

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Claude Kacser**  
**May 24, 2016**  
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## PREFACE

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## **CLAUDE KACSER**

### **May 24, 2016**

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Claude Kacser. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on May 24, 2016 and is taking place in Rockville, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Claude Kacser: Claude Kacser.

Q: And the name that you were born with?

A: Klaus Kacser.

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

A: Let me interrupt though. Klaus was considered to be a Scandinavian name when I was born, and a charming one. But at some point my mother realized it was too Germanic and she changed it.

Q: Do you know how old you were at the time?

A: About 13.

Q: 13 years old.

A: Yes.

Q: We'll get to that. Where were you born?

A: I was born in Paris, France.

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Q: And when were you born?

A: 1934.

Q: What day and what month?

A: April 13<sup>th</sup>.

Q: 1934. Let's talk a little bit about your family. Your parents. What were their names?

A: My mother was Katie. My father was Felix.

Q: Had they lived in Paris for a long time before you were born? (interruption – technical issue) I was asking you about your parents and their background, how long they had been in Paris?

A: My parents were very, they moved around a lot.

Q: Peripatetic.

A: And I've always wondered about this. But I was foolish enough not to ask questions when they were alive. My mother was born in Berlin of a German father and an English mother. But at about age 11, I'm not sure of the age, her family moved to Switzerland where she was raised and when you talked to her about it, she talked about her Swiss upbringing. She doesn't, she didn't either remember anything about Berlin or chose not to talk about it but I never said hey mommy you know what about Berlin.

Q: Was her family Jewish?

A: Oh yes. We are all Jewish. I tend to forget that. And my father well, it's important that my mother therefore had German nationality.

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Q: What was her maiden name?

A: Katie **Heilbert**.

Q: Heilberg?

A: Heilbert. And my father was born in Vienna of Austrian parents and he became an electrical engineer and he went to Berlin for his first job where he did have a family relative which was important to him. Then he moved to Paris. Why? I don't know. And there he met my mother. In fact it was a set up and I don't know if each of them knew it was set up. It probably, hey I'd like you to meet ok. In those days. And that's, the rest was history. But they'd only been in Paris, each of them, maybe for six months or a year. And I was born in Paris.

Q: What kind of work did he do?

A: He was an electrical engineer and in those days, she was just a lady. That's not fair. Previously she'd been what I'd call a social worker in a hospital in Yugoslavia. So she got around. She'd been, as a social worker is not quite right a nurse, not quite right but sort of somewhere between.

Q: What year did they get married?

A: They got married in 1933.

Q: And you were born in 34?

A: Correct.

Q: What are some of your early memories there?

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A: Ok but we have to fill in some more blanks. In 1935, they upped and went back to Vienna. Ok, where my father's family was and I think part of the reason was to be supportive of his father et cetera. People move back. But then they left Vienna in 1936. I was now two years old to go to England. As I said, borders meant nothing to them. And they bopped around from place to place. And maybe in these days we understand that but in those days there were distances. There weren't airplanes. There were national borders. None of that seemed to influence them. And for differently as well, they seem to have had no sense of their own nationality. So we moved to London in 1936. And the next question is why did we move this time? Well as I said my mother had medium family in London through her mother. And they may or may not - and this is one of those questions - were they aware that Hitler was starting and that Hitler might soon get to Austria. I don't know. And I'll never know and of course the answer may be a bit of each. And so then we get to London in 1936 and I stay there til 1940. Now I know you're going to ask some more there. But one remark is they met in France. They had spoken French when they met. They had spoken French when they courted. So the household was French and the household couldn't care less where it was geographically. The household was French. So in London I naturally went to a French nursery school. And presumably even in London French was a primary language though my parents again, each of them spoke, speak a zillion languages.

Q: They both could speak English?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have any siblings?

A: No.

Q: You were an only child then? What memories. I know you were very young. What memories do you have of that time or do you have any memories of that time?

A: That is something that is remarkable but understandable. I have no memory before the age of eight which is very old. And you know we'll get into my story and we'll get into trauma and all

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that sort of stuff. And it's been suggested I be hypnotized and find it all out and I sort of say I don't want to find it all out.

Q: This is what you heard from your parents?

A: That, yes.

Q: You stayed there in London from 1936 to 1940.

A: Yep.

Q: But no memories of that time, your own memories? And then what happened in 1940?

A: Well the war in Europe, the war in England started September first 1939. And Poland was wiped out in three weeks, absolutely incredible. And then nothing happened for a while. There were a few odd things. So the English went about their business. And then suddenly on May tenth 1940 Hitler did another one of these incredible things. You know three weeks. I think it was less than three weeks through Holland, Belgium, the Netherlands and into France. And the English said oops. Something's going on. We better watch out. And during the summer we – I have to backtrack. Churchill comes in on May tenth 1940. Within six weeks, Churchill has started interning friendly enemy aliens. If you put those three words together, it makes sense of them, that's remark -- ok. And so my father was interned on the Isle of Man which is a convenient island off the northwest coast so no one you know it's an island. You can't swim across it. And it also had many holiday residences. It had facilities for holidays, except no one was going for the holidays there so therefore here were all these empty whatever. Sort of a little bit like, I imagine old fashioned strip motels that have been and fancy upright hotels. And I hate to say this, but my father was a neurotic little **Yenny**, the type who might even have gone to Mr. Freud but Mr. Freud would have said ah, you don't have any problem. But in any case, he certainly did not like being interned. And I don't know whether the barbed wire was or soldiers with guns, how much freedom. Not –

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Q: Do you have any memory of his leaving?

A: No.

Q: No memory of his leaving.

A: Even though that would be traumatic. My uncle was interned also but my uncle was a positive easy going guy and ok so I'm interned.

Q: At that point, who were your extended family? On both sides.

A: Ok. We haven't gone into the grandparents.

Q: You can if you want.

A: But as I say, my mother had three aunts living in London. And one uncle. And her parents, no the prior generation to her, her grandparents were dead and she had a relationship with them but not huge because she hadn't seen them very often. My father had his parents. I called them the grandparents. I knew them. And there's an interesting story there. Here was this happy family in Vienna. My grandfather being fairly prosperous having a business, having a nice household, having a cook, housekeeper. And there was my father, his brother the easy going type and –

Q: His name, your uncle's name?

A: **Freidl**. And **Dita** the sister. And Dita at that time had married a Catholic, **Pebe** and I have no idea how they -- oh, yes I do. Everyone was totally assimilated except one and too, they didn't bother about religion, whichever religion it might be. Ok. But of course they knew they were Jewish. Ok. Hitler is bubbling along from 1933 on. In 1938 in March 38, he annexes most of Czechoslovakia. The English sort of noticed but hoped that all would be for the best and Neville Chamberlain comes back and saying peace in our time. Very foolish man. And we got rid of him



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in May 1940 when he was proven wrong. Then came Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938. People really noticed. And my father was in London. He'd been there for years.

Q: He was working?

A: Yes, but still with Austrian nationality and my uncle happened fortunately because of business to be in England on the night of Kristallnacht and so he knocked on the police station door the next day and says hey I want what's the word. I want asylum. So he's clever. Meanwhile, back in Vienna, there's my father's sister Dita and my father's parents, Leopold and Dora. Five others. My -- ok so my father is interned in June 1940, more or less. I haven't heard much about that internment either. It's really incredible how kids either don't listen or don't ask. And it could be that they don't listen. There are so many questions I wish I could have asked. Ok so my father is interned. My mother is therefore a single mother at a time when mothers aren't single mothers. And Hitler's --

Q: Were your parents very young at the time. Do you know? How old were they or do you know when they were born?

