

--if it'll work. This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Hans Tuch conducted by Gail Schwartz on November 7th, 2013, in Bethesda, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

My full name is Hans Nathan Tuch, T-U-C-H. But all people who know me call me Tom. It was acquired when I first came to the United States. And people called me Tommy Tucker sang for his supper. And so this is where I acquired Tom. So people who know me call me Tom. And people who don't know call me Hans.

Where were you born? And when were you born?

I was born in Berlin, in Germany, on October 15, 1924.

Let's talk now about your family. Who Were the members of your family?

My father, his name was Bruno Tuch. And my mother was Rosa Tuch.

And her maiden name?

Her maiden name was [? Olsner. ?] And both sides of the family came from Poznan, Posen, in Germany-- I mean in Poland. But they were Germans who emigrated to Berlin right after World War I. And my grandfather became a banker in Berlin-- my mother's father. And we became Berliners. They both became Berliners.

And did you or do you have any siblings?

No, I was the only child of Bruno and Rosa. My father was an insurance executive. He had the Berlin representation of the worldwide insurance company, [GERMAN], which, of course, still exists today. He was their Berlin representative.

And did your mother work?

My mother did not work, no. She was trained and educated in music and as a singer. She never sang professionally. But she was very interested in opera. And she introduced me to opera at an early age. And this is what I really am doing now. I'm a complete amateur. But opera is my thing.

Wonderful. What about an extended family, aunts, uncles, cousins?

My mother had four-- she had two brothers. My mother was one of five children. And they all lived in Berlin at that time. Her older brother was a physician in the worker area of Berlin. My father had one brother who was a-- had two brothers, actually. His older brother was a distinguished judge, who was the only one who actually suffered during the-- I should add that nobody in my family became a victim in the Holocaust. I was very lucky. And there was no victim. They all got out of Germany.

My father died at a very young age, at 46, of brain tumor. And my mother was widowed when she was 39 years old and never remarried. And she took over his business in Berlin and then lost it through the Nazi taking over there her insurance business. But everybody in the family, on both sides, got out of Germany. So I had no real tragedy in my own family life in that respect.

How old were you when your father died?

I was 12 when my father died, in 1936. And the one thing that my mother wanted while he was ill and in the hospital, she wanted to keep me out of her hair, so she bought me a season ticket to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. And I happened to see-- Jesse Owens had four of his five world records in Berlin. And I was present when Hitler was in the audience also.

Were you able to see him?

No. The 1936 Olympics were the thing in my own memory that stood out.

We'll get to that in a minute. Was-- yeah, go on.

I went to a Catholic grade school in Berlin Schoeneberg. I was actually born in Berlin Mitte But my mother and father moved to Schoeneberg about 1 block from Rathaus Schoeneberg on a [GERMAN] Strasse. And we lived there. And that's where I grew up. And I went to the [? Hohenzollern ?] gymnasium until the spring of 1938, when I was kicked out, being Jewish. And I then went to the Jewish gymnasium, but for only about five months before I left for the United States. Would you like to hear about why and how I came?

We'll get to that. Let's do sure a section on your experience in Berlin. Was your family a religious family?

No, they were reform Jewish. It is interesting. My father and mother consider themselves Germans. Their religion was reform Jewish. But it was not an ethnic thing for them to be Jewish. They were reform Jewish. And I was bar mitzvahed in 1937, a year before. And as a matter of fact, I had a high soprano voice at that time. My mother was interested in that. And I did the whole service and sang it.

Which synagogue was this?

[GERMAN] in Berlin, which was a reformed synagogue and had a very well-known rabbi, [PERSONAL] was his name-- or something like that. At any rate, it was not a religious household at all.

What language did you speak at home?

German.

German. And when you say it wasn't a religious household, did your family observe anything, Passover, or Hanukkah--

Yeah, we observed--

--or any of the holidays, or the sabbath?

Yes, on holidays, we went to the temple. And we actually fasted on Yom Kippur. But it was a thing that you did. But it was not a very important thing in my life. And being Jewish was-- I was Jewish religiously. But I had no real feeling deep-- or my parents did not inculcate in me a big major feeling of being ethnically-- and as I said, we were religious. But that was it.

How did you train for your bar mitzvah?

I was trained by the Cantor of the temple for about five months.

