really didn't -- I didn't even know that I had an accent til I got to college, because was just ignored, this is who I was.

Q: Were you still **Franz** at this point?

A: Yes. I didn't really change my name until I got into business.

Q: What was December 7th, 1941 like for you?

A: We were -- we had gone out that morning and I remember after lunch, I think my parents took a nap or went in the bedroom, tur -- we turned on the radio, and all [**tape break**] again, we had a -- we had a radio in the bedroom, and I guess it must have been about two o'clock that we heard the announcement, it was a state of disbelief. And of course I still vividly remember the speech of a day that wi-will live in infamy. And that of course almost totally prevented any further contact with the family, because the only mail that could go out was through **Spain**, or th - - through **Portugal**, up to that tor -- while **Germany** was ada -- rather, before December seventh. After that, all communication except the Red Cross, stopped.

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So those -- that started a period of no communications that I really don't know how my mother survived it. But I guess both parents were pretty strong people.

Q: What was her state of mind? You said she was wearing black at that time.

A: And she was just keeping busy. That's why I say, with volunteer organizations, she decided to help in the office and it was pretty close to where we lived, so that when I came home -- she always had lunch for me and came home after school.

And we really adapted very quickly to life in **Dayton**. In 1941 -- first of all in 1940 I felt very privileged, we got a car, which was up to that point my father could -- did -- commuted to the hospital by bus, because again, every dollar was extremely precious. I remember getting the car, getting the first glimpse of the country, and we took our first vacation in the **Smokies** that August. I was a boy scout and did all the basic activities that one is supposed to do and I felt very comfortable, and had no problems getting used to the community.

Q: Did anybody mistake you for just being German and not being a German Jew, and did you experience any discrimination?

A: The one thing which we were laughing about is that I went to camp, I developed hay fever, and when I -- I went to camp when I was 11 and I was able to take my folding camera. When I was 12, I became an enemy alien and we had to register as enemy aliens. And technically we're not allowed to get out of the

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country -- get out of the -- **Montgomery** county, which was **Dayton, Ohio's** county, without permission from the authorities. And basically we were laughing about it. In other words, I as an 11 year old was free to travel, my parents weren't. But --

Q: Oh see -- you were not considered an enemy alien?

A: Not until I turned 12.

Q: Oh, oh, oh.

A: That was in 1940 -- 1942 [indecipherable]

Q: Did that make you angry?

A: We were laughing about it, because there was no place to go anyway. There were travel restrictions, gasoline rationing. So what's the difference? But these other -- you -- you have to -- you have to laugh at anything that's funny.

Otherwise, of course everybody -- we went through all the things which were done during World War II. We were encouraged to go -- to get jobs -- when we were in high school we were encouraged to get jobs to replace people. I worked in a clothing store for 35 cents an hour. But it -- there were such shortages and they didn't -- I mean, my mother packed a lunch which was probably worth about two hours -- two or three hours work. But it gave everybody a sense of accomplishment, and my father regularly volunteered to give physicals, I think

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twice a week at the recruitment center and every -- everybody pitched in and World War II was unique that it was -- got everybody's hundred percent -- it was a moral war that everybody supported.

Q: Did you follow the --

A: The news? [indecipherable]

Q: The news of the war, and how did you do that?

A: Radio. In other words, I remember **Lowell Thomas**, **H.V. Kaltenborn**, oth -- **Edward R. Murrow** and his reports, **William Shire** at first from **Berlin**, then elsewhere. I still na -- I still know all the reporters, and you basically pu -- could put everything together and it looked pretty bleak for awhile, but I think we quickly absorbed American optimism.

Q: What about being aware of what was happening to the Jews?

A: We knew it was bad, but there was a sense of helplessness. I remember the episode with the **Saint Louis**, which was absolutely unbelievable, that -- we worshipped **Roosevelt**, who at the same time was such a political animal that he would do anything to -- basically do what he felt was politically expedient. And of course, it's easy to say that in retrospect, but at the time, it couldn't be done. Whether it was a bombing of the rail lines, and -- or the camps.

Q: When did your family know about the camps?