A: My mother was born in 1908 which makes her about 26. And my father was born in 1897 which makes him about 33, 34. My father's interned.

Q: You're with your mother

A: And I'm with my mother. And he's interned during the Blitzkrieg. Now backtracking. Yeah, very badly black, back, forward. So Kristallnacht is November 9-10, 1938 and people really notice and my mother notices very strongly and says to the grandparents and to Dita, you've got to get out of there. And Dita says well you know I'm married to a Catholic so no problem with me. And I don't know what the grandparents say but I'm sure they say well you know we've got a settled life. I'm a fairly prosperous businessman. I'm of a certain age. Grandpa was born in 1865 ok. To some extent he'd even retired from business. Uncle Freidl was the real man on the scene. So of course they said this is all nonsense and we'll stay. I should point out that

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Kristallnacht, my uncle fortunately was out of town. Secondly my -- Leopold and Dora lived in a part of town which was not the Jewish part of town. So as far as I know, but again no one told me, they weren't raided on Kristallnacht. I think I would have been told if they had. Yeah, cause my mother says you've got to get out of here and they probably said no. And my mother keeps insisting. And my mother worked very hard to get appropriate papers, visas and all that stuff. And they get out, the grandparents, in May 1939.

Q: To London?

A: To London. And now they are poor and Gretel supports them. And conceivably my parents support them. My parents were fairly well off and could support them. And I have always pitied Leopold and Dora, being uprooted from a kind of prosperous life to this rather humble life. Except the thing that they were lucky to have this happen and there were thousands of other refugees, some of them in worse straits because these two refugees had my mother and their --

Q: You don't have any memories of seeing them cause --

A: Not at this point. Because ok, getting back to me. Ok. So my mother notices Kristallnacht and she notices September first 1939, which is when the war really starts. And as I say Poland is invaded and then nothing happened and then comes May tenth, 1940 and Blitzkrieg, and at this point she really kind of noticed. My father's already interned and Hitler starts setting up his invasion fleet on the east coast of the Channel. And the Battle of Britain starts going on and in fact one is told if the Battle of Britain had been lost Hitler would have been, would have certainly -- and certainly Churchill made his speech. We will fight on the beaches because he knew damn well that we might have to fight on the beaches. Ok. You don't make such a --. So my mother says and again I don't know how much confrontation there was between my mother and my father. I'm sure they were allowed to write one letter a week or whatever. My mother says we've got to save our darling little boy. And I was darling of course. And up there in fact, yes I was darling. So she writes to a cousin, a first cousin in New York City whom I always called Uncle Martin so we have to get used to that name. And says, and again I don't know the details. Dear Marvin, dear cousin Martin. We haven't met for 20 years or so. But then we may

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have vaguely sent a letter or so but I'd like to ask you a great favor. Would you take my darling son? And look after him and also of course, write affidavits to the American government. And look after him until the war ends. Of course we don't know when that might be and right away in parentheses of Hitler's doing damn well at this moment. And Uncle Martin, I think that's what I called him, my mother's cousin, writes back to her. But then this is – I don't know the full details.

Q: Martin's last name?

A: Heilbert. Dear Katie, I happen to be a 51 year old confirmed bachelor. I live in a residential hotel on Central Park West itself in Manhattan. And you know I don't even have a dog. I'm making this up but yes, I will look after your darling son for however long it takes. And I will pay the bills and I'll take him to pediatricians. I think I know you take these kids to pediatricians but I'm not sure. But I'll ask my sister in law who knows these things. And I don't know if my mother was eternally grateful, exceedingly grateful now. I only realized I had to be incredibly grateful to Uncle Martin. When I was in the 40s or 50s, I went to a particular play. I don't remember its name. Can we stop for a moment? (pause)

Uncle Martin. Looking back and even when you, when I tell the story to people, they are astonished. He did a huge mitzvah. He did a wonderful thing for my mother Katie. He didn't know what he was getting into or for how long and he was a confirmed bachelor and didn't know much about children. And he said yes. And I only myself realized this when I was at a play when they said, would you please think of someone whom you are eternally grateful too and write the name down in this basket. So I stopped to think who am I eternally grateful and I got his name. And so often in these stories, would I have done the same? And I'd like to think that there I would even if I were a 51 year old confirmed bachelor.

Q: Any memories of leaving or how your mother presented it to you? Anything?

A: That's absolutely crucial and that's why I only have memories starting at age eight. Clearly my mother had to say as she put me on the ship in the hands of two strangers for whom she had advertised in the London Times, in the personals. Wanted, caring loving family who have papers

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in order to go to America who will escort my adorable little six and a half year old to America, a certain remuneration. And then you find two people and maybe you try to get references, whatever that would mean and then you put your adorable son in their hands. Ok so at the pier, or wherever, my mother says something to me and said here are these nice strangers who are going to look after you and you're going on a great boat trip to America and at the other end you'll meet a stranger called Uncle Martin and he'll look after you. And now comes the crucial thing that I don't know. By the way the previous stuff I made up. Does she say I'll see you soon? Does she say I don't know when I'll see you? Does she carefully not say anything except that then I'll say when do I see you? What does she say? I wish I could remember, but again if I put myself in her shoes, I've clearly done a lot of putting myself in people's shoes, I wouldn't know what to say. And what's very interesting and very terrifying is I used to say she sent me away to Uncle Martin. That was the phrase I'd tell at cocktail parties or whatever. At our Holocaust survivors function not very long ago, I was asked to make a drawing. It didn't matter what skill I had in drawing, of something related to my experience in the Holocaust. And some of the other peoples' stories were terrifying and mine was terrifying. And I'll explain. I use that word slightly different than some people would use it. There is my mother. There am I, much smaller than you would expect proportionately. And I'm desperately grabbing her leg and she is actually pushing me away with her hands in a pushing position. I have feeling she's pushing me away. She's not just sending me away, she's shoving, pushing. And both of us have tears in our eyes. That's what art therapy and so on does. I didn't know I remember ok. So I have this is an aside. I have a drawing my daughter did in art therapy, you know a psychiatrist said before. When I and her mother got divorced. And it also is very important. And I remember that. So you know when you're invited, all sorts of horrible things come up. The idea that I thought my mother was shoving me away except she had tears in her eyes at the same time. I have read books about other kids who were sent away and they were screaming and they remember screaming and they remember horrible things. Now I'm talking about Kindertransports, set up in 1938 at the Vienna train station. Of course there you have 300 parents and 300 kids, so one kid cries and, so it becomes again horrible. I don't remember that.

Q: So no memories, any memories of the voyage?

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A: No. And this is, I keep saying and you can't believe it. I have no memories before the age of eight. No, no, no. I'm just –

Q: I'm just confirming. What was the name of the boat that you came on? Do you know that?

A: Yeah, the **Samaria**, S-A-M-A-R-I-A and we landed in New York City on October third, 1940. That's the date on my green card. The moment I arrived, but the various amazing things that I arrived on effectively as far as I can tell an immigrant visa but I'm not sure. But my nationality was stateless. But I'm given a green card which enables me of course to work except the labor laws say I'm a bit too young.

Q: You're all of six years old?

A: Six and a half. But I don't remember that. Now there is a famous story that has been handed down to me and again it's psychologically very understandable of my arrival on the pier. In October, in New York City.

Q: What line was the boat?

