# United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

## Interview with George Arnstein
## October 23, 2011
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# PREFACE

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# GEORGE ARNSTEIN
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Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with George Arnstein conducted by Gail Schwartz on October 23rd, 2011 in Washington, DC. This is track number one. What is your full name?

George Arnstein: I am George middle, middle name is Ernest Arnstein.

Q: Where were you born and when were you born?

A: I was born in Stuttgart, Germany on September 20, 1924.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family. Your parents' names.

A: My father was named Arnold Arnstein. My mother Elizabeth maiden name Weil, W-E-I-L and they married in 1922, 23. I have the exact date written down of course. In Stuttgart. Both from solid, middle class comfortable middle class families.

Q: How far back does your family go in generations in Stuttgart?

A: In Stuttgart only as far as my grandparents. But in that corner of southwest Germany I have documented it because I do family history, back to 1660, 1670.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: He was leather wholesaler jobber. The name of the business was Weil and Arnstein and it was established by my grandfather. I have finally found out who Mr. Weil was but I have negligible data on him. He died quite early and then my father took over the business.

Q: Did you or do you have any siblings?

A: I have one sister who died two years ago in California. She had both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's and **guriet** [ph]

Q: Was she older or younger than --

A: Three years younger.

Q: And her name?

A: Her birth name was **Suzanna Carola** Arnstein. About, when she first came to this country in junior high school, she changed it to Carol because she didn't want to be called Suzy.

Q: You said before that you came from a middle class family. Did you live right in the center of Stuttgart?

A: In the heart of the city, not downtown but in, my father bought a four story building before he got married and we lived on the second floor and there were tenants on the other three floors.

Q: Did your mother work?

A: No, she did not. That's not quite true. She went to an arts and crafts school and when she was single she worked in a porcelain painting factory. Factory is an exaggeration. And after she got married, I owned two pieces with her initials LA Lisa Arnstein. And I owned one piece signed LW, Lisa Weil. That she did work but not after she was married.

Q: Did your mother have any help in the house?

A: Yes.

Q: Any housekeeper?

A: Yes, we had a full time live in maid until the Nuremberg laws of 1935 and then we had part time help.

Q: We'll get to 1935. Let's talk a little bit about you. What language did you speak at home? Did you speak German at home?

A: German and I even spoke the local dialect when I played soccer with the kids or the boys but at the dinner table we were expected to speak reasonably correct German. My parents cautiously spoke French when they didn't want the children to understand whatever it is they were talking about. Later they switched to English. My father spoke both languages better than my mother, not terribly well but better.

Q: How would you describe yourself? Were you an independent child when you were young or were you more dependent on your parents?

A: I don't know how to answer that. Yes, I liked to think I was independent but on the other hand up to the age of 13 or 14 you are necessarily dependent and in our home, my father made the decisions. That does not mean he disregarded my mother, but he clearly was in charge. He is the one who decided that I would attend a secondary school known as a gymnasium where one of the foreign languages was Latin. And as he said, in my day we had to take Latin and Greek.

Q: Let's talk about your education. You first started at what kind of a school?

A: Within walking distance there was an elementary school with two wings. One wing, the larger was Protestant. The other wing, smaller, was Catholic. I attended the Protestant wing. I could have been excused from religious instruction which was part of the curriculum. I was not and I attended and to this day I remember some Protestant catechism.

It was within walking distance. It was a public school, strangely enough, co-educational. There were 20 boys and ten girls. And I have a photograph taken in third grade or second grade. And I used to say I can still recall the names. Not true.

Q: Speaking of being in the Protestant section, was your family religiously Jewish?

A: Ethnically Jewish, religiously no.

Q: How would you describe them. Were they very assimilated?

A: My father had a slightly younger brother named Ernest, which is why I'm named George Ernest who apparently was quite enterprising. He broke his neck skiing in the Italian Alps at age 17, 18, something like that which meant that my grandfather had to decide on a burial plot to bury Uncle Ernest whom I never knew of course. And he picked a plot in the Protestant section of the cemetery. Not the Jewish section. I cite that as an example.
And that, of course, it's then where my grandfather was buried in the family plot. So was my maternal grandfather. That it's an indirect answer to your question.

Q: Did your parents do anything Jewishly in the home when you were very young?

A: Absolutely not. I did not know where the synagogue was. There were three words which I assumed to be German and in fact they mostly are. One was **schlemiel,** and the other one was **plite** [ph] which means bankrupt but it is so part of the German language. Anyway I did not know those were Jewish words. Oy, well there was once in the edition, there was instant Yiddish.

Q: Did you know you were Jewish when you were little?

A: No, not until the Nazis came to power.

Q: For nine years.

A: Well, yes. It didn't matter.

Q: Did you go to any family occasions like a Seder or anything like that?

A: No but I do remember after the Nazis came to power, about 1935 my sister and I went to **Gelingen** [ph] which is a village not far from Stuttgart where there was a Jewish training center, presumably preparing people for Palestine. And all I remember from that is that I did not like the taste of horseradish and that is all I remember.

Q: So you went to this public school and you were in the Protestant wing or section. What were your other interests? Did you like to read at all?

A: Oh we played soccer, we went bicycling. I was one of the boys and –

Q: Did you like to read books?

A: Oh I remember the first two books I owned. One was in German of course, Classical mythology. In a version which is kind of poetic. It is so good that it has, that version has been translated into English and published in the United States. By an author named Schwab, S-C-H-W-A-B. I have fond memories of that. And the other book was in German, **Ein Come from Rome** [ph] , a battle for Rome. It deals basically with the invasion of the Goths, the, and of course, I identified with the Goths, the victorious Goths. I still remember those two books were a present from a cousin from Nuremberg.

Q: When you were young, did you have any Jewish, any friends that whom you knew were Jewish. You didn't know you were but did you know –

A: It was not a question that arose. So they may have been but I didn't know. That changed of course after the noose tightened. But no, there was a cousin named Uncle Emil who owned the factory and he arrived with a black chauffeur driven limousine but it was an Opel. It wasn't even a Mercedes. I mean it, he was, he existed but didn't particularly think about it.

Q: Let's get to 1933. You were an old man of eight and a half, nine years old when Hitler comes into power. What are your first memories of any change from your very happy assimilated childhood?

A: First of all nothing changed in, among the boys in my neighborhood. We continued to play soccer and we continued, this was before bicycles. We had scooters but then gradually. Nothing happened in any significant way until the Nuremberg laws which meant that we could no longer have a full time housekeeper and that probably led to an explanation by my parents that we were different.

Q: Do you remember your reaction?

A: No.

Q: You don't.

A: The other significant thing is there was a cousin in Munich. This must have been a couple of years later. Her name was Marianne. She was engaged to a gentile Bavarian who was terrific. He, they took me skiing. They owned a small Fiat. At the age of 12 on country roads, I was allowed to drive. So no wonder I think well of him. And they of course, she converted to Catholicism. She became a Catholic, a convert. It didn't do any good and moved to Stuttgart and became kind of an older sister to us, or she was appreciably older but she became part of our household and most significantly she owned a car and we were mechanized for the first time. I cite this only as a reasonably vivid recollection of the influence of the Nuremberg laws and the realization that we were different and Marianne was different.
The other significant difference is that swimming pools started to have signs saying no Jews allowed. And –

Q: Not only were you different. You knew you were Jewish.

A: Yes. Exactly when and how that happened, I don't recall but I was different and the difference was Jewish ethnicity.

Q: Do you remember being frightened about hearing that, that you were different than your friends?

A: Not particularly. The, my fellow soccer players didn't treat me any differently. My fellow bicyclists who were the same thing, the same group.

Q: What about the teachers in school?

A: That is a precipitated cause. Easter 1938 I had not done my homework or I was late for class or some minor offense like that and the home room teacher took me to task and said George, or Georg of course, you who are a guest in this country. And that, that scored. I remember it today. My father had offered me earlier, had raised the question didn't I want to transfer and go to school in Geneva, in Switzerland. Where there were family friends with a son my age who were going to look after me. Easter 38 I went home and I told my father I'm ready to go to Geneva. And that was the precipitating trivial incident. There are a couple of others.
We played soccer as part of the gym class at school, secondary school. And typically you were –

Q: Secondary school you went to, did it –

A: Gymnasium.

Q: Were you still in a Protestant section of the school or was everybody together?

A: I don't recall. Yes, it was Protestant. The Catholics may have been excused. I can only remember one other Jewish boy at that point and I still know his name. He was the son of a – and to my knowledge he's a, an emeritus professor at the University of Michigan or Michigan state.

Q: What is his name?

A: Ted Hecht, H-E-C-H-T. Theodore. And I haven't been in touch with him for years.

Q: But he was the only other Jewish child –

A: And he left before me.

Q: He left before you.

A: I was literally the last one. What I was getting at is the soccer teams were chosen either by height or in turn. And I was number 11 or number 12 in size and when the teams were chosen, I was also chosen, something like 11th or 12th. That's significant. There are 11 soccer players to a side. But the point I'm getting at is there were two guys who basically deliberately followed me. And the teacher, alias umpire, didn't see it. Again, trivial but you were asking for examples and those are the only --

Q: Did you really see it or –

A: Oh, no, no ignored it.

