

## Holocaust History

Dates of Interviews: 5/05/81  
5/14/81  
5/26/81

Interviewee: Hans Erman  
Interviewer: Carole Erich

Transcribed by: R K Feist

Q: This is May 5, 1981, at 10AM. My name is Carole Erich and I am at the Jewish Community Complex (Jesse Philips Building where Hans Erman worked) at Denlinger Rd, Dayton Ohio and I will be interviewing Mr. Hans Erman as part of the Dayton area Holocaust project. Mr. Erman we begin by establishing where you live in Dayton, your home address.

A: We live at 3160 Valerie Arms Dr, Dayton Ohio 45405

Q: May I ask your age?

A: I am 67.

Q: And your date of birth?

A: April 4, 1914.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in a small German town by the name of Wittlich , which is a country seat in the larger province of Trier in West Germany.

Q: I would like to talk a little about your family life. Your parents and such.

A: My parents were Albert and Rose Erman. They were merchants at a store and about three months after my birth WWI broke out. My father was drafted into the German army. He was away, most of the time, during the four years of WWI. When he came back, I remember in 1918 and 1919. I went to school, a German public school and later, to a Jewish day school. Later I went to a German high school. I graduated from high school in 1933, exactly three months after the Nazi (National Socialist party under Adolf Hitler) regime came to power, in Germany.

Q: OK. You are getting a little ahead of me now. Let us go back and talk about your home life a little. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

- A: I have a sister who was born in 1916. She also went through the same school system. She lives now in New York. That was the only sister I ever had.
- Q: What is her name?
- A: Her name is Meta. She married a man whose name is Popper, who came from Czechoslovakia. She met him in England, where both were refugees during WWII.
- Q: I did not ask your mother's maiden name.
- A: My mother's maiden name was Tobias, and she came from a small place in West Germany.
- Q: Do you have any idea how long your family had lived in Germany? That is how far back in history you can go?
- A: The history of my family goes back to the Roman Empire. We have established fairly accurately that my forefathers, my ancestors came with the Roman soldiers when these came to the Rhineland. We know that the oldest settlements at that time were in the area of Cologne and Trier. There are some very ancient excavations and remnants of that period. We assume that our ancestors came with these legions and settled in the Rhineland around the first or second century AD.
- Q: They were merchants when they came and your parents were merchants. Was that a traditional occupation?
- A: No! Apparently, before they became merchants they were farmers. That is so because we know that many members of our family and relatives, still at the time when I was a youngster, were farmers. They had farms and had cattle in smaller villages and towns in that area.
- Q: What kind of merchant were your parents?
- A: We had a store which sold men's clothing.
- Q: Did your mother work also?
- A: My mother worked and my father was a trained tailor. That is what induced him to buy and sell men's clothing.
- Q: If you could judge what economic bracket your parents were in, at the time, please tell us. Let us start at the time before WWI, what class would you say they were?

- A: I would say that they were part of the middle class during the war, when my father was away, maybe lower middle class then. I don't know, but I assume that my mother first with one baby and then with a second one needed support either from her parents, or wherever she could get it from. I don't know what kind of military compensation she received from my father's service in the army, so I assume that she lived on a tight budget. At that time we rented an apartment in my hometown. Later on we bought a house. We had our store downstairs in that same house. Our living quarters were upstairs.
- Q: Did you live as a nuclear family or did you have an extended family with grandparents?
- A: It was a nuclear family.
- Q: Did you have help at all?
- A: Yes, my mother did have, probably once a week a person came in to help with the housework.
- Q: Was it a German (probably meaning gentile) person?
- A: Yes! Yes.
- Q: Was your family culturally orientated at all? Were you interested in the arts?
- A: My family was interested in various kinds of art, theater, movies -- when they came about, and also in music to some extent. My family, and that may be of some interest was extremely well integrated into the non-Jewish community in that town. It may be surprising to listeners or to people who are not well aware, particularly in the U.S. that Jewish families at that time had frequently more intimate friends among the Catholics or Protestants than they had in the Jewish community. As a matter of fact the best friends of my father and my mother were both Catholics. They came to our house for coffee and for tea and for meals and we went to their homes for visits. My personal friends were divided. Some were Jewish, some were Catholics, because we lived in a Catholic area. Our integration as far as social contacts was about 100 percent. We were completely integrated in the society of that time in Wittlich.
- Q: This has been a theme which has been repeated quite frequently in various interviews so I am wondering if this was a concerted effort on your parents part to develop relationships outside the Jewish community or did, on the other hand, they try to develop friendships also within the Jewish community to keep that intact, or was it just a natural kind of development?
- A: I think that the second assumption is correct. The town my mother came from, her birthplace, was a small village with only two Jewish families within a group

of maybe 35 non-Jewish farmers. So she actually had no choice but to associate with non-Jewish girlfriends and boyfriends. The same thing carried on later on when she got married to my father. Then she moved to a bigger place, but still there was no separation between one and the other whether Jewish or Catholic or what have you. As a matter of fact I recall a Catholic neighbor once saying that whenever he comes home either his wife is with my mother or my mother is with his wife. In other words, inseparable, to some extent. This may be surprising to people who in our days look back on these things. So, it was the natural thing, it was not promoted in any way -- it just happened naturally. I remember, in my high school days, I used to walk along the streets with a Catholic girl, or a Catholic boy because that was the way of life, at that time.

Q: Was that area predominantly Catholic?

A: Yes. Predominantly Catholic. As a matter of fact, in my high school class, we had 18 students. One Jewish boy, myself, and one Protestant boy, all the others, boys and girls were Catholic.

Q: Was your family orthodox, as far as Jewishness goes?

A: My parents were observant, as it was interpreted in those days. We didn't know anything about Orthodox or Conservative, or Reform. There were people who were more observant and there were people who were less observant. People knew exactly to what extent their family was observant in relationship to certain holidays, certain customs, certain commandments and so forth. There was only one type of Judaism in these places (only one place to worship in the Jewish faith and one place to worship in the Protestant faith).

Q: Did that mean then that they attended synagogue on all of the Holy Days?

A: That is right. They attended synagogue services on Saturdays and the other Holy Days and observed all the other commandments connected with our religion.

Q: Were you Bar Mitzvahed?

A: Yes. I had a Bar Mitzvah, and I went through all these things, just like everybody else.

Q: It comes to mind, I don't know why, but I wondered if your Italians attended your Bar Mitzvah ceremony, considering that fact that you had so few Jewish friends?

A: Italians? There were no Italians in our town.

Q: Did I say "Italians"? I am sorry. I meant Catholics.

A: No, that was an interesting point which you are raising and I might explain that also. As far as religion proper goes I never attended a Catholic service. I mean that I got into a Catholic church because as children we were playing around, playing football and such and we were not supposed to play in the street. The police chased us and we found refuge in a church -- otherwise I would not go into a church, neither would Catholics come to a Jewish service, whether it was Bar Mitzvah or any other service. It just was not the custom. I think that goes back to the limitations which the church and synagogues imposed on their people. Catholics, to the best of my knowledge -- and I knew quite a bit about the Catholic practices -- were not supposed to attend any non-Catholic service -- and we were told, as youngsters, that we were not supposed to attend any other service except the Jewish service. So apparently it was ingrained, into the youngsters, and we accepted that as a commandment or a law or a precept whatever you call it, and we followed it. There was no attempt made then, like later on and in our days in the U.S., to attend each other's services, so that we would understand it better. No such attempt was made. We did have dialogue, informal dialogues. I mean with my classmates, we sat around and talked about original sin, and the "Do you believe in this" and "Do you believe in that", celibacy, and all kinds of things. We discussed these amongst ourselves. Such things as "Do Jews permit this, do Catholics permit that" and why not, and why yes. However officially there was nothing going on along that line.

Q: You sound as if you had a very nice relationship with your classmates.

A: The relationship was such that we visited each other in our homes. We did homework together. My friends came to my house and I went to theirs. We sat together for hours doing homework, discussing things and for years we knew that one was a Jew and the other one was Catholic, but that was the extent of it. There was no animosity. There was no limitation, as far as contact goes. It was an almost ideal relationship, as far as that goes. Let's say that we had contact sports and we were part of a team. I was a member of a sports club. We played and engaged in all kinds of sports activities and that was as normal as anything could be. There was no Jewish sports club, at that time. Maybe there were two Jewish youngsters who participated in sports among a group of 25 or 30. So that was the way of life in that area. Now that was in the twenties, in the 1920's, when very little was known about the upcoming Nazi movement. There was some foreshadowing, but it didn't reach down to our level, at least not to any extent. Sometimes we saw a newspaper article about things which happened in bigger cities, certain claims which were made in certain areas, but it did not trickle down to our day to day life.

Q: Was your father injured during WWI?

A: Yes. He was injured and he received a pension, based on that injury. His pension was a disability pension. His disability was gauged between 30 and 40 percent. As far as I remember, he received a pension until he was deported in 1941. I

don't know what happened to it later on. I remember that he received that compensation for disability.

Q: Did your father ever express an opinion about how he felt about fighting for Germany in WWI?

A: My father, and most anybody else, were 100 percent German -- 100 percent, whether that refers to fighting for, living for, dying for, working for or standing up for the country. There was no other loyalty except that one. They couldn't imagine anything else, to the extent that when we youngsters, later on, talked about changing times and that maybe we should look around and go somewhere else, and such. It was unimaginable for anybody to think about going somewhere else or finding something wrong with Germany. If that was going to be, it was considered a temporary lapse into something, which would blow over, within a few weeks, months or maybe one year or two. That was a very tragic misconception on the part of many individuals and also on the part of our leadership. That means the leadership in Germany at that time.. I recall vividly that, whenever such a topic came up, after 1933 when the Nazis came to power, and younger people brought up the topic of; "Shouldn't we look for something else?" that our leaders, by experience and by instinct and what have you, said, "No, you will have to maintain your position. You should not budge. It will blow over, for whatever reason, either internally, or because France and England would interfere, or the U.S. would interfere." To the end some people just thought that it was a temporary thing which would not continue and everything would be restored to its proper place.

Q: Were your parents political?

A: Yes, my parents participated in political activities. In our home town, as in other places, we had elections. Germany was a democracy. I might say that, according to the constitution it was a "perfect democracy". There were as many parties as you wanted to have. You could have your own party. If no other party represented your views you could start your own party. Every party had its meetings and rallies. Speakers would come and talk to you. My parents, and all the other adults, went to those meetings and would find out which party represented them better: A, B, C, or D. They would vote for whatever party they wanted. In that respect they participated in political life and in economical life, community life as well as anybody else. In addition to participating to political life, my parents participated in other local community events. My father was a member of the glee club, where he sang. My father was a member of the volunteer fire fighters. Our town was apparently too small for a professional fire department. Once a year the volunteer fire fighters had a big day where they marched through the streets in uniforms and things like that. When they sang, the whole city came together and they listened to the songs. All these things took place. There was complete harmony between the Jews and the non-Jews. Those

were the early days of my life, this is how I grew up in that small town. The harmony continued until the early thirties.

Q: Let's talk about your high school. You said you were in high school in the twenties and there were, at that time beginning to be signs of economic discontent within the country. There were problems that came up. Did they affect your family, as merchants?

A: No, not at all. I remember that in the twenties, maybe in 1926 or so, that was the first time when the Nazis attempted to organize in Munich. Their coup failed and, I believe, Hitler was imprisoned, for some time. That was reported in the papers. We read it. Some people talked about it but it disappeared again. It was not revived until the early thirties when the Nazi party became stronger and gained seats in the parliament. Actually they gained more and more seats. Then the discussion was revived. However in the twenties we only heard about it, we read about it in the newspapers. People talked about it here and there they said that these things happened, it may not be good and would tend to be evil but there was nothing much one could do about it, or one would suffer from it.