A: Cunard, I think. And the story says that my tricycle was shipped with me. This was the good old days, passenger liners big holds and stuff, though it was war time. And that the tricycle was taken off and there was the tricycle and me on the pier and I just rode round and round and round because this was my familiar bicycle and I was hanging onto it. It was like Peanuts and his blanket. It was my red bicycle. Now the whole story is horrible. But guess what. I was saved and you never know if England might have been devoured et cetera. My mother did a wonderful thing, except a very painful thing for what it was. And she saved me. Similarly for the Kindertransport apparently. It's the same story but slightly different. The other thing I was told is that I was wearing a good English boy powder blue double breasted coat. Good English. I mean we were upper middle class or whatever, lower, upper class ok. So we knew what's what and we wore, I mean I was dressed properly in my powder blue double breasted coat, which is the same

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coat as John-John Kennedy wore at the funeral, except he was two and a half. Do you recognize the coat? So my mother did everything right.

Q: So your first memory with your uncle is what?

A: So my uncle clearly can't put me in his apartment on Central Park West. He had to put me in a small boarding school in Forest Hills, Long Island which is close to New York City. It's really a suburb. No memories of that though one story.

Q: You could speak English?

A: By that time yes. That's also confusing. You were right because I had been speaking French. It's not quite clear how the transition happened. Did my quotation mark uncle speak French? I don't know. In any case, he is forced to put me in a small boarding school. Presumably there I speak English. I wish I now knew the story of the other waifs at that school. I'm imagining sort of 30 kids ages five to eight or nine. I know nothing.

Q: Did the school have a name?

A: (pause) Sometimes I might remember it. And it's probable you know we spoke to each other and told each other our stories but they didn't mean much and I've forgotten them. Then in 1940, this was 1940. In 1942, two years later, my uncle decided it was necessary to move me away from Forest Hills because the Germans might bomb Forest Hills. There had been submarines. I don't think German airplanes got that far. But there was a blend of realism and panic in those days. So he moved me to another school a hundred miles up the Hudson to Rhinebeck, which is near Rhine Cliff which is near I can't remember. And sort of, it's above Poughkeepsie. So it's very country but I have to say that Rhinebeck has an old inn where George Washington stayed. So it's an important little whatever. One important true memory from the first school which has to be a true memory because no one would have told it to me. And it is when my uncle's mother, Aunt Golda I called her but great aunt. And not exactly aunt, but whatever, came to visit me at the first school. And held my hand and we walked happily down an alley or whatever. And

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this was in the fall and I scuffed the leaves up and down and had fun there and she was there sort of encouraging me. And no doubt she said when we finished our walk I'll get you an ice cream or something. I don't remember about the ice cream. What I remember is the hand and the happiness of scuffling in the leaves. A positive moment, a loving moment, someone paid attention to me as me as a seven year.

Q: Now you're in your second school?

A: So now I'm in my second school, age eight and a half and I remember the first day when I arrived and here is yet another transition that makes no sense to me. So I cry in my tomato soup when we arrive and I'm all by myself in the dining room because actually we arrive after the their kids have already had lunch or whatever. And I cried in my tomato soup. But then I adapt. It's clear that I've been adapting like hell all the way along. And the second school was you know, seems ok. I can remember details about it. The room where we slept. There were five boys and five sort of built in beds. And we each had a little closet. And again we were 30 waifs.

Q: Do you know if the others were refugees?

A: No, I mean this is the thing. We spoke to each other but I don't – I didn't take in or I don't remember. For instance, it could be a kid whose father was in the air force, the American air force and his mother who knows or maybe ok. I mean I don't think they were all refugees. In fact I don't even think the majority were refugees. I think they were random stories of war time.

Q: So you went to school –

A: Oh it was a boarding school. They taught us and I think badly ok because they didn't have enough teachers, instructors. They didn't exactly have grades. I remember learning about the Greek gods and goddesses which was kind of fun and clearly I learned about Valley Forge. I don't remember anything else.

Q: You were in touch with your mother at that time?

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A: Oh yeah.

Q: By letters?

A: By letters and that's also very interesting. And my mother could send me books. And this was some sort of regulation. Now by the way this is very interesting but not having to do. The ships went to Europe carrying all sorts of good stuff needed by the troops for people in Europe. And then the ships went back with nothing on them so of course you could put books or whatever. So my mother sent me books and I still have some of them. And presumably I read most of them.

Q: In English?

A: Oh yeah. By this time I'm fully English. Probably already forgotten my French. Kids forget very fast. So I get these books and I imagine it was Sunday. We all sit down and write to your parents' hour ok so we all sit diligently and I can sort of imagine. I don't remember this but dear mother and father, how are you. I am fine. The weather is hot. I played football yesterday. We killed the calf the day before yesterday. That was very exciting. Because this second school was on a farm. It wasn't a farm, farm but it was in the country with cows and chickens and some stuff like that. And we had chores and I would occasionally get the eggs out from the chickens and I would occasionally dig holes for the garbage and so on and so forth. And there were a couple of cows and a couple of horses, one of which I fell off once. But it was ok. And yes, the cows had calves and at some point the calves went off to market. And this was indeed when there was unnecessary rationing in America and meatless Tuesdays. You're too young to know about those. And my mother took the letter about the calf being killed to her friendly psychiatrist and said what does this mean? And I think he made more of it than I think was appropriate. And I think I mean I was just describing a happening. This was this week's happening but she thought it meant that I was sad and you know there was that stuff. I don't have any of those letters. And once again I don't remember them. I don't remember them and again I'm sort of making them up.



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Q: You stayed in that school until –

A: Until 1945. The war in Europe is over in May 1945.

Q: Do you remember being aware of that there was a war?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You knew there was a war going on far away?

A: Yes. And I knew to a large extent the war against the Japanese. The Japs, the ugly Japs with those caricatures and we were trained to hate them. And we had maps on the walls and you put pins where each battle was. And the pins were more appropriate I suppose for Europe. And we listened to the nightly news and ok. Oh yes, I mean the war was around. We were not isolated from the war.

Q: When it was over, how did you hear about that and how did you – do you have any memories?

A: OK I don't remember V Day but probably people were saying hey there's you know we're getting there.

Q: You don't remember any celebration or anything like that.

A: No. and I leave before V-J Day, though I don't have records of when I left. I have my green card when I came. That tells me all about my arrival. And I could go down to the archives but I've never been interested.

Q: What was the name of the second school? Do you remember that?

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A: Yeah, Crow Hill school. Crow, C-R-O-W Hill school and the principal or the owner or whatever was Mrs. Crowley but I think the crows, the bird, not her.

Q: The war is now over?

A: The war is now over and I go back to England. Again I don't know how my uncle finds someone to escort me back to England. Oh no, during the time I'm in the schools, my uncle is very diligent. And he visits me and takes photographs of me that he sends to my mother. And he takes me to the pediatrician and he takes me to the podiatrist because I have flat feet and I remember being, my feet being strapped in all sorts of devices that did no good. But no I meant. And I also remember being shown off once which I think is fair enough. He took me to his place of work and said look at this wonderful child and aren't I wonderful?

Q: What kind of work did he do?

A: Well, I you know, understand. I can it's fair enough for him to say to his friends, colleagues. Look this is what I am doing and going back he was doing a remarkable thing. He was a diamond merchant. So his colleagues were diamond merchants. And he may once or twice have shown me one diamond and told me it was very valuable.

Q: So he found people to escort you back?

A: And so I was escorted back.

Q: Who were they? You don't know.

A: Again, you just find people right. I never heard about his advertisement in the New York Times.

Q: Do you remember any celebrations the war was over? Anything?

