

--go about getting that first job?

Well, that came through the recommendations of people who-- of refugees who knew and who knew refugees who had a little job or had established something. And finally, somebody who sold household accessories wholesale gave me a job to sell it in the Lower East Side, for which I'm totally unprepared and unsuited.

That must have been quite an experience to go as a salesman. You had been a salesman before, but to go as a salesman to the Lower East Side.

Yeah.

How did you-- how did that strike you? How did that--

Terrible.

In what way?

I was terribly inhibited. I didn't know how to approach those people. They looked at me like a freak, a Yiddishe boy doesn't talk Yiddish? And these things-- or they said, don't you want to join the business? I have a daughter and this kind of thing. And the whole thing struck me like-- I all of a sudden had landed on the moon. And I never adjusted to it. I'm just completely unsuited for this kind of business.

Just out of curiosity, you had sold in various countries in Europe, yet you say, when you had this experience among the Yiddish-speaking Jewish community in New York, it was like landing on the moon. So it was very different.

The other things-- my approach was different. I was a German, basically, right, the way I felt. Now, I was in Spain. So I expected it to be completely different. My success in selling in Europe was no better than it was here, as far as that goes. I'm just not suited for this kind of business.

But here, now, I was in America. And I was surrounded for-- or I had been surrounded for as long as I had been here, more or less, by my own people. So I expected America to be that way. Now, all of a sudden, it was the Lower East Side.

When you come from a-- well, when-- at that time, when you came from a country in Europe, you were used to a certain uniformity of action in each country. It may have been different in France than it was in Germany, but then in France there was a certain uniformity. Like in Spain, if you say to somebody, oh, is that beautiful, he would offer it to you three times. And you were not supposed to accept it. I mean, just to say something.

Now, here, I am in America. And if I'm in Washington Heights, I find one lifestyle. If I'm on the Lower East Side, I find another lifestyle. And I'm not even-- not in a different country, I'm even in the same city. It's something you have to learn.

Good point. You mentioned that you were in Washington Heights. Were you-- did you stay within the Washington Heights group?

Yes.

What kind of understanding, what kind of-- maybe the word is reaction did you get when you went to the Lower East Side? Did they understand that you-- where you were from, why you were from there?

Yeah, but they didn't quite believe it. A Yiddishe boy who doesn't speak Yiddish? They couldn't understand this.

Were you made at all-- not necessarily on the Lower East Side, but were you made at all to feel like a refugee?

Yeah. That happened too. But that I understood. After all, I was a poor shnooks. And I had seen other poor shnooks. I knew how I had handled the poor shnooks who had come to me in Germany. That I could understand and adjust to because I could say to myself, this is something I can change-- if not today, then one day.

Did you speak English?

Yeah.

Had you spoken English before you--

Yes.

--came?

Yeah.

So that wasn't the big problem.

The language was not a big problem.

Excuse me. You mentioned that your mother came over. I take it, then, she came shortly after May 1940?

Well, she came after-- shortly after the war had broken out. I don't know whether it was still in '39 or in '40. I'm not sure.

You meant in the-- May '40 was the invasion of Belgium. That's when.

May-- oh, yeah, then she came in '40. Yeah, that's right.

OK. Did she join you in Washington Heights?

No. No.

Where did she go?

She lived in a hotel in Midtown.

Oh, in Midtown, OK. I was thinking. Basically, in those early years, did you-- what did you do for recreation?

What did I do for recreation? There is something missing.

OK.

And because I wasn't successful, I wanted to leave. And at the time, the Jewish organization were very glad to see you leave New York. So I went--

I just wanted to-- when you said the Jewish organizations, did you go to the Jewish organization?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Which?

I don't know whether it was HIAS or something?

Self-Help? Joint?

Yeah, so I-- no, not Self-Help.

Joint.