Q: What did you do after leaving high school?

A: I graduated from high school in 1933. Our graduation was in April (that was the normal end and beginning of the school years). That was three months after the Nazis had risen to power. They rose to power on January 30, 1933. The last few years (of my high school time) were not very pleasant, in so far that our high school class was split into two factions. I mentioned earlier that there were about 18, in our class. More or less, nine out of the 18 were registered Nazis and nine were not so registered. These latter were registered as Catholic Youth, or whatever. It so happened that when we had any kind of activity, let us say something like a field trip, nine would go together as a group and the nine others would group together. Occasionally, when we had something in common, we would also sit in groups of nine and nine. It was an unpleasant experience, however nothing beyond that happened that was frightening. Again no one knew how it would turn out. Nobody knew whether it would blow over, whether it would disappear. It was just the thing which one had to contend with. Now you are talking about leaving high school. Before we left high school we already made our plans what we would do. Graduating from high school is a crucial point in the life of a young person, so you not just stumble into graduation and then face a blind alley. So we thought it out. We considered all kinds of possibilities. At that time, as mentioned, the Nazi regime was in power. With or without my parents encouragement I had to find out what possibilities there were. Professionally there were not many. Universities at that time either would not admit Jews, or if they would admit Jews, it was very doubtful whether they would get anywhere to even first base. So many considered what else could be done. We had relatives in a number of countries outside of Germany. We had relatives in France, in Holland. So I sat down and wrote letters to the relatives. They all

replied that, as a visitor, I would be welcomed anytime, but that I could not expect to find any kind of work, because to get a job you needed citizenship or you needed certain papers which a foreigner would not be able to get. So that excluded going to relatives in France or Holland. A number of younger people tried to prepare for immigration to Palestine, which is now Israel. For that you had to attend, for two years, a special training class which they called Hasharah. There you had to learn farming for two years, in order to get the permission to immigrate by the British government, which was in control of Palestine at the time. Some did go for two years or so and were ready to get a diploma and immigration papers for Palestine. I was lucky to be admitted to a teacher training program which at one time admitted all kinds of confessions (religions?), Jews, Protestants and Catholics in the big German city of Frankfurt. There were three sections according to the religious breakdown. I was admitted to the Jewish section. We had teachers who prepared us for the Jewish part of becoming a teacher. Apparently the Protestants were prepared their way and Catholics in theirs. However when it came to teaching the general field of education, methodology and curriculum developments and so on, we were supposed to have sessions in common. Now again, on the assumption that everything would come back to normal, we entered that kind of career, about six of us, in Frankfurt (that is Frankfurt on the Main river). We were admitted to a place of higher learning which was a simultaneous academy for teachers. We studied the Jewish or Hebraic part of the curriculum. Through the whole year our question was, every day: "How far do we go? Where do we stand? Is there a chance that next year everything will go back to normal?" During the year it became more and more evident that things would not go back to normal, then I and a few others applied for admission to a Jewish teacher training institution in Wurzburg in Bavaria. That was the only Jewish teacher training institution left at that time. Others, which had been in existence in other parts of Germany -- in the other provinces of Germany (Germany had been divided into kingdoms, and other type of more or less independent states and principalities until the end of WWI) had been closed. However this institution was still in existence. At the end of our year in Frankfurt I was admitted to the institute in Wurzburg, where I spent another year. I graduated as a teacher in Wurzburg. This institution trained Jewish teachers and also non-Jewish teachers. Some of our teachers were members of the Nazi party. We had to use the Nazi form of greeting by raising our hands (actually it was the raising of the right arm, hand open and stretched out inclined forward -- the communist salute was raising the left arm hand closed in a fist) and pronouncing the words "Heil Hitler!" as it was prescribed by law. Some of these teachers taught us music or physical education or art, or whatever. They came to our place and taught us. They knew that we were Jewish. It was an odd mixture of environment, but life continued more or less in a normal way. We graduated from that institution and, to this day, we have an alumni association from the institution's graduates. We meet once every year or once every other year. There are in the U.S. some 40 or 50 graduates of that Teacher Training Institution in Wurzburg. There are others in England and others in Israel. We maintain a little circular, or paper, which goes around once a month or so, and we are in touch

- with each other. From that institution we looked for jobs in Germany. I got my first teaching assignment in Munich.
- Q: Before you get into the teaching part, let me go back to ask you one or two questions about your training. While you were at this simultaneous institution did you ever run into any incidents where you were treated differently because you were Jewish? Had it reached that point where there was any segregation or anything which might have reflected discrimination?
- A: We were students at the Jewish Teacher Training Institution in Wurzburg our life was fairly normal. We could move freely in the streets of the city. We could hold our field trips. We could go on buses or trains, or whatever we had, there were no restrictions whatever, in that particular location. I believe that in most other places there were no restrictions either (the time was 1934 for the teacher's training). During vacation time I went home to visit my parents. In smaller places differentiations were felt more keenly, that is the segregation between Jews and non-Jews progressed at a faster rate. In the bigger cities it was not noticeable to that extent. So in places like Wurzburg, which was a university town, there was no particular thing that was depressing in any way. From that point of view our life was fairly normal, we could go to movies or to whatever public places we wanted to. There was no such limitation whatsoever.
- Q: Did the relationships which your parents had established over the years change in any way during this period of time? If so, how did that manifest itself?
- A: My parents felt from day to day and week to week that certain people who had been good friends for many, many years were pressured by the Nazi party to give up their Jewish friendships. Many people would come and, sometimes with tears in their eyes, would say: "Look, we depend on certain connections, or on a certain person, and they told us in no uncertain terms that unless we give up our friendships -- unless we stop dealing with you -- buying from you -- selling to you -- we could not expect to continue having those benefits." So the circle of friends shrank from week to week, month to month, until they became fairly isolated. Only neighbors who came to the back door and were afraid to show their friendships came. It was the policy of the government, the Nazi party, to bring about that separation, through a slowly moving process in every place. It was more noticeable in smaller places where everybody knew everybody else. It was less noticeable in bigger places. For instance, when I lived in Wurzburg, later in Munich, and later yet in Berlin, more or less we walked the streets, we went to movies like everybody else. There was very little which would disturb us.
- Q: Tell me about your father's business, at this time. We are assuming that it is shrinking as were the social contacts.
- A: As far as my parent's business was concerned there was one day of open boycott on April 1, 1933. The Nazi party made a project to place pickets in front of stores

owned by Jews and write slogans on windows -- showcase windows, display case windows: "This is a Jewish store -- do not buy!" That was a one day thing. It was frightening, it was upsetting, however the next week life returned to normal. Fewer and fewer customers came to our store and, as I said, many came through the back door to buy and many tried to do business so that nobody would notice -- that nobody would squeal on them. Naturally business declined. Business declined from 1933 on sometimes faster, sometimes slower but it did decline steadily, until in 1938, approximately it came to a standstill. Smaller businesses which were run by families, such as ours without anything being done officially; bigger stores, some of which were operated by companies were forced to switch. That means that they were forced to take in non-Jewish partners who, later on would take over. They called that, in German: "Gleichschaltung" which means that it was put in line with the general policy in that a non-Jew would become a partner and later on would take over the whole thing by buying it out, or whatever. So, bigger Jewish corporations or concerns such as department stores slowly but steadily became non-Jewish places of business. At that time, at least at first, the Jewish owners were compensated, at least to some extent. Sometimes they had to sell at a loss. After the war these owners could claim further compensation and mostly received such compensation (or the return of their businesses) after 1948.

Q: The Nazi presence was quite apparent in your hometown. They were not running the actual government (of Wittlich) at the time. Were they?

A: In our hometown I must say that many, many of the public officials -- Wittlich was a county seat -- such as police, mayor, city council, tried to maintain at least a semblance of objectivity. If we needed, let us say, police protection for whatever reason they would come, they would as though everything was normal. However we knew that they had to follow, after 1933, a party line at least to a certain extent, and it was an unpleasant experience. Take doctors, for instance, they also had to figure out exactly what they could do and what they could not do with Jewish patients. I must say that doctors also tried to be, at least insofar as we know personally, and remain as objective and natural as they could. However what they thought in their heart we did not know but officially they had to follow the party line. Many had little choice, but to do what the party told them to do. A cousin of my mother was the President of the Medical Association in Berlin. He was Jewish, his wife was non-Jewish and his children were half-Jews. His practice declined because of his religion. He felt that he was standing in the way of his children, that they could not make any progress anywhere because of their Jewish father, so he committed suicide. He told me a few days before his suicide that it was lucky for me that I was at that time a young man, that I could go to Palestine and start a new life, but that he did not see that possibility for himself as a, maybe, 50 year-old man. A day or two later his, by then, widow called me and told me that they found him dead in bed. He had been President of the Medical association in Berlin.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Dr. Muller! I now forget his first name.

Q: We are getting very close to the time when I have to switch the tape over so let us stop at this point and change the tape.

It seems that when the tape was changed some of interview was not recorded, or if it was recorded it was not preserved on the tape from which the transcription is being made. It will be necessary for the listener/reader attempt to forego this information at the start of the second interview. It appears that this portion of the interview pertains to the life of Hans Erman's sister who is about two years younger than Hans.

A: (She) understood that there was a way to get to England, as a domestic helper. However in order to be a domestic helper she had to learn. So I got her a job with a Jewish family in Berlin. A family whose children were students of mine. She worked for that family as domestic help. She learned to use a vacuum cleaner and things like that. After about one-half year she received immigration papers to go to England. She worked as a domestic help in England for some time. Then she was able to use her secretarial abilities (probably also some secretarial training) and she became a secretary first in London and later on in Liverpool. She met a young man from Czechoslovakia, a Jewish immigrant, and they got married in England. Later on her husband and his brother came from England to N.Y. That is where they live to this day. These events took place already in 1935 or 36. I remember, and that is interesting, while we are talking about the topic of staying or leaving; (This probably was what CE's question was about) when I decided to leave. I had a position in a school, as a teacher. We saw some of our children leaving either with their parents or without their parents. There was an institution called: "Youth Aliya", that means "Immigration of Young People to Israel". Some others went with children groups to England, to Israel, to the U.S. We saw people leaving but still, quite a few of our friends and of our leadership said: "Hold your positions just as long as you can!" I recall and that I will never forget, my last landlady, with whom I stayed, when I finally told her that I had decided to leave, said: "Why do you have to leave? You hold a secure position. You get your monthly salary check. Furthermore nothing is happening to you. You can do whatever you want to do!" So she was, at that time, a lady possibly in her sixties, and she had trouble understanding the thinking of a younger person. She was quite depressed when I -- and maybe others -- told her that we had decided to leave. (Also possibly some self interest came into play. By 1937 or 8 Jewish landlords/landladies could no longer take in non-Jewish boarders and there no longer were that many Jewish people available who could count on a regular paycheck with which to pay one's rent). I had immigration papers, we might as well talk about this while we are on the topic, to become a student at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. As a graduate of a German high school, I could be admitted to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I also could take with me, the

money necessary to pay tuition and board for a period of two years. I had submitted my application to the German authorities. I wanted to take along, at that time, about four thousand dollars, in German money. I had part of that money and I received part of it from others who wanted to get money across the German border, in a more or less legal way. (At that time money restrictions were such that you could not freely take your own savings with you even if you left Germany with full legal permission.) The arrangements between the others and myself were that in some case I said: "OK, I will give back to you" pertaining to whatever money they gave me, however I had most of that money myself. So I prepared to become a student at Hebrew University at the age of 24. However I had been a teacher at a school in Berlin. I received my immigration papers in January of 1938. The area where I lived in Berlin was in Charlottenburg. It was close to one of the major highways. Every night we could hear German tanks moving East for hours. That gave us the shivers, we could more or less anticipate that war would break out fairly soon. There was a time when we said that things are getting to be unpleasant times and we better do something. (Internationally the Munich Accords dismembering Czechoslovakia were signed in September 1938 but interestingly enough and foolishly enough I stayed from January until May 1938, to finish the school year. I didn't think that it was important enough or dangerous enough to tell my principal or my students: "Hey, I am sorry, I have to go!" I had my papers but I said that I want to finish the school year and to give my report cards to the students. In May or June we took a train to Italy, and then a boat from Trieste to Haifa, to Palestine.

