

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Jack Ophir
August 16, 2015
RG-50.106*0247

PREFACE

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JACK OPHIR

August 16, 2015

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Jack Ophir. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 16th 2015 and is taking place at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Jack Ophir: My name is Jack Ophir.

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

A: I was born in **Łódź** Poland in 1938. To be precise, April sixth 1938.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family. How far back does your family go in Łódź?

A: I think that my family goes in Łódź maybe two or three generations prior to my birth. I do not know where they came before that. This is on my mother's side. My father's side, they came from Russia and that is three or four generations as well in Warsaw.

Q: What were your parents' names?

A: My mother's name was **Dorca Tiger** and my father's name was **Jehuda Leib Feingold**.

Q: And what kind of work did your father do?

A: My father used to be a judge or I should say a juvenile delinquent judge. Later on he was also a merchant. He dealt in porcelains and very unusual housewares.

Q: And did your mother work?

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A: I don't believe my mother worked, no. And she was brought up in a family of furriers and I guess she married pretty young and did not work.

Q: What were your grandparents' names? Do you know what they are?

A: My grandparents' names on my mother's side. Her father's name was Joseph Tiger, T-I-G-E-R and her mother's name was Miriam or **Manya Vihanberg** [ph]. Of course, when she married it was Tiger as well.

Q: You said your father's name was Fein –

A: My father's name was Feingold.

Q: So when you were born, what was your name at birth?

A: At birth my name was Feingold.

Q: And your first name?

A: And my first name was **Jurek** or Jacob.

Q: Was **Lazar** part of your name?

A: Lazar was a middle name that was actually adopted when we were on the way to the concentration camp.

Q: Oh, so that's a later –

A: That came a little bit later.

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Q: Let's talk about your family a little bit. Were they a religious family?

A: My mother came from a relatively speaking assimilated family and not a religious family. My father came from an ultra-Orthodox family. There were the Chasidims of **Gera rebbe** in Warsaw. Nevertheless he was somewhat bohemian and he left that tradition when he married my mother. And the Feingolds in Russia were ultra-religious.

Q: How did his family feel about that? Do you know?

A: His father, at the time he married, was already deceased. And his mother, if I'm not mistaken, she was on the way to Israel together with two of his siblings. So there wasn't too much of the family in Poland on his side when he married my mother.

Q: Were your parents, you mentioned Israel, were your parents Zionists?

A: None of my parents to my knowledge were Zionists. Otherwise they would have traveled to Israel together with their other siblings.

Q: Did you have any siblings? Or were you an only child?

A: I was an only child.

Q: What year did your parents get married?

A: (pause)

Q: That's all right.

A: I would think I'm not completely positive but I would think that my parents got married in 1936.

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Q: Granted you were very young when the war started I know.

A: I was.

Q: Yes. Of course. But and you hadn't had any schooling, I assume when the war started.

A: No, I had absolutely no schooling in Poland.

Q: Did you have any, again you were so little, any memories before the war, before September 39 or not? You were such a little boy.

A: Well I, the only memories that I have –

Q: No you couldn't have. You were only a year and a half. So you were young, yeah, yeah. So let's talk about your first memories.

A: My first memory come, come to mind when I was a little boy looking for toys and there were none to be found. The only toy that I remember is a, it's a bunk type of a, of a rider that –

Q: A train?

A: Not the train. No like a –

Q: A crane, a truck?

A: It swivels.

Q: A top.

A: It swivels when you –

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Q: A top.

A: A top. Yeah, it was a top. That's just about the only –

Q: This was in Łódź?

A: This is still in Łódź, where we, when we were hiding and the Germans were coming into Łódź.

Q: Ok I know this is what you've heard. So can you tell me what you heard about what happened to your family? You were a baby of course. But what do you know of what happened when the war started?

A: The only thing that I know.

Q: Know of.

A: That I know of that happened, that the Germans moved into Łódź and for the longest time my parents were not really concerned because they thought it's something that will go away, will pass. They were very, both of them were very established people and they did not think that anything would happen to established people in Łódź or in Poland. When it did happen both of them, as many other people, were looking for foreign countries to intercept them and they were looking for papers or passports to be either gotten or purchased in Łódź. They could not achieve this request and both of them together with me, traveled through the tunnels to Łódź, I'm sorry to Warsaw.

Q: From Łódź –

A: To Warsaw.

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Q: Through tunnels.

A: Partially, now which we traveled from Łódź by either by train or buses but when we arrived before, when we arrived to Warsaw, we traveled most of the route via tunnels. How do you call, those tunnels are called –

Q: Do you know what year this was when you left Łódź to go to Warsaw?

A: This was in 1940.

Q: 1940.

A: Or 1942, I'm sorry. In 1942.

Q: Approximately what month, approximately?

A: I would say towards the end of 1942, maybe November, December of 1942.

Q: And the only memory you have up to that point you said was playing with the top?

A: That's about it. That's about all I remember from Łódź.

Q: Do you remember about the trip to Warsaw?

A: The trip that I remember. When we arrived in Warsaw was going through the tunnels. And I was carrying on my father's shoulders and the guide that showed us the way to our hiding place in Warsaw was a fellow by the name of **Vachek**, Vachek, the Pole who worked for a living by showing people where to go in Warsaw.

Q: So your father obviously paid him to show you?

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A: Absolutely. It was paid for and he brought us to the place that we were hiding in Warsaw. It was on the Jewish side in the ghetto side of Warsaw.

Q: In the ghetto itself.

A: In the ghetto, right in the ghetto of Warsaw. And when we arrived, I remember a relatively small apartment or I should say I remember a room in that apartment that was completely sealed with a wardrobe against the wall. And my mom was coming in a couple times a day to feed me. And I was there with a helper that was not a Jew that my mom brought with her from Łódź to take care of me.

Q: This was like a nanny, a child --

A: A nanny. That is a nanny. That's correct.

Q: And her name? Do you remember what her name is?

A: Her name was Paula.

Q: You are now four and a half when you come to --

A: Now I'm just about four and a half when we came to Warsaw and my father, from what I understood was able to get Palestinian papers, certificates from all the countries because the American certificates or passports were not available no more. They were all sold out. And the only thing that was available were Palestinian certificates and that's what he got. And one of the reasons that he got those papers was that his brother, sister and his mother at that point were already in Palestine. They left Poland and my mother's sister was in Palestine as well.

Q: Can you give me the names of these people?

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A: Yes. My father's brother was **Neftali** Feingold. His sister was Leah or **Lorca Blumberg** but Feingold from her family home and my mother's sister was Esther or **Edya Tiger** or **Zilberberg** in Palestine.

Q: Your father now is able to get, is trying to get Palestinian –

A: My father had the Palestinian papers and he believed that the Germans of course will let us go. And one morning we were supposed to move from the, from ghetto Warsaw to the other side of Warsaw which we called the Aryan side or the side that the Polish people, the Polish lived. And from –

Q: Can I just ask you, while you're in that room, as a little boy in the Warsaw ghetto, were you able to see outside the room?