It was either HIAS or the Joint. So I told them that I would want to go to Dallas. So the question was why do you want to go to Dallas? And my answer was because I have a cousin in El Paso. But he has told me that it is very, very hard to find a job that pays in El Paso because they use the Mexicans that come over from Mexico. So the wage scale is very, very low. But I want to be close to him. So I want to go to Dallas.

And this is how I came to Dallas. And in Dallas, I got a job with a freight-- for a freight company, a trucking company. And sitting in the office, I was what they call a rate clerk. I figured out what the charges were, which was much more to my liking because it's very close to the thinking you do as a lawyer, this kind of business. So this is where I was when my mother came to New York.

OK. Now, when you went to Dallas, one-- who paid for the trip to go to Dallas? Was that--

I don't remember anymore whether that was the organization. I probably did it myself because I had the money. And I went by bus. Of course, I had a recommendation-- two people in Dallas who were interested.

Who gave you the recommendation?

The organizations here. And they also notified those people. So the first thing I knew, I was invited at the house of Mr. Marcus of Neiman Marcus. That was my start in Dallas.

That was the beginning.

Yeah. Yeah.

What-- coming to Dallas, you mentioned how the difference you found in New York between Washington Heights community and the Lower East Side. How did you find Dallas, having come here to this country only a year before or something like that?

That was completely different. That was like I was again in a different country.

In what--

The whole outlook on life, the tempo of living, the approach-- everything, for one thing, was much more relaxed and much slower. It also could take longer. The way people approached you reminded me of the difference between the approach of people in Berlin and in Bavaria, in Munich. It was very similar. The rather gruff way, comparatively speaking, of New York and the very polite way they do it in Texas was something that reminded me of this difference of north and south and in Germany. So it was--

Which one being the more polite in Germany?

South.

OK.

And so I noticed this. And I knew how to take it because it didn't mean that because they were friendly, they were any more honest or favorably-inclined towards you.

How were you treated in Dallas?

In Dallas, all in all, I was treated well. And again, I mean, I joined the refugee group. There was quite a--

There was a--

There was quite a considerable refugee group there. And I lived in the house of one of them-- not the house, the apartment, of course.

This was all arranged by the organization?

No, that I found myself then. And I found a family who rented a room. And I rented the room.

How did the general population of Dallas-- I asked before about the feelings of being a refugee. Did that come about?

The-- I don't know about the general population because down there, we refugees were completely enveloped by the Jewish community of Dallas. And they were most helpful and friendly.

Did they have the same kind of reaction that-- how could you be a Jewish boy and not speak Yiddish?

No, no, no, not at all. There, I found another thing, which again struck me as impossible. At that time, up here, you still had quite a few places who would not-- were not necessarily in New York, but here in this whole neighborhood who would not accept Jews in hotels, and clubs, and so on. And those people just wouldn't believe it because it didn't exist in Texas at that time.

How did the color problem strike you when you came to Texas?

That's an interesting thing too because I didn't approve of it and accepted it very easily. That's a very interesting observation of myself that I found. Wasn't hard at all to comply.

It's also a very interesting observation about some of the things that went on in Germany, in terms of how people can get caught up in something.

Did you draw-- at the time, were you aware of any parallel?

No. That this is how people just follow the trend, which, of course, happened in Germany, sure.

Was-- when you first saw it, the signs, I take it, that existed-- no Black-- I guess, at that time, no colored--

No, no, for Blacks only.

--or for Blacks only, did your mind at all flash back to Germany?

Yes, it did. And I didn't like it. But I-- as you said, I just didn't find it very hard to conform. It was just part of a new life. And you got to fit in. I didn't so much compare it with Europe because I had known from my travels that the first thing you have to do when you come to a strange country is to learn to conform and understand how they do things or why they do things.

And I had always made a very conscious effort not to fall into that trap to say, oh, this is terrible. We do it this way. [GERMAN]. This I had learned long ago. And the rationalization was if hundreds of millions of people do a certain thing, it can't be all wrong because they can't all be idiots.

So I concentrated more on doing what people did and trying to understand why they did it than that I tried to object against parts that were really wrong. That came much later. My original problem was to fit in.