Q: Let's back up just a little bit now. You were in Germany when the Nuremberg laws were established?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me how that affected you -- or if it did affect you, and your family.

A: Personally it did not affect me. It affected people who were married to non-Jews. It affected business relationships. A non-Jewish maid could not work any longer for or go to a Jewish home. It did affect me in one way, which had some impact: When I got my job in Berlin, I could send money to my parents. They, at that time, apparently had very little income of their own. I sent monthly checks and I could deduct those checks from my income tax. I believe that it was part of the German Nuremberg laws that that could not be done anymore. When that came through and I could no longer deduct the donation to my parents from my income tax (as other Germans could do) that was another hint that, somehow, things got worse from day to day. That was another push to tell me: "Look, it just doesn't work! You have to do something!" that occurred in the middle thirties, that I made that decision that I had to look for something else.

Q: What was Berlin like during 1936 through 38?

A: Berlin was a very interesting place. It was maybe one of the most interesting cities which you can think of in this connection. First of all half of the Jewish population of Germany lived in Berlin, a quarter of a million people. All the major Jewish agencies or institutions were located or centralized in Berlin. Interestingly enough, on one hand, I could move around very, very freely. There was nothing, whatsoever that would tell me not to go to a movie, not to go to a concert, not to go to a cabaret, or what have you. We could use the subway. We could use the elevated trains. We could use trains or airplanes or buses. I had a passport. When we completed our studies at the teacher's institute in Wurzburg, our graduating class decided to go to Israel. (then Palestine) on a visit. We were to tour it as visitors. We received passports. It was all in Nazi times, in 1935. I had a German passport. With that passport I did indeed travel at least three times across the borders, without anybody asking questions. Once we traveled to Israel and back, that is all of us except one who decided, at that time, to stay in Israel. That is talking about our graduating class. Once we traveled from Berlin, a group of young Jewish people, to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Switzerland on our vacation and then we came back. So when it came to the point where we decided to emigrate some people had trouble getting a passport, because of financial problems with income tax and what have you. I had no such problem. I had a passport in my pocket. I could cross the borders legally, at any time. When I really decided to go I actually had no official trouble with anybody. The only case which came up was the money. I had to get the transfer of money approved before I left Berlin. Somehow that dragged on, I didn't get the confirmation for these four thousand dollars to be transferred. We talked amongst ourselves. I mean people who were in the know and knew these things. I asked: "What can you do?" Some people said: "You have to go there (to the German agency) it will take you the entire morning, to sit and wait after you take a number, to get to the official." I went to the agency and I said: "Look, I have my tickets for the boat to Trieste. I have to be there a week from now! So far I did not get a confirmation that I can take along the money to study at the Hebrew University." So he looked at the ticket. The ticket was there and he saw it, and he saw that I had to go. So he said: "OK, I am going to give you a document on the basis of which you can go to a bank and they will give you your money right away." My money was available however I had to get dollars to go to a foreign country (the Mark was not accepted as legal tender, internationally). He gave me a piece of paper and he added: "If during this week, you should get the confirmation for the other application you filed, you can utilize only one of the permits." Believe it or not, but during that week I also received the other application back. For quite some time I was in a quandary as to what I should do. People said: "You have the approved application, not for four thousand dollars but for eight thousand dollars. You should take these eight thousand dollars along. Because it is your money, but not someone else's money, now legally it is yours." So leaving the country with this legal transfer. I didn't carry money along, the bank transferred it to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. It was a legal transfer. So I said: "OK!" I went to the office of the Hebrew university and I said: "OK, here is the money, please let me have it." Everything was legal, black on white, and it was transferred.

That was the only run-in which I had with the German officials, and this developed. It was always conducted in a more or less peaceful way.

Q: Did you have to have special identification at any time?

A: No! Not as long as I lived in Germany. There was no (special) identity card whatsoever. That came much later. The Jews had to wear a Star of David and had to have an ID card. That came much later, not in my time.

Q: There was a concerted effort on the part of the Nazis to have the Jewish people emigrate. They apparently encouraged emigration.

A: The Nazi party tried from the very beginning to tell the Jews: "Leave! Get out!" At first they said: "Take along anything you have -- your entire household, your apartment, furniture, money!" however as time went on and economic conditions apparently got worse (and the Nazis noticed that internationally no one cared what they did to the Jews) what you could take with you became limited. Later on Jews could take only one "lift", that means one container, full of furniture. I could take along a radio and books which I had and the money. Later on it became harder. Later you also needed a special permit to take things along. However the Germans wanted you to go. The problem was not that they didn't let you go. The problem was where to go. Nobody wanted any immigrants. There were international conferences at which all the countries were sympathetic and everybody said: "Well, something should be done!" But nobody did anything. That was the tragedy that nobody opened doors or unlocked gates for those who wanted to escape. Each and every Jew could have gotten out, if a decent place had been found where they said: "You may come!" That was the problem: where to go? So many had to cross borders during the night (to escape). Later on the only place which was open was Shanghai. To get there you had to take a train through Russia. You got to Shanghai, into terrible slums where people couldn't find anything to live on. So that was the story.

Q: You apparently left several months before Kristallnacht (the night of nine to ten November 1938 when the Nazis staged a pogrom by burning and looting synagogues and Jewishly owned stores and arresting or killing Jewish males at random).

A: Only a few months. I left in summer of 1938 and the Kristallnacht was in November 1938. Only a few months. At that time things changed much more rapidly, for the worse.

Q: Your parents were still in Germany?

A: My parents lived in their house until 1941, or so. Then the Jews who were still in Wittlich, or in its area, were concentrated in a few homes, larger homes, for deportation. From Wittlich they were deported to Theresienstadt, in

Czechoslovakia. I had letters from my parents from there, Red Cross letters. I know that my mother was sick, already before that time. About one-half year after her arriving in Theresienstadt she passed away. My father survived her by about one-and-one-half years. He died in 1943. The government of Czechoslovakia sent me both death certificates, from my parents. At that time I lived in Tel Aviv. The house they lived in was returned to us after WWII, the owner had to pay us according to going prices of real estate. This is how things returned to normal after the end of the war.

Q: Do you recall how old your parents would have been, roughly, when they died?

A: My parents were born in 1881 and 83. They were deported in 42, or so. So you have a span of about sixty years.

Q: You left without apparently any problems, when you finally departed. You went directly to Palestine?

A: I went directly to Palestine via Italy. We had no particular problem. I mean that we had very unpleasant experiences in the last years in Germany. Some of them were more depressing, some of them were less depressing. We saw signs here or there, that "Jews are not permitted!" in swimming pools or in certain areas (also certain villages or small towns posted such signs; generally reading "Juden sind hier (unable to translate)" at the edge of town. Basically, personally we had very little discomfort in that area. Stores were open, you could buy what you wanted. (that seems to have been the case in Berlin, in other cities individual stores, posted the signs against Jews). As a matter of fact I had my income. I was better off than many who lost their income and therefore were much worse off, than I was. For them the problem was much more pressing. I know a lot of cases where people disappeared. Those who disappeared were primarily those who had done something which was considered not the right thing to do. Such things were, for instance, dealing with foreign currency or shipping things across the borders of Germany, or belonging to the Communist Party. I remember that on our faculty, in Berlin, we had two teachers whose husbands had been sent to concentration camps because they had been members of the Communist Party, or something like that. My wife's brother had belonged to a youth group opposing the Nazis and right after the takeover in 1933, they came to search for him in his house. He luckily was not there. They got the word to him and at night he crossed the border -- that was in 1933 already. So he became a refugee in France and later on he went to Palestine. I know from many, many cases where people were sent to concentration camps, or people who disappeared. Nobody knew where they went to. In my hometown, some men had had some relationships with non-Jewish women, suddenly they disappeared. They were hiding in the woods. So we knew about all kinds of things. I had friends who suddenly died as young people for no good reason. Some of my relatives. I had cousins who suddenly disappeared and died at an early age for no good reason. We could piece together that many things happened at that time, some of these happenings were fortunate and people got by

OK, some of these happenings were unfortunate and people got caught. I remember some cases in Berlin where we talked about things like this: crossing the street in the wrong way was reason enough for a policeman to arrest you and warn you, if you were non-Jewish he gave you a warning: "OK I warn you, this is not the place to cross the street!" If you were Jewish he would say: "Well, go with me to the station" and he looked in registers and lists, and if the policeman found something else they may send him to a concentration camp. For a little thing like crossing the street the wrong way may have been reason enough to arrest a person and send him to a concentration camp, and that may have been the end of his life. So it was, to a large extent, a matter of good luck or bad luck if you made it through that period. So I know that quite a few friends of mine and colleagues and members of my graduating class and members of my faculty who somehow did not get out of class on time -- frequently young people, cousins and friends, -- just disappeared into concentration camps. There is no question that was not due to a plain accident or to sickness or other natural causes. My parents, as I said, were in Theresienstadt. Theresienstadt was apparently one of the better camps, it was the place visited by the Red Cross. All the other concentration camps were not visited by anybody and I know of relatives who did not get to Theresienstadt and who perished, while those who did go to Theresienstadt either died a more or less normal death or survived. However, interestingly enough some of my relatives who survived Theresienstadt, for instance, the oldest sister of my father -- you see my father was one of the younger siblings of that family -- survived and could join her daughter in Holland after the war, in 1945. We corresponded for a short time. Of course she was not well, she was an old lady, but she survived. Theresienstadt was a place where apparently enough food was given to these people to survive. Another aunt of mine also survived and told about the last days of my mother and my father and of another aunt, who were there, how they died and things, like that. I still have those letters, from the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

Q: From what you know, your parents lived a fairly non-persecuted life to the very end. They were within the camps, however, they were not brutalized.

A: We can't imagine, at this point, and I thought about that for a long, long time, we can't imagine what it means for a family which lived in one place, for x number of years, suddenly to be told to move out; to go to another house -- as they had to do. In the other house, all they had, was either one room, or they separated men and women into assigned rooms. Apparently that was the case also in Theresienstadt. Men were assigned to one area and women to another area. Nowadays, sometimes, when we, for instance, go on a trip or visit somebody and we look for our toothbrush or something else, if we don't find it we get nervous. That is a little thing! Now imagine that you come to a concentration camp where hundred or thousand people are milling around and you don't have a niche in which you can put anything down, you may have a suitcase. Although no violence was done to them -- no physical injury inflicted on them -- just the idea of being suddenly abandoned and in a crowd of unknown people, trying to collect

yourself and enter a new way of life that must be so traumatic that you can't imagine it,` You just can't imagine that.