Q: Ignored it.

A: So chose not to see it.

Q: Chose not to see it.

A: Those are about the only incidents I can remember.

Q: What about symbols in the streets or any of the soldiers, German soldiers. Do you remember? Symbols in the streets, did you see any swastikas or –

A: Oh yes, of course. You know for example, my father being the owner of the building, was expected to fly a flag prominently on patriotic occasions and he chose the local colors, provincial colors which were red and black, the city colors were black and yellow. But not the swastika and not black, white and red which were the alternate national colors. And we got away with it.

Q: What was on his flag, your father's flag?

A: On his flag? Black and red. The provincial colors.

Q: The stripes, just.

A: Two stripes, yes. No, no not remotely black white and red. Parenthetically my father had served in World War I the full four years. He was promoted from approximately corporal and made lieutenant. He was wounded twice. I don't know how badly. He had impaired, what is it called, taste buds but no other evidence of permanent damage. He had medals. He wore them once and put them away in the drawer. I saw them once. In fact I still own them. But he was not terribly patriotic. And there are two explanations for that. His mother, my grandmother was born in San Francisco. So he had -- she came to Stuttgart at age 12 more or less. Her English was there but not fluent. Nevertheless that made a difference. He, she was one of six sisters, three of them married Germans. But one married a Frenchman, one married an Englishman. So my father had first cousins in London. He had first, a first cousin in Paris which is how he spent a year there learning English and learning French, which also probably explains why he was less patriotic than one would think of a German lieutenant.
While we're on that theme let's finish it. After Kristallnacht the night of broken glass, I was in Geneva. I only read about it. He was arrested the following morning. He was sent to the local police station, our part of town, told to empty his pockets and what came out among other things was orders for reserve lieutenant Arnstein to report for either a physical exam or I don't remember those detail. It didn't do any good. He still wound up at Dachau. But as long as we were on the military theme I thought I'd include that. Kind of confusing. Enemy of the state and

–

Q: Being asked to report. Let's talk again, your experience from 34, 35 on before you left. You saw these symbols in the street. Did you see soldiers marching, uniforms.

A: Oh yes.

Q: What did you as a young boy, you weren't that young, 12, 13, what was your reaction to that, do you remember?

A: I was one of the boys. I went along with it. I vaguely remember that Hitler came through town and there was a parade of – it was within walking distance of home and I think I stood in the audience and watched it. That doesn't mean I approved or even saluted with –

Q: What did Hitler mean to you as a young teen?

A: Well. First of all you have to realize the newspapers and everything else were now coordinated and spoke with a single voice of enthusiasm. I knew my father listened to radio Strasbourg which broadcast in French and in German. Deliberately. I also knew that this was either illegal but anyway one didn't talk about it. So in that sense I became politically aware. But what did Hitler mean to me. Oh he was going to build the autobahn and good heavens that was three years away. Didn't mean all that much.

Q: So at that point he wasn't somebody who was fearsome to you?

A: No, except well yes. Going back to the building and symbols. The socialists also had a symbol, not the swastika of course but three parallel arrows and I remember three arrows were painted on our sidewalk. Which meant the following morning somebody had to scrub and remove them. There was an annual winter relief drive where they collected nowadays we'd collect canned goods, but in those days it was clothing and things like that. That used to be done by the army. It was now being done by brown shirted storm troopers. So there were changes and there is that terrible word which I don't know how to translate and I don't think anybody else does either. **Gleich Schaltung**.[ph] which kind of means coordination, coordination,

penetration, where everything was made over and the example of the winter relief drive is an example. It used to be the army and theoretically neutral and now it became storm troopers. Gleich Schaltung spelled G-L-E-I-C-H one word. S-C-H-A-L-T-U-N-G. I do not know how to translate it. So these are –

Q: What I'm trying to get at, you weren't especially fearful, frightened.

A: No I was not particularly fearful, mostly because my playmates, my fellow bicyclists et cetera, one, he died only eight years ago and I'd been in touch with him for 70 years. His name was Herman. His father was a minor government official. He joined the junior version of the Hitler Youth. He then join -- well I wasn't there when he joined the senior version and he became a lieutenant in the German army. And I looked him up at the end of the war when I was a GI. And he had just been discharged from an American POW cage. So we explored our old neighborhood together. (Laughs) He had been gone and I had been gone.

Q: Did you want to be a member of the Hitler Youth?

A: That is what I'm getting at. He, I think offered to have me join his troop or something like that. And of course I wasn't eligible, but sure, they had uniforms and they did all kinds of exciting things. The school year had changed from five and a half days of school Saturday morning, to five days of school. No more school on Saturdays, but the Hitler Youth people above all organized by the school there were excursions, hikes and things like that. And of course the Hitler Youth boys showed up in uniform and we did not. We didn't have a uniform.

Q: We being, you and the other Jewish boy?

A: I don't remember but there were some non-members of the Hitler Youth who were also in my school or in my class. So there were some of us were different, not necessarily Jewish. As I say, I was the only one in my class. Ted was, I think, a year behind me.
I also remember one incident where Herman and I were going a block or two away, possibly on our scooters and ran into a couple of other boys who started making anti-Semitic remarks like oh

you can smell a Jew a mile away and this and that. And Herman would knowing full well that I was Jewish which I realize contradicts some of my earlier comments, kind of goaded them on into saying oh we can smell one. We can see one. They're different and all that, knowing all the time that this was obviously preposterous. That's as close as I could come to incidents.

Q: But you were never physically approached in an anti-Semitic way?

A: Except for the following of, during the soccer game and oh there was one other guy in my class, big not very bright, who I think kind of wrestled with me once and but I ascribe that to stupidity rather than, than ordinary malice.

Q: Did you talk over these changes with your parents about Hitler and about the fact that now you know you're Jewish. Was this the kind of topics that you talked about?

A: I do not recall. So I'm tempted to say no we didn't. Well they were not willing to face up to the fact that the noose was tightening. They felt this was a temporary difficulty but my father did go to the – Oh two things.
My American born grandmother lost her citizenship when she married my grandfather who was a Bavarian local well established.

Q: She lost her US citizenship?

A: US citizenship. Then she was widowed. And in 1933 my father said to her, why don't you go to New York and reclaim your citizenship. Her sister in Nuremberg similarly widowed and situated went with her. And the two ladies spent six weeks in New York. I have a report from a distant relative who claims he invoked the help of Senator Wagner. That's senior. I don't know how true that is, but maybe he, anyway they reclaimed their citizenship. And thus my grandmother and her sister are both natural born and naturalized American citizens, which helped certainly. Well it tells you something about my father's attitude.

Q: His awareness.

A: It also meant because I had relatives in the San Francisco Bay area who had not returned to Germany when the time came to get an affidavit of support, and assume you know that we would not become public charges, my grandmother got in touch with her genuine first cousin. In other words they had common grandparents and who supplied the affidavit which was rejected by the American counsel in Stuttgart, on the grounds that the cousin in San Francisco was too old. Thereupon the cousin's daughter co-signed and that made it legitimate. So all of this shows that my parents, or my father who certainly were aware of the tightening noose but didn't want to face up to the fact that it was more than a temporary condition.

Q: You had mentioned previously that you had help in the house, German help and then that changed. How much of a change was it? When the laws came in.

A: No, no change whatsoever. They were treated well.

Q: So your mother was able to keep the housekeeper?

A: She then had temporary not live in help after the Nuremberg laws forbade because all Jewish men lusted after gentile girls or young women. So that was the assumption so you couldn't have a full time live in help but you could have part time.

Q: You are going through school and you said the teacher made that comment to you and you came home to your father and talked about leaving.

A: I said I'm ready to go to Geneva which of course represented some financial problems because there were financial controls. German Jews could not dispose of their money freely. They had to petition for not for internal household expenses, but for foreign expenses. Or unusual expenses, like buying real estate or that kind of stuff. I'm not quite up to date, up to date. I don't remember that clearly because after all money was not discussed with the children. But so within two weeks, I transferred, as I recall. Very quickly I transferred to Geneva. Where my friend Roget the son of these family friends, introduced me to the **Coloure Saint Antoine** [ph]

where I was in the **seisieme** and they were ahead of us in Latin. Also scenes of Gallic wars but they were further along than we were and in some other area like arithmetic or geometry, they were, that was hard. I don't remember those details either. But above all I flunked the seisieme. And of all things to flunk, I flunked German because I couldn't translate it into French and vice versa. So when I repeated seisieme in the fall, I did much better. And by early December I left.

Q: Let's get back to Germany for just a moment. There are a few other questions I wanted to ask you. Was your father's business affected at all?

A: Oh yes.

Q: In what way?