So before that, you hadn't gone to Hebrew school or anything?

Oh, no.

None of the Sunday school or anything [BOTH TALKING].

No, not at all. We went to temple on holidays--

Holidays.

--period. After my father died in 1936-- this was two years before I emigrated. I was 12. That was before I was bar

mitzvahed. I took his death very seriously. And I went to temple every night for 13 months, I believe it was, and observed the ceremonies of being--

Mourning?

Yeah, I did that very conscientiously. I just remember that.

But did you know Hebrew at that point?

No, I didn't know Hebrew at-- I learned Hebrew for my bar mitzvah. And I learned to read the prayers service. And I could read Hebrew. I learned to read Hebrew. But I memorized most of it.

What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it Jewish and non-Jewish?

We lived in Schoeneberg, as I said, one block from Rathaus Schoeneberg, in the [GERMAN], which was an upper middle class area, where we were in a nice apartment. We had a large apartment, which still exists. The building still exists. And we lived one block from Bayerischer Platz, which was one of the squares of that area, where the U-Bahn had a stop. And it was a very nice part of--

Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors?

No. Non-Jewish-- we didn't have any. We didn't know our neighbors.

Oh, you did not know people who lived in the building?

Barely. No, we didn't.

You didn't know if they were Jewish or non--

Actually, we had a fairly large apartment, which in part was my father's office. He had his office in front. And then we had a fairly large apartment in the back. My close relatives, uncles and aunts, lived in the neighborhood within about a mile. They all lived in that particular area. My grandparents also.

What about your school friends? Were they Jewish or non-Jewish?

I really didn't have many school friends that I remember. I had a friend who lived in the same apartment building, who was the son I think of the janitor. And we were friends. We were close friends. But other than that, I really had no German-- I don't remember having close school friends or other friends at all, either in grade school or in high school. It was a [? Hohenzollern ?] gymnasium, which was very close to where we lived on Martin Luther Strasse. And so I just really don't remember very much about my--

What did you do after school? Were you interested in sports? Did you have any hobbies?

In my gymnasium, I was interested in sports, that was swimming and track, which I participated in. I was never very good at it. I had what you call letters in it and so forth. But the one thing that I remember very closely is right across the street from us lived our physical ed teacher, who was an officer in the SS, who took to me. I was the best marcher-- when you marched-- and I also was the best saluter. And he was very friendly to me. He lived right across the street. And every once in a while, he wore his SS uniform. But I had absolutely no fear or any kind of-- other than that he was one of my teachers. And he was friendly with me.

And I really didn't feel any kind of persecution or otherwise until I was told that, you had to leave the [? Hohenzollern ?] gymnasium. And I was very disappointed because it was a very good gymnasium. It was close to where we lived. And I had to go to the Jewish gymnasium way across town. And I bicycled. But this was a really relatively short time.

What happened was after my father died in 1936, my mother took over his business. We lived happily in Berlin. In 1937 her first cousin from Kansas City, they came to Europe. They didn't come to Germany. They met in Marienbad in Czechoslovakia. My mother went down. She didn't take me along. And I really don't know why because she sent me off to camp. And they met in Marienbad in 1937. It was her first cousin.

Interestingly about her first cousin, who emigrated to the United States before World War I, as a young person, he had worked for my grandfather. And somehow he had gotten into financial trouble. So my grandfather said, get out of here, I'll pay you to go to the United States, and send him abroad in order to keep him out of trouble. He never forgot what my grandfather had done for him.

And therefore they came to Germany to Marienbad, to Czechoslovakia and met-- it was a family reunion. He and his wife and their son, Jeff, who was my second cousin, came to Marienbad. And they made the decision that the following year, I was to go to Kansas City for one year. And my cousin Jeff was to come and stay with my mother for a year, sort of a family exchange.

It developed during that following year. He wasn't going to come. But I was going to go for good. And I had an affidavit. And I had a visa. My mother did not yet. She had she had an affidavit from her cousin. But she didn't have a visa yet. It hadn't come up yet. So I went by myself in 1938. She took me to Hamburg and put me onto the Manhattan ship. And I went off as a 14-year-old to New York.

We'll talk about [BOTH TALKING].

But going back to Berlin--

Yeah, I want to stay with Berlin.