Q: Was your aunt able to tell you, in the letters which you have, whether your parents were able to stay in contact with each other.

A: Yes! My aunt, in one letter she wrote me that my father who was a trained tailor, as I have mentioned earlier, was able to use that skill to his own benefit and to the benefit of my mother and possibly of other relatives as well, to earn a living. In one of her letters she said that he worked hard and made it possible for my mother, and possibly others, to buy more food with the money he earned with tailoring suits and shortening or lengthening whatever they had. He made enough money to procure them a decent -- oh this couldn't be decent under these conditions -- a better than average existence. So apparently he did have his tools, you know what ever was needed for tailoring; either he took them with him to Theresienstadt or he was able to obtain them there. He did some tailoring and could support himself and his wife and possibly others with the craft he had learned as a youngster.

Q: How long were they in the camp altogether?

A: My mother about a half a year and my father about two years. When the camp was liberated some came out alive the others died there. During the confinement. A brother of my father's had a young child, a relatively young child. They were also shipped to Theresienstadt. Once in Theresienstadt they wanted to separate the parents from the child. My aunt did not want to give up that child. She didn't know where the child would wind up. So they told her: "If you don't want to give him up then you go along with him!" That meant she would be going to another concentration camp and that meant, apparently the end of their lives.

Q: You don't know what camp that was, do you?

A: No, I don't know what camp they were sent to, but we never heard any word about them. One of their daughters survived in Argentina, where she now lives. She also confirms that nothing ever became known about that family.

Q: It is May 14, 1981. This is the second interview which I am holding with Mr. Hans Erman.

I would like to start out with a little review. In our last tape you were leaving Europe for the land of Israel, then called Palestine. You went through Italy. Can you tell me if there was anything unusual or significant about the trip from Italy to the land of Israel. What were conditions like on the ship? Were you stopped at any point? Anything of that kind is of interest.

A: The trip from Berlin through Germany, Switzerland, crossing the borders, was perfectly normal. There were no incidents. While crossing the borders, of course, we had to show our passports and our luggage had to be opened and inspected. We arrived in Trieste on the Adriatic Sea and we boarded the Italian liner S.S. Roma, which brought us to Haifa. There was nothing unusual on that trip. It took us three and one-half days from Trieste to Haifa. In Haifa we were received by an official of the Jewish Agency who was in charge of immigration. We were led to a place which they called: "Immigration House." There we were housed for a number of days. We received meals there. That went on until they found us a place to live, or a job or whatever. In my particular case I knew that my destination was Jerusalem, the Hebrew University, so I stayed in Haifa only a day or two. Then I proceeded to Jerusalem where I rented a room. Then I went up to the Hebrew University to register as a student and to receive my monthly allowance of six English pounds. To give you an idea of what six pounds (English) meant at that time. It was a fairly good income. The average income of a policeman, let us say, at that time was five pounds. When I told friends and relatives that my income was six pounds they just said "Wow! You can have a very good life." I had rented a room in the center of Jerusalem and I was prepared to attend classes at the Hebrew University.

Q: Before you get to the university I would like to ask you just two questions about your coming to Haifa. Can you give us an estimate about how many people were on board?

A: The S.S. Roma was one of the largest boats that crossed the Mediterranean Sea. I believe that it was a ship displacing 3,500 tons. If I remember correctly it could transport 1,500 people plus cargo and other things. It was a fairly large boat.

Q: Was it full?

A: Yes. The ship was filled.

Q: What country sponsored the ship?

A: This was an Italian line ship. The arrangements for the passengers were made by the Jewish Agency. The Jewish Agency is an organization which helped people leave Germany and other countries and move to places such as Israel or other countries. They booked the passage and got us the travel papers. We had nothing to worry about, in that connection.

Q: The other question was: when you got to Israel, you had to deal apparently with the British government as you came in through immigration. Although, concluding from the fact that you said that you had no problem there, was there a Jewish organization which helped you initially to get established for the two or three days when you were in Haifa? Also did you deal with any type of organization?

- A: To get to your first question first; our passports had to have a British entry visa for Israel. We obtained that entry visa in Berlin, from the British consulate. In Haifa the British authorities checked the passports and the visa. All this was OK, so we had no further problems. Now getting to your second question: as I mentioned the Jewish Agency ran that Immigration House. That was for new immigrants where people could stay for a number of days and could get meals until they found a permanent place to live. I needed that place only for a temporary stay, until I proceeded to Jerusalem. That agency did help people who needed help. Quite a few probably needed a longer stay, possibly a stay for weeks or months. People could even come back to the Immigration House, if needed for example, if someone got a job and then lost a job, one could return there. It was a fairly primitive place. It was dormitory style, which means that one room could have as many as 20 or 25 beds. For meals they had some kind of dining hall where people stood in line to get meals. They could eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was a fairly primitive arrangement, but for some people, it was a good thing to have.
- Q: There was one organization which took you right from Europe to Israel and then got you settled. It was well organized?
- A: Yes! That was organized. That is correct.
- Q: Can you give us some ideas as to what the conditions were like -- the geographic and fiscal conditions of the country when you first reached it. What did you see?
- A: At that time conditions were quite different in Israel. Politically the country was a mandate given by the League of Nations to the British. The British therefore were in charge of the administration. At that time there were Arab hostilities (a massacre of Jewish settlers organized under the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem had culminated in 1936, but was still going on sporadically although the Grand Mufti had fled); there was violence against Jewish immigration. The British were in a difficult position to equalize the pressures from the Arab side and from the Jewish side. The Jews wanted more immigrants, they wanted their relatives to come from Europe. The Arabs opposed that. The British finally came to the point where they had to establish a certain policy. It was a very harsh policy. The way it was was that the British had to promise the Arabs that a certain number of Jews, only, should be admitted. Children should be admitted without limitation however for adults they set a specific limit. However even that was too much for the Arabs and the Arabs tried to prevent Jews from coming to the land of Israel. There was constant violence. One of the first things which I recall was that every Jew had to volunteer one night a week to stand guard against Arab attack. They gave us very brief training with rifles and hand grenades. From then on, once a week we had to go out and stand guard at certain points in Jerusalem, and, later on, in other places where I lived. We had to watch that Jewish neighborhoods, or Jewish settlements and villages would not be attacked at night. So, it was a difficult period. For example, I recall that in Jerusalem, I lived in the center of

town, which was fairly safe; however certain British offices were located in Arab neighborhoods. One of those places was the railroad station. I had to go to it in order to get my luggage. I had a cabin -sized box with my belongings. I had to go to the station to pick it up. Buses would go by the station, but it was too dangerous to use a bus for that location -- so I hired a cab, a taxicab. The driver told me that he would take me to the station. I could get out of the cab, but that he would not wait one second for me to come back. So I got out of the cab. Went into the station and arranged my transportation. When I was finished I had to go out and hail another cab which happened to come by, and get a ride to my room. No cab would wait at that station. In other words, it was dangerous to venture into an Arab neighborhood then. So, these cases of violence and hostilities continued for quite some time. It was very similar to what you see in our days when you watch TV about happenings in Northern Ireland. There was a two front battle between British and Arabs and Jews going on. On the other hand, the second thing which I remember distinctly, were daily demonstrations. The Jews demonstrated in front of British buildings, for more immigration papers for their relatives. This was caused because more and more letters arrived from people in Europe, from people who wanted to get out. So we asked for, or demanded, more papers of immigration to get our relatives to come out of Europe. The more letters we received, the more demonstrations were held in Jerusalem. We tried to do our best but the British did not budge. As a matter of fact many Jews tried to leave Europe, if they couldn't do it legally, they tried to do it illegally. They tried to hire boats and they tried to reach the shores of Israel with these boats. The British navy which at that time was considered to be very powerful, tried to stop these boats. Some were returned to Europe, including to Germany. Some of these people were arrested and taken to concentration camps (in Palestine). Many boats did not make it at all. They went down (sank) in the open sea. Every time (something like that happened) there were more demonstrations in Israel. On one boat close to one thousand people perished. Some boats reached the shores of the U.S. and the Roosevelt administration turned them back. They had to go back to Europe (specifically S.S. St. Louis which was loaded with children). So there was no country open to Jewish refugees who wanted to get out of Europe. Before the war and during the war it was a very restless period of constant fighting for or against immigration, depending on which side of the line you stood.

- Q: Can you give me some idea of the size of the Jewish population, as compared to the size of the Arab one, at that time?
- A: Yes! At that time the Jewish population was around one-half million people and the Arab population was about 600,000. So the Arab population was a little larger, in the land of Israel. In other words the Arabs had a slight edge over the Jews in terms of population.
- Q: When you mention standing guard at various spots. Were the Jews contained within certain areas. In other words, were there any types of restraints for areas, such as fences, anything to keep people separated?

A: Officially there was no attempts to separate us, to segregate one group from the other; however in reality the Arabs had their cities, their towns, their villages, the Jews had their villages and towns, and in big cities there were neighborhoods. For instance if you take a city like Jerusalem or Haifa you had Arab neighborhoods and you had Jewish neighborhoods. Depending upon the location, relationships sometimes were fairly good, sometimes they were strained. I mean that incidents happened -- such as attacks -- and suddenly there was a temporary strain or tension then later on that diminished again. For instance, I remember that at one time, I took a cab and we were stranded in Jaffa, in the old city of Jaffa. It was a great danger to be stranded there. Depending on conditions you could have lost your life -- so it was very important to get out to a Jewish neighborhood. Buses did travel through each other's neighborhoods. Most of the time public transportation was OK, it was fairly regular. Occasionally buses were attacked -- Jewish buses were attacked particularly on their way from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (This road forces traffic to slow down to a crawl due to the steep hills through which the road goes, complete with switch backs and hairpin turns just below fortified emplacements making ambushes very easy.) Many buses were attacked there and people lost their lives, so every bus had one or two policemen watching what was going on.

Q: We are going to have to stop here since we are running out of tape.

Q: It is May 14, 1981. I am interviewing Mr. Hans Erman at the Jewish Community Complex on Denlinger Road in Dayton, Ohio. This is the second tape of an interview on the Holocaust Project, in the Dayton area,

OK let us start with a little introduction question to this tape. I would like to know, you were giving me some material on the situation in the land of Israel at the time of 1938. Some of the British documents would lead one to believe that the British had the attitude that the Jewish community and the Arab community were going to blend very nicely. They talk in terms of everyone being allowed to pursue their own education, language and what have you. It seems to be a utopian type of idea; that this is going to work because everyone was going to be happy, do what they want to do within their rights. Now having lived through these early stages -- at that time -- I was wondering if you might go into the British attitude and how it actually manifested itself.