How did you go about fitting in, adjusting to life down in Dallas? What adjustments did you have to make is what I'm really--

Well, the adjustments were climatic because I suffer a great deal from heat. They were in letting go of the formal kind of life to which I was used. I remember when I was invited at the house of Mr. Marcus, everybody took off his jacket. I kept mine on. And he grinned and said, that will change very soon.

When you get rid of-- when you get used to 100 degrees.

Yeah. Then you take off your jacket too, the more relaxed way of doing it, the different way of talking, that certain things do not mean anything, but are only a way of politeness-- you have to learn all this, that you can always talk about the weather, which is something that didn't exist in Germany and-- to start a conversation, which made life much easier. And the approach to people-- you have to observe and learn it.

You mentioned that you still stayed within the refugee community in Dallas but that you were accepted by the Jewish community.

Yeah

You were of a dating age, I guess.

Oh, yes, I got plenty of dates. But there, of course, I was no better than other people. In a way, I didn't want to get married at that time. As Eva can tell you, I didn't much later either. And so the easiest way was to say, I don't like American girls because they were not Jewish-- German Jewish girls. There were only American girls.

How did you, in fact, really feel about the American girls?

I-- that was, for me, the hardest thing to adjust to. Because it started right from the beginning, a girl called me up and said, would you take me to a party? Now, this isn't something I wasn't used to, well, just to say one thing. And the whole-- that took a long time for me.

What differences did you notice between the German girl-- German Jewish girls and the American girls?

The German-- the kind of aggressiveness of the American girl, the freedom, the drinking, and all this is something that I wasn't used to from the German girl, the German Jewish girl, as a German girl would always give the impression to the man that he had the initiative. I had to get used to it, that that isn't necessarily so in life.

In America.

In America, you see.

Was there also-- did you also find it difficult in terms of the bridge between what your life had been like before as compared to their lives?

No, no, no, not difficult because look, I had traveled a lot. And I knew, there's no use thinking about that. You concentrate on fitting in.

You mentioned the type of aggressiveness. Did you also notice that in terms of business in America?

No.

Is there a difference between--

No. The business approach was completely different. In Europe, in most countries, there is an enormous difficulty in

getting to see the man to whom you want to sell, the buyer, or the owner. To get an appointment is almost impossible.

The American way of doing business is more or less based on the theory, I may not like the guy, I may not like his merchandise, but what do I know until I see it? You can always see a man. I mean, it's a generalization, of course. And he will look at you, and he will say, it's beautiful, and you know he won't buy, or he will say, it's terrible, and you have a chance that he will buy.

Did that difference, saying, it's beautiful and he will not buy or it's terrible and he might buy, did that exist in Germany?

Not to that extent, that you had to learn too, you see. Then there is a basic-- there, another thing I had to get used to was a basic difference in at least commodity trading in America and in Europe. The American manufacturer will buy if and when he needs merchandise, irrespective of price. And if the whole trade all at a certain needs a certain commodity and goes out, they buy it and they don't care what it costs, even though, of course, they force the price up.

Now, they all have the merchandise. And the price goes down. And nobody buys. That's not the way it's done in Europe. The Europeans will have stock on hand and try to always take advantage of the low end and more or less average it out, what his stock costs, but not here anymore. No more. No, this is-- no, no, no, this is still this way around business.

How did you go-- how did you learn the American way of doing business?

That-- by doing.

By experience.

By experience.

Did you-- what made you decide not to stay in Dallas?

My family, by that time, had all come to the States. And they were all settled up here. And I had run into a dead end down there and felt, I couldn't go ahead. So I decided to come up here and be with my family.

When you came to New York and you were looking, at that time, for work, what did you hope-- what direction did you hope that your--

What I would do?

--your working?

At first, I wanted to start working. And I didn't care what it was, as long as it wasn't selling.

OK.

You see?

You had your fill of that?