A: Weren't able to see anything. The only thing that I remember when I left that room and we went into the tunnel again to go to the other side is the smell of fire. At that point ghetto Warsaw was completely in flames. Totally in flames.

Q: This is the uprising you're talking about.

A: This is the uprising.

Q: April 43.

A: That's correct and I was –

Q: Any other memories in that room as a little, little boy. No other memories while you're in the room before the uprising?

A: There was one other memory that I should mention. My mother had a daughter who was my step sister who was with us as well, but what were her about and what did she do, I do not

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remember but she certainly was with us and when we left this particular apartment, she was with us as well. Her name was Erika or **Yehudit**.

Q: So you were in this room from December to April?

A: From December to April, yes. And this is when we moved through the tunnels again to the other side of the ghetto while the ghetto was completely in flames. Totally in flames and this is another thing that I still remember. Smell of fire and flames. And these are things that will never leave you. Matter of fact until this very day when I go by anyplace and there is a fire smell, the picture of ghetto Warsaw comes in front of my eyes.

Q: Were you very, again you were a small, small child, very dependent on your parents? Were they comforting? I mean how do you handle a –

A: There were –

Q: A five year old child?

A: They were constantly with me of course. I was constantly with them. And the next thing I remember was when we were out of the tunnels and we were supposed to go to our new hiding place.

Q: How did you get from the ghetto outside, to the outside?

A: Through the tunnel.

Q: Through the tunnel.

A: Through the tunnel.

Q: And you walked yourself, a little boy.

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A: Can I stop for one second?

Q: Sure.

A: The tunnels were actually sewer tunnels, big large sewer tunnels. And when we came out of those –

Q: And you walked, you were walking?

A: We walked right through the tunnels.

Q: Through the sewer tunnels.

A: To the other side.

Q: You yourself, as a little boy.

A: Myself, absolutely. My dad, my father.

Q: Holding onto your father?

A: My father carried me on his shoulder and my mother was walking together with my step sister in the tunnel. And we were --

Q: So you were sitting on your father's shoulders

A: Yes, I was staying on my father's shoulders. When we came out, we were supposed to be led to our new hiding place. But at that point, the Germans were waiting for us outside the sewer tunnels. We were taken, all of us.

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Q: Do you yourself have memories of this or this is what you were told?

A: Yes, no. This I have the memory of. We were, I do not remember if it was violent type of taking us or just showing us how to go and where to go to – but I do remember we were taken and we were then placed into lines of segregation where we were told to stand. And my parents' idea was that they would have to present their papers and they would take us to the place where we would be able to leave to Palestine with our Palestine papers. This is of course what I was explained later on. However this never happened. And we were put into, after the segregation.

Q: When you say segregation. – men and women separated. Is that what you're talking about?

A: Men and women were not separated at the point we were at. And later on we understood why or I was explained by my father why. Whoever had Palestinian papers the Germans took those families and put them aside for a purpose of a delayed the date exchanging them for the German people that used to be in Palestine. And they only kept in a certain grouping people who had, who used to be academicians – engineers, lawyers, doctors, and their families. And kept them together for the purpose of the exchange of the scientists and the academicians that the Germans had at that time in Palestine.

Q: So that's what you mean by segregation?

A: That's correct. At that point, when they segregated us, my mother who came from a relatively speaking very well to do family had on her arm, an umbrella. This is a story that I was told for all the years. And this umbrella had a handle that was removable and it was filled with the family's jewels. Large diamonds, rubies, all type of jewelry. As she was holding it, one of the German officers came to her and said to her may I have this umbrella? So she responded to him. I will give you my ring instead of the umbrella. It may rain and I have two children with me and I will want to shield them. And he answered to her no, I don't want your ring. You can keep your ring. I'd like to have that umbrella. And she had of course no choice in the matter. And she gave him the umbrella. This is as much as I remember from that meeting and the, from that point what

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I do remember is being on the train that took us to Bergen Belsen. So we were at that point all together.

Q: This is still the four of you.

A: The four of us.

Q: How old was your, the other child, the step sister?

A: My sister was about seven years older than I. If I was four and a half, five, she was already 12 years of age. Yes.

Q: So she was older.

A: And we were all taken to the train, of course on the way to Bergen Belsen.

Q: Can we back up a little bit. As a small child did you have anything special with you, any special –

A: Absolutely nothing.

Q: Just the clothes on your back?

A: Just the clothes on my back and whatever maybe my mother had maybe a few other things for m but and absolutely nothing else because we went away light from, from Łódź to Warsaw.

Q: Ok so now you're on your way to Bergen Belsen.

A: And we are on the way to Bergen Belsen. The only thing that I remember from that trip is me being most of the time asleep. And when I woke –

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Q: This was a passenger train?

A: Passenger train. It was a passenger train and when we arrived I must say that on this train there was another sister of my mother's with her husband. I do not recall their last name. Her name was **Lilka** and we all came together to Bergen Belsen.

Q: Was that by chance that she happened to be on the train?

A: I don't know the whereabouts, how they came on the train. Her husband was an engineer and he ended up on the same train that we did. He did not have Palestinian papers however. This is a story that my father had told me. He had South American papers. Nevertheless, being an academician he ended on the same train going to the same camp in Bergen Belsen. The camp that we ended up in was Block Ten in Bergen Belsen.

Q: Do you remember arriving there or not? Any memories?

A: I do not remember arriving there. I remember me being in a barrack. That I remember. And we were all together in the barracks. The women for a while were not separated from the men until maybe a little bit later. When the men slept in different barracks than the women slept with the children.

Q: And you're now five and a half?

A: Now I am about five and a half.

Q: Other memories of Bergen Belsen? Any other memories of Bergen Belsen?

A: The memories from Bergen Belsen were day to day memories of being hungry all the time. And I mean hungry. And the only thing that I can remember and always was reminded to me that I was crying, asking for a little piece of bread. I do remember my mother begging for some food from some of the soldiers and supervisors that were running around the camp. At one time she

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was hit and she was sent back to the barracks. I do remember that next door to us there was another camp where the **Kestner** people came from Hungary and we, as children saw that they were burying in the ground all kind of belongings before they were separated and put into their barracks. And maybe a day or two or three later on, there were few children in Bergen Belsen that we were friends and we went under the wires and dug out some of the things that were hidden there. Of course there were nothing important to us with the exception of little knives, folding knives, combs, glasses, things of this nature which we brought back and we played with.

Q: Were there many children with you?

A: In our camp, Block number ten, there were ten children. Most of them were liberated together with us when we left the camp on the train to be exterminated. We were liberated by the Americans by a couple of soldiers that came from the company of Mickey Marcus who was Colonel Mickey Marcus who later on ended up in Israel. And we were liberated by them.

Q: We'll get to that in a minute. I just want a little more detail if you can.