A: During WWI and going back to the year 1917 (that is when the British fought the Turks and later became overlords of Palestine) The British were in difficult positions and tried to obtain help from any side they could. In Britain, at that time lived a Jewish chemist, Dr. Chaim Weizmann. Dr. Weizmann made an important invention which helped the British war effort. In return, when they asked him what he wanted for his invention, he said that he had only one wish or request and that was that the British help establish a Jewish homeland in the state of Palestine. So in 1917, on November 2, the British Foreign Office, issued the so-called

Balfour Declaration. This Declaration stated that Great Britain feels itself obligated to help the Jews establish a Jewish homeland in the land of Palestine (HE and also CE keep referring to the land as Israel prior to 1948, that, however was not the name, at that time, this was not corrected in the earlier parts of the interview when it did not seem relevant). That declaration also mentions that all the rights of the established Arab community should not be infringed upon and that nothing should be done to infringe on the rights of Jews living in other countries. Based on that document the Jews believed that the British were on their side. Now for many years, apparently, the British did help the Jews establish and develop the homeland in Palestine. This man, Dr. Chaim Weizmann was very British oriented. He did not grow up in England but he was very much impressed by British attitudes, British philosophy etc. He maintained that England is our friend. So, whenever there was any discussion, or argument about what side the British were on, Weizmann was always the man who said: "We have to go with the British for better or worse!" There were, however, opposite opinions, people who said: "No, the British are not our friends, we have to fight them and we have to get them out of Palestine!" That caused, later on, the development of the so-called Jewish underground or terrorist organization of Israel, Lavy and so on. One of these was headed by Mr. Begin, who right now is the Prime Minister of Israel. He, at that time was the head of one of these underground, so-called terrorist organizations. It was called, in Hebrew the Irgun Zei Lewmi or abbreviated as Irzel. So the Arabs started to revolt against Jewish immigration into Palestine. The British discussed it at length what to do and what not to do. A great number of inquiries and commissions were set up to find out what had been done, what could be done and what should be done. At one point the British published a White Paper (that is a paper of an official findings, less extensive than a book) around 1940 -- already during wartime -- where they severely limited Jewish immigration. They said: "From now on only 100,000 or 200,000 Jews can be admitted to Palestine" and that was it, and after that nobody else will be admitted. That gave more impetus to the Jewish underground to fight against the British. Of course Jews in Palestine understood that it was not just a matter of black and white -- that the British did not just have to separate Jews and Arabs, and their interests in Palestine, but that the British had global interests. Interests in Iraq, in India, and all over the globe. They didn't just have to take care of one group, or of the other. However, basically, within the Jewish community there were these differences of opinion whether the British were our friends or whether they were our enemies. They tried, at least externally, to maintain a more balanced viewpoint -- and they tried to do that, at times. To come back to my personal experiences, which at least to some extent, ties in with these political events. I myself was, of course, legally a student of Hebrew University and daily I made my trip to the lectures in Jerusalem. After some time I found that the things which I studied were not very practical and were not very useful. I became, to some extent disillusioned with the things which they taught. Basically I felt that I had completed a certain training as a teacher in Europe and I had a very strong inclination to find a job in Jerusalem, or elsewhere in Palestine. After a few months as a student at Hebrew University, I began looking for a job.

That was not easy because there was a surplus of Jewish teachers and everyone told me that I didn't stand a chance; that I just had no chance to land a job as a teacher at present. Not only was there a surplus of teachers, but there were also many new immigrants coming from Europe who knew enough Hebrew and could easily qualify for the profession of teaching. So, I did the next best thing. I went to visit Jewish schools in order to get a feel of the profession, what was going on. It so happened that I was permitted to visit schools and to sit by in classes. In most cases the teachers whom I got in touch with very soon tried to recruit me for work in their schools. One teacher said: "I was on guard duty last night and I am dead tired. I have to go to sleep. Would you please take over this class?" He added: "Well, at least tell the class where you come from, what you did. The kids may be interested in this." That gave me a lot of confidence. First I felt that I could communicate with Hebrew speaking youngsters. My Hebrew was fairly fluent by that time, already, and it encouraged me to go further along that line, to try to, somehow, get a part time job, or whatever, in the field of education. In 1939, I was still in Jerusalem but, I think this happened in February, I received a job offer. The offer meant leaving Jerusalem and go to a suburb of Tel Aviv, a former suburb which is now called Tel Ashomer, where the owner of a large building offered me the job of founding principal for a boarding school, a resident boarding school for children who came to Palestine without parents ( at that time the British allowed immigration to Palestine only for children under 18) or children who came from homes where they could not stay any longer. After quite some consideration and thinking I accepted the job. In 1939 I left Jerusalem and moved to Tel Ashomer, again as I mentioned before, traveled the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. I remember that I was quite uneasy during that trip, on a truck with my furniture and other belongings, traveling to Tel Ashomer. In late 1939 WWII broke out. That was after I had been on that job for about one-and-a-half years. The outbreak of the war changed conditions in Palestine radically. Relationships which had existed between Jews and Arabs and between Jews and British changed completely. Suddenly there was calm. I didn't know who did it but the Arabs stopped the hostilities and everything moved to a different plane. In Israel Jews, Arabs and British had to stick together against the new enemies which were Germany and Italy. We were suddenly less concerned with the hostilities from the Arabs, we were more concerned with the possibilities of air raids which the Italians might make ( actually Italy did not enter the European hostilities and the shooting war until June 1940, when the French had been defeated) and actually undertook. So, for quite sometime, we had daily air raid drills. We built air raid shelters. I mentioned that I was working at a school. I started with five students and built it up to an enrollment of about 82. We had many air raid drills. I think that in 1940 the first air raid happened in Tel Aviv. At that time the Italian leader, Mr. Mussolini, decided for some reason or other to teach the Jews a lesson for giving the British an ambulance -- which had been donated to the British army. A number of bombs were dropped on Tel Aviv causing damage to a number of buildings and killing a number of people -- about eight or ten people, and wounding others. We heard the bombs in the suburb of Tel Aviv where we lived. We heard the explosions. For a long time that was the

only incident of war which I recall, in Palestine proper. The first few years of the war after that incident were relatively calm. The Arabs were, more or less in agreement with what was happening. The British followed their policy, Jews and British and Arabs more or less lived comfortably together. As a matter of fact I had a friend, an Arab friend, a teacher in a neighboring Arab community and we visited each other. He came to our school and visited me, met my colleagues, sat in classes and I went to visit him by going down to the Arab village visited his school, sat in his classes. We tried to teach each other. He tried to teach me Arabic and I taught him Hebrew. At first we communicated in English, to the extent that we were both able of doing that. What I am pointing out is that, suddenly, positions changed radically, to the extent that I could walk in European clothing, which was very conspicuous in an Arab village where everybody was wearing typical Arab dress. I could, for example, stop a person in the street and ask: "Where does Mr. So and So live?" and he would answer me: "Go left then right etc. and you will find it", or I would ask: "Where is that school?" and he would tell me. I could go to that school, then, and sit in a group of, maybe 40 or 50 Arab youngsters. Later on I would get home safely. He could come to my place for quite some time -- that is until the Jewish Defense Agency people gave me a hint and said: "We are not sure about that man who comes to visit you; whether he is a friend or a spy or an enemy. So for his safety and yours we recommend that you tell him frankly that he should not come anymore to our place". So, I had to tell him that, our friendship notwithstanding, we should meet somewhere else. So we started meeting in public places in Tel Aviv such as cafes, or restaurants and we continued our friendship for quite sometime, that is for many years. However, officially he could not come anymore to our school and I did not visit him anymore in his place. The war continued for a number of months -- maybe two years -- then the Jews in Israel felt obligated to contribute to the British war effort. The Agency demanded that Jews volunteer as soldiers in the British army. Pressure on everybody grew from day to day and week to week to joining the British army. All those who were young and unmarried and so on and so forth more or less had to make up their minds either to join or face constant resistance and hostility and verbal attacks from people in the area telling you that "Now we have to fight the greater enemy, which is Nazi -- Germany and Fascist Italy and we have to forget about our own animosity towards the British. Now we have to help them. They, of course, deserve some punishment, the British do, for what they did to us, but we hope that they can take that punishment later because now it is important to us that they fight with us against the Nazi forces. In the meantime the Nazis had penetrated Northern Africa ( after a thorough defeat of the Italians at Tobruk in the Eastern Cyrenaica province of the Italian colony of Libya who fell back on Benghazi. The Nazis took over the warfare in Libya in late 1940 or very early 1941) and conquered (or reconquered as far as it had been Italian) the coastal line got close to Egypt and even entered Egypt ( as far as Al Alamein) and that is where (some of) the decisive battles of WWII were fought. As far as I was concerned I felt obligated to join the British army. However there were so many stories and rumors about the way the British treated the so-called "Natives", a Native was anybody who was nor British born,

that it was a very questionable thing to do. I recall listening to one story which was told and made the rounds in Palestine, at that time, that the Prime Minister of Great Britain gave a report to the Parliament about one of these battles in Egypt. He reported that in the battle 750 Canadians were killed and 250 Australians were killed and 150 New Zealanders lost their lives and one Englishman also lost his life. Then somebody in the Parliament called out "What business did he have to be there?" So all these things including the way the British would, at times, pull back from a battlefield and leave anybody behind who was not British, convinced me that it was not yet time to join the army. Also, I was still attempting to save my parents. This required me to stay outside of the army and continue that effort. So I decided not to join for the time being. However pressure in that suburb became so intolerable. There were so many catty calls and catty remarks made that I decided that I could not stay there, in spite of the fact that I had quite some standing in the community. I decided to leave that job. Fortunately I could get a job with the British government in a place which was not the most pleasant job one could think of, but it was a secure job in terms of not being under pressure to join the army. That was a boy's reformatory school in another suburb of Tel Aviv in Nishon Yehuda, not far from the town of Rishon Le-Zion. There was a reformatory school for juvenile delinquents and young criminals where they were looking for a young teacher. I accepted that job and moved out there. There we were again under British supervision. We had a British superintendent coming from Jerusalem once in a while. We supervised that school. It was very hard work. Our students ranged in age from ten to 18; they included thieves, criminals, male prostitutes and murderers. I maintained that job for two -and-a-half years, until at the end of the war when I found a job at a Jewish high school in Tel Aviv. One of the side effects of my staying in that boy's reformatory was that, across the street from that school there was an agricultural high school for girls. I visited that school on one occasion and the principal of that school asked one of the girls to show me around. It so happened that that girl became my wife. It was one of the sidelines of my work in the boy's reformatory. We got married in 1945 and we established a home in Tel Aviv. As I mentioned, I got a job in a Jewish high school in Tel Aviv. The war ended in 1945 and our first son was born in 1947. The State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948. At that time my son was one year old. On his first birthday the first Egyptian bombs fell on Tel Aviv, when the Arabs entered the war against the Jewish State. The State had just been proclaimed and the Arabs started the War of Independence in 1948.

Q: Can I go back and ask you just a couple of questions?

A: Yes.

Q: Basically I was wondering, although you partially answered this at various times, how many languages do you speak?

- A: Fluently, I speak three languages, German, Hebrew and English. Less fluently -- or to some extent I speak French and Spanish. I also understand Yiddish and some Arabic.
- Q: Secondly, when your education in Germany -- can you give me the equivalent level as to that that would be on the U.S. level? Was it a bachelor's degree? Or had you gone up to the Master's? What level of education have you obtained?
- A: Elementary school, high school, teacher's college, the equivalent of a BA. That was the (formal) education I had. Because of conditions I could not extend my education in Germany any further. Because of conditions in Israel and the war, I couldn't pursue my education there. I tried at one time to continue my education in France, at the beginning of the war (WWII) however soon the war spilled over; I had an interview with the French consul in Jerusalem, he listened to my French and he said: "Your French is good enough, but with your German passport you can not now expect to get into France." I wanted to pursue my studies in France but he said: "It is hopeless with your German passport to travel to France!" That was the beginning of WWII. So I couldn't continue there. Later on I continued my studies, when we came to the U.S. in 1954.
- Q: You just mentioned France, were you aware of what was going on in France at the time? (That must have been the period of the "Phony War" 1939-1940, the period between the German invasions of Poland and those of the Low Countries and France, right after HE dropped out of Hebrew University.)
- A: I was aware, at that time, I think Germany had not entered France yet when I started the process of applying for a scholarship. The program I was applying for was a two- year scholarship for someone who wanted to study French culture in the Near East. It was one of the topics which interested me. My thesis, so to speak, was along that line. So, when I started that project, the Germans had not entered France. In the meantime the war had spilled over. It was a bona fide effort and, as I stated, I applied to the French consul in Jerusalem, so that project could not be continued.
- Q: Another matter, which you mentioned briefly and which led to a thought is: You were so to speak against the British military service; you were not interested in military duty?
- A: I tried to delay it as much as I could. As it turned out I managed to delay it and I could survive the war (WWII) by getting this job with the British government. Even there I had visits from people who wanted me to give up the job and join the army. However I told them: "I can't. I have the job and I can not refuse to serve Jewish youth who were imprisoned there." Somehow there was no way to force me to do it. So I survived the draft. It was an unofficial draft which I resisted, and then at the end of WWII these things became less conspicuous and I got a job in a public high school in Tel Aviv.