I should say something else about Berlin. I am sure that if my father had lived, we would have all succumbed in the Holocaust because he felt he was a German. He had served in World War I. He had an Iron Cross, actually an Iron Cross that was bestowed belatedly by Hitler. So this was never going to happen to us. We would have never left Berlin. And we would have all succumbed if he had not passed away. So this is one of the-- my personal history that I feel that the only way that we really survived is because he had passed away at an early age.

Let's now talk about you as a child in Germany. Did you experience any anti-Semitism?

Only on one occasion. And it was not really anti-Semitism. It was the week before I left. My mother had purchased for me a pair of long trousers, knowing that in the United States, young boys wore knickers but also long trousers. And I had them on-- it was right across the street from where we lived-- and when I was accosted by four or five young boys who didn't like what I was wearing or whether I was Jewish or not-- I have no idea. And they beat me up.

And I came home. And my mother in her usual way said, this did you good. So you had this experience of being beat up. So you know what will happen to you if-- things like this. And that was the only occasion that I personally felt--

[PHONE RINGING]

--just let it ring-- that I personally felt that I had any kind of bad experience in this. So I really never personally experienced the awful things that happened in Germany vis-a-vis the Jews.

When did you first start hearing about a man named Hitler? Do you remember your first impression and--

Oh, I think it was quite-- I was--

In 1933, you were 9.

I remember my father being a veteran. And Hindenburg was a former general and Marshall. And he was a political

father figure for me, Hindenburg was. Hitler came aboard. And I certainly was conscious about him. I don't remember that there were any things that happened to us personally because in any way, I heard about him pretty early. But it was one of those things that my father said, this doesn't concern us. We're Germans. He's not an important figure.

And actually, while he was alive, his business was fine. He had no problems at all. This was between 1933 and 1936. He died in 1936. So I really had no bad experiences. Kristallnacht came two weeks after I left Germany. And there's a little story about that. So anyway--

What about boycotts or book burning, anything like-- you were not aware, is that what you're saying?

I was not aware-- no, not at all. I was not aware of the problems and the dangers that came.

And you didn't feel that you were under any restrictions about places to go?

No, none.

You could do all of that freely?

Yes. And actually my mother's close relatives left. They left Germany between 1936 and 1938. They were still there when my father died. Actually, in 1936, my mother's younger brother died of what is known as hepatitis. He was 34 years old. Her father died in 1936. My father, grandfather, and uncle all died in one year. And her older brother, who was a physician, was the hardest hit by this because he lost his father, his brother, and his brother-in-law all in one year.

And that I remember hit very hard. And they all departed at the time when I left. My mother was the only one who was left by herself. And what happened on Kristallnacht-- this was two weeks after I left. I didn't learn about this till about 10, 15 years ago. She never talked about it. She never told me.

But when Kristallnacht came, she had a large apartment. She was a widow living by herself. Six of her cousins and relatives came to her. And she put them up in the apartment. And I heard about this only after she died. She never told me-- from the cousins, oh, she put us-- actually, not from the cousins, from their children. She put us up for two weeks. And we stayed at the apartment.

What was your reaction as a young boy, seeing German soldiers, seeing the swastika? Did it elicit any response?

None, except I liked parades. German soldiers-- my father was a soldier in World War II. I found attracted to military displays. The fact that there was a swastika and that you did Heil Hitler really was not-- particularly did not impress me. I was a child.

No, I know. That's why I'm trying to get what a child's reaction is to this.

I was more impressed by military precision and military parades as a young boy. And I was very interested in sports. And the fact that Germany-- especially in track and field. They were very good at it. And I was very interested in football and soccer. And I had a favorite team, which still exists and is doing pretty well this year. But I was very interested in soccer and sports. And sports teams, I've followed them. And Germans were very good at sports in those days. And I was very proud of my German team.

So there was never any fear that you felt when you saw German soldiers?

No.

Or even the swastika?

No.

Did you see any--

Actually, I never also experienced any kind of-- since this all came after I left-- the demonstrations and things like that.

So did you witness any anti-Semitism incidents as a child, things being done to other people?

No. The only thing that I remember is that my family thought things were going to get bad. And we should get out. And they all did. My grandmother left with one of her-- went to Israel with a son and daughter-- with her doctor and his wife. They had one son born by that time. And no, they all departed happily.