A: That may have been the depression rather than – he gave up his business in 1929 or thereabouts and went to work for a leather and shoe factory in the suburbs. I have since recovered some of this information because the grandson of the owner of the shoe factory published the memoirs of his grandfather. All of this was in the past year. And I have some of the details wrong. But he had a good job with this shoe factory, probably as the, the leather buyer or I don't know that. What I do remember is it was still dark and a winter night at 7:30 in the morning when he joined a car pool. A car pool, probably he, the brother of the owner who had a car and they drove out to the suburbs to go to work. But that somehow or other sticks in my memory.
But by the time the Nazis came to power, maybe the factory ran into problems. I don't know. He reestablished his business on a minor scale. Instead of having a separate office and storage facility he operated out of his mother's, my grandmother's apartment where he had an office. My aunt, his sister, unmarried was kind of secretary. And I don't know those details because money business was not discussed in front of the children. Our life style as far as I can tell did not change appreciably.

Q: Why do you think that that one remark bothered you so much that you wanted to leave? You

said that you really didn't experience, aside from the soccer game and so forth, much anti-Semitism.

A: It must have been a maturation, a realization of gradually increasing obnoxiousness, it was, I obviously it is a trivial incident to – that did it.

Q: What was it like to leave your parents? I mean you were young. You were what, 14.

A: 13. It was quite difficult which is why I turned it down in 1937 when my father first offered it. On the other hand, I did know the family friends in Geneva who did a very nice competent job of kind of looking after me. I lived in a boarding house.

Q: Just to get back to Germany. I wanted to finish Germany. Did you have any ID cards, identification cards?

A: The answer is no but for the purposes of, of emigration, I had a imitation password, passport which I still have. It basically is an identification sheet which says this serves in lieu of a passport for purposes –

Q: Because you were a minor.

A: Yes.

Q: What about your parents?

A: They had passports and when the law went into effect that all Jews had to take middle names. Namely my father did not become Arnold Israel because he had a passport which did not expire for another two years. My mother had to renew her passport and she became Elizabeth Sara. I still have both passports. So and I still have the imitation identification paper for purposes. I guess I had to have it in order to go to Switzerland.

Q: But again when your mother had to put that additional name. She didn't talk about it to you or do you know how it affected her? What was her state, as a mother.

A: I was gone by then. And not only that. In 19, well this is probably also pertinent. Every summer we went away for a nearby summer vacation. Black Forest or that kind of thing. In 1933 we went to **Fronten** [ph] which is in the Bavarian, in Bavaria close to the Austrian border. In 1934 Hitler had imposed a thousand mark duty if you wanted to cross over from Germany into Austria. In an attempt to of course choke it off. And that was our last summer in Bavaria. Then we started going to Switzerland for summer vacations. But I remember that very vividly, how the change was from one year to the next. We could go into Austria one year. And then no longer. Austria being a piddling distance away.
So the change of going to Switzerland was fairly significant in the sense my father wanted to read different newspapers. He wanted to but there were financial controls which made it possible but difficult to go abroad for vacations.

Q: Did your sister not leave with you because she was too young?

A: Yes, also when I think back on it. This is speculation. I'm the first born. My father may have been, wanted to save his first born. This is speculation. She was three years younger, blond, blue eyed. To the point where my mother went to her school once and the principal asked her are you sure that he that he is the father. Actually my sister looks enough like other family members that there's no doubt but – Blond blue eyed and had, well I can't say I had difficulties because I was brown and had brown eyes and brown hair.

Q: Do you remember saying goodbye to your parents?

A: No because there is an odd variation. Our appointment at the American consulate to be interviewed for the visa was December second 1938. I was in Geneva. I came home for that, home, returned to Stuttgart, for that weekend so I could go to the American consulate and be interviewed and then I went back to Geneva. And I knew that was the final visit to Stuttgart. But

I knew I was going to see my parents in another month because we met in Paris and, and embarked on Christmas eve 1938.

Q: Tell me about your recollections of Kristallnacht. You said you were in Geneva at the time and you read about it?

A: I read about it. I knew about it. Somehow or other I never made the connection that my father would be one of those arrested.

Q: How did you find out he was?

A: The friends who looked, kind of looked after me in Geneva, were told by my mother and were told not to tell me. So I didn't find out til I reported to Stuttgart for the interview at the consulate where I encountered my father who was a mess. He was, I mean he was a broken man psychologically, possibly more than physically.

Q: How long was he incarcerated?

A: Three weeks. They had far more inmates than they had planned on so and the only thing that I remember his ever talking about was he survived better because he had been in the German army and the guards of course were also veterans or, so he knew how to behave. Maybe and this is speculation, he got a little bit more respect because the Germans are very fussy in making distinctions between civilian life, military service, combat service. They make the distinction. It's very important to have been a front line combatant rather than in the supply corps. And he had been a combatant so that got him brownie points.

Q: In what way. He said he was a broken man after this. In what way and how did you know that as a 14 year old?

A: Well

Q: Just by his appearance, his look?

A: After all I lived with him for two years in San Francisco where he was, where he felt terribly déclassé and poor, dependent. And irritable. And in bad health. I do not know to this day whether he died of stomach cancer or stomach --

Q: Ulcers?

A: Ulcers. I don't know. Possibly both.

Q: When you came back to Stuttgart to get the American visa did you see a lot of damage from Kristallnacht or had it been cleaned up?

A: No, no.

Q: You did not see, synagogues –

A: Well I spent 48 hours, maybe 72 hours there. And visited my grandmothers, two grandmothers and the family and maybe childhood friends, but those were –

Q: I was wondering if you saw any destroyed synagogues or things like that?

A: The synagogue was on the other side of town. I mean there, that was not part of my ambit. I may have seen some broken windows in the department store, but that may be a retroactive imagination. I do not know.

Q: So you get the visa. You go back to Switzerland.

A: For three weeks.

Q: For three weeks, and then.

A: Met my parents in Paris on –

Q: You got yourself from Switzerland to Paris.

A: Oh yes. In some ways I was quite independent in terms of –

Q: That's why, when I was asking that question how you would describe yourself. You were only 14.

A: When I returned from Geneva to Stuttgart in order to go to the consulate, I bought the ticket, or maybe they bought it for me and I was supposed to go from Geneva to Zurich to **Calzoo** [ph] and change there to an express to Stuttgart. Well wise guy George when he got through Calzoo figured out that there was a semi express which left earlier and would get to Stuttgart half an hour earlier. So I took it of course. My mother traveled to Calzoo in order to meet me and intercept me so that was a disaster but it's evidence or example of my independence. So yes, traveling from Geneva to Paris on my own at age –

Q: 14.

A: Barely 14 yes. And by that time I spoke reasonably fluent French so nothing to it.

Q: So now you're in France.

A: We only spent three days in Paris, where we had relatives.

Q: Your parents and your sister, right?

A: I think my Aunt Nellie was part of the package too. Single, sister of my father, unmarried. And we, Paris was quite meaningful because the cousin who had given me my first two books from Nuremberg, and they had emigrated in 1933 to Paris and were completely assimilated, at

least to my outsider's view. And that was quite an interesting experience. We had probably Christmas dinner with them, although they all were converts to Catholicism. And all of the descendants are Catholic. I have them in my family tree but we, they do not wish to maintain contact. I'm not being critical. I'm merely noting. So those were three days in Paris, interesting. Because I spoke French, I was probably more important to my parents than –

Q: Yeah. Do you remember your little sister's state of mind about leaving Germany?

A: No.

Q: Friends?

A: I'm sure she did well. She certainly adjusted in San Francisco faster than any of us. She went to elementary school and junior high but then she also is a much more sensitive or was in terms of inter personal relations than I am so she adjusted better.

Q: Did you notice anything in Paris related to the war at that point? Did you notice people talking about Hitler, the French people when you were there?

A: Three days in Paris is not enough to notice or remember. And in Switzerland of course I tended to associate with people who were anti-Fascist to use a term.

Q: When you were in Germany, did you ever listen to the speeches on the radio, Hitler's speeches on the radio?

A: Probably but I can't answer for sure.

Q: You don't remember any reaction you had or your parents' reaction?

A: The very fact that my father listened to radio Strasbourg tells you something about, oh and he had a one close friend, maybe even two and they went to the Salon of then, and they talked

politics and smoked cigars. And I wasn't supposed to know about that and but I certainly did know that it was subversive if you wish.

Q: This is in Stuttgart?

A: Oh yes. And the two friends in particular that I remember. One was an artist, a painter. In fact I have two of his paintings in my living room. He went to Buenos Aires where he died. My wife and I visited him 20 years ago. And the other one was a newspaper reporter and I don't know what happened to him.

Q: Did you see any evidences of anti-Semitism not to yourself, on the streets of Stuttgart?

A: Yes, I mentioned that the swimming pools had signs saying no Jews allowed. The public comfort stations had signs and our parents would come to stand guard if we had to go. And the, across the street there was a baker. A bakery with a café, two entrances. I think both posted the sign no Jews wanted or allowed, but the delivery boy continued to deliver the rolls in the morning.

Q: To you all?

A: To us. In other words, business was more important than ideology. We never felt, in the neighborhood, we never felt it.

Q: So you never felt threatened?