Q: Did you ever, at any time, consider or even think about joining one of the groups that Begin at the time was involved with? Did you ever consider that avenue of resistance?

A: Actually, in Europe, before my leaving Europe, in Germany, I was a member of Begin's group. I still have pictures, in uniform, of being with a group in Frankfurt where we had some para military training. At that time I was more or less convinced that Begin's direction was the right one. When I came to Palestine, I attended some rallies and I became disillusioned with the group as such, with their intellectual level and the kind of philosophy they articulated and I discontinued my contact with any of the groups. Later on, I had very little contact with them and certainly no inclination to join any of these underground groups.

Q: Were you, at the time, a Zionist?

A: Yes, I was a Zionist to the point that I had invitation from friends to come to the U.S. from 1933 until I left Europe in 1938. I declined all these invitations, because I felt that going from one country of anti-Semitism to another country would only transfer the same problem from one place to another and I felt that the only solution to the Jewish problem and anti-Semitism was by creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine (that was and is actually the philosophy of Zionism, it had and still has nothing to do with relocating oneself to any country other than Palestine/Israel except as needed to further the aims of the Jewish homeland in Palestine). That was the reason why I decided to go to Palestine and that I did go.

Q: Were you politically oriented? Did you take any part in the political aspect of what was going on in Palestine at that time, or did you go along with what was going on without personally getting involved in the politics of the war issue?

A: Politically the Jewish population in Palestine was rather disorganized. There were all kinds of opinions. As you can imagine, under the British domination people could not develop the kind of organizations they should have or would have developed if they had been independent. That process also was not very attractive so I took no part whatsoever in any kind of political organization or groups or political parties. I tried to look out for my own career, to pursue my own career, to complete my education and earn a living. This meant, to get a job. That is what I was after all those years.

Q: You apparently were liberal minded enough to have created a friendship with this, supposedly, an enemy, an Arab, and you continued despite warning.

A: Well, in that connection, I always tried to plan ahead. When I was still living in Berlin, in 1935, 36, 37, 38, I took Arabic lessons. There happened to be an Arab refugee from Egypt, this man was a poet, a writer and an author, he had been exiled by King Fuad of Egypt. He lived in Berlin and made a living by giving

lessons and lectures and so on. I saw him once a week and studied Arabic, in the thirties in Berlin, because I knew that I was going to go to Palestine and that I would have contacts with Arabs. So, when I came to Palestine, I could speak some Arabic. I could also read and write some Arabic. At Hebrew University one of the courses I took was a course in Arabic. My idea was that actually Jews and Arabs would have to live together, would have to understand each other and that there was simply no other way out. That is what I had planned ahead and my line of thinking in that area. It paid off insofar that wherever I went I could make myself understood, at least to some extent and could communicate with others.

Q: Would you mind giving me the man's name?

A: The man's name was, if I remember correctly, Mohamed En Afnit.

Q: He was a teacher?

A: He was a teacher in a village called Yahudai (can not verify the spelling or location of this) not far from Tel Aviv. He had a brother who was a minister in the cabinet of Jordan, then. I am not sure as to what happened to him later on. I know that he came to visit me in Tel Aviv after I moved to Tel Aviv, toward the end of the war (WWII). We had some meetings, however I have no idea what became of him later, he stayed in Israel (after the War of Independence) or became one of the Arab refugees, or if he transferred to another job somewhere I truly don't know.

Q: Do you know if he was ever warned about his contacts with you or was that one-sided?

A: I have no idea, no idea about that. I don't know whether he really was dangerous in terms of being a spy, or if that was an insinuation, or if just the fact that he was an Arab who had no security clearance. I mean that we had every reason to be suspicious. There were so many terrorist attacks on Jewish villages and towns that most every Arab was a suspect. Apparently nobody could tell whether this man was connected or related to any of these organizations.. So, as a precaution, they told me: "It is better for you to stop seeing that man."

Q: However you didn't! You saw him!

A: Yes, I continued to see him because my philosophy was that eventually we would have to live together as neighbors. Therefore I made no real, strong effort to sever our relationship, until by some reason or other it unraveled and was discontinued.

Q: When you were teaching in that reform school situation, there were only Jewish children there?

- A: Yes, all these were Jewish children. A few children from western origin, but mostly Jewish children from Arabic countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq or natives who spoke only Arabic amongst themselves. That was another reason for me to make progress in Arabic. As a matter of fact I learned Arabic from these children.
- Q: Were these children basically orphaned or did they have families? What drove them to commit petty crimes, under the circumstances? Or is there an explanation?
- A: These children were, by the terms of reference we use in this country now, juvenile delinquents. They were caught by police doing criminal acts and they were sentenced to three, four, or five years of reformatory life, until they were old enough to go to prison they stayed in the reform school. So we had all the records of the children and we knew what they had done. So I got a glimpse into actual prison life, and how prison life is organized. In our days when I sit down and I read what goes on in American prisons and I read about all kinds of good or bad habits and practices and so on. I have an understanding about how these things are being done. There is a certain way of life which only a prisoner or a warden who works in prisons can understand. There is a certain, what you call, psychology, a certain pecking order. In other words; in every prison there are some people who are in power, in addition to the authorities who have the gun or the club or whatever. Amongst the prisoners there are leaders and there are others who are being led. The purpose of the administration is to be on good terms with the leaders amongst the prisoners. If they are with you then it is easy for you. For instance: if you give them vacations, days off on holy days -- to go home, to see their families, and you give them money for the trip or for whatever -- and they come back, then they are on your side. Then you can sleep comfortably and you know that as long as this guy, this fellow, is in charge of the place and we had some 60, 70 or 80 juvenile delinquents in that school and I was the only adult in charge of the school, when everyone else was on vacation or otherwise out. Even under those circumstances, I felt quite comfortable because I knew that the leadership among the prisoners, among the young juvenile offenders, were with us. Whenever we had any problem we called on one or the other and we said: 'Look, we have this and this problem, help us!' Then we could be sure that they had their own spy net. Their own net of helpers and assistants. They would find out what was going on and would give us a hint, or such. They would tell us in advance: "youngster No. 80, is planning to run away!" so we would know. They would tell us where he went -- where he meant to go -- and we would go to his home and pick him up and bring him back. There was a second institution, of the same type, an Arabic reformatory school. This school was located in the famous Arab town of Bethlehem. We had close contact with that reformatory school in Bethlehem, to the extent that some of their teachers occasionally came to our place and some of us went to their place. Especially, if some of our youngsters became unruly to the point where they would run away frequently or would

commit some crimes and since our school was an open place, we could not deal with them, then we had to transfer them to the school in Bethlehem which was a walled-in, old fortress, so that people could not run away. On a number of occasions I was given the job of transferring youngsters from our place to Bethlehem or bring back kids from Bethlehem to our place. So I was in touch with that school also. Again my knowledge of Arabic was most helpful. I could talk to the youngsters there. I would ask them: "Why are you here?" and they would tell me: "I beat up my mother" or "I killed a British officer" or "I beat up my father" and all these things (Of course some of the reasons for being sentenced were not common law crimes, but misbehavior along the lines put on the books by the colonial powers). It was a very interesting way of life in terms of getting to know what juvenile offenders are up to.

Q: Wasn't there, under those particular circumstances, a danger for the younger people to be transferred within various ethnic groups, because they were not only dangerous to each other, but to be actually thrown in with another element which was a danger?

A: I would not call it a danger, but it was a severe, severe punishment, in so far that they were subjected to all kinds of mistreatment. I don't remember any case where someone was hurt or killed, but they were all subjected to the normal things which go on in prisons including sodomy and homosexuality and beatings and what have you. They knew that and they were warned not once, not twice, but many times: "If you run away again, we have no choice but to transfer you to Bethlehem." After several times there was no choice but to do what you had threatened to do. That was part of maintaining discipline in a boy's reformatory school. I took those youngsters and I made photographs of them. I like to take pictures. I took those kids to an open swimming pool in an orange grove, some 60-70 kids, on a Saturday afternoon, all by myself. They marched like soldiers, there was no infringement whatsoever (to the regulations) because the leaders were on my side. I could trust them. Up they walked. They swam. They went back. They went to dinner. Sometimes it was a pleasure to see them. When I show these photographs, people are surprised and ask: how one man controls a group of 60 or 70 juvenile offenders without getting killed.

Q: I think that we are going to have to change my tape. (Obviously the new tape does not start completely on cue for the third interview but very little appears to have been lost.)

Q: The events which took place in the youth reformatory school which we were talking about last time, were interesting. Would you like to elaborate a little more on them?

A: There were two goals which we had in regard to these youngsters: Number 1. They had to be taught, they had to study the normal curriculum which youngsters of that age, that is ten through 17, would study, in elementary or high school.

And Number 2 was to try to reform them, to teach them morals and ethics. One of the ways in which we tried to do this is by teaching them a decent trade. We were planning to have workshops to teach them carpentry and plumbing and things like that, however we started with agriculture and we really had quite a number of acres of arable land. Most of the work which these youngsters did in the fields was to prepare them for agricultural work. In the morning they attended classes where we taught them languages, math, history and the other subjects. In the afternoons they worked in the fields. That was the basic working day in that school. We did have cases where youngsters escaped and sometimes we could not manage one or the other and then they were sent to the Arab reformatory school in Bethlehem. That school, if you remember, was walled in like a fortress so that they could not escape. Sometimes they stayed there for a number of weeks or months and then they were brought back to our place in Rishon Le-Zion. Some of these boys were recruited into underground organizations. In the eyes of the British these were illegal underground movements. Some were caught. I knew of at least two who were convicted and executed by the British because they carried arms and, possibly participated in terrorist activities, as the British called them. I mentioned earlier that I met my future wife while I worked in that school. We got married in 1945, shortly before the war ended, and we settled down in Tel Aviv where I got a job in a Jewish high school. Two years later, in 1947, our son was born, our first son. We called him Etan, in Hebrew, which means strong. One year later the War of Independence broke out. The British decided to abandon their mandate of Palestine and to withdraw. The Jewish state was proclaimed. The very moment the Jewish state was proclaimed seven Arab countries declared war and began bombing and attacking the Jewish frontiers; so the war broke out. That was in 1948.

Q: Can you recall any of the incidents? You knew that independence was coming? Or did you hope that it was coming? Was there some indication that you must prepare for war? What was taking place, as far as the Jewish state was concerned? What were the preparations for independence at the time and how did they affect you?

