

Please wait until I ask you a question. OK.

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Harold Cohen conducted by Gail Schwartz on February 21, 2014. It is taking place over the telephone at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and in Port Washington, New York. This is track number one.

What is your full name?

Harold Samuel Cohen.

And when were you born?

June 26, 1924.

And where were you born?

I was born in Coney Island, in Brooklyn.

And let's talk a little bit about your family background. Your parents, what were their names?

My mother's name was Fanny. Fanny Cohen, of course. My father's name was Morris Cohen. I also had a grandmother, my mother's mother, living with us at the time.

Was your family a religious family?

Somewhat. Not very. But I was going through Hebrew school, and I had a Hebrew tutor also when I was very young.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. What kind of work did your father do?

My father was a cutter in the garment industry.

And your mother?

My mother was a homemaker. She did not work. Took care of ours and did a great job.

Any siblings?

I had an older sister who unfortunately passed away a few years ago.

I'm sorry.

But I think she passed away happy. My brother-in-law told me that she was eating a tongue sandwich at the time.

[LAUGHTER] And what kind of schooling did you have? Where did you go to in the beginning? Where did you go to school?

I started at P.S. 100 in Brooklyn, and moved to another part of Brooklyn. Went to P.S. 119, then went to Thomas Jefferson High School for one year. Moved again and graduated from James Madison High School, also in Brooklyn in Sheepshead Bay.

Did you experience any antisemitism when you were young, growing up in elementary school or high school?

I was trying to think of how to phrase it. We lived in a Jewish neighborhood and an Italian neighborhood and the two

did not get along, did not play with one another. Used to throw rocks at one another. Missed all the time, but it was done.

Yeah. So you did experience-- what about your schoolteachers? Were they--

No. My school teachers, I've never had a problem with school teachers. I had a personal problem with one teacher. Would you like to hear about it?

Well if it relates to this--

No, not really.

OK. So-- and did you have any other interests besides school? Sports or reading, things like that?

Yes. We used to. [INAUDIBLE] friends of mine used to, if necessary, clear the snow off a basketball court and a playground. We played basketball 12 months a year, enjoyed it very much. I also play the trumpet. And I recently met someone who played with me in the 1939 World's Fair.

Oh wonderful.

Years ago.

And were your parents Zionists?

Yes. Yes. They both felt strongly about Israel as a country.

So Hitler came into power in '33. Of course you were very young, you are only 9. But as the 30s went on and conditions got worse for the Jews, did your parents know about this, and if so, did they talk it over with you?

No, they did not want to talk it over with me. I know they knew about it. They spoke about it.

They did.

They felt probably I was young.

Sure.

And needed to remain innocent.

Sure. Sure. So life went on, and then you-- would you call yourself a very independent child? Were you-- or were you more dependent on your parents?

No. Unfortunately my mother had breast cancer and died when I was 14 years.

Oh dear.

While I lived with an aunt of mine in the same apartment house where my family lived, and I was out on my own, free to do whatever I want, but I went to school.

Yeah, yeah.

After that, I roamed Coney Island. There were no questions. I was arrested once, for roaming a little too far. I tried to get on a ride that was closed. A policeman came along and took me to the police station, and I knew it wasn't too serious when they asked me whether I wanted vanilla custard or chocolate.

So you are a young high school boy, and you graduated in when, in 1940? Or--

Yeah. Early 1940. 1940.

OK. And again were you aware at that time that Hitler had invaded Poland by then, or did you know any of that?

Yes. Yes, it was in all the newspapers and especially talked about--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Did you as a young Jewish boy feel especially threatened or frightened about the future for you all?

No, honestly I must say no. I was young and naive--

Yeah--

The longer the--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah. So then what happened when you graduated? What happened after that?

After I graduated from high school, a friend of our family got me a job as an apprentice diamond cutter, and I went to Brooklyn College at night. I stayed at the job even though honestly, I must say, that I was not as nimble fingered as I should have been. But I stayed at the job until I was drafted.

And you went to Brooklyn College, you said, at night?

Yes. I went to Brooklyn College at night.

OK. Any memories of Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941? Do you remember that or not?

I remember it, but it was far away from me.

Yeah. Right. And then, as you say you were drafted. When was that?

In January 1943, I was drafted. I went to Whitehall Street. I took an examination. I was 1A healthy. Went to Whitehall Street and we all congregated, or whatever it was called for that day, and continued from there.

OK. So then let's now talk about your military career. So you said that was January '43. Where did you first do basic training?

What they did at Whitehall Street was had us lined up in alphabetical order. They took groups of 50 or 60 people, and the first 60 went-- I don't know where, I was part of the second 60 people, which by the way included seven Cohens because it was strictly in alphabetical order. We were put on a train. Did not know we were going. We ended up at Camp Grant Illinois in Rockford, Illinois, which is a medical base, a basic training camp.

So you did you didn't go to Fort Dix or anything like that.

No, no. We went right from Whitehall Street.

To Camp Grant, Illinois. OK. And you said it was a medical team?

Yes, a medical team.

Can you explain it? Talk a little bit about it, your experience there?