Yes. So I got into-- I worked for a freight forwarder. And from there, I got into an export company. And from there, I got into the job that I have now.

Which is in that same field?

Which is import-export, yeah, and financial.

What do you import?

Import-export of hide and skins, raw, that kind.

Mainly from South America?

No, no, from the whole world to the whole world.

To the whole world, OK. Just to get back, when you came back to New York the second time, at that time, did you join any clubs or organizations?

No, no, I joined Eva. That's when we met.

What did you both do, then, for recreation?

We went to the opera.

You want me to come in?

Fine.

Well, we had met friends. I had made some friends and met them. And we actually met at a cousin of mine, who Richard had met in El Paso-- in Dallas. They had moved to New York. And we made friends. And once we were married, and--

It was--

I mean, it was a--

--a social family thing.

--social family-- not family, no, friends.

--well, no, no, social friends. We came together with friends. We didn't go into clubs-- or once in a while, we saw a theater--

Yeah, we-- I was going to say--

--or a concert.

--we had no children. We both had a job. We could afford certain things, which mainly we did in the theaters and so on, and in family entertainment. And once we were expecting our son, I said to Richard, I think we should belong to a congregation. And we joined the Tabernacle and met more people.

That's right.

And from then on, the usual.

What do you think was-- in looking back, what do you think was the most difficult adjustment that you had to make in coming here?

The most difficult adjustment I had to make in coming here? Well, to find the direction of what I wanted to do. It completely disoriented me. First of all, it was New York. I sometimes spent hours just walking around Times Square because I couldn't, so to speak, cope with it.

And this whole thing, it took me quite a while until I found a direction so that I could go ahead with-- never mind where, but that I could go ahead. It overwhelmed me. And so I think, the adjustment to New York was the most difficult time that I had.

When you say, it overwhelmed you, just to go back, you said that you had always wanted to study law.

Yeah.

Certainly, this whole period from 1933 on, it crushed your hope for doing anything with law in Germany.

Yeah. Yeah.

That's very difficult for a young man who always has intended to do something to reestablish his life. Did you consider going back to law school?

Not to law school because I didn't know how I could go to law school and make a living at the same time. But what I tried to do is to find some kind of a job where the kind of thinking and decision-making was similar to the law thing. And that's how I finally found a way out of it.

Was this readjustment at all depressing while it was--

Yeah, it was very depressing. It was very depressing.

I can imagine that it would be.

It took quite a time. I know, in Belgium, was horrible in that respect because I had nothing to do. And I to hide. Because I couldn't work. I lived from what my parents gave me. And I had enough time to think about what's going to happen. And it was six months, which is quite a long time. And what I had done before, the selling, didn't appeal to me at all. And I hadn't found a way yet what I really, then, would want to do.

Do you feel that the United States provided the opportunity that you had hoped for when you came here?

They definitely gave me a chance to build up, there's no doubt about it-- about that. And much more than I could ever have hoped in any country in Europe, there is no doubt about it, that during that period, whoever came here had the chance.

Do you feel that there's more mobility here than there is--

Mobility physical?

No, no, mobility in the job opportunities here than in Europe?

Yeah, I think so. I think so. Because the-- there is a certain tradition in Europe-- or was, I don't know how it is now. But at that time, you still had a certain tradition that the son followed in the footsteps of the father. And that there were certain ways in which you got off the footsteps, like for instance, the son of a manufacturer could go into a doctor or--

Profession.

--a profession. Yeah, that was acceptable.

In making a comparison between yourself and your son-- you only have one son, right?

Yeah.



In making a comparison between yourself and your son, do you think that he has more opportunity--

Definitely.

--than you yourself had?

Definitely. But you see, I look at it two ways. While he has more opportunities, he also has more problems.

In what way?

Well, if you have opportunities, you have to decide what you want to do. When you come here with \$10 in your pocket, your opportunity is the first job you can get so you can eat. That makes it much easier. It's a two-way street.

The priorities are set.

Yes.