A: Many of the things which pertained to political activities at that time were not publicly known. It was a matter of guessing or hoping as to what was going to happen. Many of the things were surprising such as that everything was organized for the state to start functioning the first day the British moved out, on May 15, 1948. We were surprised that many of these things had been organized well, as far as organization goes, as far as military preparedness goes. Apparently the leading personality David Ben Gurion, was well organized and in charge of things. He did a tremendous job in getting the Jewish state started. The population knew very little. Militarily there was the so-called Haganah, which was directed by Ben Gurion, and there were two or three underground organizations which also fought the British. We were never sure to what extent. They cooperated with or fought each other. There were indications of both, that sometimes they fought each other, working at cross purposes and sometimes

cooperated with each other either against the British or against the Arab attackers. We were never sure, until, sometime later, it became apparent that force had to be used by the central power which was in the hand of Ben Gurion to subdue the underground organizations because they wanted to maintain a certain degree of independence. Ben Gurion had to force them to incorporate their forces in the official Israeli army, the Jewish Defense Army. It took real force and there were some casualties, until they really buckled down and were ready to incorporate their forces into the Israeli Defense Army. These were the official happenings at that time. So the state started functioning in 1948. It was a very very hard time. Conditions were extremely difficult. Life was difficult. Commodities were in extremely short supply, and everything was rationed. We needed coupons to buy food, you needed coupons for socks or a sweater or shoes. For the amount of coupons which a person had for a month you could buy a pair of socks, and maybe a pair of shorts. You had to accumulate coupons over a period of six or seven months to buy a pair of pants or a blouse or a shirt or something like that. You had to accumulate coupons maybe two or three years. Of course if you had a youngster, we had our son who was born in 47 and our daughter was born in 1950. It was extremely hard to get food for the babies and our relatives sent packages from the U.s., from Europe. Unfortunately we could not tell them not to send them. We disliked the idea of being supplied with foodstuff, canned milk, canned meat, coffee, tea and things like that. We received packages once a week, or so, from our relatives overseas and we definitely needed them. So life in Israel was very hard and, worst of all, even after the War of Independence, which was won by the young state of Israel, against the seven Arab states, I, as an individual, did not see that peace, would come soon. In the late forties and early fifties I came to the realization that, for many, many years to come there would be warfare between the Jewish state and the Arab countries. I realized that the peace was illusive. Some people were more hopeful, more optimistic, but with the conditions staying the way they were, and with the illusiveness of peace I came to the realization that we should plan for our possible immigration from Israel. When our relatives asked us repeatedly whether we wanted to come to the U.S., at first we declined, the second time we declined. When the third offer came we said: "OK, prepare the papers for us to come." That was in the early fifties and it took us about two years, from 1952 to 1954 to get these papers and to get the exit visa from Israel. I was drafted in the army (every Israeli male between 18 and 50 and also every unmarried female has to serve in the armed forces for active duty to be followed by yearly reserve duty of several weeks) and I had to get permission from the army. Even after the active duty service stopped at the end of the war I was a member of the reserve force. I had to serve one month a year and one day every month to keep the units in practical front line shape. We had to get official permission from the army to leave the country for whatever purpose. Finally in 1954, early in the year, we got all the papers together. We left Israel in May 1954 and arrived in St. Louis where our relatives lived in June 1954. The relatives in St. Louis are those who sponsored our immigration to the U.S. We stayed with our relatives for about a month, that was July 1954, then I obtained a position in Chicago. That was the position of a Hebrew teacher in a

congregational school. During that year I enrolled in a college in Chicago, first at Roosevelt University where I had to take some courses to complete my bachelor's degree. I needed courses in American history and in the English language. From there I transferred to North Western University to get a master's degree in education. After I received this master's degree, in 1958, I obtained a position as executive director of the Bureau of Jewish education in Des Moines, Iowa. We lived there from 1958 to 1963. In that position I served as principal of a community Hebrew school. I organized teacher training and also organized an adult education program. In 1963 I received an offer to become the Executive Director of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Atlanta, Georgia. We stayed there for six years from 1963 to 1969. There I did serve as principal of a Hebrew high school. I organized teacher training. I had to supervise a number of Jewish schools and also organized a very comprehensive adult education program. In 1968, I obtained an offer to become the Director of the Bureau of Jewish Education in New Haven, CT. There I was in charge of coordinating Jewish education of elementary schools, a Hebrew high school. I also administered a branch of the Boston Hebrew College. We stayed in New Haven for six years. Then I obtained an invitation to come to Dayton. This being my sixth year in Dayton, I am planning to retire in 1981, at this time.

- Q: All of these moves which you made were basically advancements, with no ulterior motives to go from one place to the other, other than to advance your career?
- A: That is correct. Practically in every case there was an advancement involved either to a bigger city or to a higher salary level. In every city there is a certain structure of salaries going down from the Executive Director of the Jewish Federation to the Directors of the lower divisions and you can progress only to a certain extent. Once you reached the ceiling you can not do much to make further progress, unless you give an ultimatum or you leave and go to a place where salary scales are higher, or whatever. You may also have other reasons to leave after you have stayed in a place for a number of years and you didn't find the place very conducive to making personal progress or educational or intellectual progress, or you decided to leave for whatever reason. In most of these places, or practically all of them, while I was Director of Jewish Education, my wife was teaching in one of the Hebrew schools as a Hebrew teacher. So we had a fairly good income and we could afford to send our children, both of them, to private colleges. They both got their Bachelor's degree in St. Louis, at Washington University. Then they continued in other colleges, to get a master's degree. My son got his in Business Administration at the University of New Haven. My daughter is in Special Education again at Washington University in St. Louis. She lives in St. Louis. These are the major highlights of my life and the major lines of development, as far as that goes.
- Q: Let me ask you a couple of personal questions. First of all you mentioned having to go to the University to get not only a little bit of U.S. history, but also to get a

little more expertise in English. How was your ability to communicate when you came here? Did you have a problem? English was spoken obviously in Israel, so you apparently had to deal with the language there.

A: Very, very little. My knowledge of English was very poor. As a matter of fact I had never studied English in any school situation. In Tel Aviv, there was a so-called British Institute. I attended some evening classes. Then I subscribed to the English daily in Israel which was called the Jerusalem Post. We received that paper daily and I tried to read that paper with a dictionary. I used the dictionary not only in looking up the meaning of a word but also the phonetic symbols for the pronunciation. It was not too hard. When I came to Chicago and registered at Roosevelt University, I had to pass an entrance examination. The results in math, were very good, but in English, they were very poor. As a matter of fact, the line for being admitted was 16 per cent and I scored 17 per cent. I had just one per cent over the minimum line for admission. So I had to take English courses. English 101, 102 and in order to get a U.S. Bachelor's degree I had to take some courses which I had not had before, especially in American History, in addition to English. Once I had my bachelor's degree from Roosevelt University, I transferred to north Western. There I took courses toward a master's degree in education, while I had a job at the (here he states the name very rapidly but it sounds something like "Onshet-Emmet"). This school was a day school, Hebrew school and Sunday school. I taught 27 hours a week. Of course we had a family which included two young children. My wife also had a hard time picking up English. Our kids picked it up more rapidly. After a number of years we felt confident enough to want a better position.

Q: Can I ask you how you felt you were received by the people of this country when you came?

A: As far as reception by the people in this country is concerned we were very happy and we have been very satisfied with the kind of reception we received. I recall, for instance, that when we came to Chicago one of my goals was to visit schools because I was planning to go into education. In many instances, when I visited schools I was introduced by the classroom teacher and, instead of being permitted to just listen, the teacher would ask me to tell the students about my post, whether in Israel or in Europe. I felt more and more confident being asked to do that because I realized that, if the teacher asked me to do that she or he felt that I could do the job to the extent that youngsters would understand what I was talking about. I was very pleased in that respect.

Q: Have you deliberately, or did it just happen, each time you moved that you moved to a Jewish neighborhood? One where you would be inclined to stay within your ethnic group. Each time you left an area in order to move to another state, did it just happen, or did you live in an integrated community.

- A: Interestingly enough there were great differences between the neighborhood in this country in relation and in comparison with neighborhoods in Europe. In Europe, even during the Nazi period, there was no such thing as a Jewish neighborhood, (The old type Jewish Ghetto had been maintained in Eastern Europe and the Nazis forced all the Jews back into Ghetto living after 1938, even if that had not been the norm in Westernized Europe). In larger cities, to some extent minorities, ethnic groups, tried to live in a certain proximity of each other. However in this country, we found that ethnic groups lived much closer together than in Europe. Of course in Israel there was no such thing as an ethnic neighborhood. So, in this country we tried to live close to the places where we worked, for practical reasons, and also close to the places where our children attended schools. Therefore whenever we bought a house or rented an apartment we tried to locate them accordingly. It so happened that in this country, again for practical reasons, most of the times, we did live, in what you may call loosely, very loosely, a Jewish neighborhood (in the U.S. the Jewish or Catholic community services such as religious institutions and community centers are located close to where they are accessible to people of that faith in order to make it easy to attend). This means that in that neighborhoods a certain percentage of the people were Jewish. There was never any place where a neighborhood was only Jewish, or even predominantly Jewish, however in most of the places there were areas and there were neighborhoods where no Jewish families lived and other areas where a few Jewish families lived and other areas where many Jewish families lived. If you wanted to be close to a synagogue or a Jewish school then it happened to be a "Jewish neighborhood". This was not for the sake of finding such a neighborhood but for practical reasons it seemed to be beneficial to be in such a neighborhood.
- Q: In connection with that; has most of your social life revolved around the Jewish families, realizing of course that you have always worked within this kind of a setting? Have you branched outside of the Jewish community to have friendships with people who were not necessarily within your faith or within the job area?
- A: We were very surprised to find that American Jews -- Jews who grew up in this country, went to school with non-Jews, went to college with non-Jews, limited their social contacts 99 per cent to Jewish people. Unlike Europe, where the average Jewish family had at least as many non-Jewish friends or social contacts, than Jewish friends -- in this country we found a certain self-imposed segregation of Jews. To this point, after more than a quarter century, we will find that whenever we meet, in a Jewish home, that there are exclusively or predominantly Jewish people there. For no good reason, whatsoever, we never found out why, native born Americans of the second, third or fourth generation of American Jews, limit their social contacts to Jewish people, rather than to mingle with non-Jews. I never found out why this is so. We recall only a few instances where we found in a social setting non-Jews, for whatever reason, being invited. We also found that conversation, in those cases where non-Jews were present, somehow was stifled and stagnant and slow, because somehow the mixture of Jewish and

non-Jewish people, in a social setting, was such that conversation did not move on. It did not move on at least, not as quickly, not as naturally as when the group was primarily or entirely Jewish. I never could find up why. That, as I said, was surprising because in Europe, in Germany for instance, it was not the case.

Q: I have a couple of questions which I would like to ask you in relation to this. Basically since your whole life and your work has been surrounded by Jewish people, the complex, the teaching, to what extent is your religion important to your lifestyle? How religious are you? Are you Orthodox? Do you keep all the faithful days? That type of thing? I know that you said that in Europe your parents were observant, I believe you put it. Have you gone beyond that to become more religious because of the experience you have gone through?