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A: No. It's interesting because you've asked that twice. Clearly we must have gotten excited. The grownups there must have gotten excited and told us who knows. We might have had a birthday cake or something. So I go back to England in about let's say July 45. And now this gets very stupidly personal. I told you that my father was interned which I didn't ever tell you that he was released about three months later. Ok and then got into war work and since he was an electrical engineer, he helped design or whatever for little electric motors which might have been the type you put in sewing machines or it might have been the type you put in torpedoes. But he never explained much. But his war work was in the country. And my mother went out to be with him initially. And she worked in the cafeteria and then she said to herself and to him. I don't like being in the country. I don't like being, working in the cafeteria. I'm going to go to London by myself. Some of this ok. I have no idea what he said. But she went off and she had her little excitements. She was an air raid warden. She would go onto the rooftops of buildings and say hey that next roof is burning so this was mildly heroic or courageous. She was looking after the grandparents now. She in fact lived in their small flat during this time. They had come over in 1939 and they had been set up in a small flat in an apartment so my mother stayed there and gone up to their roof and I've seen the place. And since this was war time and since she was cultured and intellectual she got to work at the BBC in the radio station. And she met all sorts of wonderful people and she also later on worked in the very proper, very famous book store, Foyles and I can't immediately think of an American equivalent. And she talked to people who were there and I have the fantasy and I think she may have included it. That they probably all had affairs all the time because bombs were dropping and today may be the last day and so on and so forth. In any case, this of course I learned afterwards. I arrived back and been on the ship, who knows what that was like. Then there was complications about getting off at the port Southampton and getting to London and the expectation that they'd be in Southampton but they weren't so you get to London again with this escort. It's all kind of confusing emotionally. And then get picked up in London at Victoria Station. Go off in a taxi to the Dorchester hotel which is a fancy hotel and like the Mayflower here. I mean we were of a certain richness. We were of a certain class.

Q: Where did you see your parents for the first time?

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A: No, I mean she is at Victoria Station. She isn't at Southampton pier but she is at Victoria station. She kisses me, hugs me.

Q: Did you recognize her?

A: That's a very fine question. They sent me large portrait photographs. Proper eight by tens, taken by a high professional. My father's very intellectual posed. My mother is just a lady but she is somehow a lady and I'm sure I studied these. Because yeah I mean the last time I saw my mother was five years ago. But of course she knows me partly from the photographs that my uncle has sent. So she immediately grabs me and I sort of grab her and say hello mommy. You are very good at sort of empathizing and getting the story. Do I remember that moment? No. But I remember what happened next which is outrageous cause my mother sometimes doesn't have sense. So we drive off in a taxi to the Dorchester, to the Mayflower hotel. We sit down for tea.

Q: Was your father with you?

A: No. And I'm presumably told my father is in the country. And we have tea and then a strange man comes up and my mother says this is going to be your new father. This is within four hours of meeting my mother. I'm not sure where this fits in with the Holocaust, except it fits in because it's –

Q: It's your story.

A: It's all these crazy things that happened because of it. Now in a way I can't forgive my mother for that. She should have let me get settled in. I hardly knew her. She should have then said you know sadly your father and I are divorced. And then a week later she said oh and by the way here's – which would have taken two weeks. That meeting in the Dorchester hotel after four hours this is your new father. Now in a way it was partially necessary because my new father hung around while we were getting settled quotation marks in London. Because my old father you know was off in the country and sent us eggs and tomatoes because they didn't have eggs or

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tomatoes in the – all of this is sort of crazy. Well that's the end of the war time story. I know you want to get on.

Q: You and your mother and had she been married, second, married again by the time –

A: Oh there was no marriage, no.

Q: You move in with your mother and you go to school and just generally what –

A: Yeah, I know all of this is again unfortunate. My mother had progressive ideas about education and other things. You know, you've got a certain sense of my mother by now and in any case I know about Valley Forge and George Washington. But I don't know about William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hastings. So even though I'm reasonably intelligent my knowledge base is kind of low even. And now my knowledge base for England is very low. So there's a transition even though the language is the same. So my mother puts me in a progressive school and I don't think they have these any more. It's a little bit like Hampshire College. Do you know about Hampshire College, where you do your own thing.

Q: You were living at home?

A: Oh yeah but ok but a progressive school following the lines of virtue and **Rafthorn** [ph] you do your own thing. If you want to learn something, you do, you don't. Ok. And clearly I don't believe in this at all. Now in actual fact I don't believe in a thing. I don't seem to be getting enough of an education. I feel the teachers aren't doing their job. So I say now I'm 11 and a half, I say at age 12 or 12 and a half. You know mommy I don't like this school. It's not enough like a school. I'm not learning anything. Can we go to a normal school? And mommy by the way is a very loving mommy and says whatever you want my darling. I don't understand you. Not quite because she had her wishes. By the way she is mommy in England but I mean the moniker. Ok to get to a normal school I have to now catch up. And interestingly enough I now have to catch up more because the progressive school has retarded me. By the way I'm very intelligent ok. And I don't know how emotionally ragged I am but clearly I had to, we will get to that later.

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Q: Do you remember when you came back to London, do you see the destruction from the war? Did you see any of that?

A: Yes. We didn't travel around much I think but what you would see you'd see some build – London in the center is what you would call townhouses, but we certainly wouldn't. So there'd be one house next to another. You'd see a whole wall an outside wall of one house and you'd see the lines of the staircases and then next place where there should have been a house, there was a three foot wall and there was water behind and there was a sign and I can't remember what the sign was, cause this was very sad. And the next house had been bombed out. Of course it hadn't been bombed out nice and cleanly. It had been bombed out and then it had been cleared out and there it was. And I remember the different wallpapers on the stairs. And the stairs

Q: Did you feel particularly Jewish at that time?

A: Good question. No. I've told you we were assimilated.

Q: Yeah.

A: This is an interesting aside but you, maybe this is why it takes three hours. Well my wife has led me back into Judaism. She is strongly Jewish. So I belong to a synagogue now, her synagogue and they celebrate when the elder becomes 83. Do you know this sort of thing?

Q: 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your bar mitzvah.

A: Yeah. I didn't have a bar mitzvah and they're going to ask, will you talk a little bit about your Judaism and your wisdom and all that. And the first words, the first sentence I'm going to say is, I am Jewish because Hitler knew I was Jewish. Being Jewish and because Hitler was chasing me determined 90 percent of my life. I'll clarify that a little bit. There was because, maybe it's time for my question except you were asking me something. You asked me whether I was, but you asked something before. Ok we have to come back to the schooling. But my parents were totally

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assimilated and so that's the simple answer. But I now want to come if I may to the reason I asked for this interview. You have listened to the story and you have seen the similarity to the Kindertransport. The Kindertransport was a program that the British government encouraged. They waived visa requirements whatever. Sure they said that someone must be there to support you. They've got to find a 50 pound affidavit, but the good Jewish community did that and the good Jewish community found placements and families and stuff. So it was a good positive act of the British government. Alas, the American government did everything possible to keep out all these Jews. And I'm sure the Holocaust Museum knows quite a lot about that so I won't get into it too much. But the State Department and infinite visas and oops, your papers came apart after three months if you hadn't gotten the whole package together and so on and so forth. And there was even a bill presented in Congress. I think it's Smith Wagner but it may not be. I don't remember the name where these two, one congressman and one senator, I think, proposed a bill that said in light of the fact that the British are being so wonderful and doing this that and the other, might it not be appropriate for the American government to do something similar. Congress said well you know first of all we don't want to separate parents from the kids but second you know we don't want any of them in any case. Do you know about this?

Q: Well, yes of course.

A: Well so the American government did everything possible to keep us out.

Q: What I wanted to ask you was when it came out what happened to the Jews during the destruction, you were young, obviously. Did you know about that? When you heard about concentration camps and –

A: That's a very good question and I can't tell you whether we were told then 1943 or thereabouts or in 1945, or whether I just learned later.

Q: Later.