They trained us to become either a medical or surgical technicians, or both, and I was trained for both. That meant that I was trained to treat people for injuries under the supervision of the nurse. The nurses were officers. We were not the nurse's supervisors. We're doctors. We're trained in the use of certain medical techniques, use of certain medications and how to use a hypodermic needle. We practiced on apples and oranges and hypodermic needles, and-- I took the training there, and I think that was the first place that I saw some signs of antisemitism.

And believe it or not it was not from the trainers or their officers or the sergeants, et cetera, or that, but other members of this basic training camp were obviously anti-Semitic. They tried to pick on the Jews, but we fortunately were able to withstand them, and sometimes there was even a sanctioned boxing match, on which the-- which set up-- the other officers, et cetera watched it. I was set up against-- a Jewish man against a non-Jew. And they really went hard and heavy. I was not involved with that.

Mm-hmm. And any other instances, any other?

Yes. During basic training we were also involved with KP, which was kitchen police.

Right.

And again we were called in alphabetically. The first group was called in to help the cooks and clean up and help the serving, et cetera, when our group, which consisted of six Cohens, plus [INAUDIBLE] was called in. At the end of the day, we were called back the next day to go on kitchen police again. One of the Cohens happened to have been a lawyer.

He said he had read the army regulations, which said that kitchen police could not be used as a punishment. And he said to me, do you want to come with me to the commanding officer? I said sure. So we went to the commanding-- I was young, and he said let's go, so I said I went, and went to the commanding officer, and he explained to the captain what happened, that we were called back twice for kitchen police and this should not be used as a punishment.

What were you being punished for?

I think we were being punished just for being Jewish--

Oh, I see.

Because we were all Cohens.

Yeah.

Because the captain called the mess sergeant, and the mess sergeant said, no I'm not punishing them. They didn't do a good job, and I wanted to give them a little more training. So the captain said to us, go back to the kitchen and finish your day's work. And they asked the-- he told the Sergeant to stay with him while he spoke with him while we were gone. And I think probably-- I think what happened was he said, don't do it anymore.

Right.

And we were never called for kitchen police again. I guess that was one of the arrangements made between the sergeant and the captain. But for me it was obvious that it was the Cohens who were being picked on for that.

Right. Did you and the other Cohens talk about the war among yourselves and what was happening to the Jews?

No. I must say no. We didn't at all. We were busy. They kept us busy a big part of the day. And we slept well because we were busy. Besides basic training, we in the medical and surgical end of it, we had physical training push ups, et cetera.

But I was just saying, so many lives-- this was already '43, so many Jewish lives have been lost. But you all weren't aware at that time.

No. I don't know if I was aware of it. If I did, it was far away from me.

Yeah.

Things changed, but we'll get into that.

No, I know, I know. I know. So you're still at Camp Grant. How long were you there for?

We were there for five months. And then after that, they choose-- they chose some of us to go to a basic engineering program. I went-- they chose some of us to go to the University of Chicago, where we went to school for nine months to learn basic engineering. Honestly I couldn't see the connection between that and anything else that the army required or my basic training, but was happy-- I was happy to go there. It was challenging. Great professors, great area in Chicago.

Obviously had no connection to the medical training you just got.

No, not at all. OK. I don't know why-- I still don't know, honestly, what the purpose of it was. We did not become-- in nine months, you don't become an engineer.

Right. Was it the same group of Cohens, that--

No. These were people from all over the country. It wasn't the Cohens. We finished the nine months. And this was not far from Chicago. And during my training, I went to Chicago and applied for the Air Force, the army Air Force. And after my training, I was accepted for training in the army Air Force, and were sent to Keesler field in Biloxi, Mississippi, which was a B29 field where they were training people besides us for pilot training. They were training people specifically to pilot, et cetera, on the B29.

We stayed there, again this is the army, the Air Force was part of your army at that time. We stayed there for about a month doing nothing, waiting for assignment, playing basketball and going to town, and doing very little, just waiting for assignments. After about a month-- oh by the way Biloxi, Mississippi had, of course, a kosher delicatessen. I was very surprised. We used to go there for sandwiches once in a while.

What was the name of the field you were at?

Keesler. K-E-E-S-L-E-R. Or another interesting point-- I guess it's interesting-- first day we got there, I went to a mess hall for breakfast. Went to the mess hall, and they serve the same breakfast again. For lunch at lunch time served they cornflakes et cetera, et cetera. And I went to dinner again, they served cornflakes, juice, et cetera. The second they had discovered that it was a 24 hour field when mess halls served only breakfast, and other lunches. So after one day of old breakfast, I--

You learned. Yeah. So you stayed there? For--

I was there for about a month, and it was decided that there were too many personnel, too many pilots to serve for the planes. They couldn't produce enough planes to service us. So we went back to our respective specialties. I went back to Camp Grant.

Oh. OK.

And then, to be assigned to a medical group.

So back to the medical. Yeah. Now when is this? This is '44, obviously, right?

Yes. No, late '43.

Oh late '43. OK.

The fall of '43. And I was assigned to 170, it's a general hospital, which is-- a general hospital was similar to a large hospital in New York or any other place where it was treated medical and surgical situations. We got together and set off for England on our way to France, and we went to England on a hospital ship with a big Red Cross painted on the side. which I thought to myself was a great target for submarines. But fortunately, we got to England and touched-- landed in Bournemouth, England. I spent a day or two there and went across England, and went to land at a place called Omaha Beach in France about a week after the invasion of France.