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A: Well, we knew about **Dachau** very er -- early on. **Dachau** was established before 1938. I was absolutely flabbergasted when I looked at the map, to see how close **Auschwitz** was to **Gleiwitz**, and when we were back there, I took that one day trip into the area from **czechsla** -- from the **Czech Republic**, and when I looked at the map I was flabbergasted. In fact, I had a very interesting -- got a very interesting letter from the Holocaust Museum last week, forwarding a letter that they received from **Gleiwitz** that in -- the local organization in **Gleiwitz** has -- I forgot the exact name, something for international relations, is going to dedicate a memorial to the Jewish community, at the site of the synagogue. When I was there seven years ago, it was a rundown playground with asphalt and not a plaque, nothing. And the Jewish old age home became a police station. After that visit, everything else was pretty much unchanged, but I couldn't wait to get out and they -- I now got notice that they're dedicating a memorial on the site of the synagogue and that the dedication is going to be on the 28th and 29th of October. And my wife and I and my three kids, and **Joe** and his family are going there for the dedication. Also visiting **Berlin**, which I understand has a new Jewish museum. And I feel I want to show the kids our roots, and I also want to show the people who are doing this that it's about time. That's [indecipherable]. In fact, when I wrote the letter of acceptance that we're all coming, and I mentioned the European titles, that all

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my children are being doctors and lawyers, all have the European titles as doctors, that we're coming and that I hope the visit will be a very productive and memorable experience for all of us and them. And that's the reason I feel strongly about going. I si -- it still hasn't been determined whether they're financing it, but I'm willing to finance it, because I think it is for a good cause, even though a couple of my kids disagree.

Q: Will you be speaking to any groups over there?

A: Apparently yes. I don't know what the language barrier is going to be. But the head of the organization writes perfect English, so knowing that most schools are bilingual, we should be able to communicate to some extent, although when we were there seven years ago in **Opin**, that's the town where my mother was born, where I found the apartment where the business was and also where the Temple was, which is now a Russian style office building, I couldn't communicate in either English or German. And when we went to a restaurant, we finally pointed to the table next to us, where they had soup and a sandwich, and that's how we ate lunch. So it should be an interesting experience.

Q: Let's get back to the war. Any other mention that you want to make of the war?

[phone ringing, tape break]. As I was saying -- saying to get back t-to the war, you were following what was happening and communication got less and less --

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A: Yes.

Q: -- from the family, and -- and your parents state of mind because they were busy, was functioning and they were doing worthwhile projects and so forth?

A: They were definitely not only functioning, but became extremely active in any kind of relief efforts. And as I said, it went to other causes after that.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Because that was their way of making up for the family that was lost, that philosophically our feeling is, you can't replace what's lost, but you can better what can be replaced.

Q: Were you speaking to your family still in German?

A: No. We stopped speaking German probably within six months. But of course we all spoke with an accent, and I do not have very -- I am [indecipherable] graphic and picture person and I do not have very much language talent.

Therefore, I never heard the difference. And that's the only way I can explain the fact that I retain -- I retain my accent after 65 years.

Q: Then it's the end of the war, and what was that like for you and your family?

A: Well, that's when everything unfolded and the realization came that nobody could be traced. In other words, it was finalized by **Leo Baeck**, which must have been in the late 40's or early 50's when he came here. And it became quite

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obvious that my uncles never made -- never made it back to where they came from, and as I said, you have to use the energy positively and that was the family phi -- philosophy.

Q: So you became a high school student, were you active in high school, and have a lot of interests?

A: Very -- a lot of interests, yes. I consider myself a reasonably good student. I participated in various clubs, a lot -- mostly political. And I guess it shaped me also in a fairly liberal philosophy that Jews have always prospered in any fu -- liberal society, and it's important that everybody has the rights that they're entitled to because it rubs off. And I still thi -- I travel a lot, being that it's my business, but I still kiss the ground every time we come home, whether I agree with policies or not.

Q: And then you completed high school, graduated from high school, and then what?

A: I went to college, **Western Reserve University** and during my sophomore year I met my wife, who by some accident or act of faith was the first European woman I ever dated. And we got -- we were married as soon as I finished college. It's just about 53 years ago.

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Q: Ho-How did you meet your wife?

A: Both of us went on unwilling vacations where our parents wanted to rest a few days in **Lake Placid**. And then we started corresponding and one thing led to another. We kept the **New York Central Railroad** in business. They went bankrupt after we got married.