My father's oldest brother was in America from 1933, 34 on. And he was an operator type. And he was always doing very well, but not really doing very well. And he was in the United States much earlier. And then, of course, my mother's cousins in Kansas City, with whom she was close. And he-- I didn't realize this till much later-- he always felt very close to my mother because her father had done the right thing by him.

What was his name.

His name was [? Olsner. ?]

His first name?

Sally, S-A-L-L-Y. That would have been-- what would have been--?

Solomon?

Probably was. He was known as Sally [? Olsner. ?]

So now let's talk about your leaving. You're 14 years old. What were your thoughts? Did you think you were going for permanently, or you were going for a year?

I was going on an adventure.

For a year? Or you didn't know?

No, I was leaving.

Oh, you were leaving Germany, and you knew you weren't coming back?

Correct.

That you knew. How did that make you feel? Was that upsetting? Or it was just--

No.

--exciting to go on an adventure?

Exciting going on an adventure by myself, on a trans-Atlantic ship all by myself. It was an adventure.

Were you a very independent child?

Yes.

You must have been to be--

I was. My mother insisted that I was independent. And she sent me to Switzerland on Christmastime to go skiing with some of her relatives, with her cousins and so forth at Christmas time. This was after my father died, that I-- and she said be off to boys camp in the summer.

So you had been away by yourself before you left for the United States?

Yes.

By the way, just tangentially, did you celebrate Christmas?

No. Hanukkah. No, we did not celebrate. I didn't celebrate Christmas until I came to this country. And then it became with my American family.

So now you're told you're going to be going. And you went to Hamburg? Is that--

Yeah. The first experience was getting a visa from the United States--

Yeah, and how did that work?

--and getting an exit permit from the German polizei-- from the police.

So who did that for you? And how did it happen?

I did it myself. She sent me to the American Consulate General. And she sent me to the police. She didn't go with me. She sent me by myself. She really trained me to be very independent from-- and I was an only child.

Were you afraid going into the German offices to get your exit visa?

No. I was [MUMBLING]. And I have the documents still. And no, it was, to me, something natural. She says, you go to the police, and go there and be there at such and such a time. And I went on the U-Bahn and did my thing. It was natural.

So now you're getting ready to leave. What did you take with you?

I took a large steamer trunk of my mother's, which she had had ever since her marriage. It was a large steamer trunk. And the history, I kept that steamer trunk until the 700th anniversary of the Berlin creation, which was about 15, 20 years ago. And I donated that trunk to the Museum in Berlin, Potsdamer Bahnhof Museum, which collected things like that. And I donated two steamer trunk. And I have a German article about the donation of that steamer trunk.

That steamer trunk was my home for the next 30 years. Even in the Foreign Service, that's where my things were. So it was a large trunk. And I traveled with that trunk and then baggage and so forth. And that's what-- I had my things there. And that was it.

So did you take anything special, any special books, anything personal besides clothes?

I only took clothes, and I took maybe a few books. And the one thing that I took with me, which I still have, I had started-- the month before leaving Germany, my mother allowed me to go to the [GERMAN], to the opera four times. She went with me three times. And the last time I went by myself. And she allowed me to see four operas during the month before I left. I think it was every Sunday before I left. And I saw four operas, Faust, Trovatore, Tannhauser, and Fidelio.

And I kept the programs. And I lost three of them but held one that I took with me. I took all four of them with me. But I lost three of them since then. And the fourth one, I have kept and still have. And I started collecting opera programs. And I have a collection of about 3,000. And they are now at the Wolf Trap Opera Company in their archives. And they

have all been computerized. And they are available for people who need them.

That one program of Fidelio. I didn't look at it for about 10 years. And about 10 years later, I looked at it. And it says, [PERSONAL NAME], conductor, [PERSONAL NAME] debut, the first time he conducted in Berlin. He came from Aachen, where he was the music director. And I showed it to him in Berlin. I was in Berlin [? place ?] met briefly. I didn't know him well. And I wouldn't give it-- he didn't have it. And I wouldn't give it to him. I made it Xerox and gave it to him. But I kept it. And it's in the collection at Wolf Trap. But it's one of those little things that happened.

But this is one of the things that I took with me. I took, actually, four with me. And somehow the other three got lost. But I think I took a few books.

Did you have any souvenirs from the '36 Olympics--

No.

--that you took with you?

None.