A: Any threats or anti-Semitism that I can recall.

Q: You didn't see other people getting beaten or anything like that?

A: I didn't know of any other Jews in the neighborhood. Well there was a, around the corner there was a tobacco store, a tobacconist and the owners were Jewish, which I didn't know. Not

only that. I think they were Polish Jews. And it embarrasses me to say this today but Polish Jews were different. You know Hans Hirsch. Hans and I got in a discussion, disagreement when I told him, yes I have since found out there was a Stuttgart chapter of **B'Nai Brith** and it had a clause saying no Polish Jews admitted or wanted. And he said oh no you're wrong. So we pulled down the book that, I was right. It's probably the only time in my life that Hans was wrong.

Q: Did you feel bad about leaving Germany? This was where you were born. This was your home and you were leaving your country. What was that?

A: Yes there probably was some nostalgia but I cannot answer the question for sure. I've been back several times since then and yes, this was home and it feels quite comfortable and homey in some ways. Because all of the traces of the nastiness have been erased. How I felt at the time of leaving I can't answer that question either, how I felt.

Q: Did you, besides those two books that you loved, did you take anything else special with you?

A: My parents arranged for a so called lift which is a massive container to store the furniture to be shipped, furniture, linens et cetera. It never arrived in San Francisco, even though it was prepaid and insured. My mother established photo albums when I was born and a separate album when my sister was born. She had the wit to shove those in the suitcase and they, I own mine to this day. My sister owned, well her kids own it to this day. And I had occasion to use it just a couple of days ago but yes.

Q: Anything personal besides that that you took as a 14 year old boy, besides your books?

A: That is again difficult to answer because my grandmother's lift, household container, was also lost. Also prepaid. My Aunt Nellie, single unmarried sister of my father, her lift came. Well because she's unmarried, she lived with her mother, my grandmother. To this day I have inherited a few things that go back to my grandmother and I sometimes fail to make the distinction whether it was my home or hers. There is a certain continuity. And that is how I own two pictures, two paintings by this artist who was a friend of my father's.

Q: Where and what boat, where did you sail from and what boat did you go on?

A: Can we stop at this point?

Q: Sure.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with George Arnstein. This is track number two. And we're talking about your leaving for the United States. And what boat did you go on and where did you go from?

George Arnstein: It was the port of embarkation was Cherbourg. The name of the ship was Franconia, of the Cunard line. And it was very, well it was, my first look at the Atlantic and it was a winter, not very smooth passage. I think we got sea sick but not terribly so –

Q: What was your date of –

A: Christmas Eve, 24th of December, 1938. And we landed in New York on the second of January 1939. The crossing was, there was one thing worth mentioning, in my opinion. There were lots of other German and Austrian refugees. And I think at age 14, I mightily flirted with a girl and I remember my parents' displeasure because she was not of the proper class. It's trivial and I don't mean to suggest that they in any way said oh you may not speak to her or anything like that. I just felt a slight –

Q: Were these Jewish refugees?

A: Yes.

Q: These were Jewish refugees

A: But Austrian. I mean there were both German and Austrian but this particular girl –

Q: Did you feel Jewish at that point?

A: No. Or marginally. But following on that question, we were hung up in New York for six weeks, because of an idiosyncrasy of the German currency regulations. You could prepay your voyage to San Francisco in German marks, provided it was by ship. You could not go by rail. We were prepaid to San Francisco and then the American company would not recognize the ticket. And so we spent six weeks in New York and then they relented on a winter luxury cruise that was not sold out, from New York to Havana. To Panama, to Acapulco, to Los Angeles, to San Francisco. We were in a third class cabin but these cruises give you the run of the ship and it was an unlikely beginning. And I remember it did not have an outdoor pool. It had an indoor pool. They built an outdoor pool by throwing together some wooden frame and lining it with a canvas.
And to this day I remember crossing the Panama Canal, floating in this outdoor pool and saying if I ever amount to something, I would like to do this again, which my wife and I did some 25 years ago. Not in a canvas covered pool. Sorry that's a detour but hung up in New York, I actually enrolled in public school number 12345, in the eighth grade which I flunked because I didn't know enough English. I was farmed out to some relatives who had emigrated earlier than we did. And lived in Jack, not in Jackson Heights. In the part of Manhattan that there –

Q: Washington Heights?

A: Washington Heights, thank you. Also known as Frankfurt on the Hudson. Where first of all I learned some English and they were very helpful and they had been my parents' bridge partners in Stuttgart. I mean this was a close relationship. The thing I remember more vividly than anything else, my first exposure to the A&P and self-service. At the end of six weeks we left, sailed.

Q: What did America mean to you at that point? As a young German immigrant?

A: A place of refuge. A place where my great grandfather had migrated to during the gold rush, and where my grandmother was born in San Francisco, which is why we were headed to San Francisco, which thus in a way was part of my memory. I identified with it easily and readily, more than with America in general. That was an abstraction. San Francisco was something specific.

Q: Were your parents very emotional when you arrived in the United States do you think?

A: I have no idea. But speaking of emotions. I do remember, I wasn't there but my mother told me this story. When they traveled from Stuttgart to Paris by train on or about the 21st of December, on the Orient Express. As they crossed the Rhine from **Kale** [ph] to Strasbourg, my father got up and spit in the Rhine or did something symbolic that I don't remember the details. But my mother proudly told the story that, of that symbolic crossing.
And parenthetically in their passports, the exit from Germany is on the 20th of December. The entry stamp for France is on the 21st. It was that close to midnight. I may have the dates off by a day or so but the one day difference I do know.

Q: Now you're a student in New York for six weeks and then.

A: That was sobering. The discipline, you had to line up to walk from one classroom to the other and that's about all I remember and of course I flunked. By the time we arrived in San Francisco and that's a story worth telling. We still thought our furniture would come so we stayed in a hotel for three or four days and then cousin Fanny, an American, third generation American. Came by and found us a furnished apartment. Whereupon my father went to see the manager and said where is the nearest high school. I want my son to start in the morning. Where is the nearest elementary school. And when cousin Fanny and Manny, her husband. Fanny wore the pants in the family. Came by. My father proudly announced, oh George is going to start Galileo High School in the morning. Whereupon cousin Fanny said no member of our family has ever

gone to Galileo. I will take George to Lowell high school and introduce him to the principal, which she did. And that is how I wound up in a very much academically kind of elitist public high school in San Francisco, which had a college graduation. I mean college –

Q: Curriculum.

A: College prep curriculum. It had no shop. It did have shorthand and typing for the girls. I took typing. Good thing I did. But it was completely academically oriented. And even before the war it graduated something like 92 percent who went on to college.

Q: Did the other students ask you about your background and experience?

A: No. Because I had begun Lowell in late January I guess and the change of semester occurred let's say on the tenth of February. There were quite a few junior high school students who transferred into Lowell as sophomores and I became a sophomore. But I was already established as a Lowell student, by virtue of two weeks or whatever it was. And I was almost elected room representative. And I didn't know what a room representative was.

Q: Obviously you weren't a Californian so you were different than the other students. Did they not question or ask you?

A: What I now know and did not know then is that Lowell high school was disproportionately Jewish. To what extent I don't know because I didn't think in those terms but I will cite as an example that Supreme Court Justice Breyer is a Lowell alumnus.

Q: They didn't ask you about life in Germany or Hitler or anything like that. You didn't talk.

A: Not that I recall. Well no, there is an exception.

Q: Or the teachers?

A: There was a classmate named Sidney Brown who clearly was fascinated by the idea of having a friend who had escaped from the jaws of – and introduced me to his parents. I was not sufficiently with it to realize what was going on. And Sidney died I think before graduation of natural causes. And I didn't have enough sense to visit the parents or, I mean, whatever I was supposed to do. Which would have been to my advantage with hindsight because they would have quasi adopted me. He was an only child. I don't want to sound mercenary but, so there is an exception. I know for sure that Sidney, with hindsight, almost certainly of Eastern Jewish origin. Sorry to make these distinctions but they do matter.

Q: Did the teachers ask you about your experience?

A: Not that I recall. Now I took French, where of course I was a stellar student and skipped four, five, six until I got to French eight, but which time my French had declined. I still did well but, and of course in French, it was predominantly girls, where again I was. I don't want to say I was treated as a pet. But I was a little bit different because I knew so much more than they did, with the exception of Lucille who had a French mother.

Q: But you picked up English quickly?

A: I must have. I probably lost all accent by the time I went in the army. And of course, reacquired an accent by virtue of having served in the European theater where I had to speak German. I can't be certain of that but –

Q: Tell me about your parents' adjustment. Your mother.

A: My mother did a lot better than my father. My father never adjusted. He couldn't find a decent job. He died on the 25th of November, two weeks before Pearl Harbor, which meant of course, full employment came right after that. The relatives in San Francisco were conscientious, helpful, but they were all retired and they had warned him we're not going to be very helpful in getting you settled in a job or occupation.

Q: Financially how did your family manage?