Oh so this is June '44 we're now talking about.

Yeah.

You're talking about D-day. After D-day.

Yeah.

So it's already June '44--

A week after D-day. Yeah.

Oh. OK.

And we went there. We landed. There were still a lot of traces of the invasion. There was still-- they were believe it or not, still cleaning up bodies a week after, or 10 days after the invasion. We went on and we--

Now how much preparation did you have for these kinds of sights and seeing the devastation?

Not-- nothing at all really.

And you were so young, too. You--

I was young, as I say, I was a kid. They said go here, I went here. They said go there, I went there, et cetera. And personally, I just went along. And we set up camp, and we set up the hospital, which was a tent hospital, but a very large hospital with two medical rings and surgical wings and emergency room, just like any other hospital right outside of a town called Le Mans. L-E-M-A-N-S. In France.

Were you working with any other Jewish soldiers?

Yes, there were Jewish nurses. Most of the doctors were Jewish.

Oh OK.

Some of the nurses were Jewish. The personnel were-- it was everything, of course.

Now did you discuss again about what was happening to the Jews by '44?

Yes. We were at that point. We were a little more involved.

Yes.

Jewish members more than others.

Aha.

The doctors, we had discussion with the doctors about what was going on. Types of patients we saw as a result of the war going on, et cetera, et cetera. And we-- I anyway, I started to get a feel for what was going on and what I felt should be done, and what was right and what was wrong, and how terrible, for me, the Germans were.

Yeah.

And again, just a little interjection. I don't know whether it's right or wrong, but I still will not-- if I know that a product is made in Germany, I will not buy it. I will not buy a German car. I say, they might have a prejudice which is incorrect, but this is the way I feel.

Do-- do you speak German, or did you speak German at the time?

Going back to high school, I took German in school.

Oh.

And after the first day, the teacher said to me, but you know you know German don't you? I said no, but I speak Yiddish. And I started to go over the days of the week, whether counting the words that were so similar that I felt I knew it. Took three years or German, enough so that I could understand Germans. We had after a while we had some German prisoners of war working in our camp, and I was able to have conversations with them and discuss what they should be doing, et cetera, et cetera.

That was a little later on, right?

Yeah.

We'll get to that. Yeah. OK so now you're in Le Mans, and you say you helped to set up a hospital?

Yes. We set up a hospital, surgical, and a medical wing, and an operating room.

And you were treating military people? Who were you training-- or civilian?

No. It was all military.

It was all military.

No civilian. And--

Were you in danger at all at that point?

At that point, no. This was behind the lines. We set up there. When we originally set up we were pretty close to the front line, but meanwhile the line kept moving east as the Allies went further and further. And I had a good rapport with the doctors, -- and I did things that-- I don't know if they'd accepted these days, such as giving injections, changing dressings, maybe a nurse these days would do it but not a civilian, or a technician anyway. But I did. I found out later, one of the doctors told me that I was doing such a good job that they wanted me in their operating room.

Oh my.

And however, I had a commanding officer, which I said to myself-- I didn't say it to him, of course-- that I think was on the wrong side. He did not like any of the Jewish soldiers. He couldn't do anything about the officers of course, but the soldiers that were under his command, he did not like. And he used to send us out on what's called detached service to get us away from him.

And one of the times that he sent us out on detached service was a wonderful experience. He put me-- I went out with a group of people that work on a hospital train based in Paris. We went out on the train to pick up wounded and sick soldiers, bring them back to Paris to rural hospitals. And in the interim, I had a day or two off in Paris to tour Paris and view the sights, et cetera. And so that was one of the benefits of him not liking me.

Did you see any Jewish refugees at that time?

Amazingly, there was-- I got familiar with a farmer who had some land not far from our camp.

This is in LeMans you're talking about?

Yeah. And he was Jewish.

Oh my.

Nobody ever knew he was Jewish.

Oh my.

And of course the Germans had occupied that area and didn't know he was Jewish. And I used to go to him, and I used to buy a drink from him. I'd give him one franc, and he'd give me a drink called Calvados, which is a liquor made from apples. And we'd sit and we'd talk, and he had a dog, and I learned a word called-- a French word, I also taken French besides German, I'd taken French in high school.

I was going to ask you how did you know French?

Yeah. And I took about four years of French in high school. Not about, but four years. And I learned a word that I'd never learned in high school called pisse. He had a dog, and he looked at me and yelled, pisse. And the dog was ready to urinate on my leg.

[LAUGHTER]

I learned what that word means. And as a side issue, I was in a French restaurant many years ago after the war, and I ordered a Calvados. And there was a brownish color, and I said to the restaurant owner, happened to be a French woman, how come in France I got the right Calvados and here it's brown? He says, well, so there was a woman-- she said, the Calvados you got was maybe eight hours old. Not age, didn't have it.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Right, right. So now you're still in Le Mans, going back and forth to Paris. You said--

No, I was just stationed--

Or just watching.

I was stationed in Paris to work on a hospital train for a few months.

Oh you were actually stationed there.

Yeah that's right. I didn't go back and forth from Le Mans. We were-- we lived on the train.

Oh!

There were sleepers on the train and we lived in our little sections. But we were in Paris, and we had time off and had time to explore the city with people, et cetera. And that was one of the benefits.