So you never had anything from the Olympics?

No. I didn't keep my tickets or anything like that. I may have had a badge or something. But I didn't-- no. So I really just took a clothes and personal-- I don't really remember taking anything with me.

I just have to mentioned the Olympics. When Jesse Owens won, how did you feel about that?

Oh, we all applauded him. It was great. All the people around me, they were very enthused about him. And it was only a Hitler and his cohorts who objected. Everybody cheered for him.

They did?

Yes, even though he beat the best German art.

Right, right.

Oh, no, no. There was--

But there's still--

Very, very favorably.

Do you remember any other parts of the Olympics? Or was that--

No, I don't really.

Did you go by yourself?

Yes, by my-- yeah, sure.

12 years old.

I took the U-Bahn and-- you see, I think my mother, from an early age, trained me to be very independent. I was an only child. And I never realized that other people had brothers and sisters. It was just I was not conscious of being their only child.

So how did you get to Hamburg?

My mother took me on the train from Berlin to Hamburg. And she took me to the boat and said goodbye to me as I went up the gangplank.

Did she say anything special that you remember?

No. I don't remember. I don't really remember crying.

This was September?

We went by train. And people, family-wise, saw me off at the train station. But she went with me and took me to Hamburg.

So this was, what, September of '38?

That was September--

'38?

--29th.

September 29.

No, September 30, because-- sorry. It was not. It was October 17--

1938?

--after my birthday. And I landed in New York on the 30th of October. It was a 13-day trip on the Manhattan.

What was it-- on the Manhattan? Now, number one, did you speak any English?

Very little. I had had a few lessons when my mother decided that I was going to go. I had not had any English in school. I had Latin and French. And I think she had me take some private lessons. But I knew very little English. And as a matter of fact, there is a family tale about my English knowledge.

When I landed in New York, my uncle-- he was actually my mother's first cousin, but he was a generation higher, so he was Uncle Julius-- met me at the pier in New York. And it was pretty late in the evening by the time I got off the boat. And he said, are you-- and he spoke German. He was the only member of my American family who spoke German. And so he spoke German, but not very well anymore.

Are you hungry? And I said, Yes. And he took me to Penn Station, where the Harvey restaurants were open 24 hours a day. And he took me to Penn Station. He had my aunt in Kansas City, who was quite well to do-- the family was well-to-do-- had a cousin in New York, who lived in the Warwick Hotel on 54th and 6th Avenue, and had a limousine and a chauffeur. And that limousine and chauffeur came with uncle to the pier. And we went to-- I immediately said, that's just the way they live.

[LAUGHTER]

It was new to me. They took us to Pennsylvania Station. And we went into the restaurant, Fred Harvey's. And there's a huge menu. And he says, what would you like to eat? And I looked at this menu. And I wanted to show off my English knowledge. And I says, I want apple pee.

[LAUGHTER]

And apple pee became the family-- Tom wants apple pee.

[LAUGHTER]

So that was my introduction. Then we went by train.

Coming into the pier or coming to New York, did you see the Statue of Liberty? Did you know what it was and what it meant?

I must have. And I saw it. But only later did it become--

Symbolic?

Yeah.

What did you know about the United States? What did it mean to you as a child?

Cowboys and Indians. I was an adherent to Karl May, the German author who wrote books about Indians and cowboys. He wrote about 40 books all-- I don't know whether you know about this. Every German school boy was addicted to Karl May, who was a German author living in the late 19th century. He wrote his books in the '80s and '90s of the 19th century. Never having been to the United States, he was somewhat disreputable in his business dealings, and I think he was even in prison for a time-- debtor's prison or something-- but he wrote about 40 books, many of them translated into English, about the Wild West.

And then he wrote another series of books-- about 20 25-- about Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. And the books about the Wild West was the Bible of every young German boy. And unless you had read at least 20 of them-- and they were all 600-page books-- you read them at night underneath your blanket with a flashlight-- you were not accepted in your group of Germans-- Karl May, you were-- and of course--

How do you spell his last--

M-A--

I?

M-A-Y.

M-A-Y.

Karl May, yeah. And he's known in this country. He's translated. But it was one of those things that Karl May was every young school boy's Bible. And you read about the Wild West. And the chief Indian of the Apache Indian tribe, his name was Winnetou. And the cowboy chief was Old Shatterhand. And there was another cowboy was Old Surehand.