A: In Bergen Belsen.

Q: In Bergen Belsen as a small child. What did you have to eat? I know you said you cried for bread. What was your mother able to get for you to eat?

A: Some soups that were made out of water, salt, either potatoes, potatoes peels and I'm sorry. Beets. And beets. Then there's, once a day we were getting a little piece of bread. What I do remember vividly that once a day the Germans came from their kitchens and they set up milk cans, old fashioned milk cans made out of steel. And they were maybe three or three and a half feet tall with soups in them. And they were arranging them like maybe six or eight of them, one after another and they made them, people in the camps or what they called the prisoners stand on lines, mostly the men. And in front of those cans there were soldiers, German soldiers who used to give every one of the people portions of soup. They had a habit of maybe after ten or 15 people that they served, they lifted the cans and they left the place and within seconds there were

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piles of hundreds of people one on top of another trying to grasp and get into those soup cans. Many died underneath and many never made it. And this was a picture that I, of course, as a child, will never forget. This is how we were fed in the camp.

Q: What did you wear? What clothing did you have?

A: I have no memory of the clothing. None whatsoever. My father wore a striped uniform and I don't recall what my mother wore.

Q: Did anybody have a yellow star?

A: We all had yellow stars, yes. We were all –

Q: What did that mean to a five year old boy?

A: Didn't mean a thing.

Q: Didn't mean a thing.

A: Absolutely not a thing.

Q: And the language that you spoke? Was it Polish?

A: Polish, we spoke to my parents –

Q: Did you know any other language?

A: None whatsoever. No, my mother was, my mother was French speaking, Polish speaking. My father was Polish speaking, Hebrew speaking because of the family and the full German speaking. Later on I learned some German as well as I was in the camp.

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Q: What did you do all day? You said you, with the other children go out and dig up some of the things? Anything else that you did?

A: There is nothing that I remember how we passed the time but we were with our mothers and we played among the few children that were there, we played with one another. But did we do, I do not remember.

Q: What were the sleeping conditions like?

A: We slept on the floor in the barracks. There were some wooden beds as well. That there were tiers with one tier's bench out of wood that we slept in. We slept with our mothers and we –

Q: Did you ever have to line up to be counted? Did they do that there?

A: Every morning we were counted but I don't have a clear reflection of that. But we were counted.

Q: And then it was time to leave you said, Bergen Belsen.

A: And then there was time to leave Bergen Belsen.

Q: When was that?

A: We were notified that there was a transport and we are going to Palestine and we did have the Palestinian papers so we believed it to be the truth. My mother's sister was at that time still in Bergen Belsen and as I was told, my mother was begging her to come with us. So we would stay together, but her husband convinced her not to do so because she, they had South American papers and he was a little bit more sure or he thought so anyhow.

Q: Was optimistic?

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A: That he was more optimistic about having those papers and being maybe liberated with them. So we left the camp with another large group of people. We were put on trains, supposedly to be sent out to Palestine supposedly on the way to Hamburg. However, we were on the way. The trains were stopped. And when they were stopped, there was a lot of commotion. There was a lot of bombardment.

Q: Do you have memories of this?

A: Yes, I do. I have memories of the train stopping. I have memories of heavy bombardments.

Q: Was this a passenger train also?

A: No. that was a –

Q: Was it a cattle car that –

A: That was a, a cow train. You know that was a –

Q: They call them cattle cars, cattle cars.

A: A cattle car. These were all cattle cars and we were all standing or sitting in the, in those cars and traveling. And when the train stopped, we stopped in **Hillersleben** [ph], a small town not too far from Bergen Belsen. We did not traveled very far. On the outskirts of Hamburg and this is where we were liberated in the forest. Two soldiers came out. One of them was by the name of Cohen, introduced himself and said that help is coming very soon.

Q: So you were in Bergen Belsen until when, when did you leave?

A: We were in Bergen Belsen until the very beginning of April.

Q: 45.

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A: 45.

Q: To go back to Bergen Belsen.

A: I'm sorry. We were, yes until April 45.

Q: To go back to Bergen Belsen. You said that some people died trying to get food from the soup cans.

A: Many people died.

Q: Did you ever seen any dead bodies?

A: I saw hundreds of dead bodies.

Q: How does a five year old understand that? What does it do to a five year old and what did you think, do you remember?

A: The five year old doesn't understand it. The five year old as I had seen it, just sees piles of people one on top of another and a lot of screams and, and hollers and pain around. That's what I remember. What does this really mean, I didn't know at that time.

Q: Do you remember what your parents explanations were? What does a parent say to a child?

A: No there was, I do not recall any explanations whatsoever. I only remember clinging to my mother.

Q: Let's move ahead now to liberation. You said.

A: We were first liberated and then —

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Q: Outside of Hamburg you said?

A: I'm sorry.

Q: Outside of Hamburg.

A: Outside of, of Hamburg and everybody at that time realized that we were, we are liberated and all the people that could -- I remember one other thing that before maybe I was -- before we were liberated, the Germans came to the train, to the cars and asked or been asked, took from everybody they could civilian clothing. And at that point, many of the men realized that something is going on, because they were putting those clothing on and they were running away. So when we were actually liberated some of the older men, they were half naked and they were looking for clothing and they all went into town which was not too far away from where the train stopped. And we were left there with my mother and other women were there. And then the men went to bring food and clothing. And that's how I remember we were liberated. And later on I remember that we were brought to a camp. I would say it was or a area of identification.

Q: What does liberation mean to now a seven year old? Was it a difference? Did it make a difference to you?

A: It didn't mean anything. It just, it meant to me that I had something to eat. That was the only thing that I had seen or practiced differently. But I did not really realize what it meant. None whatsoever.

Q: Do you remember if there was, and again you were so young. A change in your parents' feelings, relief, did you sense any of that or not. You were too young.

A: I was too young to sense that.

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Q: Of course.

A: There were, I do remember their plans that we are going away. We are going someplace. At that point at that time, I didn't even know where we were going. But at one point, I was separated from them.

Q: From your parents?

A: From my parents, from my mother. And I was either looking for food or looking for something. Food. And I was separated from them and matter of fact, my parents were elsewhere. My mother was elsewhere someplace looking for food as well. And when she came back to where I was or when I came back looking for her, we didn't find one another. And I was placed with a lot of other children. They had a special camp for children, for left children. There were no parents. For a few days. I don't remember how many days but maybe, maybe not very long. Maybe two days, a day or three days. I don't remember how long. But my mother did come and she had to convince, now this is what was told to me later on. She had to convince the caretakers to have me. Because they did not believe anybody. People had the tendency to urge healthy children to their families because they lost children. And the only way she was able to get me, I had a birthmark on my back and she had told the guards over there, if you take off the child's shirt, you will see that he has a brown mark on his left side, right behind, right below his shoulder. And they did. And they let her have me. And this is how we got back together. And the next stop for —

Q: Do you remember that situation or not?