Yeah.

Again, he sent me out, and I had learned to drive and service. They needed an ambulance driver and they asked for volunteers, and I'd seen my parents and other adults driving, how to shift the car. They gave me an ambulance, and I think it was an hour and they said here's an ambulance and this field. I want you to practice for an hour. And they said OK, now you're in an ambulance driver.

Right.

And I became an-- I'm sorry-- I became an ambulance driver, and was sent out to pick up people closer to the front to bring them to aid stations or hospitals, et cetera.

These are soldiers.

Yeah soldiers. Wounded, the wounded soldiers. Wounded or sick soldiers. And one of my tips, by the way, it was probably dangerous because they said-- I was told, wait, wait, wait. OK now go and go exactly the way we told you. Of course that area is cleared and you can get in and out. And I'm one of the troops. As I was driving to pick up patients, a bomb hit the ambulance.

Oh my.

Slipped over. I broke my-- I broke my left ankle, got a big gash on my left thigh, broke my right forefinger, and had to be taken back to the same hospital that I worked at, the general hospital.

Oh my.

And this is-- some more evidence about how I felt about my commanding officer. He came into me what I was lying in bed with a broken leg and said, you people are always complaining. And I said I'm not complaining. I'm laying here. You know, he said, don't argue with me, soldier. He got very angry at me. Don't argue with me soldier, and stamped out.

I think it was-- I don't remember if it was that day or a couple of days later when the doctor who was treating me who happened to be Jewish said that our commanding officer, he had heard this, and he said Dr. Manifoff is being transferred to another location, not in a position where he would have people under him. So, anyway this doctor knew the situation.

Yeah.

Anyway, I recovered. Amazing. I guess it was pretty amazing that after about four to six weeks I was back on my feet, and back in business, working again at the hospital, giving injections, treating patients, changing. I worked in the surgery and I must say the doctors were amazing. I saw the doctors sew a finger back on a soldier, and the finger-- in those days, I don't know what was being done but the finger was able to be used again after a while.

Amazing. Now while you were there and in France at that time, did you see any Jewish people returning, or survivors?

No. I was looking for-- there was what must have been a Jewish area called Le Marais, the swamp, in Paris. M-A-R-A-I-S, which was a Jewish neighborhood. And I went there, but I don't know if there are any Jews yet at that time. And from there, I'd say that the 170th general hospital, until the war ended at that time-- the hospital closed up, and I was still

in service, and I was transferred to the 100 tent station hospital. No, let me go back I'm sorry, I'm jumping the gun.

Again, while I was at the general hospital, a small group of us were sent out, again some doctors and soldiers. The doctors chose me among others to go to a refugee camp. Survivors of a concentration camp in a town called Prachatice. P-R-A-C-H-A-T-I-C-E. Where there were remnants of a woman's concentration camp, women who had marched from Poland into Czechoslovakia under the care-- not care-- under the eyes of Germans. And--

So this camp was in Czechoslovakia.

Yes. We were sent there in a rush until they could establish a more basic-- they needed someone in the rush to go over there to take care of the people until they could establish a hospital for these people.

Oh.

And I went there--

You went from France. You went from France to Czechoslovakia.

Yeah. We must-- there must have been about five doctors and 15 enlisted personnel.

What time of year was this/

This was--

Was this early--

Late-- early spring.

'45.

Yeah. '45.

So you weren't involved in the Battle of the Bulge or anything like that.

Well again, as part of my-- when I was driving the ambulance, I also went in to the Battle of the Bulge area a couple of times again. As I said-- they said, wait, wait, go and make sure you go exactly the way we told you to, because this area's been cleared.

Oh that was the time of the Battle in the Bulge. OK. So now you get to this women's camp, you said--

All women, Czechoslovakia.

Whereabouts in Czechoslovakia was it? Near--

Near Pilsen.

OK. Yeah. Towards the southwest part of Czechoslovakia. And I went into the building on the first day we got there, ready to treat the people who needed treatment. And there was one room where the woman in it was beaten black and blue with her arm in a sling, and there was a soldier sitting outside her room, and I found out later that she was one of the German prison guards in the same building, but in a separate room from the survivors of the camp march. And when they were liberated, the Jewish people jumped on her and beat her up so badly that she was black and blue and her arm in a cast. And I must say, I felt good about it. I felt sort of-- feeling guilty about it, but I felt very, very good about it.

When I went in to visit the women in the hall or lying around, a lot of them had frostbitten toes, other illnesses, et

cetera. We did have a little section, a segregated section of people that we felt had diseases that were maybe communicable, but most of them there were mostly surgical problems such as frostbite. We had to scrape away the dead tissues on the toes, that was part of our job to inject them with antibiotics, et cetera. And I must say the women who ranged in age from early teens to I don't know how old, the older ones or workers, I was young-- it was hard for me to visualize. But their spirits were wonderful.

What camp had they come from? Had they all come from the same camp?

Yeah. I'm sorry, I don't have the name of the camp, but they came from-- they were marched from a camp in Poland because the Russians were approaching from the east. They were moving west. And they couldn't get any further west, because the Allies were the West and that's where they ended up.

But all those women had come from the same camp.

They were all young.

Were they in the striped prison uniforms or regular clothes?