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A: My guess is it was so horrendous that it was only presented to me later. I mean but I know those photographs. I know Eisenhower and all that stuff. But no I don't know the answer.

Q: You are now, you're in London and you're going to school.

A: No, no but I want to stay on this digression. My experiences like the Kindertransport, except crossing an ocean, was the same trauma, the same on, all ways. The American government did not make it easy but my mother was very persistent going to embassies and stuff and she got the papers. I thought of myself just as a waif of the war. There were zillions of waifs with different waif stories. In the schools there were certainly waifs ok. That's war. In the year 2000 there was a letter in the Washington Post that said. It's not exactly what it said. The British government did a wonderful thing called the Kindertransport in 1939. I am wondering whether there are any adults out there who had the similar experience and therefore we can say the Americans had a Kindertransport. And I wrote to her and said do you know. That's kind of interesting and I think I fit the bill. And apparently this woman also advertised in other places. I have no idea how many she got from Washington. And her name was Iris Posner and she's a local Silver Spring master of fine arts, Jewish but with no connection with the Holocaust. She had just seen the movie Into the Arms of Strangers, about the Kindertransport, which is a very moving movie. And she wanted to know I think she wanted to hope that the Americans had done something similar and she of course, realizing that there would be trauma. So she collects, she's very diligent. She goes to the archives and collects ship manifests and she writes this letter in all sorts of big newspapers. She manages to collect in one way and another 1200 names and old addresses and whatever. This doesn't happen to know this. And she thinks this is an interesting phenomenon. She's talked to some of them. She manages at one point to find 600 still alive. Now she has already the women who changed their names and all these people who moved their addresses. It's remarkable. Unless there's 1200 from ship manifests and also, oh records of HIAS and stuff like that because HIAS helped the kids. HIAS and the Joint and 11 Jewish aid societies. They all had records because they had all helped. I had come purely privately but many of these kids had come with institutional sponsors like HIAS and the Joint. She's a remarkable woman, Iris Posner. She had no connection with the Holocaust. So she signs us. She gives us a name, the One Thousand Children and she gives us an international conference in Chicago in the year 2002.



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And she tells me that even though my story starts in England. Nonetheless it's an interesting story and the way I presented it to her is interesting. So would I please talk? And I say well you know I don't know. Because I don't identify with this group even. And she says yes. So I go and from that moment I identify with the group. I identify with the Holocaust. I consider myself a child survivor of the Holocaust and I start doing activities connected with my being a child survivor of the Holocaust. And see what she's done in the year 2002 is she has created a new category of child survivor which had never been thought about before and she put 1200 kids into this category and she said you know there may be many more but I've got no way of tracing them. And later on she got up to 1400. Her leads. She couldn't have traced me through HIAS. She only got me because I read her letter that day. And the Washington Post wasn't going to print that letter three times and I don't read the letters in the Washington Post all the time. So who knows how many of us there are out there. But we call ourselves the One Thousand Children and when I do any Holocaust stuff, I write Claude Kacser one of the One Thousand Children. And she, she's incredible. She managed to find an editor type and she and the editor type put together a book that describes the One Thousand Children and has eight to 12 individual stories and some informational stuff. And there is one journal written by a 12 year old on the ship, at the time which he managed to keep and that's in the book. Fascinating. And we have a webpage and we have a Wikipedia article and if you are in Wikipedia you exist. And it's important to me that the knowledge of the One Thousand Children be not forgotten which is why I'm doing this and why I do a lot of other things and so on and so forth. And you didn't see because my jacket fell, I have a lacquer lapel pin. And I go to the schools and I tell the schools, yeah the Holocaust is an important memory, but it's just a memory and I wouldn't be here to talk just about here. I'm here to talk about now and **Zacor** [ph] me never again and it means not the Yazidis in Syria today. And you've got to do something about it. You're only a 12 year old but tell your parents or whatever. And unfortunately I have no idea what you've got to do. I can get quite heated about that. So I've got two causes. One, the One Thousand Children exist as an important subgroup of child Holocaust survivors. And the other thing is Zacor never again. And look at those poor Yazidis. You know there are only 10,000 of them or whatever. And look at the Syrians. There are only two million of them. Never again. So I go to child survivor meetings. I work on the Wikipedia article. I worked on the web page and I'm going to give you the addresses in a moment. And we played all sorts of fun and games at the moment to get ourselves

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in the archives of YIVO which is an important New York Yiddish museum and they are going to go on because benefactors are going to give them money. We have no benefactors left. We are falling apart but if YIVO says we exist then someone doing a search will find us. And I want them to find us. And I can't explain why it's important to me in this way but it is.

Ok, so Wikipedia, you simply look up One Thousand Children with spaces and you'll find a ten, 15 page article and I don't know how to incorporate photographs in Wikipedia so there are no photographs. That might be the next thing. And you find a webpage which is One Thousand Children, all one word. [WWW.One Thousand Children.net](http://WWW.OneThousandChildren.net). It's very important that we are net, whatever that means. And you find a lot and you find the 2002 conference a lot of it. And you don't find this on your webpage but you find it on the Wikipedia page. You know we've got members. There was no memberships. We had a board. It was a tax free organization, 501C but slowly it disintegrated. The reason so many of these things disintegrate. I am sort of young, Ok. By definition you have to be between the ages of zero and 16. We have a 14 year old baby. So we disintegrated in October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. The Inc. did whatever Inc.'s do to disintegrate but the concept still exists and a few of us still maintain the concept. But I suppose one of the things and it is as a waif, you're just an incidental victim of the war, Hitler. But as a One Thousand Child you are an explicit child survivor of the Holocaust. The Holocaust becomes an important part of your existence, of your labeling of yourself. It's your self-identity. My self-identity changed at that conference. It got a new one. And that's very important to me. And related to that comes my life's theorem which I hinted at. My whole life trajectory and I know you're going to get up to that. My personality. My happenings with regard to marriages and divorces is determined or was determined 70 percent because I was a One Thousand Child. Yeah, let's skip. My external stressors, 70 percent because I was a One Thousand Child. Sadly 30 percent because my mother overcompensated afterwards to make up for the horrors she has put me through and we haven't discussed all the – 30 percent for random genetic. I don't quite know this is a force which adds up to 130 percent, but that has to do with that interaction in all ok. And this is a symbolic theorem. And then separately, cause those are the external stressors and then we have me inside and how I respond to those stressors. And this was, systems analysis. Do you know about systems analysis?

Q: Not much.

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A: But black boxes and stuff and that leaves a fairly broad band of possible trajectories that I fit somewhere in the middle. And let me back track. Both with Kindertransport and they've written several books and with One Thousand Children and several books, there are some kids who were violently angry during the war. This one kid who ran away or managed to upset three families and went to the same institution twice and just barely survived for five years. You could be angry. You could be passive. You could be withdrawn but not exactly passive. You could be as confused as hell. Depends on your age and your previous personality et cetera. I withdrew cautiously, not a full withdrawal but I was very cautious. I became – I'm now talking of while I was in America. I became a bookworm. I had friends but nonetheless they weren't a crucial part of my life. Uncle Martin who turned up, well once every week or once every month. I don't know. He was this bachelor guy, 51, now he's 54, 55 and yes, visits that he'd take me to the local restaurant and you know what we'd do. Eat in local restaurants, this inn that George Washington slept in. And they have what I loved and I remember this. They have an amusement arcade type thing, a machine gun and you fight, you fire a Japanese zero airplane. Right, because Japanese Zeros ok. Oh by the way during the war I remember making model airplanes. Not the way they do now. Just do a few pieces of paper, of plastic but grips and glue and stuff. Do you know what I mean?

Q: Yes.