Just to go back for a minute to your mother and father, did they-- did-- how did they adjust to life in New York?

I think there were good, don't you think?

They-- perhaps, the mom, I don't think. But I think I only met mom after her illness. And I think she made the best of it.

My mother, for a period of almost 20 years, didn't leave the house after she had a cancer operation. And she did make the best of it because she was up to date on everything.

She could have gone out. But at the time when we met, the finances of Singer-Feist also had run low. And she could not take a job on the outside. But she was-- in those days, knitting was very apropos. And a lot of people had dresses knitted. And she was knitting for somebody. And she said, if she would go out, she couldn't earn any money knitting. And she felt that she had to contribute to the upkeep of the household.

You mentioned that your father had said-- in line with that, you mentioned that your father had said, when she said she would rather sit in a small room in Belgium than stay in Germany, and he said, wait until you have to sit in that small room. Now, when they were in New York, in effect, they were in that small room, a figurative--

Figurative.

--small room. Did she--

No, she adjusted to that.

She never complained.

She never once complained.

About that, she never complained. And she was used to a big social life and to lots of goings-on. And she never complained about that she couldn't go out or that she couldn't have the social life she had before.

And what about your father?

Well, he was more flexible. And he had a business.

Here?

Yeah, the business that he was in. He founded it here.

A little import business. That was also my mother-in-law's doing because my father-in-law, as I understand, was willing to take on any job. And she also said, again, over my dead body. You have never been--

That's true. Yeah, that's what.

You have never been an employee. It will be very hard on you. You're not that young anymore. I don't care how little, you have the connections to import into this country. Start little. And whatever you make, you make.

What did-- did they import in the same field as they were in?

Sure, sure.

Cutlery?

Yeah, cutlery.

Just this is where the name comes in. When he wrote with the name Feist to the manufacturers, they knew exactly who he was.

From where did he import? Did he import from Solingen?

From all over Europe. The name was known all over Europe. It didn't make any difference. When they heard Feist, they knew it in Italy, they knew it in Germany, they knew it in France.

How did they-- did they have enough capital to start, even though it was small? [AUDIO OUT]

Did they have enough capital?

This was very-- he started it in a very small way. And as we said, we used to say, his stock is between his underwear because he used to have maybe five dozen of one kind. And they are packed very neatly. And he could put it there.

But you also mentioned that he didn't need the capital because--

That's right. When he made the contact overseas, people would let him-- would give him credit. Because the name was known. He was known personally too.

How did he sell here?

He sold to retailers.

He was his own salesman?

He was his own importer, and salesman, and wholesaler.

How did he adjust to the American business as compared to Germany?

I think he did that very well.

Yes, he did that very well. And he established the business after the war, when everybody was-- everybody was looking for different items during the war, nothing was imported.

And he learned. I mean, he was willing to learn. I remember that he was used to maintaining a certain level of

businesses profit. And he came to a man once and said, what are you so stubborn about? Aren't you better off making X dollars and not making the same percentage than making no dollars and maintaining your percentage? You have to go a little bit with the margin that can bear. And he repeated this. And he learned from that, that that is the way to do it.

Yeah, and he understood it. Well, the reason I'm asking, he was at a much more advanced age.

He was over 65 when he started the business.

That's what I mean. So it must have been quite hard for him to-- the uprooting in itself must have been difficult for him. So to adjust and re-establish a business was--

Well, he had a very individual way of doing it. His saying was that he worked almost 24 hours a day. And in a way, that was true. He would get up in the morning early. He would have his breakfast, read his paper, go-- by that time, he had an office next to the--

That was many years later.

Yeah. And then he was even older. Because he worked until he died at the age of 84. So he would go over to the office. He would maybe work for an hour. Then it was 11 o'clock, and he would go out and see a few customers. He had to be back by 1 o'clock to eat his lunch. Then he would sleep a while.