They were already wearing regular clothes. They wanted to get rid of their uniforms as fast as possible. And I was able to-- not all of them spoke Yiddish or Jewish, but I was able to converse with most of them.

So these were all Jewish survivors.

All Jewish survivors and all female. From ages from early teenagers up to I don't know how old. And their spirits were marvelous. They enjoyed-- seem to enjoy-- what they wanted mostly from me was, do you have a cigarette? Do you have a cigarette? Do you have cigarettes? And the army gave us cigarettes, and I collected cigarettes for every other soldier that could figure it out, that these women were happy. Originally-- this is probably how we got together-- I was hoping to find somebody who was a survivor of that camp or discuss with them.

Yeah.

But we spent about 10 days. I had met some of the civilians who lived in that area, and there were all Germans who the German government had chased, taking the land from Czechoslovakians, moved German families into their families so that they can claim it as part of Germany. But of course it didn't happen. So we spent about 10 days. 10 days to two weeks. I'm not sure.

Did they tell you about what had happened to their families there? Did they talk about that or not?

No. No they didn't. I don't remember that. I do remember talking about where they came from. They were all, or mostly all, if I remember, from Poland. And as I said, they were just trying to avoid the Russians who were approaching, and I don't know why they moved them, didn't leave them. But anyway.

What kind of connection did you feel to them?

I felt very, very-- I felt as if I was one of them. Whatever they wanted, whatever I could do for them, having long discussions with them, and pleasant discussions. And as I say, amazingly enough, the spirits of everyone there, I guess-- it may have been relief, but they were all in good spirits. Nobody-- probably I did not discuss their families, et cetera.

Yeah. Yeah.

That wouldn't have been as pleasant.

Right.

I got the feeling of--

Yeah. Were there any other incidences of the German guards being taken revenge on besides that one woman?

No. I remember reading something a while back, that the women turned upon their guards and killed some of them, and probably this one was on the verge of being killed, and the American soldiers who entered that camp probably kept her--

Saved her life.

I don't know what happened with her.

What was the reaction? Were there any other Jewish soldiers with you who were helping out, who were doing what you were doing?

Yeah. If I remember, all of the doctors were Jewish. That's because most of the doctors at that time were Jewish.

Right. So what did they say? Did they have any special comments, being Jewish and seeing the survivors?

I remember one of them being very angry at what had happened to them, a couple of them feeling that way, and the comments about how badly they were treated, for the women, for no reason at all except for being Jewish.

Right.

And I felt that-- I felt the same way. I don't know. It's very hard for me to remember, to express my feelings. I was-- I felt good about the fact that the women were so high spirited themselves.

Oh yes. Yes.

Especially the young girls, as if they were on vacation, finally.

Oh my gosh.

However you can put it.

Yeah.

It was quite an experience.

I can imagine.

And I remember also, prior to that, as I said, in the army, they said go over here, I went here. They said go there, I went there and I did what I wanted. But when I saw them, something inside of me switched on. All of a sudden, I felt different. And I think this was me-- my turning point from a boy to a man. When I saw, everything else previous this was impersonal. This finally became personal. I can't even express it anymore. But it was a different me after that.

I'm sure.

And that's something I lived with, and used, and tried to live as-- try not to punish people that are not being deserved, don't pick on people, et cetera. And it was-- I think it changed my entire personality, just being there and seeing these people. I remember a few years ago, going on. I googled the word Prachaticce. And there was quite a bit about it, about where they marched from in Poland. I don't remember, honestly. But that information is available. And again, I'm hesitating. I'm reliving the feelings that I had at that time, when I saw and realized what I felt was our purpose in the war.

After that, I'm trying to think of any other comments about that. But really, my comments about that were mostly my feelings more than the physical, or both feelings and the physical situation, and how I felt changed when I finally-- try it, that everything was impersonal. I picked up soldiers from close to the frontline, brought them back. They were wounded. I didn't know them. They didn't know me. I was just doing my job as a soldier. But when I got there, I felt I didn't know what I could do more. I tried to do everything I could besides for these people. I tried to imagine and I couldn't imagine what they had gone through. When I saw the women with their toes blackened and frostbitten, falling off almost, I was working with them, I felt entirely different than I had previously. And I think as I said to repeat-- I know I'm repeating it--

That's OK.

I became from a child to a man. A young boy to a man.

Yes. Go ahead.

Were there other young soldiers like you, Jewish soldiers who you think had the same response that you did? Do you know?

I didn't know. It's funny, there was one not Jewish, an Italian person, an Italian young man from the Bronx, who had the same feelings. Maybe he lived in a Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx, but I don't know. But he also-- we would discuss it and comment upon it. His feelings were the same as mine also, from being a child to becoming a man.

Right.

Seeing this personally-- everything else was impersonal, we did pick up soldiers who were in terrible shape, but again it was impersonal, it was a job. This was different than a job.

Yes. What other problems did the women have? You talked about the frostbite. Were--

They had-- some had communicable diseases, some pneumonia, bad coughs, other cold symptoms. And we put on a mask and went to take care of those people.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--just like anyone else.

But was it like diptheria and things like that?

Uh. I really--

You wouldn't know.

I know there were communicable diseases.

Yeah.