A: No.

Q: You were told that.

A: That was, that was told to me. I do remember being separated with some American soldiers. At first. Getting some sweets, maybe a rattle or something of that sort and then there is no

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memory for a couple of days. And again my mother getting me out of that, of a place. I don't even remember what place it was.

Q: So you're back now with both of your parents?

A: Now I am back with both of my parents. We are all together. And the next memory of mine is not even the trip itself, but the next memory is being in France. So obviously we traveled to France and we ended up in Paris. And we had, I should say both of my parents had friends in Paris and they were not thinking at that point of getting to Palestine, but they wanted, or I should say my mother more so, wanted to end up in France because she had some family in France. Family in Belgium. And she was French educated so her preference was to be in France. And we ended up in Paris and the place that I remember is Hotel **Lutetia**.

Q: Is this after D Day, excuse me that was the year before. I apologize. I'm sorry, is this June 45?

A: This is already, this is in June I presume of 45 that we are in France. And I don't remember too much of this hotel with the exception of its grandeur. As a little boy I looked around and saw this beautiful, beautiful decorated walls and that's all I remember. And the next thing I remember, being in P, being on the boat moving to Palestine.

Q: You went from France to Palestine.

A: To Palestine. I remember being, we went from Paris to Marseille which I do not remember how we got there but in Marseille we were put on a boat, on a ship, and we were on the way to Palestine, totally legally. Because my father, or we all had Palestinian papers. And I remember vaguely the trip on the boat. Arriving in Palestine.

Q: Is your name still the same Lazar Ophir?

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A: My name is still Feingold, Jacob Lazar Feingold. The name Jurek dropped from the picture because it was my Polish name and nobody referred to me anymore with the exception of my mother by the name of Jurek. And I remember that we were taken, I remember getting off the boat, off the ship and we were taken to a place in Palestine called **Atlit**. It was a camp that all the comers to Palestine were kept there. Now there were two different groups of people in that camp. First we were intercepted by the British and there was one side that had people that came in illegally to Palestine. They just had the desire to come out to Palestine and they did. All kind of different ways, not necessarily on our ship. On different ships. And they were kept separately. We were kept in a camp of people that legally arrived in Palestine because we had the papers. And now remember after maybe a few days, a few weeks, my father's sister came to visit us in Atlit. I don't remember the meeting. I don't remember how they met but I do remember that very shortly thereafter, they let us go from Atlit and we ended in Tel Aviv.

Q: Let's back up a little bit. I wanted to go back on the voyage from France to Palestine. What was the name of the boat? Do you know? Do you know the name of your boat? And who it belonged to. Don't know, ok.

A: I have no memory of the name.

Q: What month was this, in 45?

A: It was probably in the fall of the, fall of the -- for sure. Yes.

Q: And were there many children on the boat? Or were you one of the --

A: There, yes there were -- the children that was with me in Bergen Belsen, in our camp. I don't remember if all but most of them were on --

Q: Many of them were the Bergen Belsen children.

A: Most of them were on the ship. Few I remember. I remember the names until this very day.

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Q: Such as.

A: Rachel is one of them or Rachel. There was **Ahuva** or Esther was just about my age. They were from the **Flakowitz** family. Then there was a girl by the name of Rina from the Engle family. And there was Hannah or **Hanusha**, the name we used to call her. And I don't remember her last name.

Q: What did you all talk about as children? Did you play games on the boat? What did you do?

A: We played games on the boat. What type of games I do not remember. But we were running around when we were playing.

Q: And you had enough food obviously.

A: And we had enough food. There's another family with two boys by the name of **Shladov** and both of the boys were approximately my age. No, I'm sorry. Ron was. Adam Shladov, he was my age and the other one was not with us. I'm sorry, there was Ron Shladov. The other one was born in Palestine.

Q: Now you were going to Palestine. What did Palestine mean to you at that time, at seven years old? Did it have any meaning?

A: Palestine did not mean anything to me with the exception of meeting my uncles and my aunt which of course, I was introduced to them and I all of a sudden had uncles and an aunt. And that was my first recollection of Palestine.

Q: Then they come and take – you move from Atlit?

A: They, they take us from there to Tel Aviv and at the very beginning we lived in Tel Aviv together with my father's sister, **Lorca** Blumberg or Leah Blumberg. We all moved to their

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small apartment. That was very close to Jaffa and that's where we lived for the first few months in Tel Aviv. And I would say that within maybe three or four months, my parents had gotten an apartment in Tel Aviv, small apartment, very close to the **Habima** theatre or to what's called the **Sderot** Rothschild, or Rothschild Boulevard on **Berdichevsky** Street. And I remember vividly at that point me living there or us as a family living there.

Q: Did you not know any Hebrew before you came?

A: I do not, I did not know any Hebrew whatsoever until I came to Israel. But what's interesting is that I was talking about it with my wife a couple of days ago. And I said you know I kind of thought about it and I do not remember when was the day or when was the time when all of a sudden I started speaking Hebrew. There was like no time, time limit to that. Not early or, nor late. Nor did I develop since I was relatively young any Polish accent while speaking Hebrew. My Hebrew was totally fluent and a real Hebrew. And must I say my father spoke a fluent Hebrew as well. Cause he was educated in Hebrew from -- at his home and he did not have any accent in Israel either. My mother in contrast had a very heavy accent and didn't speak Hebrew very well until the day she passed because she spoke other languages -- Polish, German, French - and never found it, never found the necessity to speak fluent Hebrew.

Q: So you started school right away?

A: I started school right away. I do not remember when did I start school?. However, I do remember that to the second grade I went into a religious school in Tel Aviv. When I say religious, it was an ultra-religious but it was a religious school in Tel Aviv by the name of **Bil**. That was the name of the elementary school.

Q: And were most of the other children refugee children like you or were they sabras?

A: Most of them ended up in Tel Aviv, of the children and they, we're all part of the first. And from time to time later on we have met socially, but we all parted company and everybody went

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his own way. I, as I know the parents were working people. They were seeking jobs and had jobs. Some of them went into businesses.

Q: What did your father do when you got to Palestine?

A: My father had actually two professions in Israel. My father was a merchant and my father was a writer. For many, many years he wrote in the Palestinian newspapers I would say which was, what was later on the Israeli newspapers. And he heavily wrote to the American **Mogen** journal in Yiddish for many, many years. So his occupation was a dual occupation. He was a writer and if you opened up the telephone book in Tel Aviv, his name appeared as Yehuda Feingold **Itonay**, which means a writer or a newspaper writer. However to subsidize himself he was a merchant. He dealt in piece goods and later on in glass.

Q: Did your mother work at that time?

A: My mother as well. Yes, she did. She worked and mainly as a seamstress for many years but her job, her work was not a steady work. She worked a few days a week in and out.

Q: During those years of the war, your health and I assume your parents' health was ok?