Then he would go to his office and do some writing. And by 4 o'clock, he would have a cup of coffee. And then he'd sleep a while. And then he would work till 6:00 and rest a while and then listen to the news. And by 8 o'clock, he would work again. So he really worked all the time, but at his own speed.

Did it bother him at all-- just in terms of the German mentality-- did it bother him at all that his wife was helping along in the beginning?

No, no, I don't think so.

Because it made her happy to have something to do.

And it made life easier. I mean, I don't mean financially-- it made life easier for the two of them to live.

She felt he was contributing something to it too because she also felt, on the other hand, that so much money had to be spent on her due to her illness. And I would like to interject with something as far as my father-in-law is concerned. He was a very friendly, outgoing elderly gentleman. And I mean gentleman.

And wherever he went, the doors opened due to his personality. And that also-- and he was also a type of person who said, well, I'm here. When in Rome, do as Rome does. And if I can make a living by doing this, fine.

OK. That's-- just one more question. In terms of your lives today, are your friends still mostly of the German Jewish community?

Absolutely.

Why do you think this has persisted?

I wish I knew. Because actually, I wasn't used to that. But I don't know. I mean, I can only-- in a way, it is justified because since America is really not that much of a melting pot as we thought it was, like people tend to congregate with like people. And that is so all over the world. And that will never change because you feel more comfortable in a surrounding where you can foresee, to a certain extent, what reactions your actions will evoke.

And I think part of it also is that we all had the same problems. And the same problems went together. And as we got

older, of course, we stayed with the same friends. Our children, our son, is an entirely different story.

In what way an entirely different story?

I mean, our son certainly does not flock together only with children of refugees. He will-- he has some Jewish friends, he has some non-Jewish friends. He has some Irish friends. He has friends of any nationality.

In your--

And as you get older, you certainly don't make friends as easily as you do when you are younger. Consequently, you stay-- we have stayed in our group.

But along the same lines, your business contacts must also include Americans.

Yes, many more Americans than others.

Did you-- has-- many more Americans than others. Has there ever been a social contact other than the 9-to-5?

Not much, no. Not much.

Why-- that-- why-- do you-- can you just speculate on why you think?

I don't know. Because even with the immigrant people I have to do with in business, there's very little social contact.

And an immigrant, do you mean including the Germans was?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So that it's not a question?

No, no, no, no.

Have you been back to Germany?

Yeah, once.

Have you been back to Solingen?

Yeah.

How did you feel when--

Well, that was a very strange thing because we-- I had kept up a contact with at least one of the guys from over there all along. And when I wrote him that we were coming, this whole group that I went to school with, they meet once a year in Solingen-- they are all over Germany. But they meet once a year.

So he said, we will have a meeting. So when I came to the-- with the exception of one, the complete class that I went to school with was there. And that made it much easier. I was prepared to get a shock. And I really felt, I didn't-- I think I got a delayed reaction after I came back, more or less, of it. I-- it didn't shock me. I even saw the house we had lived in. I didn't go in.

When you say a delayed reaction, what reaction did you have when you thought about it after you came back?

Well, I don't know. I mean, my readjustment--

I think you were just tired.

Well, that's it. I mean, I-- we went, then, also to Israel. And I saw a lot. And then we came back. I had a very hard time to readjust to the time lag.

Yeah.

And I don't know whether-- and that was-- everybody told me, you're even more nervous now than when you left. I had that kind of a reaction. But as Eva says, it's very hard to say. Was that an emotional thing? Or was this--

Did you have any contact with the new-- I'll call them new owners--

No, no.

--of the factory?

No.

Or any other Germans other than your own friends?

No, no. When you saw this-- when this class reunion took place, was there any discussion of what had gone on during the war years?

Not really. Not really. Not really. Talk was all very personal.

Just one thought occurs to me. You said, you went to Israel at the same time, on the same trip. How would you compare your feelings?

You mean between Germany--

Yeah, going to Israel and going to Germany.