Excuse me. And at that time penicillin, had just been-- it was just becoming in use. Prior to that, most of the-- in fact, when I started out in service, most of the drugs that we had for treating things that needed were sulfur drugs. Penicillin became available, and fortunately, it was really a miracle, miracle drug. When I got home from the war, there was a place in Brooklyn, Merck Pharmaceuticals. Had a big tank on the roof where they were making penicillin.

Oh my.

And I remember that.

Oh my. So you stayed at this place for 10 days, you said?

About 10 days, yes. Until a regular hospital unit, a complete hospital unit, could move in. We were the emergency fill-in till they could assemble somebody.

Were the women there able to eat?

Yes. Yes, some of them, as I say, were walking around fine, and some were just lying there. They were in bunks three high. Again, there wasn't spread out. They weren't in beds on the floor, but at different levels.

So this is all in one building.

Yeah, all in one building.

About how many women, did you say? Do you have any idea?

About 100.

Oh my.

Yeah. About 100.

Oh my.

I don't know exactly. This was the remnants of a much larger group.

Right, who'd been on the march.

Yeah.

And I also discovered that if any Jewish woman on the march, if she faltered, she was shot and that was that. If a woman was pregnant, she was shot, and that was that. This is why they turned upon this guard who had been one of the shooters, et cetera, and beat her up so badly. It was-- again, it's an experience that I am trying to decide whether I was happy I experienced it, and I think I am. It helped me be what I am and where I am, even though it was such an unpleasant experience.

However, to repeat again, the women were-- or the ones who were able to, let me put it that way-- were in great spirits. The ones who were lying and couldn't get out of the cuts or beds, there's nothing they could do.

So did you get a sense that the women were helping each other and supporting each other?

Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah. They were helping to feed one another. They'd been there. I don't know how many or what happened for the few days they were there before we got--

Before you got there. Yeah.

But one way or another, well, the army at that time-- there must have been one or two medics, there are always medics attached to the army groups that took care of them till we moved in as a medical group. And those medics, I guess, took care of them till then. Set them up, et cetera.

And did any of them talk about possibly going to Palestine, or that didn't come up?

No, not at all.

Yeah. OK. So then--

I don't know. I don't know if they even had, how long they had been in a concentration camp, what they knew. Were they able to be in contact, et cetera, et cetera.

So they didn't have any numbers on their arms or anything like that?

Yes they did.

Oh they did.

Yeah. They all did.

Oh.

Yeah. It was a sort of bluish tattoo that they all went through. And--

So they didn't mention Auschwitz or anything like that?

They were not from Auschwitz. They were from a place-- a camp in Poland, I don't remember the name.

OK.

But--

It could have been a subcamp of Auschwitz.

Maybe. Maybe. I don't know. They had a terrible, terrible march in cold weather. No shoes, some of them, sort of, that's where they had the frostbite, et cetera.

So again, do you remember what month you were there? This is early '45, obviously.

Yeah. Early spring. It was maybe February or March.

OK. '45. Yeah. And then you got orders to move on?

Then, when we were replaced by a complete medical unit, we went back to our position at the general hospital . At that time, there was already a different commanding officer who I got along well with. Yeah. And I don't know what happened with Captain King. That was his name, Thomas King. One of the things he did to me was the doctors kept trying to promote me. I was a private. And they kept trying to promote me. He kept turning me down on my records, not suitable for promotion.

Right.

And he didn't write not suitable for promotion because he's Jewish.

Right.

Not suitable for promotion. And for that reason, I was never promoted. But it didn't make a difference. I did whatever I was supposed to do regardless of rank, et cetera.

Yes. So then as you said, you went back.

Yeah. I went back and that hospital was dissolved, and I was transferred to a 100 tent station hospital, which is another hospital unit based in Vienna.

Oh.

Yeah. And we took over an established hospital called the [INAUDIBLE] in Vienna. It was in a building, and we took over that hospital, and I worked there again as a medical and surgical position, and drove an ambulance occasionally down. And Vienna was in fair shape, and it was a tripartate government, the British, the Russians and the Americans governed Vienna. And nobody who was part of the Russian army was under six feet two. They're all tall, imposing soldiers the Russians sent in to make sure that the civilians knew who was boss. The Americans didn't do that. Neither did the British. But every Russian that we met was, as I say, was very tall and in good shape to be an imposing position.

I had contact with civilians. We had civilians working in the hospital, in the kitchen, et cetera, and I spoke with quite a few of them. My German had improved, by the way, since then. And never-- another thing is, I never heard so much not me, and I don't know what happened, as I did in Vienna.

Oh really. Yeah.

Yeah. And I spent time at the hospital over there again as a technician, and visiting the town et cetera, and meeting with civilians who would say, oh, not me. Talking with the English and the Russians, we all got along well. The-- I don't remember honestly, how many months I spent over there. And then finally, they were being-- we were being replaced by new soldiers from the States, and I was approached by somebody who said, I know you're never been promoted, but if you want to stay for another few months to train the incoming people, we'll make you a corporal. And I said, no thanks. Make me a sergeant. And they said no, we can't do it. I said OK. I'm going home. And that was my army career.

So when did you--

Early '46.

Oh, so you stayed for another year after the war was over.

Pretty much. Yeah.

And that was in Vienna the whole time?