And their rifles and their armaments and what they had-- and these Apaches were fighting the Comanches. And so you knew all about Kansas and "Ar-Kansas"-- not Arkansas, "Ar-Kansas." And you knew everything about Cowboys and Indians that you learned.

At the same time, you also were acquainted with the Middle East, where the hero was a white Anglo-Saxon-- or maybe German. [? Offendi ?] was his name. And he had an assistant, an Arab whose name was [PERSONAL NAME]. And he was the-- to this day-- [LAUGHS] so he wrote about 20, 30 books about the Middle East. And so you were acquainted with these two areas. And your whole education about America was Karl May.

Was from that?

Yeah.

So you come. And as you say, your relative greets you. And you had your dinner.

Actually, again, my cousin, but my aunt, was one of those well-educated, wonderful person who had absolute-- her idea of how she was to treat me and accept me in her family, she was going to be my mother. I called her Aunt Helen. But she treated me in exactly the same way as she treated her own son. There was absolutely no difference.

So much so, that she knew that I had been bar mitzvahed in Germany. Her son, my cousin Jeff, was going to be confirmed in the reformed Jewish in Kansas City. He was going to be confirmed the next spring. She insisted that I would be confirmed again with him because she wanted me to have the same number of presence that he got, that I would-- she treated me as her own family's son. And it was just terrific. I was accepted completely into her family.

She was well-to-do. Her father had founded, in St. Joe Missouri, a company, which moved to Kansas City I think right after World War I, of cigars and pipes wholesale. And my uncle, my cousin, was the executive vice president of that company and was that until he died. And my cousin Jeff took it over and finally sold it. But I was accepted into my American Family as though I were a complete member of it and was treated as such.

What kind of past policies you have with your mother? I

Wrote to her every week. And she saved the letters. As a matter of fact, I wrote to my mother through my service until she came to the United States. And she saved them all. And I kept those letters until last year. And I had them down in the basement. I finally got rid of them. There was nothing-- I took out the photos and things like that. And I got rid of them.

But I wrote to her. And she wrote to me. She could not get out of Germany, because she did not have a visa until March 1940, after the war started. She got a visa to go to the Philippines while she waited for-- she had an affidavit. But she didn't have a visa. So in March 1940, she went to the Philippines by boat from Genoa and spent a year in the Philippines, where her younger brother and his wife were also already waiting for a visa to the United States. So they were together.

And her younger brother and his wife had a child. No, I'm sorry. My mother got out of the Philippines in August 1941 and came to Kansas City. And that's when we were reunited.

What was that like?

It was very interesting, in retrospect. I was by that time an American, living with my American Family. And I was thoroughly Americanized, language-wise. I only spoke English. I would not speak German to my mother because you are in the United States now. You learn English. And she did. And a peculiar thing about my mother over the years, she spoke German with her friends. She could not speak German with me. She switched it to English when she talked to people. And this is something psychological. She was never able to speak German with me.

And I said, Mother, speak German, for heaven's sakes. We were in Bonn, in Germany. We were in a department store. And she would ask me to translate for her because she would not speak German in front of me. And it is obviously something psychologically. But she absolutely learned English. And she spoke only English with me and learned English really very well. She became a business woman. She was the credit manager of the [INAUDIBLE] Meat Packing Company in Kansas City for many years.

So you moved out and lived with her?

I moved out and lived with her first in a very small apartment in Kansas City. And then some years later, we moved into another apart.

Did you miss Germany those first few years?

No.

You did not?

Mm-mm. I became immediately so-- my aunt, when I came to Germany, right away said, for two weeks, let us have-- every morning she took me to a teacher-- or her chauffeur, they took me to the teacher to study English with her for two--

Like a tutor?

Like a tutor, for two hours every morning. She happened to be a friend of the family. And after two weeks, she sent me to Southwest High School. And I was thrown into Southwest High School. And that was it.

What was the reaction of the other students? Did they ask you about your background?

Not very much. They just-- I was the new kid. But my 50th high school reunion, Mimi and I went to Kansas City. And we went to this. And we walked into the country club where it was being held. And there were two people standing there. And one of them says, Tom Tuch, Hans Tuch, you were the kid who couldn't speak English. And me this is how they remembered me, as the kid who didn't speak English. And I was thrown into a high school. And it was probably the wisest decision that she ever made, sink or swim. And I had a number of teachers who were very sympathetic.