A: Both of my parents health, as I remember, was ok. As was mine and my sister at the time.

Q: And was your sister with you now in Tel Aviv?

A: My sister was with me in Tel Aviv as well. For relatively speaking a short time. And then as children we parted company for a short time. I ended up in a private school, away from my parents and she ended up in another school.

Q: Is this in Tel Aviv?

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A: In Tel Aviv yes. I was out of Tel Aviv and she was out of Tel Aviv. We were both out of Tel Aviv, basically because my parents were trying to get themselves together as a family on one side of the spectrum. And the other side of the spectrum, we were very difficult children. And I mean very difficult children.

Q: In what sense?

A: In the sense of getting along.

Q: With each other?

A: Not, not with each other. With children on the street, with other children. I for one as I remember, I was very physical. And I was very aggressive towards other children.

Q: Were you big for your age? Or average? Were you large for your age or average size?

A: Large, largely my age or maybe a year or two younger because when I started elementary school I was a year older than my contemporaries just because over that happened, during the war and when I came to have a beginning I was about a year or year and a half late. So we were kind of separated for a while in Palestine but very shortly thereafter I came back home and lived at home since then.

Q: Now it's 46, 47.

A: Yes. Palestine came into fruition as an Israel state, as an Israeli state. We were at that point all together. My sister was on the way to the army and I was in a elementary school.

Q: You're ten years old now?

A: I am yeah just about ten years old, that's right. So I was back to elementary school and my sister was in a different school, still not at home. She was in a separate school. She was, I'm

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sorry, she was on her way to the army at that point. And very short after she had never finished her army and she was declared or found to be mentally ill and it was a mental illness that had never left her. She was a very substantially schizophrenic at that point and there was no solution to this situation and there was no therapy to this situation at that point. And she was institutionalized so we parted company from her as a family. I stayed with my parents and I continued my pre high school education and –

Q: Did you celebrate the establishment of the state of Israel?

A: We certainly did. We celebrated, we celebrated the establishment of Israel.

Q: And again what did it mean to you as a ten year old? Anything special or just a time to celebrate?

A: The only thing that I remember – it didn't mean anything to me with the exception of being free and joyous but I did not have the concept of what does it mean to have a country. At that point I did not understand it. I was too young to understand it. But the first, very shortly thereafter I started high school and at that point I started to understand that I am in a new country and I came from Poland where I was in a concentration camp. Thereafter the understanding of these circumstances started to be much more clearer to me.

Q: You had no positive feelings, I assume, for Poland at that point?

A: I had not feeling for Poland, none whatsoever. I had memories as I had stated before from Poland, from being through the sewer canals. That's about all.

Q: That are all negative. All of your memories were negative.

A: I don't know if they were negative or positive. They were memories of escape, of travel. There were memories of fear when I had seen the ghetto burning. That's all I can say about Poland, but I had no feeling of the country being good or bad. I had stories of course explaining

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or telling me that my parents came from a very, extremely well to do background so Poland was good to them but I cannot attest to that fact.

Q: Good to them prewar.

A: Prewar naturally yes.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Jack Ophir. This is track number two. You are now in Israel. Did you have any comment about when you arrived in Israel? You thought maybe that it was a little bit later than you first mentioned.

Jack Ophir: Maybe a little bit later. I did not –

Q: September 46?

A: Maybe September 46 yes, but I don't remember in my first going around in Israel a kind of very murky in my mind. I don't remember friends. I don't remember people necessarily. I don't remember that. I just remember that my mingling with other kids was very difficult. For the first few years.

Q: Because of what you had been through as a young child, yes.

A: Yes, yes. I wasn't a nice kid and all the other kids on the street they were afraid of me. And I was using my hands to excess.

Q: You were very physical?

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A: I was very physical. And if I didn't like something or I didn't like somebody I used my hands in excess. I mean there's no question about it.

Q: Did you get in trouble?

A: I got, all the time I was in trouble.

Q: Which is why you were sent to the private school?

A: That's why I was sent to a private school. Absolutely. But when I left the private school, by the way, I just ran away from the private school which was quite far away from Tel Aviv. It was on the outskirts of Haifa which was quite away. And at that point I was a young child but I couldn't care less.

Q: You left on your own?

A: Unh hunh. Completely on my –

Q: You walked off the school grounds?

A: I left off the school grounds. I had maybe one or two pounds in my pocket. I got on the bus and I traveled all by myself to the, to Tel Aviv. And I made it from the bus station back to my parents' home. And matter of fact when I arrived, my mom, my mother was in a shock to see me. To know what had happened. And I explained that I will never, ever go back to that place. And this is when my father came back from work. You know. And they had some conversations and all I know is that I stayed at home and they had to work out a fresh school for me you know et cetera, et cetera. And from that point on of course, I stayed in Tel Aviv.

Q: And so you're in high school. And then what happened?

A: Then I started, I started high school. I became, my bar mitzvah was of course in Tel Aviv.

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Q: What was that like? Can you talk about it? That was –

A: Well all I remember that –

Q: 1951.

A: A lot of people came you know to my bar mitzvah and that was in 1951. And from that point on, I became in many respects, a different person. By that I mean my aggression kind of left me and I became much more friendly with people, much more friendlier with children my age. I joined the bush guards of Israel at that time, which later on I became a guide in the bush guards. I went to high school. I went to some of the better high schools of Tel Aviv. And I became, I matured somewhat I would say.

Q: Can you describe your bar mitzvah, where was it?

A: Where was it? The bar mitzvah was in our apartment. In the house, not in the, not in a hall or matter of fact, at that time, people made what we call **smichot**, **simchas** celebrations in their own homes. It was very customary to do it at home. Not in a public hall.

Q: Did you read from the Torah?

A: Of course I read.

Q: You had a service in the home?

A: I read the Torah. I went up to the Torah. I was, at that point, I still was a semi-religious boy. I was wearing a **yarmulke** until I went to high school. When I went to high school, that was already a non-religious school that I was not accustomed to it at the very beginning, because I still went as I remember with my yarmulke on my head. And some of the kids in school were kind of making fun of me which didn't sit too well with me at that point. But it took maybe six

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months to a year until I removed my yarmulke and I continued high school with all the other children. Until of course, I finished high school and I was called to the duty by the army.

Q: So you went into the IDF in 56?

A: Yes. 56, end of 56 I went into the army. And I went to the **Nahal**, which at that time was a special unit in the army that the end result was a membership in a kibbutz. However, while I was in the army I was, I decided to have a military career and I was asked to go to a corporal's school in Israel, prior of or I should say in Israel you cannot, you don't become a corporal because you are a good soldier. You become a corporal because you go to a special corporal's school. If it is a fighting unit. You have to go to a school. And since I belonged to a fighting unit, I went to corporal's school. I finished it. I was an instructor in the military for recruits that came into the army. And shortly thereafter, maybe a year after I went to the military academy which I finished and I became an officer in the army. I went to a paratroopers unit and that's how I finished up my army, as a retired officer.