Q: So where was she living?

A: She lived in **Kew Gardens, New York** and I lived in **Ohio**, but I went to **Western Reserve** in **Cleveland** and she went to **Syracuse**. And the distance to **Syracuse** was quite a bit shorter -- shorter from **Cleveland**. That was kind of little bit better than halfway. So it was doable.

Q: And did your -- you said your wife was European, where did her family come from?

A: **Vienna**. And when -- when the **anschluss** occurred, her father was also in the leather business and had a customer in **Philadelphia**, a person, not Jewish, who offered them an affidavit. And they came here -- they went -- their name is **Simon**, maybe they had Jewish roots somewhere, but they definitely were not, and they lived on the **Main Line** in **Philadelphia**. And they came over in the same ship as I did, one sailing earlier, the one that was -- that was sent back during **Munich**. But

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we probably wouldn't -- wou-would have hated each other wa -- if we met when we were nine years old.

Q: And then you got married and where did you live?

A: In -- first in **Kew Gardens**, and then **Great Neck**. And when I -- I worked in **New York** for -- until 1992.

Q: What kind of work did you do?

A: I was in charge of production of textiles. I was in -- for a textile converting firm, until I retired. And after six months of retirement we -- rather, we moved to **Washington** because my two daughters both had gone to school -- to graduate school here and retire -- an-and found **New York** boys to marry in **Washington**, so we decided to live in -- to move here where we could grow new roots. And we've been living here for about 10 years, and since I'd done a lot of business travel, I went int -- went to travel school to learn the computers and I've been doing that since we live here and I work full time and travel a lot.

Q: When were your children born?

A: 1951, '54 and '55. And they all have families. **Joanie**, being the oldest has two -- has a daughter of 18 and a son 16. And he is the one who is going with us to **Poland** na -- which became **Poland** after World War II when I -- I say -- I became Polish retroactively when the borders changed. And my other -- my son has a

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daughter who is 12, and my other daughter has two daughters, age 14 and 12, who also live in **Washington**. **Jerry**, my son, lives in **Seattle**.

Q: Does he have any children?

A: Yes, I said, a daughter of 12.

Q: Oh [indecipherable]. Mm-h. Now -- and your parents stayed in **Dayton**?

A: My fa -- my father stayed in **Dayton** unt -- until he died in 1979. My mother tried to s-stay in her house in **Dayton** and unfortunately developed fairly severe **Parkinson's Disease**. And finally after she couldn't manage with round-the-clock help, she -- we brought her to **Washington** in 1993, and she died in the Hebrew home, 1995. But my kids did know her.

Q: Your parents you said were very active, Jewishly, in community --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and your father sponsored a lot of affidavits. Were they friendly with many other refugee Jews?

A: Some, but their roots really were in the general community, both Jewish and non-Jewish. In other words, we tended not to be cliquish and believed philosophically in being fully integrated. To me it was a step backwards to move to **Great Neck**, which is kind of a gilded ghetto, and I prefer **Washington** for that.

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Q: Let's talk now a little bit about some of your thoughts. Do you -- which you've already expressed some already. D-Do you feel that you would be a different person today if you hadn't had the childhood and the experience that you went through?

A: I've been -- let me answer it in a different way. I've met a fairly substantial number of Germans and I confront the history. I feel that the Holocaust is probably almost as much part of the German psyche as it is the Jewish psyche.

I've also noticed that the -- by the numbers that come to the Holocaust Museum. I feel I've had a much, much richer life in the **United States** than I ever would have had in **Gleiwitz**, even if it hadn't -- there hadn't been a war or Holocaust. So I sometimes use a statement in speaking to Germans, the best revenge is living well. And I believe in that philosophy and I think our children reflect it, that the opportunities, I'm talking about cultural and otherwise, that we've had in **New York** and **Washington** are far greater than anything we could have experienced in **Upper Silesia** in the best of times.

Q: Ho-How did you convey your religious feelings to your children?

A: We sent them to Sunday school. I'm a great believer that the two most important things you give your children are roots and wings. And they all not only went through Confirmation class, but they all went through post-Confirmation

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class in order to be rooted not only Jewish religion, but Jewish philosophy. I'm a philosophical Jew. My father used to say, I may eat **traif**, but I like to think kosher.