A: But the war was a military – you asked about that. Was all around but I don't think in a threatening way. And I think kids may have responded kind of exciting. I don't know. The movie which I think is semi-real and shows kids in London during the bombing and the bomb damage having the times of their lives. In any case, so there's my theorem and yes, I survived. I didn't go into tears and I didn't get angry but as I say, I was cautious.

Q: Can we talk a little bit now just –

A: No, but I want to go on and I think that that has propagated throughout my whole life.

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Q: That's what I wanted to talk about. You have stayed in London from 1945 til, going to school.

A: Til about 1961.

Q: You were in London up to that point?

A: Well no.

Q: Going to school?

A: Going, by school, you mean college? I was based in London. My mother lived in London throughout but, and I went to – at some point I began to go to normal schools. It was a long difficult trajectory because of my schooling background and my mother's craziness, before I get to a normal school which I only do at age 15. But then I get to college because of my brains. And it was rather remarkable.

Q: In London?

A: No, I get to Oxford University and I get to Christchurch. But the hazards along the way because even though I get to a normal school. The normal school does not expect its kids to be up to the standards of Oxford and Cambridge. It expects us kids to get to a decent level but not have the extra things so getting into Oxford was difficult. But I get there and even there I'm a little cautious and I don't do all the wonderful things you're meant to do. And I only actually start dating in my fourth year when I'm 22. And England was that you do later than America. But now it's college and now you can start dating and stuff. But that fits in with my fear.

Q: What did you study?

A: I studied, well the first year I studied mathematics but it was too complex for me and I suppose too difficult and furthermore my father kept saying, but Claude, you can't do anything

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with mathematics. You should do physics or ideally you should do engineering like I did, ok. He's trying to lift up in those favor clearly and I didn't know that. So I did physics. And physics is more concrete and physics, that was my thing.

Q: You said about getting your name changed.

A: Oh that was a long time. That was when I was 13.

Q: 13. How did that come about?

A: Well that was my – well I was Klaus. I may have noticed a certain distress or whatever when other people learned my name. They'd say what's your name and I'd say Klaus and they'd say is that German? And that was a bad thing. And my mother must have been probably even more aware of that type of reaction. So she –

Q: Legally changed it?

A: Yeah, legally changed it. I'm sure, I may have said mommy can I change my name but I probably wasn't aware of the concept.

Q: When you were in high school in England, did you feel very different than the other students?

A: A good question. I hinted and my mother's making up for the conversation plus my mother's progressiveness meant that my schooling track was very strange. And I only settled down into normal schooling at age 15, except it was a school for, what do we call it. It was a track school.

Q: Gifted school?

A: Gifted for all the London workers. Ok, it was lower class. Not lower class but lower than ours. Middle class, ok, lower (phone interruption)

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Q: The school.

A: Ok, well.

Q: I asked you if you felt different than the other students.

A: Here's the school with good intellectual demands, a syllabus which is likely not right for our -  
- this keeps coming up. The social class thing. The kids there were kids of workers.

Q: But were they interested in your background? That's what I wanted to find out. Not the intellectual.

A: What this meant that I had only one friend there. And that friend also had a strange background. And the other kids and I – and one of the other kids, I and Page were the best academically. I and Campbell hung out together because we were different.

Q: They knew about your childhood and your moving?

A: How dare you ask the same question over and over. Who knows? Were they interested? Probably not. But in any case, A, I was different. B, I felt I was different. And C, my mother wouldn't put it this way but my mother thought of myself as different. My mother knew that I was going to go to Oxford or Cambridge. It goes without saying. She didn't have a college degree, but she was a woman at a time when women didn't have college degrees. And as I said, the school was good, but wasn't, it was for gifted, and it was a different type of school. So in fact it was difficult for me to get into Oxford. It was relatively easy for me to get into London University which was a perfectly decent school and it's like the University of Maryland versus Harvard. And good kids around here, they should be happy with the University of Maryland but their parents say you better get to Harvard. And Churchill high school no doubt tracks them to get ready for Harvard.

Q: Can we move on a little bit to – so you finished the university and then where did you go?

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A: Well I do undergraduate work at the university and get a first in graduate work at the university, Oxford. And there we aren't graded and I get my degree in 1959 but in the meanwhile I have won a prize fellowship by examination which means once again I have distinction. And also I go to an international conference where only two people from England are allowed cause it's a summer school. They only want 30 people. So I am in fact damn good but in any case. So this Oxford physics, 1959 and Sputnik and Eisenhower and money in America for physics. England still would have a little bit of recovery to do from the Second World War. So all the exciting physics was in America. Any bright young English physicist would go post doc-ing to America for his career, and that's just what these things meant that physics departments were wonderful in America.

Q: You had lived in America as a small child, so what did it mean to you at that point in your life? Did you feel a connection to America at that point?

A: No. And I say, I went for physics but I discovered it was a different tonality.

Q: Where did you go to in the United States?

A: I post doc-ed at Princeton. Again I was bright. I'm saying that over and over again but it does but after the post doc-ing and I had gotten married in Oxford in my last year as a graduate student. After two years at Princeton I was quite happy to go back to England. A post doc means you go somewhere and then you, ok. So mentally I was happy to go back to England except now it was time in England to find a good position and to settle down. And I look around and I get a good position. And there are two things wrong with it. The University of Sussex. It's a sort of new university growing and if I had been very clever I would have seen one good thing about it. But the bad thing was I was the only person in particle physics but I needed someone to talk to, to develop my physics. The physics I'd done at Princeton, I had done with someone else. I needed collaboration. They said well London is only 60 miles away and you're just – nothing. They gave me an insulting salary. And I told them this was insulting. And they said we're sorry. Let's raise it a little bit.

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Q: At that point did you feel British? How –

A: Oh what a good question. We'll get back to that in a little while. But more British than anything else. And America had now been sort of behind and I'm saying about my personal.

Q: What did you do at that point?

A: Oh so at that point I say wait a minute. England is for the birds and I'm going to become part of the brain drain which was a concept England was very worried about. They trained all their brains. They did that for free. And then the brains up and left. And at times I felt guilty about that. But in the best of all worlds self-interest matches society's interest. That's the best of all possible. In any case, so I upped and immigrated to America in 1962.

Q: And where did you go?

A: I went to Columbia University and this was my first real position in America. And that was therefore an important but expected to be temporary position for which you then look around for your life time position. And I looked around and I found the University of Maryland. And they were very glad to have me because they were a growing department but they had already grown more. And they had a chairman. And again here was good old Sputnik and so physics money was pouring in. The good old days. We didn't know how spoiled we were.

Q: So you stayed in Maryland?

A: So I stayed at Maryland from 1964 to 1997. That was 33 years. And I retired from there.

Q: Can I ask you some questions now?



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A: No, I want to say I'm going to answer one of them. After about 15 years of living here I decided you know, I'm living here. I'm not quite American but you know I should vote. I should take on the responsibility. I should become a –

Q: Citizen?

A: I don't do the five years. I wait for 15. Furthermore even now in a joking way but not in a joking way, I'll back up. I admire our queen. Our queen. I admire many English virtues. I dislike some American vices. It's not the word I normally use. I consider myself 90 percent American. That is I say I value my queen and her work, not as a joke. Toast my queen. The queen god bless her.

Q: You're a British citizen?

A: No.

Q: You're not?

A: For instance when I give a talk about myself and I get to sort of this end, I say but you know I still admire my queen. The queen god bless her. And she's very remarkable in herself, but – I was born in France. If I had served in the French army, I would have been able to be a French citizen. But I didn't. My mother was German. But after the war, she and I, because I tagged along on her papers – became British citizens by naturalization. Ok.