Q: Was your name still Jacob –

A: I still, for all that time, was Jacob. Some of my friends referred to me as **Jankele**. That was a nickname that I carried since my very early age in Israel.

Q: What did you do after the army, when you left the army?

A: When I finished the army most of my friends were already either in the university. Some of them working or building careers and I kind of found myself a little bit lost because I didn't know what I want to do and I had to make up my mind. And being persuaded by some good friends that I should go and continue my education. Question became where should I go and what should I do? And as I had finished my matriculation in Israel, there was one subject that I was somewhat weak with and oddly enough that was English. My English was very weak at that time and of course when you were seeking for higher education, English had to be one of the subjects that you passed. I did not pass English. And therefore, it was somewhat difficult for me

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to make up my mind, how to proceed. It took about a year or so until, and I did all kind of odds and ends in all kind of different jobs. Until I made up my mind that I am going back to school and from all the places that I decided to go to, came the United States of America. So I parted from all my friends in Israel.

Q: What made you decide to want to come here if your English wasn't so good?

A: Well I came to the conclusion that the only place where I will quickly command a language will be if I will be able to speak no other language but the language of the country. And I had many other choices. I could have gone to France or to Germany but I kind of felt that the United States of America would suit me best. And I decided to come to America. It took maybe six months for me to make the proper arrangements. I left my friends. I left everybody in Israel and I traveled to the United States of America, a country which I am in until this very day.

Q: What did the United States mean to you as a young adult at that time? Did it have any special meaning besides the fact that you were going to learn English?

A: It meant to me, America meant to me the country of success, the country of big achievements, a country of being able to do whatever one wants to do. A country that has really no limits. That's what it meant to me.

Q: So you land here.

A: And I land here.

Q: Did you fly or take the boat?

A: I took a boat. I was sick as a dog and I –

Q: What boat were you on?

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A: And I made myself a promise that I will never ever put my foot on a boat again.

Q: What was the name of the boat?

A: The name, actually I came through France. I came on an Israeli, on an Israeli boat of that time to France. And from France I traveled on the virgin voyage of the France into the United States of America and to New York City.

Q: And putting your foot down on American ground.

A: And putting – on American ground.

Q: Was that special?

A: It was not. Nothing was special. To leave the sea was very special. I was sick as a dog and being on the ground gave me, gave me great pleasure. As a matter of fact I had an aunt, one of my father's sisters who lived in the United States since the Second World War. She escaped from Poland through Morocco into France and ended up in the United States of America with her family. So I met her and lived in the first few months with her, in New York City. And of course, when I first came and looked at New York City, it was like a story from one thousand nights of stories. It was an unbelievable scene to see the size of the buildings to see all the people. And most disappointing at the beginning, everybody spoke English and I did not. But that did not take a long time.

Q: So we're talking about what year, 1960?

A: 1960. 1960. And then in 1960 through a very pleasant and unforeseen connection, I was guided into CCNY in New York City.

Q: City College.

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A: And I went to school in CCNY. After that or matter of fact part of the, at the same time I went into Fashion Institute of Technology and graduated and started my career in New York City. Modestly picked up English and by the time I finished, I was pretty fluent in the language of --

Q: Did you go to language classes?

A: No, I did not.

Q: You just picked it up doing --

A: No, I got myself a girlfriend and that's the way I learned my English. No, no. I was many years before I got married.

Q: But you graduated from the schools?

A: I graduated from the school and I worked for an engineering company by the name of Bertram Frank Associates. And then after a year and a half or two I worked for another company of engineers as well. And while working with this engineering firm, the name escapes my mind for a moment. I met some people who were in the midst of building a large factory for, in Puerto Rico, from all places. And we finished it up and I came back to New York. And they offered me a job to work with them. I wasn't sold on it because I had a very serious job and I was happy with the job. At that time I was making a lot of money for a young man or that's what I thought, anyhow. And I was very comfortable. And they invited me for a few interviews which I did go. And I met a fellow, a guy by the name of Charles Greenberg who happened to be a nephew of the man that owned the company and they convinced me to join them. They did better than match my salary and I joined them, to find out after maybe a year with them that the man who hired me, a fellow by the name of Leonard Sherman decided to sell his business without telling me anything about it and he did sell the business. And we became a part of a much larger company. But after selling that business, I got together with my, what was at that point, my partner or my associate, a fellow by the name of Charles Greenberg and we decided to leave the company and go on our own and open our own manufacturing facility, which we did. We

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produced women's lingerie or women's underwear for over 18 years. And in and around the 1985 we parted company and the business was sold. First, much prior to that I had met my wife, who happens to be my wife until this very day, a lady by the name of **Thea Otehea Hornstein** of that time and today of course Thea Ophir which I am still married to her. I should say happily married.

Q: Was she from Europe also?

A: She was a born Israeli or a sabra, the way we refer to.

Q: How did you meet her?

A: We met through some mutual friends actually that we had, here in the United States. She used to be a stewardess with El Al and on one of the flights to New York City she, I don't know, I don't remember any more, happily or unhappily, came to my apartment, place that I was entertaining on Sundays you know and that's how we met. And the rest of it is history.

Q: Do you have any children?

A: We have three children. We have a daughter that came first and two more sons. All are, all three are married and have their own families. The youngest works with me until this very day.

Q: When did you become Mr. Ophir?

A: I have changed my name very shortly, or I should say while I was in the army in Israel. Before I went to officer school, one of my units was, worked as guards to David **Ben-Gurion** and he was very influential on us. To change the names to Hebrew names. One of the members in my family, a son of my father's brother, he changed the name first to the name of Ophir and I had the knowledge of it of course. And being that I did not want to have too many names in the same family, I took it upon myself and I changed my name to Ophir the same way he did. So the Hebrew name remains the same within the family.

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Q: Did you choose the name Ophir for a specific reason? How did he come to choose that?

A: That's a good question. The name Ophir is a Biblical name and it is the land of gold, a land that Queen Sheba mined her gold for King Solomon. It was the finest gold found at that time. So that's the relationship to Feingold.

Q: That's wonderful. Are you still working? You said your son is in business with you. Are you still working?

A: In 1985 we have – I should say prior to that my wife was in the antique business, and being that we sold our lingerie business, she raised a question one day. She said to me Jack what would you like to do when you grow up? And it wasn't a question of finances. It was more a question of peace of mind, I would say, among us you know. And I thought about it and I said to her you know what. I will go into the antique business, the same business you are in. And to make, to make it clear, I always had an interest myself in the art and antique business so it came rather easily to get, to go into that business. And my wife at that time handled very, I would say, very small collectible items and by virtue of maybe importance I would say, not very important items but more collectible items and decorative items. And when I went into the business, I made a decision I would like to handle more important type of objects. And that took a little time to recognize where we want to be and what type of merchandise or objects we want to handle. And came a moment where we decided to handle the art nouveau period as Europe was concerned, mainly French and Austrian type of objects. And parallel American Tiffany studios or objects that were made by Tiffany in the 1900s or I would say late 1800s and early 1900s, a business that we are in until this very day.