Q: Mm-hm.

End of Tape Two, Side B

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Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Frank Liebermann**. This is tape number three, side **A**. When did you change your name to **Frank**?

A: When I started working for a commercial firm. First th--there were two things which I had to do. One is sound American, and change my signature that nobody could read it, because at the time we were doing export business, the first customer I di -- I did correspondence with was **M.B. Herrairi** in **Baghdad**. And when I wrote a letter and signed my name, my boss said, this is something you have to change immediately. And he signed just initials and make a scribble and you never put any name, just initials, that we can tell whom -- who you are, and then I just -- it was easier to be **Frank** because it's a common name, people remember it better, and I had no trouble doing it.

Q: How did your parents feel about your changing your name?

A: No objection. Although my father kept his name **Hans**, and he kept the second **N**, because he said, I don't want to be -- I don't want to live with any kind of pretense. This is who I am and I don't want to change it. My wife has adopted that philosophy and insists on the two **N**'s. She sa -- wh--when my kids went to camp and the company made mistake on the nametags, she sent them back once,

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because she's very firm on it and my kids also retained the **Liebermann** with two **N's**.

Q: Did your children have a -- become a **Bar** and **Bat Mitzvah**?

A: Oh definitely. Again, we believe in -- we believe in studying and in the Jewish philosophy that you really -- in o -- in order to defend yourself, you have to know who you are. And probably the people who fared least well in the Holocaust were those who really didn't know who they were. In other words, even the ones who converted were considered Jews. And they didn't have the background to deal with it. And I would say this is one of the things I learned from the Holocaust.

Q: Well, you were very young when you went through what you did. When your children were that age, did it bring, you know, seven, eight, nine and so forth, did that -- did it bring back that part of your childhood to you, when they were the same age?

A: No, not really at that age, but I know that my children persuaded my mother to write her autobiography, because they wanted their sense of history.

Unfortunately, it was fairly late and we had to do a lot of editing because she wrote a lot of notes originally. And I want to thank my daughter-in-law, who did a wonderful job on the computer in putting her various stories together in a logical

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way, which became difficult at the time she did it, which was probably in her mid-80's.

Q: What happens to you when you see a swastika now? What runs through your head?

A: Since I -- I am -- I would say I have come to grips with it. I would -- I'm saddened when I see it. I'm beyond angry. Basi -- as I say, I confront Germans at various times and I feel you can't undo history, but you have to take -- you have to learn from it. This is one reason why -- my wife managed to get me tickets for the consecration of the Holocaust Museum on that rainy, cold, miserable day, when there wasn't a seat to be had in the part that was roped off for people who wanted to bear witness, while in front, the part that was left for the dignitaries was half empty. It's also why, when I had a chance, I volunteered at the museum, because I feel I can convey a message and I'm glad to be doing it. My kids are very much aware of their roots, and that's a reason why they are going on the trip next month, because I said we believe in roots and wings.

Q: Are you angry that you had to leave **Germany** and your family had to go through what it did, and you had the losses that you had, and other people didn't? Let's say Jews here in the **United States**?

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A: Not at all. Look, we made the best of a bad situation. We were very fortunate. My father's good fortune was that he lost his living relatively early in 1936, and that he had the foresight to leave. My father-in-law, who left **Vienna**, said you know, his good luck was that he was not too old or too rich. Either of those circumstances made many people victims.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And early on it's a very, very traumatic experience to move. I know it from **New York**, or from **Great Neck** to **Washington** that it wasn't easy. Moving to a strange country is extremely hard. But once you do it and succeed, I feel I could not have had the life that I've had, if we had stayed, forgetting about the politics and everything else that occurred. So, I'm certainly not angry, but I'm trying to be constructive.

Q: How old were your children when you told them about the loss of their -- their relatives?

A: I don't remember, but we made no secrets of it. No, it -- we've always been open. I've -- I'm not smart enough to keep secrets, because then you always have to remember what you said -- whom you said what to, and we kept various pictures. We still have albums of family that are -- particularly my granddaughter has used for some of her art projects, and that's part of our heritage, that we're survivors.

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Q: What does it mean to you to be a survivor?