Most of it. Well, part of it was still at the hospital, 170 General Hospital, till it was disbanded and moved to Vienna. I was in Vienna maybe eight months, seven or eight months. And living a pretty good life, by the way. The food was good. Was it-- a civilian situation rather than an armed situation.

Right. , Again any antisemitism, even after the war?

No. It's just a denial.

Denial. Yeah, right. These are the non-Jewish Austrians who are denying--

Yeah. Not me, I didn't know, I wasn't there, I didn't see anything, I didn't hear anything. I never heard so much of that. And not-- this is all voluntary. I didn't ask them. That was their first approach.

What was your reaction when the war was over and you heard Hitler died?

I was sorry to hear that he committed suicide. I wanted him punished bad, and not take the coward's way out, the easy way out or however you want to refer to it. And I was hoping that he would-- that he would be brought up before a tribunal, but it didn't happen. Then again, I felt there was an opportunity that was somehow missed or let the world know what had really gone on. As I said when I saw that concentration camp, I became a different person. My thoughts

were different. I didn't think it was just me as a kid, going here and there, et cetera. A sort of personal involvement which still carries on.

Of course. So now you come back to the United States.

Came back. Again, went to live-- my mother had passed away.

Right.

My father had remarried. Then I went back to Brooklyn College, finished up school and then went to the University of Chicago for a masters in engineering.

Oh, back to Chicago.

Yeah.

A master's in--

Industrial psychology. And I got a job. Shall I continue?

Yeah. You can just generally tell me what you did.

I got a job for a toy manufacturer called Pressman Toys. They asked me to come in to help design toys. They made basic items such as checkers and chess, blocks for kids, et cetera. And they wanted me to come in to help design some based upon my ideas. Industrial psychology, some toys start-- kids would be more acclimated to. And again, my background-- and made a little ambulance, a plastic ambulance packed with gauze and--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And that was good.

And then I came across the idea, which someone took over, but I'll tell you at the beginning of it. I called it tater head. T-A-T-E-R.

Potato Head. Yeah.

It was-- mine was all plastic. And again, with replaceable ears and nose and mouth, et cetera. And we made it for a few years. Unfortunately, the company didn't patent it. Another big company came out with the Potato Head.

Right.

Using a real potato instead. I can't think of the name of that other company. Pressman Toys, I believe, is still in business. That other company became a big toy company. I don't remember which one it was though. And it became a very popular item. I stayed there for, I don't know, maybe a year or so, helping with design, and helping to reconstruct their production lines to be more efficient, et cetera. And I felt that was a dead end job, and I ended up going in the garment industry, with a firm called Marlene Industries. It was the largest private label women's clothing manufacturer in the United States. Private label meant-- Macy's would give us an order, and we put their label in it.

Right.

Or Bloomingdale's would put their label in it, et cetera. We also sold to other retailers. Like Lord and Taylor for example, was willing to pay us more money for the same garment as Macy's, because they know they can get more money for it. So the only difference between a Lord Taylor garment and the Macy's garment was the label. And people went to Lord Taylor just to buy the label and paid more. And I felt that it was funny. We'd run a production line, and

then they'd stop and switch labels, and just keep going with the same production line.

And then how long did you stay with them?

I stayed with them for the remainder of my work life.

OK.

I ended up being vice president of operations. I did a lot of traveling through our factories. In the South we had factories. In Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Arkansas and Alabama. And I did a lot of traveling. Some of the things I did there were-- some of the what I feel were noteworthy things were, I dealt with the local and state governments and set up schools on our premises so that we would have trained sewing machine operators. So the state paid them, and all we did was supply was space and the sewing machines, and were able to get the experienced operators.

Wonderful. Wonderful. Well, do you have a family? Did you get married?

Let me give you one more situation.

Oh, sure.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

We had one of the plants. Well we're doing very, very well, and we didn't have enough personnel living in that area. And I told the town fathers that we'd have to move the plant unless they were allow us accept the fact that we would integrate the factories with Black people working next to white people on the sewing, on the production line. And they said absolutely not. So they said, we don't need you. We'll get along-- we got along without you before, and we'll get along after you leave.

So what I did was, arrange with the bank who sent out the payroll to pay everybody. We paid in cash and there was-- in \$2 bills. When the townpeople, town fathers, elected officials saw how many \$2 bills were floating around the city, they said yes, let's try doing it. They realized how important we were.

Yeah.

And that really worked out. The Black people had worked as porters carrying the material, but never on a production line. So they knew-- the working people didn't care.

What city was this?

This was in A or A-Y-N-O-R, South Carolina.

South Carolina.

And it worked out.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Everybody was happy.

Wonderful.

And things went on. As I say, I stayed there for the rest of my working life, till China took over. We couldn't-- we could not--

You couldn't compete.

We couldn't compete with Chinese labor costs.

Of course. Yeah. Let's talk about family. Do you have a family? Did you get married?

Yes. I was-- I got together, after the war, we got together with a group of-- not got together, but there was a group of young men who went out together, et cetera. And we were going up to the Catskills one day and we stopped off at a hotel. On the way up to the Catskills, I don't even remember what town it was, there was a young lady. And I said let's dance, and we danced.