A: In Israel we were less observant than we had been in Europe, because life in Israel, in general, was either very observant, extremely observant, completely orthodox or non-observant at all. For many years, and even to this day, you might say that 75 to 80 percent of people in Israel do not observe anything of a religious nature, although the national life follows the religious patterns. For instance Jewish holy days are the official days of rest, that is the Sabbath and the other holy days. The stores, offices, schools, factories are closed. So, officially everybody follows that pattern. However that is not done from a religious point of view, or reason. For that reason we did not observe things as we had done in Europe. Later on, when we came to this country, again we had to make a switch and observe Jewish customs and habits and ceremonies and laws because, otherwise, you would not be considered a Jew. We started again to attend services more frequently and to observe things more inline with the local customs in the places where we lived. So we decided that our philosophy should conform with the so-called Conservative ideology in America. The term "Conservative" was not known and not used anywhere else. It is a typical American ideology, rarely found anywhere else, a middle of the road approach to Jewish life. It is not the Extremely Orthodox, observant way and not the Reform way of doing things, but somewhere in between. When I say somewhere I really mean that there is no right, anywhere between Reform and Orthodox we call Conservatism. There is a wide latitude as to what you can do or what you can not do, depending on where you live and who you associated with. So what we had to find every place was the proper line where to locate ourselves and how to conduct ourselves. So we followed the Conservative line. I would say rather on the observant side than on the non-observant side, and we felt quite comfortable with the rest of the community we lived in. We never had any conflicts along these lines. We tried to understand our non-Jewish neighbors, as much as we could. Occasionally I was called on to give talks on Judaism to non-Jewish audiences, that happened particularly in Atlanta, Ga. I may mention to you, in this connection that in Atlanta you may be surprised to learn that there were 1,300 churches which, all had adult education programs. They made it a point to call on rabbis and knowledgeable Jews to give a view on Jewish life, Jewish religion and so on. Since, in Atlanta, there were less than ten rabbis, I was frequently called upon to

non-Jewish groups, church groups, about Judaism. That happened so frequently and sometimes questions were so difficult to answer that I decided to register at the Religious School of Emory University to get a better understanding not only of my religion but of how my religion relates to Christianity, and to the various denominations in Christianity. That was a very interesting experience of talking to religious groups and sometimes, interestingly I was called back to the same place two or three times. Apparently people like the way I presented things to them. By attending Religious School and by getting in contact with other denominations and students, I learned quite a bit. My library grew, especially in the area of comparative religions, tremendously while attending Religious School in Atlanta.

Q: You keep surprising me with these statements which I don't expect. I should ask you if you have gotten any more degrees, which we have not mentioned or taken any more work.

A: In Emory University I was enrolled in a PHD course. I could not complete it because we moved away from Atlanta. However these days, I feel that when I talk to Jewish groups about Jewish things they are quite surprised to what extent I am familiar, not only with the Jewish religion but also with Christian theology. They are surprised to what extent I am familiar with the New Testament, and things like that. These things were actually never a part of my background until I felt that I had to become familiar with things to do justice to the jobs which were given to me.

Q: I am going to go off now into a direction about which we talked privately, not on tape before. I would like you to speak on this subject, if you will. I wanted to ask you, and we can't go into this too long, because I don't have so much tape left; here. Would you please discuss a little bit the feeling about raising two children, and they are one generation removed from the Holocaust. Has this, in anyway altered your attitude -- it is of course hard to tell because you didn't raise children before -- because of the experiences which you and your wife did you have a unique attitude about raising children?

A: I must answer this in the affirmative. I will give you a very frank answer, which may surprise you also. We were brought up, as youngsters, to be truthful, to be very law abiding, to be very ethical. The Holocaust has taught us one lesson; for better or worse: talking to people who made it and knowing about people who did not make it out of concentration camps, or out of Nazi Germany, or such things. The lesson, which may be a very sorry lesson, is that people who were very truthful, who were very honest, were very much law abiding, who listened to commands and listened to orders were the ones who perished -- and that those who could, somehow bent the truth a little, one way or the other, who could "finagle" one thing or the other in secret or under the table, were the ones who made it. They were the ones who could succeed in getting out of difficult situations, save their lives, and come to be successful. So, when we were faced

with the question of educating our children, we were really faced with a dilemma: should we install in our children the feeling that you have to be law abiding, that you have to follow instructions, that you have to respect authority or should we tell them: "Look, if you are in a situation where it is important for yourself -- for your life -- for your relatives or so, sometimes a little white lie may serve you better than the truth." That presented us with a severe dilemma.

Q: It is May 26, 1981. This is a continuation tape of a third interview with Mr. Hans Erman. We were discussing the dilemma you faced when you had to teach your children to deal with today's world.

A: I had the feeling that my son, who was the older one of my children. And I assume quite practical and smart somehow got this point. I realized, over the years, that he did not hesitate to use a white lie if it suited his purpose. He never got in trouble with any law. He made everything OK. However I got the feeling that he understood that point. Without mentioning it, without saying it, without documenting it, but I got that feeling. On the other hand my daughter, for whatever reason, she is a very straight, law abiding citizen. She would never lie. She would never try to use any deceitful means to achieve anything. I really don't know whether our attitude had anything to do with that or not, but I notice that in our children there is this kind of dichotomy. Our son sometimes did use white lies to get around a difficult problem. Our daughter said: "No, I go the straight way. I promised to do this, so I will do it." Both of my kids, when they went to college, had loans, government loans, to pay their tuition. They had to repay the loans. My daughter paid everything on time. I know that my son tried to postpone the repayment. He said: "Well, I signed OK, I will pay next year when I will make more money" and so on and so forth. On little things like that, I notice the difference between these two youngsters.

Q: Have your children now voiced anything about how they feel, being the son and daughter of you and Helen? Have they in any way suffered because you suffered? Has this been passed along, your attitude about the entire segment of history and life..

A: No, actually not, I couldn't say that they suffered in any way or that it influenced them in anyway, that they were children of survivors of the Holocaust. My son never showed much interest in our past. We told certain things. We had conversations at the dinner table or wherever. Things came up with friends on certain occasions. My son never expressed much interest. My daughter does show interest. Whenever we tell anything about our past she would like to know more, she would like to see pictures, she would like to listen to tapes, and know more about these things. I see now that she tells her children about these things and she shows pictures to her daughter and to her son: that is your grandfather, that is your grandmother here or there. So there are marked differences between our children. Now why this is so, we really don't know. It is interesting to mention, in this connection maybe, that some survivors of the Nazi period made a

firm decision never to go back to Germany, for whatever reason. That feeling was very strong in Israel, and very strong amongst American Jews too. Quite a few did not mind going back to Germany for whatever reason. Here again we were in a dilemma. We did not know which line of thought to follow. The Germans made a great, great effort to compensate people who suffered through the Nazi period. I think that the Germans (actually only West Germany, not East Germany offered compensation) and are the first and only people of those who persecuted Jews to make attempts to make amends and to compensate people, to pay restitution, or what have you. Realizing that they could not bring back to life people who were dead; that they could make good for pain and suffering which had been caused, they tried to financially, compensate people. I recall that in Israel, when these things came up in 1948 and 1950, even the government of Israel was split as to whether they should accede to offers from West Germany to accept compensations and restitutions for property which was left in Germany – property which had been taken away from Jews. The newspapers in Israel were, I should say, 80 percent against accepting a penny from Germany for the blood which was spilled or for the suffering which was caused to Jews of that country. It was again Ben Gurion (prime minister of Israel from 1948 through 1953 and from 1955 through 1963), a great leader indeed, who tipped the scale toward finding some kind of accommodations with the German government. At that time Chancellor Adenauer was head of that West German government (actually he was Chancellor from 1949 through 1963) was ready to recognize Israel and to make restitutions. It was Ben Gurion who tipped the scales toward accepting compensation from Germany. As a result of this the State of Israel received large, large sums of money, as well as material goods (the State of Israel was declared the legal heir to all those who had disappeared as a result of the Nazis and for whom there was not a living heir with legitimate claims to the moneys and/or goods) at a welcome time when Israel was fighting against the Arabs. Individual Jews received compensation for losses such as losses on property, loss on education, loss of health, damage to health, loss of income, incarceration, forced sales, confiscated assets, and so on and so forth. (These Jews did not have to reside in Israel to receive compensations, however some lawyers set up shops to file and pursue these claims for percentages of the awards). So slowly more and more people got used to the idea: “Well, we are dealing with somebody who hated us -- somebody who caused us damage -- somebody who inflicted pain and suffering but this is a new generation.” More or less people got used to the idea of accepting these overtures. Then more Jews did go back to Germany for whatever reason. I remember that the reason why we did go back was the fact that my wife’s brother -- her oldest brother -- was first deported to Russia. He became a prisoner of the Russian army, and he was deported to Siberia. He came back from Siberia to Russia and he went back to Poland. He wrote to us from Poland. He heard about the fact that he could receive compensation from Germany, but the Poles would not permit anything of that nature (no private moneys were allowed) and he did not know what to do. We recommended to him that he should leave Poland and go to Germany and collect his money himself -- that means collect whatever compensation the Germans would offer him. He was

sick. He went back to Germany first of our family. He was so sick that he could not travel from Germany anywhere else. We tried to see him. In the meantime we moved to the U.S. At first we asked him to meet us in Paris, since we were once in Paris. He said that he couldn't even travel from Germany to Paris. So, on our second trip we made the decision to see him in Germany. That was the first time we went back to Germany. We met him and we spent a number of days together. However once the ice had broken we traveled a second time to Germany. Now we understand that quite a few Jews went back and visited their old home- towns, visited cemeteries where their relatives were buried, so it has become a commonplace experience that people go back. As a matter of fact some German cities have made it a point to invite former citizens to come at their expense to places like Berlin (and Frankfurt, and Augsburg) and others. They pay, if not all but many of the expense which it takes to come and visit their former hometowns (from the U.S. or other countries).

- Q: I would like to jump one more time to another subject, on which I would like to ask your opinion. I would assume that you have very strong feelings for Israel and on what has been taking place there since you left. I was wondering, if you would comment on the State of Israel now. What is taking place and how do you see the future. (The interview took place a couple of years after the Camp David agreements.)
- A: We did have very strong feelings about Israel and we follow the news on it, in the paper and magazines very, very closely. We have contacts with friends and relatives in Israel with whom we exchange letters. We exchange photographs, and such. We have very strong feelings about Israel. We participate in most every activity in this country directed toward improvement of conditions in Israel. Nobody knows about the future of Israel. Israel, at this point, is in a generally very precarious situation in regard to the surrounding Arab world. There are three million Jews in Israel surrounded by some 100 million Arabs. Most of these Arabs are apparently intent on cutting the throats of the Israelis. So, what the future will hold nobody really knows. We hope and assume that with the help of the U.S. and other countries Israel will survive. We plan to go back to Israel as soon as we can. However, as far as definite answers, nobody has any.
- Q: One more question which comes to mind is you are retiring about one or two months from now, do you have any definite plans, which you might be thinking of as to what you will do when you move to St. Louis. Are you going to return to school or work?
- A: Yes, I have been in touch with my colleague and friend, the Director of the St. Louis Bureau of Jewish Education. I indicated to him that I would be interested in participating in educational endeavors of his agency. He promised to help me along these lines. So I look forward toward an active partial retirement in St. Louis, teaching adult courses, and giving lectures at colleges and possibly taking

part in programs at their Jewish Community Center. That center is very large and extensive, much bigger than this one. So I plan to be leading an active life.

Q: We are just about at the end of the interview. I was wondering if there is anything which we may have neglected to talk about. Is there anything which you would like to introduce into the tape at this time which we have not covered at all.

A: I can't think of any specific topic or subject which we did not touch on, which would lend itself to such a taped interview. So, unless you have any additional questions, I would not know what to add to this conversation.

Q: I think that we covered the ground pretty well however I want to thank you for the time you have given us.

A: It was my pleasure.

Q: I have enjoyed the interview very much.

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