A: I'm happy to have made the best of the situation. I've probably become very family conscious on how important it is, and I think I'm try -- I'm trying to pass that on to my children and grandchildren, with whom we try to travel and give them as many benefits as we can f -- as we can find, or as they're willing to accept. That's -- that's all I can say.

Q: Let's talk about some of your political views. You -- you did allude to that before --

A: Yes.

Q: -- because of what you went through. You want to le -- elaborate a little more?

A: Well, I -- I would say I'm -- I -- I've become a student of history, Biblical and otherwise. And if you do that, you realize that the Jewish community has always done well in a free society. And therefore, I think there's a reason why Jews tend to be liberal in their own self interest. And some of the trends we have th -- do worry me, because we don't seem to be getting our message across as well as we did in former years. In other words, I'm not -- when -- even when Senator **Lieberman** mentions God too often, I don't think that's -- that belongs in politics. Now, one of the things that made things so easy for the Germans is that the churches and synagogues were fun-funded by the state. In other words, you gave a

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certain part of your taxes to go to the church of your choice. And therefore, they had complete records of what everybody was and thought, whether they were with them in -- or against them. And I therefore don't like some of the trends that we see now in fighting terrorism, of invading civil liberties. I mean, I certainly don't mind giving my name, but some of the illegal searches and so forth, scare me.

Q: Does that remind you of **Germany** in the 30's?

A: That's what I'm talking about. And being specific, Mr. **Ashcroft**, who I think is going over the line. So it has shaped my political views.

Q: What are your thoughts about the State of **Israel**?

A: Well, I am very sad that the middle in the world is losing power. In other words, the extra -- you only hear from the extremes, in other words, the right wing or the left wing. The only way that that conflict will ever be solved is through some fairly tough compromises on both sides. And the further we go to the extremes, the harder it's going to be to come to terms with it.

Q: What are your thoughts about the necessity for a State of **Israel**?

A: Look, it's -- it certainly -- I'm very much for the state, even though I wasn't always. I didn't want a nationalistic -- I didn't want to be identified with policies with which I disagree. At this point I believe it's here to stay, it's -- when the whole world closed, if we had had a State of **Israel**, that wouldn't have happened.

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Philosophically, I think the **Likud** policy of trying to presser -- of the occupied territories is contrary to Jewish la -- to Jewish law and contrary to Jewish interests, because they're trying to create a **South Africa**, where we have -- you can't be a religious state where some people are more equal than others. And there is merit in -- if you want to have a Jewish state, it has to be pretty much limited to the Jewish population and you can't be Imperialist. Because strictly on basis of the increased birthrate, if they carry it on the way it was done in **Lebanon**, where it used to be 50-50, and then you had a ruling minority, that is poison for stability. So I'm -- I'm thinking of it again from a philosophical rather than a political point of view.

Q: And you are concerned about the stability of the State of **Israel**?

A: Certainly as an occupying power, it can't work in the long run.

Q: Did you have -- or did you follow the **Eichmann** trial, and what were your thoughts when that was going on?

A: Look, he was a monster. I had -- I don't think that he could get justice, no matter what happened. And I suppose it was expedient to get rid of him, even though a -- I think they were successful in not making him a martyr, but there was a danger of that. Sometimes a **MacArthur** idea of old soldiers, sometimes if they could have faded away, it probably would have been just as good. In other words, I'm not a revenge person, but I'm not always sure that that's for the best in the

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same way that eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, which they are doing in **Israel**, because it just creates more unrest and more anger. On the other hand, I understand that you can't let yourself become a victim without reacting. It's a dilemma.

Q: Do you feel German in any way now?

A: No. In fact, my -- I am much more sensitive, though, to German characteristics, which probably wouldn't bother somebody else, they do bother me. I'm talking about the pushiness that I've -- I've gone through **Germany** in part. In a store, if they have the sale, they go with elbows. That probably bothers me more than it would bother somebody else. Or the very rigid bureaucrats. So I'm sensitive to those characteristics, but I try to avoid them.

Q: So you have no emotional attachment in the sense of the place you were born.