And I said to my other-- to my friends who were with me, I said you go on, I'm going to stay here. And we got to talking, et cetera. She went her way. I got her phone number. She was originally from the Bronx. She was living right near Fresh Meadows. I lived in Brooklyn. And we went out quite a bit together. And one day I said to her, how about becoming my wife? She said, I don't know how she phrased it. Are you sure? Or something like that.

I wasn't making a lot of money at that time yet, and she said, what about-- can we along, et cetera. And I said I'm lucky to have found you, and my luck was going to carry me on. And sure enough, the luck carried on.

Wonderful.

For my family, to my two children, my in-laws. And everything, it's been wonderful.

Can we talk just before we end, a little bit about some of your thoughts about what you went through? When your children were your age during the war, and you saw what you saw, did you tell them about that? Did you--

Yes I did. I told them about the experience I had.

You did.

And how important it was to me to be Jewish. How important it was to that connection to other Jewish people, not only the ones who had lived this terrible time. And of course at that time, we knew about what was happening.

Yeah.

In Russia, and other parts of the world.

Right.

I told them about how my grandfather, who lived in Russia, was enlisted, was drafted into the Russian army. And in those days he would have been served a 20 year term-- and walked across Europe to North Germany, I'm trying to remember the name of the town. Danzig. Walked from Russia to Danzig, hiding in hay mills during the day and walking at night, and stealing and the baking food on the way, and making it to the United States.

And when he got to the United States, he landed in Boston. And the Irish immigration official said, what is your name, and he gave them his Russian name. His Jewish name, first name. And they said OK. Your name is Thomas. I never knew his name was Thomas. He would never acknowledge that name. He felt it wasn't a Jewish name. I knew him as Tobias.

Tobias?

Which was his Jewish name originally. But his official name in the United States was Thomas Rose. He never accepted it.

What are your thoughts now? You did allude to your thoughts about Germany.

Yeah.

You still feel that way.

Yes, as I say, right or wrong, but something in me says do not buy a German car. Do not buy any product that I see is made in Germany. I will not visit Germany, I will not visit Austria. We have been to Europe, my wife and I.

But you have not gone to Austria either.

No, no. We've been to France. We've been to England. Never-- I wouldn't consider.

What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial?

Again, how evil. I don't remember the name of the woman who talked about the banality of evil.

Right.

How the Germans, the normal people became evil, because it was easier for them to live that way. And I believe that was the reason, but just again, reinforces my feeling that-- I'm not expressing it well. Reinforcing my feeling that I would not, no matter what they say, no matter how they turn or might feel, how they claim they feel, I would not go back to Germany or Austria.

Do you think the world had learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

I'm afraid to say that people still people feel the same way as they did before about Jewish people all over the world. You hear stories about antisemitism in different parts of the world still going on. And it will never change. I'm afraid that will never change. I don't think that Israel will settle its borders during my lifetime.

Have you been to Israel?

Yes. I spent a wonderful, wonderful time there. At that time-- that was many years ago, and went into East Jerusalem, no problems with it. Now I wouldn't want to go. But we felt free to go wherever we wanted to, and the spirits of the people there, they're so wonderful.

Were you-- were you active in the Civil rights movement in the 60s and 70s? I mean here. Hitler deprived-- the Germans deprived people of their civil rights. Did you see any connection or were you active in the Civil rights movement here in the United States at that time?

No. No I wasn't. I was strictly-- I'm trying to figure out how to say it. Not Republican. I was active in, maybe-- I joined a Democratic club. And-- but that didn't have much to do with whether you were Jewish or not.

Right.

Right now I belong to a Jewish community center where we discuss every week the news of the world, our reactions to it. And we get amazingly such divergent points of opinion on that. I feel is good. And we discuss Israel quite a bit and our situation. And one of my relatives is-- I'm trying to remember-- is connected with a AIPAC. And there's some discussion about AIPAC as against opposing views about what's going on.

Right.

I don't have-- I purposely don't have an opinion on that right now.

Have you been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington?

No, not the one in Washington. In Miami. I-- one of these days I would like to go to the one in Washington. And I don't know if you've seen the one in Miami. It was very-- they did a wonderful job. And again, it brought out emotions that I didn't know I'd had since World War 2.

Do you find that you think more about that as you've gotten older, what you saw?

Yeah. I do. At the Jewish Community Center I belong to, there are couple of survivors. One of my neighbors where I live now is a survivor. And we talk about it quite a bit. One of them had written a book, and I got his book, and I look at it every once in a while. And that's the way I feel, just what you said. On my-- what went on in this world are human beings, how human beings are not human. Some of them are inhuman. Like that Black man in California who was beat up, said can't we all get along?

And I'm afraid to say-- acknowledge the fact that I think it's never going to happen in my lifetime or in the future. Things I think are getting a little bit better, but then you hear about what's going on in countries like Germany and some of the Scandinavian countries, and here in the United States even, where there are talks about boycotting Israeli products.

Right.

And what happened to the Lower East Side. The Jewish Lower East Side is not Jewish anymore, but that's OK. And fortunately, I guess about-- I live in a condo where maybe 1/3 of the residents are Jewish. But we all get along. I don't see any overt signs of antisemitism around. And I'm sure there are other feelings, but they don't express them. They don't want to. But I'm afraid that in other parts of the world and other parts of the country, that it still is going on and will go on forever.