Did anybody ask you about your background?

Yeah, I'm sure they did. But I was integrated into American high school life. The interesting thing too was we lived on the Kansas side across the state line from Kansas City, Missouri-- across the state just 1 block. There was no high school in that area of Shawnee Mission, Kansas. So we were permitted, Jeff and I, to go across the state line in Missouri and Kansas City to go to high school. To get there, we got driver's licenses when we were 14 in Kansas, so that we could go to Southwest High School. And my cousin wasn't doing very well. So after one year, he went to private school, Pembroke Country Day School. And I continued at Southwest and went there for four years.

So you felt welcomed?

Yes.

Were you aware of what was happening in Germany then? Were you interested?

Yes.

Kristallnacht became something that I was aware of. But I was not really--

What were your thoughts when you heard about Kristallnacht and made aware of the damage?

I heard from my mother she was OK. And I became more conscious as I grew older--

Yes, of course.

--of what was going on. But as I said, I had no personal contact in Germany anymore, no relatives. No friends. My mother's friends, there were some, but I was not aware of them. I was not familiar with them.

So you move in with your mother. And then you finished high school. And then what?

I was just 18 in 1942. And I started immediately after I graduated, in June of 1942, at the University of Kansas City, which was then a private university. And my aunt's brother-in-law was the chairman of the board of the university. And I went there-- started summer school. And I got in a year and three-- and I went that fall. And I went to night school at the same summer school that winter. And I was working in the cafeteria to earn money, and I was working in the library to earn money, and then I was working in the front office, \$0.30 per hour as a student.

And I managed to enroll in night school at the same time when I was going to day school, which was not permitted. But I was able to. Because I was working at the registration department, I kept the two records separate. And so I got in a year and 3/4 in one year [INAUDIBLE] of college. By May of the following year, '43, I was drafted into the army.

Let's go back a little bit. What about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember that?

Oh yes, I do remember that. My family on Sunday had a family lunch. And we went into the sun room where their radio was. And we had the radio on when we heard about this. Actually this was-- yeah, that was Pearl Harbor. And then the next day the president's speech about it.

FDR, yeah.

Yeah, FDR's speech. I remember that. And then, of course--

Now you were not a citizen yet when you--

No.

--when you were drafted?

That is another story.

So now you're drafted. You get the noticed.

I was drafted. And I was at Camp Sibert in Gadsden, Alabama, in chemical warfare basic training.

What were your thoughts about going into the American Army? Were you upset?

No. I was--

Proud?

I didn't have a chance to volunteer. I was drafted. I was in the army 6 months after I was 18.

[INAUDIBLE]

And I was in Camp Sibert in Alabama in chemical warfare, which meant that you did everything in basic training as the infantry does, except with gas masks on. You walked, jumped, ran with gas masks on. Then I guess the Army decided that there were some going to be any chemical warfare in this war. So they close the camp. And I was sent to New Orleans to be in a port battalion as a stevedore, loading and unloading army ships.

And I was doing this. And I said, I've got to get out of here. And so I applied for training, ASTP, Advanced Specialized Training Program as a soldier. I was a private. And I was accepted. But you had to have some kind of a security clearance. And they came to me and said, you can't go into the ASTP. You're an enemy alien. So

They assigned my sergeant, who supervised me. And now he said, you will go down to New Orleans to the district court. And you will be sworn in as a citizen. You will be made a citizen. But you have to have a witness who has known you for three years to do this. And of course, I knew nobody. My sergeant, I've known him for three years. He's known

me for three weeks. And he says, I swear that I've known him. I'm with him. So he could get a day off that way. And we went into the city of New Orleans. And I was sworn in as an American citizen on that day.

Did that have any meaning for you?

Yeah, I was able to get out of stevedore.

That's what it meant.

Exactly. And I went to the University of Illinois for several months and did-- actually, I was put into a graduate program in German. And I ended up with 12 hours of credit towards my bachelor's degree later on. And I was there for about 3 months. And then I went to Camp Ritchie. That was my-- from University of Illinois I went to Camp Ritchie in Maryland.

Now let's start talking a little bit about Camp Ritchie. Did you know what it was?