A: There my father was reasonably provident. Reasonably. Within the limits of the restrictions. On one of my trips to Switzerland. Maybe it was the final one. I don't remember. They handed me a box, cigar box size. Wrapped as a gift. Told me to put it under the seat, not tell anybody and retrieve it afterwards. And that is how a good deal of jewelry was smuggled out. I don't know all those details because children are not initiated into financial affairs. But he used various devices to accumulate some money. There was another fortunate thing. The provider of the affidavit, a first cousin of my grandmother's, obviously an old lady because she was turned down, being too old for the affidavit, died within half a year after we got there. And my father was in her will to the tune of one half of one percent or some ridiculous sum like that. Which turned out to be $4000. I mean it, I use the word ridiculous. Obviously I –
There were things like that. And another cousin helped my mother invest the money or he borrowed some money from my mother at a high rate of interest. They did various things to help. There was another fallout which I consider very fortunate. Not only did I go to a good high school. A cousin lived within four blocks of home in a very elegant district. We didn't. They had season tickets to the San Francisco Symphony. When they couldn't go, we got the tickets. So I kind of grew up with Pierre Monteux and the San Francisco symphony. And I swear by Pierre Monteux to this day. These are the kinds of things that I think you were looking for.
One other thing that fits in with your questions. In New York a cousin on my mother's side who I have since found out was born in Switzerland, but I thought he was native born American, because he was genuine American and had married a genuine American. Told my mother oh of course you're coming on either Saturday or Sunday to Temple Emanuel. Literally the first time in my life that I had been to a synagogue, of which I remember essentially nothing except that it was not that different from the Protestant services I had gone to occasionally with one of the maids or –
There was organ music and there was a I think a choir but significant in terms of this interview, I think is literally the first time in my life that I set foot in a synagogue.

Q: How Jewish did you feel in San Francisco?

A: Not at all. We lived in within five blocks of Temple Emanuel to which some relatives belonged and it was there and oh I got a gift membership in the Jewish community center which had a pool and a library of comic books which helped my Americanization. That's about it. Oh, no. One other significant thing. After Pearl Harbor you may recall there were enacted a series of laws or regulations, the evacuation of the Japanese, which meant that native born Americans of Japanese descent, including my classmate **Torsho** [ph] were evacuated. We technically enemy aliens, were merely subject to a curfew. We could not travel more than five miles from home unless we were going directly to or from school or work. And we had to be home by eight PM, which means that I could not attend my own high school graduation in the San Francisco opera house, which was held at eight PM. And because Drummond law observing tradition, my mother said, my father was dead by then. You can't go and I didn't go. There are 27 people who have told me since then but you could have passed. It was no great deprivation for me but it answers your question of did I feel Jewish. Well this also meant that we couldn't go out Saturday night like other adolescents. So there were three or four of us who got together on Sunday afternoon because that's the best we could do on weekends.

Q: But this is because you were German?

A: Exactly, because we were enemy aliens.

Q: You became an enemy alien after Pearl Harbor. Is that –

A: Let me continue with enemy alien because that has -- When I was inducted in the US Army in May or June of 1943, I was sent to the Presidio of Monterrey and I said where do I go to get naturalized, because I knew that as soon as you were in the military you were eligible. You didn't have to wait the full five years. Oh, no, no that will happen when you take your basic training. So I was sent to Fort Riley Kansas, the cavalry school. And took my basic training and the mounted cavalry, horse cavalry. Where I asked where do I go to get naturalized. Oh you're just trying to get out of the obstacle course. Not now, not here.
At the end of 16 weeks of basic training horse cavalry, mounted radio operator. I got my orders, a week delayed en route as it was called which means basically annual leave. And then you have

to report to the port of embarkation. I made it as far as the change station in Junction City, alias Junk Town. My name was not called. Why? Nobody knew. Go, go back to Fort Riley. So I did where I found out the following morning I could not be shipped overseas because I was not yet a citizen. That shipment wound up on the Anzio beach head. So they didn't know what to do with me, still not naturalized, so they sent me to advanced communication school. I was trained as a radio operator where the instructors were delighted that there were three of us who were interested in cryptography, crypto analysis. Nobody thought the fact that here an enemy alien was inducted and a crypto analysis which I never used. And in due time I was shipped out to camp McCoy, 76th cavalry, reconnaissance troop mechanized. And then I was naturalized at Lacrosse Wisconsin and was ready for, we were then sent overseas anyway.
But and didn't wind up all that well. We were committed during the Battle of the Bulge. But still it was the tail end and we were not part of the initial –

Q: What did it mean to you to become a citizen of the United States, an American citizen?

A: Paperwork. Psychologically I had made the transition and was merely, really annoyed that I had not yet been certified. So to speak.

Q: You felt American?

A: Oh absolutely.

Q: Did you think a lot about Germany while you were in the army?

A: Only in the hostile sense. Yes. I thought about Germany, that we knew we were going to be shipped to the European theater which meant that I would probably be useful. I turned out to be useful in the reconnaissance outfit where if we took prisoners we had to ship them back to division headquarters where there was a IPW team, interrogation of prisoners of war who had been properly trained. And four days later we might find out whatever wanted to know. We wanted to know being a reconnaissance outfit what was over the next hill or in those woods

ahead of us. And that is where I turned out to be very useful. I could go unskilled interrogation on the spot. So did I think a lot about Germany? Good heavens, we confronted it daily.
One of the incidents worth mentioning. We would occupy a new village or a new site. It occurred to me, maybe the phones are still working but who would I call. And I was also careful enough what would my fellow troopers think. Would they clearly realize that I so two reasons not to use the phone. Which I never found out where it would work or not.
But it's by way of elucidating or answering your question. Did I think about Germany. Yes.

Q: Did you know what was happening to the Jews during the war. When did you first hear about it?

A: No.

Q: You did not know until the war was over?

A: No, a bit earlier. We did run into liberated what were later called displaced persons, slave laborers. We, over at Buchenwald –

Q: You were in Buchenwald?

A: We went through it, passed it because we had to keep going eastward so that is not meaningful. We did visit Buchenwald four weeks later when it was already somewhat cleaned up. But no we didn't know what was going on. At least not in any meaningful detail.

Q: Do you have any memory of your reactions, do you have any memory of your reaction at Buchenwald? Even though it had been cleaned up a bit.

A: No. I've seen so many movies and so many documentaries and read so much about it that I can't tell really from then.

Q: Where did you actually serve when you were, the locations?

A: I was part of a reconnaissance troop which disembarked in Le Havre. And we crossed France, Belgium and Luxembourg fairly fast and of course in France I spoke French. In Belgium I spoke French. Very shortly. In Luxembourg, they weren't at all surprised that I could talk to the natives in what Sergeant White described as slop bucket Dutch, which I didn't speak but they either spoke French or German. We crossed the what we call the Siegfried line and the Germans called the **Westwall** and basically crossed all of Germany and advanced clear into what later became the Soviet zone of the German Democratic Republic because we were over achievers. We advanced too far. We were for six weeks part of the very short lived American occupation of Saxony. Because as reconnaissance, we were hit and run. Our job was not to fight. Our job was to reconnoiter and report back, which made for a very uneven life. But it was like the infantry which –

Q: When you met up with Germans, did you have any visceral reaction? You were standing in your American army uniform.

A: I didn't talk to them very much except, oh I remember when we crossed over in Germany the exec, choke commander said oh from now on we're going to be billeted whenever possible in homes. No more slip trenches, no more camping out. And you corporal George, I don't know. You are going to tell them they have 30 minutes to clear out. I said, who me. Tell them. Well you get used to it very quickly. And that is what we did whenever we needed billets and I amended the orders and said don't lock anything up because American, we had trench knives, not bayonets, variations of. We'll only be doubly tempted by whatever is locked and you will lose.

Q: More.

A: Other than that I didn't amend the orders. I also told my fellow troopers who we very quickly discovered ham and chimneys and eggs in the chicken houses. Yes, by all means. But why don't you leave the K ration, chocolate and a few cigarettes by way of paying them back which as far as I know they did.

But we had no compunction about raiding chicken coops or hauling ham out of the chimneys. Did I talk to Germans? Well obviously to, to tell them to get out. There wasn't much conversation, no. They stayed away from us. They wanted to know could they come back and milk the cows or could they come. And occasionally they would say I never even was no Nazi no how. There was essentially no interaction other than necessary interaction.

Q: Did you ever let any of them know you were from Germany?

A: I don't recall that the question came up but I certainly didn't mention it. On the other hand, they drew, some of them probably drew their own conclusions when somebody spoke –

Q: Fluent.

A: At that point I spoke fluent, but not adult German. I acquired an adult vocabulary of course, during those months, but not only that, I spoke with a southern dialect. No, they did not interrogate me.

Q: Did you try to go back to Stuttgart?