This is an interesting thing, which has to do with my total background and upbringing. Germany, for me, was a revival of certain things. Israel was a historical experience. I-- my approach to the Bible, my approach to Israel has always been historical. And I looked at what I saw there strictly from that element.

So some things stick with me, which other people don't even know. Well, I mentioned, we were driving towards Galilee in a bus. And the guide said, we are now driving over the road over which 2,000 years ago, the Persians, and the Assyrians, and the Egyptians used to travel. And I got goose pimples thinking how narrow and close this all is. This was my experience of it. Or to see how people of all phases pray at a grave.

But I had more in mind in terms of an emotional attachment.

No, that's what I'm trying to tell you.

You look at it from a historical perspective, rather. And when you went to Germany, you mentioned a revival, meaning a revival of your childhood?

Of the experiences, of the same kind of people, how they developed. I mean, this was this kind of a thing. While Israel, for me, was a historical experience. It's interesting, but I did not have the feeling, this is my birthplace. This is, in a way-- this is-- no.

It's an interesting-- [AUDIO OUT]

As far as belonging, I belong into America. Every time I come back, I'm glad I'm back in America. But as far as roots are concerned, roots, I have nowhere.

And I underwrite this. I never felt that I owed Germany something as Germany, even at that time, when I was there-- and before Hitler. I never had that kind of a feeling.

Why did you say, you don't think you have roots anywhere?

I certainly don't have them in Germany. I don't think, since I came here as a refugee, I don't think I've been here long enough to have grown, actually, what you call roots. My brother is in Israel. I go to Israel. I will do anything for Israel. But I also don't think my roots are there, my personal roots.

I'm an American. And I used to be a German with-- of Jewish religion. I'm an American of Jewish religion. I mean, I don't have a dual nationality. And I hope that I will never be in the position that I have to say, I also have an Israeli nationality. I hope America will always stick to the Constitution, and we will always be able to live here, even if I doubt it at time-- at this point.

Why do you say you doubt it?

What's going on right now and what is-- if you look at Skokie, if you look at our own cemeteries at this point. I even go as far as to say, I don't think that this was an act of antisemitism, I think it was more an act of youngsters not having anything to do. And they got in there. Because if it would have been antisemitic, I think they would have defaced them and actually willfully broken the stones. But still, there is this much of a doubt somewhere in the back of my mind, maybe something is with it.

What did being Jewish mean to you?

Being Jewish actually meant to me-- this is very strange-- a historical root. And I looked at it completely from a historical point of view. And I used to concentrate on finding out certain traits which go through the Bible as characteristic of Jewish reaction up to this day.

You're an historian?

Yeah. Yeah. This is what fascinated me in it. As far as religion is concerned, we were not three-day Jews, we were two-day Jews-- one day Rosh Hashanah and one day Yom Kippur.

Was the congregation that you belonged to liberal?

The congregation was Orthodox. But since there were only a total of 50 families in that whole neighborhood, which was not only Solingen, but all the surrounding territory, it behooved those who could afford it to belong and to support. So I had to get private religious instructions, which are mostly spent outside the room because the teacher was absolutely impossible.

It was the teacher--

Like all of them. Like all of them.

It was the teacher who was absolutely--

All Jewish teachers are. There are very few good ones.

He started out by saying, in the beginning, God created heaven. And then I was allowed to say earth. And then he read the next sentence, and I was allowed to say the last word. So that's right. And two weeks before my bar mitzvah, he

went to my uncle, who was the president of the congregation, and said, he'll never learn it.

Let me ask you, in terms of-- have your feelings of being Jewish changed over the years from what they were before the Hitler years in Germany to now?

They have, in a way, strengthened in the direction that I had picked up then. And that is, if you ask me what my roots are, then they are not territorial. But they are intellectual because I am aware of certain traits in my character, which I feel are Jewish and can be proven all the way back to the Bible. This is where I see my roots.

So your roots are in a people, rather than a territorial.

Yeah, yeah, you can say it like this.

Well, that, I think, goes for me too. I'm definitely, 100%, a Jew.