Yes, it was the Army Intelligence school. And I was going to be an intelligence specialist, knowing German and having German as my main qualification for going there. And I was used to army life by that time. Camp Ritchie was different. It was a camp close to Washington, where your training was not six days a week and one day off. It was seven days a week and the eighth day off, which was called Ban Day because the commanding general of Camp Ritchie was a brigadier general by the name of Banfield. So you worked seven days and got the eighth day off. And the course, I think, was eight weeks long.

It was also a peculiar camp because many of the soldiers there were privileged kids of senators and congressmen and people in the administration. And on weekends, very often-- on Ban Day-- there were limousines coming up to take their sons and daughters. There were some very fancy people who were soldiers there.

The permanent staff at Camp Ritchie were primarily-- they were not German specialties or anything. There were a lot of refugee children, youngsters at Camp Ritchie. And some of them were children of very prominent people.

When you say refugees, you mean German-Jewish young people?

Yeah, because we all spoke German.

German was your native language. Right.

The previous element at Camp Ritchie was Italian speakers because initially there was plans to invade Europe through Italy. And they were training Italian speakers. And when it was determined that they were not going through Italy, they kept these youngsters-- these Italians speaking-- as staff. And they became the enemy that we were trained to come to fight. They were the enemy. They were all Italian-speaking kids, Italian Americans. The German speakers, there was a permanent staff there. And the man in charge, Master Sergeant, [PERSONAL NAME], a very well-known former wrestling chaplain, was the Master Sergeant in charge of our barracks and so forth.

His name was [PERSONAL NAME]. He was a huge guy. And I remember distinctly he was a very nice person. But his name was [PERSONAL NAME]. There were some children of well-known people in the camp. And I just cannot remember him now-- a well-known writer and author, who later on in later life was defected to East Germany. And I will be able to look it up. But I just don't remember it now. But we were-- and it was a pretty fancy kind of a camp. Being a private in the army in Camp Ritchie, I was very impressed.

And our intelligence training consisted of fighting the Battle of Gettysburg from the intelligence point of view. And we were taken out at night and put on trucks. And we were taken into the-- we were at Camp Ritchie-- in the Gettysburg area. And they let us out of the trucks and said, find yourself back to Camp Ritchie within the next three hours. This is your compass.

We all had learned by that time, from other kids, you went to the next farm, rang the door, the farmer would-- saying, we're from Camp Ritchie. What--

direction?

--direction should I take? They said, take [INAUDIBLE] with so-and-so. And you will find your way back. Now they would ask you, what language are you in? And it's German. He says, take such and such an [INAUDIBLE]. And you will get back to camp. And we all learned that. And so that's what you did to get-- but you fought the Battle of Gettysburg from the intelligence point of view. And that was in the Gettysburg area. And that was part of your training.

Anything else you can tell me about the training that you're allowed to tell?

Oh, there was nothing classified in those days. As I said, we were treated really very well. Food was good. It was not like basic training and so forth.

It was a country setting, wasn't it?

Oh, it's a lovely-- you don't know.

I've seen pictures. I've seen--

They have guide tours to it. It's next to the president's--

Camp David.

David. Yeah, it's really next to it.

[QUIET MUMBLING]

And at the end, I remember after we graduated--

You were there for how long?

Six weeks.

Oh, just to Camp Ritchie for six weeks?

Yeah.

I see. When you were there, you said there were other refugee young men. Did you talk about Germany? Did you--

Very little, not. No, we didn't talk--

Did you stick together with them? Did you feel a connection?

We were all-- they were all German speakers. So most of them were refugee children. There were very few--

Did you feel an emotional connection with them, their having gone through what--

No. We were army kids-- I mean, we were the GIs who spoke German and had similar backgrounds. Most of us came from Germany.

And they were Jewish? Or were some--

Many of them.

Not all?

Practically all, but you didn't know and didn't pay-- this was not an element that you were conscious of. As a matter of fact, throughout my foreign service career, I had many friends who were Jewish. And I didn't have any idea that they were Jewish. It just was not an element that was known.

As a matter of fact, one of my closest friends, his name was Heartree. And about 10 years after we'd know each other, I found out he was born in Austria. I said Heartree, how come from Austria? He says, it was Herzbaum. [LAUGHS] This is the way it would work.

That's the end of Ritchie.

OK.