Q: So you are a British citizen?

A: No, no, no. So then I come and become an American citizen and I foreswear all allegiance to foreign potentates.

Q: So you had to give it up?

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A: So I gave it up. Now if you are a born British citizen, you can foreswear allegiance but you don't mean it. You can have double citizen, but see I wasn't fully British. But I've never fully fitted in and even now I don't fully fit in but I fit in very well.

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany?

A: Ah. After the war, my mother wouldn't buy anything German from a pencil eraser to a Volkswagen car, not that she drove. And I picked this up. I came to America and I first bought a second hand Dodge I think it was. And when that died, I decided to buy a Volkswagen. And I thought about it as being German, but I also thought about it and at that moment that car seemed to be a good car. I forget why people wanted Volkswagens. So I bought a Volkswagen. And then I bought another Volkswagen after that. So I was aware of this question, the buying. But I clearly didn't follow it totally. I do remember when I was about 20 let us say, taking a train trip across Europe. And the train went from France through a bit of Germany, to Italy. I was trying to get from England to Israel. And while we were on Germany territory and going through German customs, these officers coming, I didn't like it at all. Just the feeling, and yet the German customs people probably seemed very militaristic. Or maybe I projected government. But no. I've never been to Germany as a tourist. And something very strange happened in 2013, 2016. I told you I'm a child survivor of the Holocaust. I'm a member of the local area child survivor group. I go to schools. The child survivor groups have an international organization – the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Descendants. A mouthful but it's all the child survivors of the world. And they have a national conference. They have an international conference every year that bops around from place to place. And I had dropped in one session when they were in Washington but I hadn't paid my \$350 so I then I was sort of ambivalent. But then in 2013 they decided to have theirs in Berlin. Oops. And I'm sure there were many child survivors who said oops, and I'm not going and I said oops. But you know what. A, I have a reason to go to Europe this year. B, I may have something to say at that conference. It turned out I didn't but I think I'm going. And there were about eight of us, of us. I identify with the Holocaust survivors who went. And it turned out the structure of the conference was not such that people thought that if the structure had been I wanted to tell them about One Thousand Children because I wanted to tell them. I wanted to tell the whole world

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about this special group that people had forgotten about. But no the conference was workshops and plenary speeches and stuff. But I went two and a half, three years ago.

Q: What was it like to be in Berlin?

A: After the oops, it was all right. By the way I said this, I'm sure many people didn't go. And I had read about the Germans and their, on average, who knows, I don't know the word. Acceptance of guilt is not quite the right word. And make reparations to Israel and survivors and all sorts of – but the Germans were doing their best they could to apologize or whatever. And of course, you can never make up but you do have this second generation and by now we're the third generation and so I accept most of that. And this is an aside, but a very interesting aside. At that conference and I'm sure this had been set up beforehand, but there was some finer political tight negotiating and at the end of the conference, it was announced that the German government was going to give a token payment of 2500 Euros to all child survivors because of the extra trauma they had suffered as children. This would be over and above any other reparations which is kind of interesting. Like 2500 Euros is peanuts. But then you know they sort of admitted this was token and symbolic. And at least it was \$3300 at that time. It's now I hate to say this only about \$2200. I accept it as a token. I have a friend who went berserk when he heard about this and he said you know that's a token, token. And I can't stand it and you can't buy me off that easily.

Q: Do you get reparations?

A: No. I don't even get that because they carefully defined and you know you've got to define these things so that one was if you had been in a concentration camp, if you had been in a ghetto or if you'd been a hidden child for more than six months.

Q: Do you have –

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A: You asked about reparations. No. Kindertransport don't get reparations. One Thousand Children don't get reparations. Kindertransport and One Thousand Children don't get the 2500 Euros.

Q: Do you have any children? Do you have children?

A: I have a daughter.

Q: You have a daughter. When she was younger did you, and she was the age that you were when your life changed so radically, did you think about your background when she was that same age. Did it trigger?

A: I don't think so but a related question is when did I tell her the importance of all of this and what did she think about it all. And to be honest, I don't remember. But she knew about it very early. About my coming to America and going back and stuff. And at that time I didn't think of myself as a child survivor of the Holocaust. I just said you know this is my interesting messed up story. And I'm sure I didn't tell her about meeting my new father after four hours until much later. Now again I say since the year 2000 I'm very into Holocaust issues. I've served on the local metropolitan, Washington metropolitan area JCRC Holocaust commission since about the year 2003. I consider that commission important. We put on the area wide Yom **Hashoah** and I consider that important and my participation in the commission as we've worked on it and I'm a very dedicated member of the commission. Sometimes too dedicated so I cause waves. But this is another example of hey it took me til the year 2000 but now – and there it for a while I was a true representative of the One Thousand Children and one year. I'll tell you about the one year. But now I use that as my status to be there, but I'm just there to be there. They used to have poems and stuff, talking about concentration camps and ghettos and stuff. And I felt they weren't honoring children enough. Hidden children, whatever. And one year it was my turn to present a poem or whatever. And I found a very sad poem, song which goes something like Oh so really, so really where is your mother? Your father is gone and you are alone. And I did it in a semi Yiddish accent that is clearly about a hidden child whose father is already dead and he's pining for her mother. And first of all it was her saying these things about her parents. And then

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there is a closing verse that says something like so really when you are old you will remember this. And may it not happen to you or something like that. And I found that thing very moving and people in the audience found it very moving. And it was chosen to tell people there are child survivors, hidden child survivors et cetera. It wasn't my story but ok. I never told you about our book. I told you about our web page. And I mean I've told you about – our book is called Don't Wave Goodbye. By Phillips Jason the editor type and I was part of \_\_\_\_\_. Your turn again.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Do you remember?

A: They weren't specifically strong. I mean yeah I followed Holocaust things in general. But this was before I was a child survivor of the Holocaust. And I much more remember those horrible photographs that Eisenhower and the British army and stuff took. By the way when we were in Berlin, we went to the Berlin Holocaust Memorial that I don't get but I went three times to try and understand it. It's very symbolic in many ways. But we also went to one museum of terror. That's what they called it. And another, and two other sort of things. And in the museum of terror, it's sort of watered down but they still have some horrible photographs. They have a photograph of the naked people and the pit and a guy with a gun, stuff like that. They don't have the totally emaciated ones. So there again the Germans are trying to do things and maybe if you were in that museum and said hey do you have any other photographs down in the basement?

Q: Speaking of museums, what are your thoughts about the United States Holocaust Museum being here in Washington?

A: In a way I don't get the question. By the way of course, they have them scattered all over America.

Q: There are so many.

A: Which is a good thing. No, I'm glad they have one here. That is on the Mall, ok, that a zillion school kids come to it. It's stop number one on their tour. It's good. It means of course that adults can manage to be in the museum and that they come very late. I was in the museum, I

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would say three weeks ago, about 2:00 and I couldn't get to the photographs. I tried to be behind one group and ahead of – but it didn't work. The place was not infinitely crowded but it was sufficiently crowded that I felt they were a pain in the ass. But I always understood why they – and you know they were gathered and looking.

Q: What about your parents? Your father stayed after the war –

A: Both my father and mother stayed in England. They were divorced. They got divorced. Soon he remarried. She didn't. I lived with her. I had visitation with him but it often got complicated.

Q: Did they visit you when you finally settled in the –

A: In America. There were two visits by my mother and my uncle. I and my daughter would go to England more often. Once or twice before we were divorced with my ex-wife. So on average every two or three years we would get together.

Q: What was your relationship and was he still alive with Martin when you came here as an adult?