A: Much later. Ok. The end of hostilities was the ninth of May when we were deep in the heart of Saxony. We held a victory parade in Saxony. We were invited to the Russian parade which was across the river. Which I don't remember very clearly but it happened. There, during those six weeks, quasi-peace time in the sense that no hostilities. There I was exposed to a lot of German conversation and probably sought it out because I was curious to learn what they were like and what they were feeling. We lived in German housing that we had taken over. Long detour. This was in **Limbach** in Saxony. Well we had taken a corner house. And we hung an American flag from the balcony. I still have a picture of two GIs standing and the flag, not me but two fellow troopers. Four years ago I went to Berlin to meet a German historian who was also interested in this six week occupation of the later German Democratic Republic. And we had exchanged e-mails and he was fascinated. Some of the photo – oh he doesn't know much English so he found a correspondent who could correspond in German. And had photographs. He

checked up on me. He asked me did I remember where we were billeted in Limbach. I said well it was across from a park and I vaguely remember. Maybe it was called **Allee esse Strasse** [ph] number 15. Here is a photograph of the house. He went. It was number 13, not number 15. But because he had a photograph. He interviewed the residents and he found a woman who said oh I was a seven year old girl and there was a German who spoke with a southern accent. It was this American who – He didn't' check up on me. He kind of wanted to authenticate. That's a lengthy detour of your question, did I interact with the Germans. Yes, after the end of hostilities a whole lot. I found a photo shop in Limbach which still had chemicals and paper and by that time a lot of Americans had acquired cameras. Liberated cameras. And asked me could I arrange to have the film developed. And I had duplicates made for my own collection. Thus I have probably the largest collection of photographs.

In a different small town, I arranged for laundry service. We had to provide the soap of course but the underwear came back ironed and all of this is by way of answering your question, did I have much interaction with the Germans. Not during the combat period. Except when necessary. And of course eternally they said oh I never was a Nazi or I was this, I tended to cut them up s, cut them off short. Got to be a litany.

Q: And Jewish refugees you said –

A: Well we encountered all kinds of displaced persons. A name not, then not known. They were called slave laborers, even though some we found out had volunteered. I remember a Belgian girl, young woman who admitted clearly that she had volunteered. There was nothing to eat at home. And by working she was reasonably well taken care of, along with half a dozen others. Those were non-Jewish volunteers. The displaced persons, Jewish, that's where I discovered that I didn't speak Yiddish but if they spoke slowly and if I repeated everything twice in German we could communicate. I didn't know there was such a language. Well I guess I did know that there were Americans who spoke Yiddish but whoever they were. I have since learned from Hans Hirsch that there is a variation called western Yiddish which my German ancestors probably spoke. Hans knows far more about that than I do. But he has educated me.

Q: Did you feel any connection to these Jewish DPs?

A: No. I should but I didn't. Now I do remember clearly in **Yayna,** [ph] for example, a town in east Germany, former East Germany. We had advanced without military government personnel. There were no, we had advanced too far. There was no provision for military government. And I was asked to improvise. And facetiously and in quotation marks, I became the chief of police of Yayna. Nobody had issued orders for all arms to be turned in for example. So I issued the order and sent out the town crier. That is how the order got amended by various Americans or all cameras had to be turned in. I did not issue that order but in fact I never acquired a camera. But we at that point I, your question was dealing with the DPs or Jews. I very clearly remember that we took over a former German garrison just explicitly as quarters for the Jewish liberated refugees, whatever you want to call them. Displaced persons today. That we tried to provide food for them because they didn't have ration stamps and things like that. But I was chief of police for six days so there's a limit to what you can accomplish.
We had to improvise because while there was quite good American preparation for military government it had not extended that far east. I have actually written an essay about that particular episode because it is that unusual. And I have since read a German historian and I don't quite agree with his description of that six week occupation. I've probably gone too far afield.

Q: it wasn't a particular DP camp. You just met –

A: No, this was not a camp. This was –

Q: Individual DPs

A: These were refugees liberated and they needed to be taken care of. And I certainly took the initiative. I'm not patting myself on the back. That because I spoke German, I was expected to do all kinds of things.

Q: How long did you stay in Europe?

A: In Europe. Do you know about the point system? Ok I'll explain it briefly. To be repatriated to the US you had to have a certain number of points because they were this enormous number of Americans who were ready to go home. In August of course the war with Japan ended, against Japan ended. You had to have –

Q: Let's back up a little bit. What was your reaction when you heard Hitler died? Do you remember that?

A: I don't remember any reaction. The point is we were winning and the war was almost over or completely over. There, that was irrelevant.

Q: All right, so now it's August of 45.

A: I was sent to camp San Francisco near Chateau Thierry for reassignment because I was not ready to go home. This was the so called repo depot, replacement depot. I managed to get to Paris twice. Illegal passes. And I knew I was going to be sent back to Germany because to be repatriated you had to have points. You earned one point for every month of active service. You got a second point for every month of overseas service. And you get five points for every medal or Purple Heart. Well I didn't have enough points. I had to wait my turn. So I was sent back. And assigned to Eisenhower's headquarters. US Forces, European theater. US FET. Where I was a clerk working under WAC Captain which I did not resent. Interesting now. Some of my colleagues resented it. And one of my duties was to drive a colonel to the airport or something like that. And I remember the colonel said and how do you like your job corporal. And I said frankly sir, I don't. I am bored. I have skills. I am bilingual and I am not being utilized. Incredibly enough within a week I was transferred to a suburb of Frankfurt. It was called the UT, U S Information service. It later became the US Information Service. And it was then called the Information Service Control Command. Where I wound up in a fascinating assignment. A daily, because I had a minimum of journalism exposure. A daily digest of all anti-American activities in the American sector. The werewolves, I don't know if you have ever heard of them. There were some Nazi fanatics up in the Alps who were doing terrible things to, I mean never amounted to anything but there was much talk about the werewolves.

And the other thing I remember is any number of Germans came home and found that their girlfriends or wives had been seduced by Americans or by American chocolate or cigarettes and thereupon they either cussed out the Americans or did actually something anti-American. That was the daily confirmation. But what impressed me, it was for circulation only to colonels and up. And here I was a corporal. That lasted a while. I have since tried to go to the archives and find my immortal prose. I haven't been able to find it and it's not worth the effort. I have not been able to find comparable compilations either.

Q: You mentioned the werewolves. Did they come down hunting for Jews again?

A: Oh no, no. there that was a continuation of the fight against the allies. It was, it does not, or I'm sure they would have. No it was not explicitly anti-Semitic. It was anti Allied. It didn't amount to anything. It was trivial. And it was probably reported more thoroughly than it was in fact. After a few weeks in Bad Hamburg editing this daily digest I asked to be transferred to the provinces and I was assigned to **Regensburg** which is on the Danube in Bavaria. The district information command which was doing de-Nazification work. In those days to work on a newly reconstituted newspaper or radio or no television. Or even appear on the stage. You had to go through a de-Nazification which was a questionnaire with 101 questions. And there were three of us, three Americans. In Regensburg who did this kind of de-Nazification. We also did what was no longer called censorship of the newspaper. But post publication scrutiny. Which means we read the damn thing and if we found anything objectionable we were supposed to object. Never happened.

I remember with a colleague named Bill Clark who knew German but his German was atrocious. And my German of course improved daily and became much more adult. We went to the nearby town of **Straubing** [ph] because there were rumors that the local theater had put on an anti-American play. I don't remember the author, I think it was Kleist and it dealt with the French revolution or something like that. We enjoyed the performance, went back to Regensburg and said nothing. Straubing sticks in my memory because I ran into a German Jew and his daughter who had survived the war. I think he was married to a gentile, who alleged that he remembered my ancestral factory, 80 kilometers to the north. I did not pursue it in any

meaningful way. It was one of the few cases where I actually encountered some vague link with my patrilineal ancestry.
Well in due time at the end of Regensburg I had enough points to be repatriated. And --

Q: So you get back to the United States?

A: To San Francisco. And promptly enrolled in Berkeley. And that's it.

Q: Did you graduate from Berkeley?

A: Yep.

Q: Just generally what did you do? What kind of jobs did you do?

A: Then I was at loose ends and had some time left on the GI Bill and decided to go to the University of Geneva and the Graduate Institute of international studies where I spent a semester plus. And then dropped out because a classmate from Berkeley and a friend to this day in Washington. And I accepted jobs with an English language newspaper in of all places Stuttgart. It went bankrupt at the end of eight weeks but, and that was my year in Europe. I was at loose ends. So I went home and enrolled in graduate school and got a teaching credential as a fallback position and got a master's and got a PhD and the rest is history. At Berkeley.

Q: A PhD in?

A: In history and philosophy of education. A totally useless subject which I have since converted into more useful things.

Q: What kind of professional career?

A: I did some teaching. I was going to teach forever but at that –

Q: On college or high school level?

A: No at the college level.

Q: College level.

A: Oh I worked at the high school level. While in graduate school I was a substitute teacher in the Oakland schools, mostly to make some money. I was married by then. And I –

Q: Your wife was American or European?

A: Very much, born in New York of immigrant parents. Eastern. Her mother was born in Odessa. And she went to UCLA, came to Berkeley for a summer session and that was her doom. We were only married 45 years. Successfully, happily.

Q: You said you taught?

A: I taught –

Q: After you got your doctorate, did you teach?

A: No. I taught at the California College of Arts and Crafts where they needed somebody to teach future art teachers and I was half of the social science department. I never taught arts and crafts. I taught at San Francisco State College for a semester. It's now called San Francisco, California State University, San Francisco. These are inflationary times. I came east because I had a job offer from the National Education Association to become assistant editor of the monthly journal which was quite a professional production. Circulation 600,000. I mean – I had a lot to learn. On the other hand I had enough, oh I left out something. Somewhere along the line I became a contributing book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle, which meant I got to keep the books which we traded in at the Berkeley book store where we had a positive balance. I mean they bought them second hand but sold them. I'm sure they –

My wife was so impressed that she said oh I could try my hand at that. And I brought home a couple of books. She was at that point a deputy juvenile probation officer and there was a book on juvenile delinquency and I brought it home and she did a glorious review, which her bosses liked because she wove in their names and the Oakland probation department. That led to the California Teachers' Association Journal asking me would I do an occasional review for them which wound up doing a couple of articles for them. And that led to a referral to the National Education Association where I became an assistant editor and we moved to Washington, have been here ever since.

I taught at Penn State for one summer session while working for the NEA. In the history of education. Recycled my old lecture notes. But basically decided that the academic life was not for me. I have since had several research jobs and other policy jobs in education. But it's a mixed bag and I don't know if you want to go into my whole career which is erratic or opportunistic.

Q: When you were teaching students did you ever mention about your childhood and where you came from and your background? Did you ever bring that up?

A: Almost certainly not. No. Not pertinent.

Q: You talked about what your education was?

A: By way of reinforcing that. While still working for the NEA, I was invited to give a lecture in German. I was then working for the NEA for the so called automation project which dealt with the impact of automation on education. I was invited to give a lecture on automation at the **Ost College** in Cologne, in German. Ok. Sounds like fun. I wrote a lecture very carefully in English, translated it into German. Sent it to a former German classmate for editing. And he cleaned it up. He said it didn't need much fixing. Gave the lecture in Cologne. At the end of which there was a question and answer period which I handled reasonably well. And when it was all over somebody asked me, did your parents come from southern Germany. I said yes, why do you ask? Well you speak with a southern accent, but did never even entertain the idea that I had was an immigrant or I cite the incident only by, as an elaborate answer to your question.

Gail Schwartz: This is the continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with George Arnstein. This is track number 3. And let's talk now a little bit about your thoughts and your perspectives, considering where you were born and what you went through. What are your thoughts about Germany today? You said you'd gone back obviously on visits and lectures. Just generally what --

George Arnstein: Let me detour. My wife was a powerful influence on my life, which I'm sure happens in other marriages too but unusually so. She was smart, competent, sensitive, et cetera. On our first trip to Europe which she was eager to do, we also stopped off in Stuttgart, ostensibly to liquidate a wicker basket which had been deposited by my great aunt Clare with a bank in Stuttgart when Clare, American born, great aunt, and the bank had charged annually a modest deposit fee, rent. And my wife said we've got to liquidate that. Fine, we – among other things. She also said and this is typical of my wife. I want to know where you came from. So we looked at the house we lived in. And things like that. We also went to the bank. It took half an hour to produce the wicker basket. And it contained linens, towels, 12 pieces of silverware which however is not sterling because the German standard is only 875 and sterling is 92% or something like that. And there also were a couple of arm bands and I said oh these. She said oh I think there was something. They turned out to be gold and one went to my sister and one went to Sherry. She spotted them. The linens we gave to former maids whom we also looked up. The pieces of silver, we took to a local silversmith, jewelry store. We would like to buy, we had German restitution funds. We would like to buy 12 place settings and they said we can't do that because we don't have enough silver and we can't import any. You have to have old silver to trade in. And I said well we just happen to have this pile. And literally that's how it happened and that is how today I own place settings for 12 in almost sterling silver.
You ask about my feelings about Stuttgart. This is an example of my wife's influence in, to some extent, reconciling me and on that same trip. Oh.

Q: What year was that? When did you go?

A: 57, 58.

Q: The 1950s, ok.

A: I also engaged in a long correspondence, dealing with restitution. My mother doesn't type. My sister doesn't know German. She does, but badly. And so it befell to me and I inherited all these documents, from my aunt Nellie, from my mother, from my grandmother. I still have an enormous collection of them. And I successfully pursued any number of restitution claims. Successfully has its limits. They were put into blocked mark accounts because Germany in those days had no foreign currency. They were essentially bankrupt. So you could use the money within Germany but you could not, oh you could sell it in Switzerland at a terrific discount which we did a couple of times. And of course I shared everything with my mother and sister. The result is that we were wealthy when we were in Stuttgart. And in the process I engaged a lawyer in Stuttgart and got a letter from one of his interns for lack of a better name who identified himself as a former classmate who is now an apprentice lawyer. And he would fully understand if I did not want to correspond, continue the correspondence. The point is I did, and we're still friends today. His kids have visited here and et cetera.
PS, his father was a printer with the pre-war Social Democratic newspaper. In other words, left-leaning.
So that is another, shall we say point of reference where we had access to a, oh they weren't living in Stuttgart. They had been evacuated during the war. Where my wife got a feeling for how Germans lived and was most curious to learn about my previous life. Is this the kind of stuff?

Q: Yeah, I just want to go into your, what your thoughts about Germany, whether you're comfortable there.

A: At the Ost College, the lecture I gave in German, very significant. I faced a decision. If I accepted that invitation, for which there was a trivial honorarium, I had to accept the Germans. I had to make my peace. So I was confronted with a decision and I made it. And in the affirmative, if you want to put it that way. Germans today are two generations removed from

then. Every once in a while I run into somebody who of course is of my generation. And there I tend to have problems. Nothing hostile. They all behave very properly. And I behave I hope properly, but I simply don't relate to them the way I relate to younger people. There is an American foundation, the Obermeyer Foundation. Arthur Obermeyer is a third generation American of German Jewish descent from southwest Germany. And he has established an annual award, honoring those Germans who are doing something to keep alive the German Jewish memory. It's mostly restoration of cemeteries and that kind of stuff. And four years ago, Hans Hirsch and I and a couple of others nominated somebody successfully. And I thought ok, I've done my thing. So Hans asked me, you're going of course. I said it hadn't occurred to me but I went. Found it very interesting and I'll spare you the details. I've since done it three more times, mostly because we have identified various people and we're currently waiting to see whether this year's nominees were elected or not. The trip to Berlin was interesting to me also because I wanted to meet this German historian who is also interested in the six week occupation. It turns out he was conceived during that occupation of an American and a German mother. That's his motivation. And he doesn't speak much English. He has since discovered his American father and has been accepted by the family in Ohio or wherever. Still doesn't speak much English. But he has been very helpful in taking me sightseeing to pieces of Berlin that I would not have seen otherwise and obviously is of a different generation.

Q: Do you think you would be a different person today if you hadn't gone through the childhood that you had living through Nazi, the beginnings of Nazi Germany, having to leave your home country?

A: Yes. I can, I can tell because my sister being three years younger and married to an American with three American, California born kids, knows about American childhood, rhymes, stories, anecdotes. I, not having kids, and being just a bit older. Oh I vaguely know who Old Mother Hubbard was but not really. In that sense I am not fully assimilated. You asked me, would I be different. Yes. I would be different but I didn't have that kind of childhood or experiences.

Q: I also meant psychological, in background knowledge, right. But psychologically do you think –

A: Yes, I still have certain German habits, customs that, the way I was brought up is, emphasizes deferred gratification. Maybe fewer white lies, maybe too much adherence to telling the truth, even when it's, when it shouldn't be told. Now my wife taught me an awful lot and certainly has Americanized me. I think that's as far as I can go.

Q: What are your thoughts about being Jewish? Did you, you didn't realize it until you were older. Have you become more Jewish or –

A: I have for the past dozen years or so longer than that. My wife. Been very active in doing family history, genealogy. My wife teased me. Until I started compiling her family history which is quite limited of course because eastern resources are. But I discovered a cousin of hers who had fled the Soviet Union, lived in Germany. I corresponded with that cousin who said oh, you Sherry have an uncle in Leningrad, whereupon we took a Baltic cruise. First lined up a local recent immigrant who made a phone call to the uncle in Leningrad. And basically arranged that we would meet in Leningrad when our ship stopped there. The uncle imported a cousin of Sherry's who lived in Moscow. A retired teacher of English who had never been in an English speaking country to serve as interpreter. In short my wife has forgiven me my interest in families. I'm being glib of course.
Why did I engage in what is clearly unequivocally Jewish family history. I learned a whole lot about my ancestors, who spoke probably western Yiddish who are clearly were observant. I had a great grandfather who was a either a **parnas** [ph] or but it's all historical interest. It doesn't do anything for me. In the emotional Jewish sense. I am ethnically Jewish as non-observant as can be. The only time I go to a synagogue is for weddings or funerals. Hans has forgiven me but clearly that's it.