A: None at all. None at all. In fact, I once got in a conversation with a tra -- when we were on a ferry in **New Zealand**. I got on fairly early and I got a very good seat and opposite me sat -- somebody came in later and said in German to the neighbor, I wonder where I can get something to eat. And I gave him directions in German. So he looked at me and said, how come you speak such good German? And I gave him the answer, translated, I was once German. And he said, how can you say that, it's your Fatherland. I said, not for me. And I got into a discussion

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with him. His father was a minister and he hadn't really come to grips a fact that he didn't speak up. And I think I had him in tears during that trip. He was a tour leader for **Budget Tour**. We were going on a f -- in a fairly comfortable way. And that's where I originally started using the term, the best revenge is living well. And I've used it several times since, but that really brought it up. And that sums up my -- my German feelings.

Q: Let's talk a little bit now about the Holocaust Museum. You did mention that your wife arranged for tickets for the opening ceremonies, but what was your first encounter with the museum?

A: Well, at the opening, I had to take a woman from the Temple sisterhood on the condition that I take her out for lunch. Which I dutifully did and I went through it and of course I heard the protest of six million lies right across the street. It was a very emotional morning. And then I just felt I wanted to bear witness. But after September 11th, when the travel business really collapsed, and for a month we did nothing but give credits and retur -- arrange for refunds for the days that nobody could travel, I was asked to work three days a week, and I took the course at the museum, and I started to volunteer. Now my -- my agency asked me to come back in January, and I told her look, once they've invested their time, I feel I have an

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obligation. And ever since I've been doing that Thursday morning, then I work the rest of the time. I get th -- I get to the office by about two o'clock.

Q: So you've been working at the museum since January 2002?

A: Actually, yeah, since the fall of 2001.

Q: Right, after September 11th, and then you took --

A: Yeah, it's almost two years.

Q: Yeah.

A: It'll be two years fing -- December first.

Q: In between the time of the opening in '93, and -- and September 11th, 2001, what was your contact with the museum?

A: Just that I had gone a couple of times. I decided to donate my grandparent's business papers, which my mother kept with all kinds of correspondence, and the bookkeeper had preserved them, and whatever other letters we had in our collection, because I felt my kids can't read German, I can barely read German because the grammar is so cumbersome that I may as well give it to somebody who can -- who can use it. So I've had that relationship with them, and I had gone a couple of times, and of course, I'd recommended it.

Q: Recommended it to other people to see.

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A: Yeah, people. And I got a wonderful letter from a Catholic friend of my wife's, whom I gave tickets to, about how moved they were.

Q: What kind of work do you do at the museum?

A: I'm just information, you know. Greeting, elevators, tickets, information --

Q: So you're in vi -- you're in visitor services.

A: Visitor services, exactly. And frankly, I enjoy the once a week, invigorating experience of going to the mall area and interesting people that we meet at the museum.

Q: Has working there affected your memories of your early childhood?

A: Not really. No, I have no -- I am -- I am past the point of being emotionally repressive or -- in other words, I -- I handle it in an unemotional way now. Even though when I gave the lecture and put it all together, at the end I was tearful.

Q: Wh-When you gave a lecture --

A: At **Madera**. That was --

Q: This was your --

A: -- that was draining.

Q: This was your grandchild's --

A: Yes.

Q: -- school.

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A: Yes.

Q: This is a high school that you spoke to.

A: Yes. But, let's see, I keep on living and try to make the most of it.

Q: When you're at the museum and you've gone through the exhibit in the fifth floor, in the 1930's in **Germany**, do you identify with that?

A: The one that really got me -- oh, sh -- one second, I turn it off [**tape break**] -- not re -- the one that I got -- probably was most emotional about was the present exhibit on the children.

Q: This is the hidden children exhibit.

A: Yes. And the last ti -- wa -- again, when I was emotional is in "**Schindler's List**" when they lead the children away. That's something that I can't come to terms with, and I think of my cousin, who when we left she was three years old.

Q: And who did not survive.

A: Who did not survive. I mean, none of the children survived.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you identify with the children yourself?

A: No, no, no. I mean, I identify as what happened to -- children were totally helpless and -- and I would sa -- it's probably -- that's the only pogrom that's di -- that really -- attacked the children first. From a phils -- philosophical way of destroying the community.

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Q: What is your relationship with other survivor volunteers at the museum?

A: Good. I have no -- I mean, I like some better than others. Some people you relate to, that's normal.

Q: Do you exchange stories with them?

A: Not really. We don't have time.

Q: Do you feel a connection with those who came from **Germany**?