Q: Can we now talk a little bit about your thoughts and your feelings about what you went through. How do you feel about Poland today? What are your thoughts about Poland?

A: About two, three years ago we, I finally made a decision that I would like to take a look at Poland.

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Q: You had not been back at all?

A: I had not been back to Poland since. I have been back to Germany which I will tell you in a second about. And we did go and first place of course we went to Warsaw and before we toured Warsaw, we went to Łódź, a place I was born in. And when we arrived in Łódź, of course, from stories, I knew that we come from a very, very well to do background and the homes were very serious homes, very elaborate homes. And it was natural for me to look for those homes. I couldn't find those homes and most of, I know from the stories that my mother when she was still alive, she went to look for her home and couldn't find it because the Polacks brought everything down to the ground and built some apartment buildings there. To be completely candid, we – our first visit was the cemetery in Łódź, which is a huge cemetery. Nevertheless, half of it was completely ruined by the Germans. And none of the graves could be found. We looked, we tried. Nothing was found there. And some of the older cemetery that was in place and the only place that was evident was the place where some very well to do Jews lived and were buried right before the Germans came in. And those of course, stones still stand and there are absolutely unbelievable in their construction, looks and importance meaning they look like celebrity stones. Celebrity people were buried there. This was Łódź. As far as city is concerned, it meant nothing to me.

Q: Were you still fluent in Polish?

A: I am still completely fluent in Polish.

Q: When you were there you could talk to the people.

A: I talked to the people. I talked to people. Matter of fact our guides all were fluent in Polish and they couldn't believe that I speak the type of Polish I do. But I am fluent. And from there we returned to Warsaw. Warsaw is being rebuilt completely. High rises, beautiful homes. And that was another city that had absolutely no impression on me, none whatsoever. Like all the feelings were burned out. We went to see the old, the old city of Warsaw which actually which

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was totally rebuilt. There is nothing old about the old city, with the exception of a rebuilt city. We were in the places where the ghetto was existing of course and couldn't find anything with the exception of some insignias of families that lived there. Or stayed there. To be perfectly frank I was, I liked, I always did, some traditional Polish food because that's the way I was brought up in my mother's kitchen. However, I must say with a little humor that you can get better Polish food in Greenpoint in Brooklyn than you could in Warsaw of Poland and that's the gospel truth. From Warsaw, we stayed in Warsaw for a relatively speaking short time and we left. And to be very frank about it, I have absolutely no feelings or no memories of what Poland was to me or is to me. Just with the exception, oh it was nice being there just to have a memory that I was born there. And that's about it.

And we did take a trip of course to Germany. I used to do some business in Germany. And at one point, not too long ago, I made a decision that I would like to see Bergen Belsen, a place that I really for many years didn't want to see. I had a conversation with my wife about it and we made the decision to go to Bergen Belsen.

We traveled to Berlin, stayed in Berlin for a few days. And by the way from old places much more so than Poland or Warsaw, everywhere you turned in Berlin, on the Berlin street you find Hebrew insignias and Hebrew names of families that used to live all over Berlin. They are impressed with bronze signs and it's absolutely impossible for you to visit Berlin and not know the influence that German Jews had on Berlin. That being said, we had an appointment with a driver, a young fellow that took us directly to Bergen Belsen. We asked him if he would like to join us, whatever he would like to do. Or maybe meet us you know later on. And he kind of insisted for us to take him into Bergen Belsen which we did. We explained to him who we are and who I am, that I was there during the war and he was a young man that knew very little about it or maybe just what he was taught in school or told by his father. But I would say the driver was in his early 30s or late 20s. So he couldn't know too much about it. But he knew that it, the digest. We came into Bergen Belsen and we were greeted by the one of the chief guides in Bergen Belsen of today's guides in Bergen Belsen. At first it was turned into a museum and when we said hello, the lady that intercepted us or met us she thought at the beginning that we are visitors. And my wife then explained to her yes we are visitors but you have in front of you a person that spent some time here in his childhood. She was taken for a moment. And then she said, yes that her boss who couldn't meet us, he was the general manager of the, he couldn't

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meet us but he prepared for us some items and he did. He prepared for us the complete double book of all two volumes, two large volumes of books with an addendum of all the people that were in Bergen Belsen as long as Bergen Belsen existed. And at first you know she said that she would be very happy to give us a tour and she did bring us, we spent some time in the general hallway that is, it looks just like a cave. And all the personal artifacts and things of this nature are displayed which wasn't a very comforting type of a memory. But those cans that I told you about that the Germans used to bring the soup in, a few of them were there you know, on display. And you know when we went through all the displays we wanted to go into Bergen Belsen, into the camp, which we did.

Q: When you saw the cans, did it bring anything back?

A: And the first place. No, no barracks, no buildings. Everything was taken off and where the crematorium was, where there were exterminating people, that was completely gone. And the only thing that you could find were outlines of the barracks and where the barracks were located. And when, as we went into the camp, I requested to be in barracks number ten and I was led to it, immediately as we entered the camp. And believe it or not, I sat in person right on the grounds of the barrack that I lived in while we were in Bergen Belsen. My wife was at first with me. And there was very little that I would say. I for a moment you know I just wanted to be left alone. You know just a, just look around you know. And it was a little bit difficult, it really was. Many, many, many years passed by but all of a sudden some memories came by you know and I was right there. I was right there. We spent a few hours in Bergen Belsen. There's a big stone right in front of the camp with the name of the camp. Here is, at first I took a picture in front of it and it's on my Facebook and we came back to Berlin and in the taxi the guy was kind of telling us and thanking us that we allowed him to come with us. That he knew about it, he knew about what had happened but he never really had a chance to see it in his own eyes. Then we came back to Berlin. We had a pretty good time in Berlin. Berlin is a nice city and we stayed another day or so and came back to the US. Came back home.

Q: Is the US your home?

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A: That is our home.

Q: Poland is not your home.

A: Absolutely -- our home -- actually, actually it is I happen to be by now more American than anything else. I am in this country for over 50 years. Israel is a home too. But in a different way to therefore. My children were brought up here. They have their own family here. In Israel it is different. We still have some family in Israel. Many of my wife's family but it's different.

Q: When you are speaking of your children, when your children were the young age that you were when life changed, you know a little boy five years old, six years old, when your children were that age, did that trigger memories of what you had to go through when you were their age?

A: Absolutely not. When my kids were small, first I had the memories of where I was and what I did, but it was already so far away that I started my own family in the United States on totally different grounds. The only one that kind of reminded me of it at the very beginning was my mother when she came to visit us and she kind of memorize. She said you know this what triggered, at first she was happy and, and very, very much attached to them you know. She could have, from time to time said do you remember, I remember when you were that age. You know. But I did not relate stories any more. I mean to be very frank about it, I think that my wife had related to it not as an experience over there but as a happening that she wanted the children to know and understand what their father went through. So she was the factor of me really translating or telling my children --

Q: She was the one to tell them your story.

A: Yes, not my mother. My wife is the one that really forced the issue. Because for a long time I didn't want to get there. I didn't want to repeat it for, for many reasons. And some of them are personal reasons of my own of difficult sharing those experiences on one hand. On the other hand I really thought or think that they don't have the full understanding what going through this type of experience means. To them it means a horror, something that was terrible. But not

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necessarily the bodily experience. And that gave me always a little difficult time to relate with it to them. Until my wife had convinced me that they really should know some more about it. And at that point, I tried to give them a little bit more knowledge of those stories.

Q: You mentioned that when you, still in today's world, go past something that's burning that it brings back the memory of the burning.

A: It certainly does.

Q: Are there any other sounds or smells or sights that trigger a similar response in today's world? Or just the burning?

A: Absolutely not, absolutely. Matter of fact the view of hundreds and thousands of corpse, of dead people did exactly the opposite in my own self, meaning when I see a body, it's meaningless to me and I don't say it in a positive way. It's in a painful way but it is a fact of life. So sometimes somebody may fall down and break a leg or hurt them self. It means very little to me and again not because I don't feel sorry for the person. But it's because I had seen so much, those things become relative. And when I take a second look I say to myself so what. You understand and this is a, it's a very difficult things for many people to understand. But it kind of brings out a certain nerve in your own body. It just, it's a dead, it's not existing.

Q: You had to protect yourself as a young child to what you saw.

A: Absolutely. It was probably a protection mechanism when I was a child. But now as I am a grown up man, it doesn't exist you know. And at times, I almost have to make it up, as it exists. Gee I'm sorry. But it doesn't exist and it's not an easy thing to admit. It's not an easy thing to live with all the time. That is a fact.

Q: Are you more comfortable being with people of similar backgrounds than native Americans let's say. More in common with --.

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A: Absolutely, absolutely not. I feel comfortable with people that had my background or have my background but it doesn't mean anything to me. Many times when other people discuss my background meaning not necessarily my background but the history of that background, I sit and I listen. And sometimes I laugh in my heart because I know that they really don't know what is it like. But it doesn't give me any hard time or any indifference being with. I listen and I listen very thoughtfully and very openly. With no anxiety of my own whatsoever.

Q: You obviously lost a part of your childhood going through what you had to go through. Do you feel you got it back?

A: I lost all my childhood. Not part of my childhood. All of it.

Q: Did you get any of it back or not?

A: No, not really. Maybe some of it I'm getting back now. When I look at when I look at my grandchildren you know. Or sometimes my wife.

Q: Do you feel like you're two different people, someone to the outside world and some different inside? Are you one and the same?

A: People that went through the experiences that I have in many respects are different people. The common denominator is that we are people. And we try to care for one another. That's the common denominator. Since the experience, the young or the early experience is so vast sometimes we are very different.

Q: You were a young adult in the beginning of the civil rights movement here in the United States and since you and your family were deprived of your civil rights did it strike a chord or were you involved in any way in the civil rights movement?

A: Not really. No.

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Q: You were still getting adjusted to life here.

A: Not really. I did not relate to it at all. I just related to it from a point of view of people being dealt with not as even, not as the same type of people, but I -- no relationship whatsoever to my background.

Q: Was, going back to your youth, was there an advantage do you think to being so young during the war? Was it or would it have been if you had been older

A: I would, I would suspect that being as young as I was, many of the circumstances or many, many of the situations that I went through I took as granted that that's the way it is.

Q: That's what life is.

A: That's what life is, naturally. I just started to maybe think about the different thing, immediately after the war when I have been associated with some other children my age. And this probably was why I was so aggressive and difficult because as a child this was my existence. This was what I had seen as a young child.

Q: The violence that you saw.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Do you remember if you had any specific thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Did that mean anything to you at that time?

A: Would you repeat that?

Q: The Eichmann trial, Adolf Eichmann trial, did you have any thoughts during that time?

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A: Well the Eichmann trial. The thoughts that I had were very simply that what he received, this is what he deserved. That's all I can say about it. Sure, I had followed through all the time and there were some memories of course involved you know from the Eichmann trial, but the relationship to it as what had happened, some of it disappeared. Stayed in my memory but some of it disappeared.

Q: Did the experience make you more religious, less religious, have any effect on your thoughts about religion, once you became an adult obviously.

A: My experiences did not make me any more or less religious. I was always, I must say that my father tried to send me to a religious school when he came to Israel. And I did attend a religious school and I had a pretty good background of religion in my young age. Nevertheless the question that you're asking if my experience had changed my mind about religion. No, it did not. Nor did it enhance it by no means of the imagination. I understand why I am a Jew but the religious part of it is something totally different to me.

Q: More a sense of people-hood. Is that what you're saying? More of a sense of people hood type of.

A: It's more of a sense of people hood yes, absolutely. I am not fanatically religious. I never was, I never will be. I just know what it means to be a Jew and I am proud of that. But to translate fanaticism of Judaism a strict Judaic laws, I can't do it because I have to do too much comparison to what I went through and there were just too many question marks.

Q: Are you angry that you had to go through the terrible, terrible times that you did because you were born in Europe as opposed to being born here and those of us not having to go through that.

A: I'm not angry at all. Because I didn't know any different. The anger actually came when I started to understand what my parents went through. This is when the anger came in. But I am not angry about my upbringing because I didn't know any better.

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Q: But you had to go through terrible times when those of us were here playing.

A: When I went through those terrible times I did not know that they were terrible times so there was a very fine line as studying and being more educated and starting understanding what my parents went through and how they had to raise me through all what had happened. That's what brought anger to my heart. But not the physical upbringing up to the age of maybe six, seven of my own because I thought that that's the way it is at that stage of the game. There's a very fine line that today of course, being a little bit older and a little bit more understanding of how people act or react then I can put it into a larger consense of how I feel about it.

Q: Can the Holocaust happen again?

A: It may. It may. We wish from day to day to educate the population and to educate all human beings that it should not happen again. But to have guarantees, we do not. And I don't think we can have those guarantees, but we should do anything and everything possible through education and through showing other people what was it all about so they don't think about it, that it can happened again.

Q: Before we close is there anything, any message you want to give to your grandchildren, any special words you wanted to say?

A: I'd like to say to my grandchildren and my children, that it will be very wise to study that era in their parents and grandparents life, relate to it from the point of view what humans should not do rather than do. And to understand that not all people are the type of people, the Nazi generation used to be. And I want them to appreciate the fact that their grandmother requested or influenced me to have that interview in the Holocaust Museum.

Q: Thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: Gail, it was my pleasure.

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Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial museum interview with Jack Ophir.

(end)