Q: What are your thoughts about Israel? Do you feel a connection?

A: That's an awkward question or an awkward answer. I keep thinking the Jewish claim to Palestine, to Israel, is a little bit like are we ready to give America back to the Indians. They did, I'm conflicted obviously. I am not a Zionist. I am vaguely pro-Israel but it's a tenuous connection.

Q: Have you been there?

A: We have been there twice but not, but superficially. We took Mediterranean cruises and the ship docked in Haifa and we had 36 hours. I walked the stations of the cross in Jerusalem because the fellow passengers were Protestants. My wife had a non-cousin in Haifa I think and visited him. My wife had a much more traditional Jewish upbringing. She belonged to B'Nai Brith youth and no Hillel youth, but I don't want to put words in her mouth but I think she kind of saw marrying me as a liberating experience. Part of it may of course have been simply loyalty to a marriage and I don't know. But she certainly adjusted more to my way of life and thinking than I adjusted to hers.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial?

A: I'm not sure I had any. But he's an SOB and he had it coming. I mean, that simple.

Q: When the news came out after the war and the liberation of the camps and the terrible photographs and films, did that –

A: There but for the grace of God go I. Of course, of course. I certainly internalized that. I am very conscious of the fact that thanks to an American great grandfather and thus an American grandmother and thus extended family in California, my life became a whole lot better, in part also because I didn't get hung up on the east coast in New York. There is nothing with New York and there is nothing wrong with, but I'm glad I grew up in San Francisco where in a moment of weakness of course, I can claim to be a fourth generation Californian.

Q: Do you still get restitution, reparations I meant?

A: My mother was unhappy because she never collected the monthly –

Q: She never did.

A: No, she somehow or other fell between the cracks. No, we collected on the house and its forced sale. And on things like that. And I got a very modest restitution for my sister and for myself for interrupted education. Parenthetically, she collected more than I did because I was hell bent to get a PhD and she took her own sweet time to get a master's. But those are the aberrations or idiosyncrasies of laws enacted.

Q: So you didn't get monthly reparations?

A: Oh it didn't amount to all that much. But we were poor struggling graduate students and every little bit was welcomed. I have uncovered a couple of dormant Swiss accounts. Because I pursue that kind of stuff. And I tipped off a cousin in Connecticut who collected far more than I did but she had wealthier relatives. And tipped off a cousin in Florida who failed to follow through. It has been ongoing but nobody in my immediate family ever collected monthly payment. No these were always rather small lump sums.

Q: Do you feel lessons have been learned from the Holocaust? That the world has --

A: Who is the learner? I mean we're supposed to have learned. As far as the Germans are concerned, I am persuaded that they are trying to do the right thing and are doing the right thing. Sometimes I even worry that the, maybe going too far in outgoing any kind of a protest but that's their problem, not mine. Yes, the Germans have learned their lesson I think. Who else is supposed to have learned? The Austrians certainly not. They're opportunists. I happen to have Austrian Jewish neighbors. He was much younger than I was when they came here. He's fully, far more Americanized than I am. And we sometimes make our unkind remarks about Austrian opportunism. I assume you're familiar with the story. Who else is supposed to have learned from the Holocaust?

Q: The world in general.

A: Sorry I draw a blank.

Q: What are your thoughts about the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC? Being built in Washington?

A: I'm glad it's there. I'm glad it includes the Roma. I have been there. I have enjoyed is not the right word, the exhibits. In fact the last time I was there, I was reminded, it is my life déjà vu all over again. The exhibits are awe inspiring. In a way I'm glad that it's just off the Mall. Period.

Q: Because, why do you say that?

A: The Mall should be American patriotic. Just like Martin Luther King is just a little bit off in part because the Mall is more or less full. But. (pause) It's only in a limited sense the American experience. Therefore it's entirely suitable but maybe off the Mall.

Q: Is there anything else you would want to say before we close, anything else you want to add?

A: I should add something about my military experience which obviously is a major event in my life. I am glad I went was sent to the European theater. It was a very meaningful experience. I don't want to call it an emotional experience but it and I don't want to call it vengeance either. But I was clear what the war was about and I was glad to be doing it. Something towards it. I am amazed with hindsight and I was in a small outfit, 160 men. How fully accepted I was. That they never to my knowledge had any doubts. They weren't that conscious of the difference between Jewish and non-Jewish. The, I was fully accepted.

Q: You're talking about the men in your outfit?

A: Oh yes, my fellow troopers. And of course I was more pivotal than most others because I spoke French and I spoke German. And I knew all kinds of local things that turned out to be useful. I could translate the sign that said **Achtung Menin** [ph] So I just want to add that was a meaningful experience and I'm glad I was in it.

The experience in military government after the end of the war was also meaningful. First of all it certainly enhanced my vocabulary to do de-Nazification questionnaires you had to enlarge your vocabulary and your view of the world. I also, it also refreshed my memories. One reason why I am probably better able to remember things during an interview like this than others is because I had a refresher course at age 20, 21 which living in an environment that evoked all kinds of things that I'd forgotten or would have forgotten. And once again the influence of my wife is massive. Period. Positive, obviously.

Q: Do you feel German in any way?

A: I'm not sure I understand the question probably because I can't answer it. Part of me says hell no. And part of me says well of course. That's where I was born. That's how I spent the first 13 years of my life or 12 years. I had my father certainly wasn't Americanized. My mother became quite thoroughly Americanized and learned to speak excellent English. Well she lived within walking distance of her grandchildren and she became a surrogate mother to the grandchildren who to this day think very highly of her. Well she had a house with a pool in Los Angeles. The, but my mother was German. And expected me to, I was expected to write home in the army, after the war, regularly, often. And I would get a letter back, punctually. That simple was a given.

Q: Were those letters always in German? To her and back to you?

A: Oh no. No, no. In English. Well mine had to be in English because they were subject to censorship.

Q: Oh, to censorship.

A: Well not after the end of hostilities of course. But I'd have to look. My mother's letters almost certainly were in English by then.

Q: Did you talk to your mother in English or in German?

A: We spoke English almost from day one in this country. Obviously not. We had to speak German because we didn't know enough English but we were hell bent to become Americans and assimilate and learn English which in the case of my sister and me was happened not overnight, but very quickly. And in the case of my mother we increasingly spoke to her in English. We had no intention of going back. This was in the day when it took a week on a steamer and no, we didn't want to go back. Of course I went back within five years but –

Q: Did your mother ever go back to visit?

A: Oh my mother went back at least twice. My aunt Nellie died too soon. She didn't go back. Marianne didn't go back and my grandmother also, she died in 49, much too soon to go back.

Q: Did you lose any extended members of your family in the Holocaust?

A: Extended, yes but not immediate family. Well because I do family history I have of course I mean I have several thousand names and there are lots and lots of victims. But in terms of people that I knew personally, there was a classmate of my father's who's also a distant relative who committed suicide in Los Angeles because he found out that his nieces and nephews had been deported. There was a cousin who of all things was the equivalent of a county judge, not I mean he was a judge but not, who was killed or his wife was killed. I don't remember now. One of them died of natural causes about that time. I think it was his wife and she's the relative as opposed to the judge. But this is extended family. Of all the people that I knew I literally can't think of one.

Q: When you meet someone from Germany, a Jew of your generation or, do you ever talk about your childhoods or do you not dwell on that?

A: Well as I told you, Herman came out of a PW cage. This was September 1945. The war ended in May. We explored the neighborhood together and we did it amicably, successfully and nostalgically. He told me that his, he was a lieutenant. His company commander who was a

captain was a guy who lived across the street, and he was four years older than we were. And he was killed. He, period, paragraph. My wife and I went back and visited Herman and his wife. This must have been my wife died 14 years ago so I tend to time everything before and after. This must have been 18, 20 years ago. And it was a very good visit. He and his wife and my wife and I took a trip out in the country and we visited a ruined castle on a mountaintop because Herman and I had bicycled there in a one day trip. And we were all staggered that we had managed to do that at the age of 12, 13. But these are selective. When I visited, oh the city of Stuttgart had a program to invite its former citizens. My wife was by then too ill to travel and so my sister and I and her husband went whenever. And I was interviewed and there was a story in the newspaper with my picture, whereupon there promptly was a phone call from a former classmate in the hotel who'd like to get together with me. Well he was one of those I did not wish to get reacquainted with. He was the cousin of one of the guys who had followed me during the soccer game. Now blood is thicker than water. He was a cousin so maybe he was less enthusiastic and less nasty but I chose not to tell him off, not to do anything. I just not to get reacquainted. Does that illustrate. In 1945 probably during that same visit with Herman, I remember walking past the house where the teacher lived who had made that precipitating remark and there was the doorbell and there was his name. Should I break his goddamn windows. No. I chose to ignore him. So I don't remember exactly what your question was but my feelings are very clearly no, I do not want to exact revenge. I merely want to take advantage of whatever present memories I have.

Q: Well that's a good note to end on.

A: I thank you. I hope I have contributed something.

Q: You certainly have. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with George Arnstein.

(end)