A: There again I was dumb. I didn't really seek him out. I probably met him once and he also came to London occasionally and my mother and I would then see him. He wasn't important. As I say it was only some years when I was 40 that I suddenly realized wow. I've told you about aunt Golda and that walk in the leaves. We visited her once in Florida. She was very old. She had Alzheimer's.

Q: How would you describe yourself today, as American?

A: Well you've asked that question before and –

Q: I know you said that you were more Jewish –

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A: I tried to get all those questions. As I say when I give this talk in my synagogue when I'm 83, I'll say I'm Jewish because Hitler knew it. Then I'll say yeah ok, I know I'm Jewish. I probably always knew I was Jewish but I didn't practice any religion. While I was in England, I externally practiced the Church of England which we had in school every day and I can still sing you some good hymns from the Church of England. And I never believed in God, but that's what you did every morning in school between 8:40 and 8:55. Ok. And in college there was also a feeling of Church of England around and we had a grace that the senior undergraduates would say in **fatio** and it goes **Noce nosowi hominae** [ph] then again **brovis** [ph] and then I'd break down. It's a hundred words in Latin and it said we miserable sinners and carries on from there. But ok, back to Judaism. I knew I was Jewish. I dated a woman once who was explicitly Jewish and she took me to her Reconstructionist synagogue three or four times and it was kind of fun but I had no belief in that. And that was a long time ago. Then I started dating Linda and got married later. And that was now 32 years ago. And Linda was very Jewish, religious. Her belief in God was sort of not quite clear because Reconstructionism is a little bit dubious about God, is very into religions and synagogues and stuff. You know about it? Ok. But innately, it was nice when we lit the candles on Shabbat and I bought those two candlesticks that are behind you. My contribution to this household. I went to synagogue. I even took an introduction to Judaism course. I started Hebrew but that was impossible. And I slowly did little things and now I do more things because we moved to another better quotation marks synagogue. Reconstructionist. But we also belong to Jewish Renewal and that I like. There's more English. There's more singing. There's more happiness. But my wife prefers the Reconstructionist one. In part she has more friends there so I generally go there.

Q: Are you angry that you had to go through what you did as a young child and others, young children your age in this country didn't have to?

A: I don't, no, no. For far too long I was angry at my mother for having sent me away and remember you know England hadn't been invaded and I was not sympathetic enough to her and I didn't think at all about the agony she had gone through to push me away. And I was explicitly angry at her. And I created horrible scenes which now I regret and she just couldn't take it. And what I wanted her to say was darling I love you very much. I sent you away to save you. But I

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do realize that it was traumatic and that it had damaged your psyche for life. And I think those last four words are sort of fairly heavy but it seems to affect your psyche for life. And she was only willing to say I had to save you. Some mothers would have been strong enough to say of course there was an effect on you which was negative. She wasn't and in retrospect, I understand that she couldn't. And sadly it was only after she was dead that I really came to the realization that some mothers could not say they had done harm to their kids. Some mothers could be brave enough to do so. And that you can't blame a mother who couldn't. That's a lot of wisdom on my part that sadly I didn't have when she was alive. And my wife saw me fighting her and hated it. She told me she hated it. And my mother once said, wrote to me and said, she wrote a note and saying darling I just can't take it. Will you please stop? So what does that say? It's sad. And of course it's related to the fact that yes I do feel I was damaged. And you haven't asked about lots of aspects of my life. But my theory of my development. 70 percent because I'm a One Thousand Child and 30 percent because my mother overcompensated. You know there's nothing left except I throw in 30 percent for whatever. I didn't date in college. When I started dating when I was about 22, I started dating a woman who was inappropriate for me though I didn't know it and the reasons she dated and married me is complicated. But we married, had a daughter and very soon thereafter we split. And looking back I can see the strong reasons why because of my – on son. I didn't have essentially any experience dating. She had had too much experience dating for me. I wasn't a good idea that we did. There were even some pressures. What's the phrase? I don't remember but and then it took me a long, long time and an infinite amount of therapy. I was in the therapy for something like 40 years. I cannot stand it and guess what. I'm still in therapy. That doesn't surprise you, does it? Could not be cured in ten years or whatever. In any case, I am, my current wife is – we've been together for 32 years, do very well. She knows about my story. At times she wishes I didn't harp upon it so much. And she understands my difficulties in life, all of which is very good. And she loves me and I love her.

Q: A nice note to end on unless there is anything else you want to mention or we haven't covered. Anything else?

A: I'd like you to somehow put those three references on record. The Wikipedia article, the webpage [www.Onethousandchildren.net](http://www.Onethousandchildren.net). And the book Don't Wave Goodbye.



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Q: That's important.

A: Yeah, I mean as I say the One Thousand Children is very important. And at the moment we are desperately working to try and make the webpage permanent file YIVO. In principle, YIVO has said yes but in practice all sorts of complications.

Q: Have you been to Israel?

A: No. My wife has been to Israel six or seven times. I have no interest. I was not a good traveler any more but our synagogue runs trips to Israel every so often and a few years ago I started being interested but there were too many just practical happens. And then there's another, they're doing another trip this year.

Q: Do you feel that you're two different people, someone in the outside world and another one inside of you? Do you ever have that feeling?

A: Well in many situations I don't tell them about my One Thousand childhood and that my British connection will come out. And in actual fact this is confused. There are many social situations where surprisingly, ironic or whatever, I bring it up. And then they are all interested and then we move on to Trump or whatever. At this moment I don't seem to get a word in edgeways because we've been talking about Trump so much. But you understand. It's very important to me and I don't hammer it down people's throats but yeah I tell them. Does that make me different? I'm 82 years old. So I am what I am. By the way yeah I mean I am what I am now.

Q: That's what I'm saying, to the outside world and inside.

A: Whatever. Except that to the outside world and again I put this down to the One Thousand, to my experiences between ages six and 11. I'm cautious, shy, introverted and who knows I might have been all of those things without, but I put them within my theory.

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Q: Do you think you would have been different if you had had a totally normal childhood?

A: Yes, oh definitely. I mean I can't prove it but yes, definitely. And the various moments in my life where being English but even more being a One Thousand Child, damaged my American career. And I look back on those and they are quite obvious. My chairman came up to me once when I was at Princeton and said hey, would you like to teach a course in statistical mechanics which happened to be my sort of interest area, what my research is. And I said mm, interesting, interesting. Let me think about it. So after a day or two I went up to him and said you know I'm here and he said oh, I got Jones to do it. And clearly Jones would have said oh sure. Correct? But not all Jones would. That's an example. I never learned how to function in this somewhat likely more competitive set up. That was a very clear example. There are others and in part I mean there in part it's because I was raised in England because in England it would work by the old boys network. Oh Kacser you know I think it would be good for you to teach this stat mech course, ok. And very difficult sort of going from the one world to the other though many people manage it. And so less assertiveness, less forwardness, less introvertness. All those things which ok I am now as I said 82. But in the past if only. No, my theory failed. I am because of my One Thousand Children. Yes, there's a part of me. I would have been different. My theory doesn't say what I would have been but at least in fantasy I would have been all these positive things. I mean even now trivially, at social gatherings at my synagogue. They aren't even parties whatever, people seem to be talking to each other in free from me. And I don't know how to get into any of those conversations. Now some people sort of learn to be social but I'm not. Have I survived being a One Thousand Child? Yes. Would I prefer not to have been? Definitely yes. Were there some gains out of being a One Thousand Child? I'm never asked that question. I became a bookworm and an academic. I mean I see that as a connection. Any other gains? No. That's probably about it. You're right. It's now quarter past four. And we started at two.

Q: Thank you very much for doing the interview. And this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Claude Kacser.

(end)