A: Again, I look strictly as people. I don't have any -- no more -- I usually ask where people are from, whether they're from **Ohio** or **New Zealand** and places that I've been to. From the museum, that's more interesting.

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 **Frank Liebermann**. This is tape number three, side **B**, and we were talking about your experiences at the museum. Would you encourage other survivors to volunteer at the museum?

A: I think it's -- I think it's quite important that I sometimes do ask, if I'm the survi -- actually, I don't consider myself a survivor, because my parents with their good fortune got me out before '38, or during '38 and I really had a minimum of

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trauma. But by being represented as somebody who is authentic, I think it adds to the experience of people at the museum, and I do get asked.

Q: You get asked what?

A: Whether I was a survivor. And I say yes, even though I don't believe it myself. In other words, the category of survivor is somebody who really went through some of the hell which happened after Crystal Night.

Q: What are your feelings when you walk into the building?

A: I think it's a fabulous piece of architecture. In other words, the somewhat disjointed look is, I think, a marvelous achievement. People often ask me, you know, about the map that they give out. And I said, it really doesn't help because people didn't know from one moment to the next what's going to happen. So you can't put that in a map. That's my standard comment.

Q: Do you feel like you belong there? There's a connection to the museum for you?

A: Yes. In other words, I feel that somewhere I can contribute more than I probably could elsewhere.

Q: But I meant an emotional connection when you walk in.

A: Ah, I do not tend to be that emotional. In other words, I appreciate the happenings and I -- I try to reason -- I try to believe in reason over emotion. Not that I

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don't get emotional, but this is not -- I don't have the connection that way, except I think that it -- that it's an important part of education and I have taken -- I've invited -- for instance, I've invited my kids and grandchildren to the celebration of survivors, November first. And I think that's important. But from an educational point of view, rather than a strict emotional point of view.

Q: What are your thoughts about the non-Jewish staff and volunteers?

A: They again -- it depends which ones. Some of them are strictly business, others are really devoted. And also in th -- among the volunteers are some non-Jewish volunteers. You don't know what reasons people have for reacting. So-Some of them take it strictly they've had experience in museums and it's a museum job. Others do it because they feel it -- it's particularly important. And both kinds of people are useful. No other comments.

Q: Do you go to many of the lectures and presentations?

A: I don't have time, because I leave there and go directly to work. If they have something in the evening, preferably on weekends, it's much easier than during the week. Course I -- I get home around quarter to six. By the time I have dinner during the week, that's -- that makes for a long day -- we -- and we go to the theater a lot in the weekends and have cond -- all kinds of subscriptions. It's -- you can only do so much.

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Q: You had said that the hidden children exhibit was particularly meaningful for you. Are there any other exhibits in the permanent collection that -- or any other temporary exhibits that really were very memorable, or are very memorable for you?

A: Again, they have all been very educational, whether it's bringing up the book burning and the intellectual philosophy of race superiority and so forth, which was popular in -- throughout the world, it was just taking that to an extreme. And I say one of the -- one of the things that's unbelievable about the Nazi movement is the high emotional pitch that it could get to. And that's such a danger sign that it still hasn't been explained to me. In other words, how the political rallies can be so devastating. On so -- so-called educated people. That's the reason I tr -- I try to be unemotional.

Q: Because it's dangerous to be emotional.

A: Yes. You said it in different words.

Q: Has the world learned lessons from the Holocaust, do you think?

A: I wish it really had, but the fact that it's recognized hopefully will be helpful.

We probably won't know for another two or three generations.

Q: In closing, do you have any message to those two or three generations?

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A: Unless you learn -- unless you study history, you can repeat mistakes. That's the reason I've been -- I -- the Holocaust really has made me look at history, including by the way, the re-religious history of the New Testament, or rather the -- the Christian Bible, to be correct. That in making it the national religion of **Rome**, **Constantine** basically had to absolve the Romans. And therefore, it was easiest to blame the Jews. And that is not an uncommon way of interpreting history, that it's always written by the victors, about the people who can't answer, after the fact. So the study of accurate history is extremely important and history is generally not taught very well, as to what the real issues are. I think that's the end of my thought.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add before we close?

A: I don't think so. Anyway, thank you for a nice interview.

Q: Thank you very much for doing the interview. This concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Frank Liebermann**.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview