

Interview with Paul Leeser

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Interviewer--Rabbi Cary Kozberg

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Q: This is Cary Kozberg speaking. I am conducting the first interview with Mr. Paul Leeser in my office at the Temple. Mr. Leeser lives in Richmond, Indiana. This is Wednesday afternoon, August 23, 1978. Mr. Leeser, how old are you?

A: Fifty- seven.

Q: Where were you born?

A: In a city in the Rhineland (Germany) called, at that time, Hanborn(spelled by PL). Today it is a suburb of a larger city called Duisburg (Duisburg is again spelled by PL). It is called today: "Duisburg-Hanborn." They are both in the Rhineland tate? Part of the German State of Westphalia.

Q: Did you grow up there?

A: My early years I spent in Hanborn. I went to school there. Then, when I was not quite in high school, that was in 1927 or 1928, we left the Rhineland and moved inland because my parents bought a business there. I continued my education in a little town called Rinteln which is on the Weser River near the town of Hameln in the district of Minden, at the time. The city, today is in the district of Hanover. I continued my grade school education there and had my first religious training. That is religious school and Hebrew school, etc. which in those days was sponsored by the German government and paid for by it. A rabbi came to the public school where we then had the classes. After the fourth year, I, like most German children of means did, went to the Gymnasium. I stayed there for five years. By that time Jewish children could no longer attend school and we had to leave.

Q: Was this a small town or a rural community or a city?

A: It was classified as a city because it was the county seat. The political subdivision in those days was called Graftschaft Schaumburg (that is what it sounds like). We might loosely translate this as the county of Schaumburg. It actually belonged to the province of Hesse, but it still was a political subdivision of its own. The city

had, maybe 6,000 inhabitants. However it was classified as a city, rather than a village because it had most of the government offices. It was a vacation spot because it was one of the old walled German cities. We used to play on the city walls.

Q: Do you know when and how your family came to this place?

A: To Rinteln?

A: Yes!

A: My parents had been married and in business in Hanborn, in the city where I was born. It was small, even by German standards. They made a living though. They got the opportunity to expand, to get into a little venture a larger store with the help of one of my father's brothers who had his business, a nice going concern in a retail store in Herford (spelled by PL) which is not too far away from the place where my father's parents lived. That was Buckenburg (spelled by PL, but not located by transcriber). Even when we were little in Hanborn, while I was still growing up, we used to visit my grandparents in Buckenburg frequently. So we knew approximately where Rinteln and Baue were, that means where they were located. I was really too young to really make the decision. My brother was still younger. My parents picked up and went to Rinteln, bought out this store. We lived in the dwelling behind the store and that started our career in Rinteln and, within a few years we were one of the leading establishments in the dry goods line, ladies coats and children wear, notions, etc.

Q: How many members were there in your family?

A: In my immediate family there were four. My parents, my brother, and I.

Q: Your brother's name was Werner?

A: Yes.

Q: And what were your parents' names?

A: My father's name was Louis. My mother's name was Henrietta. That was spelled just like the English Henrietta, except that the last letter was an "a". I think the English also has an "a".

Q: Paul is your real name?

A: Yes. I did not have a middle name. Jewish kids in Germany had as a rule of not having a middle name. We had a Jewish name, of course, but it was not used in the everyday world. My present middle name is Jerome. I adopted it while I was in the U.S. military service. I did this mainly under the influence, not actually

influence, but as appreciation of a captain who was influential for me. The captain's name was Jerome and he said: "You adopt my name or I won't go with you." So I use the "J" as my middle initial.

Q: When did your family leave Germany? When did you come to the United States?

A: We left and arrived in the U.S. in May 1937.

Q: You said that your parents were selling dry goods?

A: That is right.

Q: What exactly was your education? Your secondary education?

A: Starting in Germany it was the usual. In Germany I believe that there was no choice. You took everything, at the grade school, in preparation for the secondary school, the gymnasium; which I entered after four years of grade school so in 1931. There I took the regular pre-college course. In my case I was interested in chemistry, so I took what was going to, ultimately lead to a college degree in chemistry or chemical engineering. The courses in the German high school, of course you go to high school much earlier than you do in this country, were all inclusive. (The school system, even under the Weimar Republic which followed WWI was not uniform throughout Germany. It depended upon the German state in which you lived). We studied Latin, starting in our first year, then French, then English. We started in on the higher levels of mathematics early in the game so that when I arrived in the U.S., it was fairly easy to get into high school here.

Q: Can you tell us about your religious life at home?

A: There is not very much which I remember. We, that is my brother and I, attended synagogue regularly as far back as I can remember. Otherwise said we had to attend synagogue when we visited our grandparents. We had a visiting rabbi. This rabbi was hired by, and belonged to four or maybe five congregations in the district crossing state and county lines. His residence was in Obernhirschern (spelled by PL). It was not exactly centrally located but, by custom, Obernhirschern had been the rabbinical residence for, I would say decades -- otherwise said before I was born. The rabbi served the cities of Staethagen (spelled by PL) naturally Obernhirschern, the city of Buckenburg, which I mentioned earlier, and Rinteln, where we lived. His travels were either by train, or if any of the more affluent community members had the time they would take him by car. More often than not, he traveled with some of his students from city to city by bicycle.

Q: Did you keep kosher in your home? And observe the Sabbath?

A: No, not kosher, according to the Torah. My father was brought up in a kosher home; my mother also. Her father was a butcher. When his business as a kosher butcher came to an end he took on regular butcher chores. There he cut off cuts of meat other than things really “treff” (that means those things specifically prescribed), but he did not limit himself to kosher cuts. My mother ran the house the same way. She would buy her meats in our little city from any butcher shop, but she stayed away from things considered “treff”. That means, no loin quarters, no pork. We didn’t know bacon except in restaurants but at home we had none. Earlier we attempted, I think, to keep meat and dairy dishes apart but, about the same time as we grew older we no longer practiced having our dishes separated that is what you call “Pesach-dicke” dishes. (That name comes from the idea that in many Jewish homes, even some who do not practice every day the idea of separating utensils used for meat and those used for dairy products such a separation takes place for the Passover holiday period. The separation is justified by the idea of not “eating the kid in the milk of his mother”, this is considered as a major religious commandment by many). We, as a token, still used the matzos (unleavened bread eaten exclusively during Passover). One of the traditional dishes, in Germany, around Passover, was matzo with warm milk. To eat that you needed a particularly large cup and everybody had his own. (It was a breakfast dish) more for utilitarian reasons than for religious ones; however we did not eat strictly kosher. My mother shuddered every time we went to the butcher shop and the butcher handed her a piece of sausage, she could never be sure of what it contained, but, other than that we had no specifications about eating beef, lamb or veal. You were talking about religious education, and we got a little sidetracked.

Q: How were the established holidays celebrated?

A: They were not celebrated, so to speak. On Friday nights we went to temple. On Saturday mornings we went to temple, or rather synagogue, but that was a chore, but since all our peers went, or were being made to go -- remember that in those days a father’s word was the law -- so you went. We went particularly later on when it became difficult for the rabbi to proceed unmolested, then my father took over as the rabbi’s stand-in and he conducted the services. When my father had to be on the pulpit, we better attended services or else! I can’t even imagine what the “or else” would have been. Even though we might be unwilling to go because there might be a football or a soccer game in which we would like to play, or some other important event we went every Friday night and every Saturday and all the holidays.

Q: Did your father always lead the services?

A: No. I followed the service when I was able. You see the services were entirely in Hebrew, except for the sermon, and my father did not give a sermon, when there was no rabbi, but another member of the congregation was asked to do so by my father. We were sometimes put on the spot when my father asked one of the older boys to talk about something for five minutes. It was always embarrassing and

the boys were hoping for the rabbi not to put them on the spot. (In Europe, as a contrast to the U.S., children received very little instruction and experience in talking up in a formal way when there were adults there). We had to do that without preparation, so otherwise we never got to lead the service, so I never learned and never could step into my father's shoes and lead the davening (praying).

Q: You and your brother were Barmitzvahed (the Jewish religious ceremony held when a boy was about 13 years of age to signify that he counted as a full member).

A: Yes.

Q: That was in Germany?

A: That was in Germany. My Barmitzvah took place in the city (Herford) where my uncle lived, and about which I talked. My cousin Hans was one month younger than I, but we had our bar mitzvah instructions together in Herford. I received my bar mitzvah instructions from our rabbi, until maybe one week before the big event, then we had a dual Barmitzvah. (It is traditional that, for the ceremony, the 13 year old to conduct most of the Saturday morning service. This means that the two cousins conducted jointly). In Herford. My brother's Barmitzvah took place the following year.

Q: Was German the principle language spoken in your home?

A: Yes!

Q: Did your parents speak any other language?

A: No! They spoke a little broken French, because my mother had been brought up near Cologne, and that was close enough to the borders so that French was known. They knew a little bit of the Teutonic Hebrew. Just like in other ethnic languages, you know a few words which you can use for idiomatic messages, for example, the Hebrew alphabet was used to mark the wholesale prices on goods. They did not use the Hebrew letters, because that would have been too obvious but they rather used their German equivalents. There were certain Hebrew expressions used in business to denote, for instance; that you had to be silent on the subject: "Don't speak!"; "The man is a crook!" I don't recall all of them because it is a while since I put them all down. There were names like a "Ganeff!" (a thief or crook), "Beneven", "Spieken" which I don't even know what they mean, probably in Hebrew it means: "Be quiet, don't speak!" I still recall that there were rather few expressions from the Hebrew, which got into every day conversation, but they did not speak the language (obviously meaning Yiddish) as a conversational language.

Q: Did you think of yourselves as rich or poor?

A: Today, when I look back, we must have been, if not rich, then very upper class. While we were there, however we never considered ourselves as rich because most of our peers were able to do the same thing we did. We knew some poor people who had nothing, but the idea of being rich never entered our minds, however we must have been fairly well to do.

Q: Did your parents associate with non-Jews?

A: Yes. Most of their social contacts were Jews, but we did have quite a few real non-Jewish friends.

Q: To what extent did they associate with non-Jews outside of business?

A: There were a few members of my father's bowling team. There was one non-Jew in his Skat (that was a card game played pretty much all over Germany, but only Germany) playing group. They used to get together once a week and played this pretty well known European card game. There were some non-Jews they went on excursions with us. These excursions meant that you packed a rucksack and you went hiking through the mountains and through the hills to some nearby resort. As I recall there were quite a few non-Jewish families, including children on those hikes with us. The parties, as you call them, where people were invited over to the house on special occasions such as high holidays and birthdays consisted mostly of Jews.

Q: What other types of recreational or educational activities did your family engage in? I mean such things as theaters or politics or music, either in or out of the Jewish community?

A: Attendance at movies or the theater was more on an individual basis. We were in mixed company there. In a little town, everybody there were mostly non-Jews, because that was population wise. For theaters, we had nothing locally. If you went away and could go to one of the nearby bigger cities, where they had theaters and operas. There they usually went alone or with the family or if we did go with close friends they were usually Jewish. Just because they happened to be friends. My parents were interested in the theater. My mother was an opera buff from way back, when she was a little girl, however their attendance at these functions was limited because of distances. The closest grand opera was in Hanover. They put on their own shows at the Jewish Community. My mother was always one of the writers and instigators and the main actors, but that drew only Jewish public. Concerning other educational things; no! My parents were too busy to participate. My brother and I had to attend the gymnasium and it wasn't until much later in the Hitler period that we were given private instruction in Hebrew, English and how to cope with foreign countries. During our early adolescence we participated in regular sports which took place after school. We

usually played with a mostly pickup team; we didn't even have any questions of; are you or are you not a Jew. We were very proud of the fact that one of the players on our city's soccer team was a Jew. We made the most of it. When Hitler first came in with his propaganda, we attended sports contests, but these were under Jewish auspices, and for these we had to go out of town.

Q: You mentioned the fact that you attended synagogue regularly. To what extent, really did the synagogue play a role in terms of other activities? Was it the center of Jewish life? Were there other Jewish activities?

A: It was a way of life. Actually to us Sunday school meant more. It was a little bit of an adventure. It was something we enjoyed to be able to get about to the town, wherever it was held. Religious school day was one day a week. Later on when we went to high school (to the gymnasium) that went by the wayside. In order to attend Sunday school we bicycled to one of the four cities and we took turns. Staethagen was a little too far away so we agreed that we were not going to have Sunday school in that city. Rinteln was nice for the kids to get to by a nice bicycle distance but as time went by, about the time we started Barmitzvah lessons, most of our Sunday school meetings were in Buckenburg because they had the biggest synagogue with the nicest accommodations for several school classes. Then everybody from the surrounding cities went there by bicycle except that sometimes their parents took them to Buckenburg every Sunday morning. It was nice. We met other Jewish kids, we made friends with other Jewish boys and girls. The parents condoned this. The kids got along together well. Once a year there was a party for all the students and the pre-students at the rabbi's residence in Obernhirschern. It could have taken place around one of the high holidays, probably Sukkot (that is the early fall harvesting festival when Jews build an outdoor open air shelter with clear view of the stars, taking place ten days after Yom Kippur, when apple and nuts are shared by all) maybe it was Shavuot (that is the early summer festival when today Confirmation takes place). Well, all the kids were at the rabbi's residence, in the garden. I still have some photographs left of these parties. This was what made the kids want to get together, rather than the religious services. Now religious services to a nine or ten or eleven year old is, even today, a bore.

Q: It was the social aspect which really attracted you.

A: It was the social aspect which made me realize that this is a Jewish community.

Q: How would you describe your childhood?

A: It is difficult to pin a name on that. It was strictly normal until we got old enough to know what the Hitler business is all about. The excitement of our parents when the pre-election campaign was taking place. The pre-election campaign was conducted with big placards. List No. 32, I remember was a bad sign that Hitler was coming into the program. It was at that time that we first saw the anti-

Semitic posters. The faces on the placards of the so-called Jewish stereotypes, they were later regularly publicized by the Nazis (the National Socialist Party, the party organized and headed by Adolf Hitler) party paper the "Sturmer" (translates as one who assaults) as the one was called, and the other one was called: "der Volkischer Beobachter (translates as the "People's Observer"). Loosely translated it means the "People's Watch" or maybe the "National Observer" would be close to it. Jews in our area did not ever subscribe to the "National Observer" here, they remembered it well what that meant, during our growing up time. Altogether we had a generally normal childhood. Some people were affluent. I thought that we were somewhat affluent. We could afford to go on a vacation every year. My parents were too busy in the store so they could never go on a vacation together. We, as boys, never questioned that. My mother on her vacation went with relatives, usually with my father's brother's family to whom we were the closest, both socially and geographically. When she came back, my father, my brother and I took off on our vacation. It might be just a bicycle tour which was a big adventure or we went to one of the more lush North Sea resorts and had a ball with my father. A few times our parents sent us to a Jewish children's camp also at a North Sea resort, one which I recall was on the Island of Fohr (PL spells the name of the island as Foehr but the atlas locates the island of Fohr and does not locate an island with the other spelling) in a city called Wyk (PL spells the name of the city as Wyek but the atlas locates the city of Wyk auf Fohr and does not locate a city with the other spelling). This was a fairly expensive Jewish children's camp. Another time we went to a relatively inexpensive Jewish children's camp where they wanted to bring country children to the big city and the encampment was in a large Jewish orphanage in the city of Hanover. My brother and I realized mostly that parents had to have a little money for this sort of thing but we appreciated it and remember things today. We did not realize that we had a hard time until after the Hitler years, approximately.

Q: Do you recall any other special events from your childhood?

A: No, events like my Barmitzvah and my brother's Barmitzvah, other events like the death of my maternal grandfather. The funeral of my maternal grandfather is the first Jewish funeral I ever attended. For other special things I would have to sit and think for a while, your memories don't come back at a moment's notice, but there must have been some other special events. We were sent off to spend the summer with an aunt in Hamburg. I don't know why. She wanted some nieces and nephews. She was an unmarried lady and I spent some time there with a girl cousin. I got my first sex education from her. I must have been maybe 11 at the time. You know what selections there are but no really outstanding events, but wedding anniversaries of my parents, plays which we gave for Chanukah (festival of lights which occurs about Christmas time and which indicates the rededication of the Temple by the Maccabean warriors). Then the kids presented something. The older ladies of the community, we considered them older ladies, but they were probably 21 or 22 years old, wrote the script and built the scenery. There are things you can remember but nothing earth shaking and outstanding.

Things you can talk about every now and then with those people who participated, but they really have no bearing on the subject.

Q: You say that you attended a secular school?

A: Yes!

Q: With Jews and non-Jews?

A: Right!

Q: And that your religious education was during school hours?

A: No, that was after the regular school hours.

Q: How many days a week?

A: One day and we had to take tests and pass them. On all our report cards there is a subject called "Religion". If you did not pass your "Religion" then you got a failing grade and a "U", and if you did you might fail the entire year. So there was always some negotiating going on with the rabbi, if you were, for instance, particularly bad in "beginning Hebrew". The rabbi was involved with the grades, during the first four years of school. Children who did not go to the higher school, to the high school, to the lyceum or to the gymnasium, after the first four years of school had to continue religious training and remain in the public school system until they graduated, after eight years. However when you were released from there to go to the high school, then it was up to the parent to see that you kept your religious instruction up. When you left the public school system and went to the high school, education was no longer free.

Q: What subjects did they start to teach you in religious school?

A: It is too long ago to really remember but I know that what we call here (transcriber can not understand the name of the subject) was taught. We learned a lot of history, that is not necessarily mythology, but the Biblical stories.

Q: The midrash? (That is the rabbinical explanations of the Hebrew Scriptures, the so-called oral tradition).

A: Right! Exactly from the midrash, the Purim story. The Megillah (a scroll, especially one containing the Book of Esther, or of Ecclesiastes, the Book of Lamentations, the Book of Ruth -- but generally, without added explanations refers to the Book of Esther) was one of the things he taught us. Naturally everything was taught to us in German.

Q: German was used in both religious and secular education?

A: Yes. That was the principal language. There were no Yiddish speaking people who lived there. Well, I correct that. There were some whom lived there, but, because of fairly stupid prejudice, the Eastern Jews, who could speak Yiddish, hid that fact. They did not want it to be known. So, German, High German, was taught in all classes and the Hebrew instructions naturally were also in German. In those days it was still practiced that a student had to learn a passage from the Hebrew text, word by word. Whether one was able to sit down and read a sentence in Hebrew and give the meaning in German was not considered. No, one had to know it word for word. The vocabulary we practiced was just like that of any other foreign language. We had a sheet of Hebrew words in alphabetical order, then you covered the German equivalent with a sheet of paper, then you studied each word. Later your parents finally asked you the same words out of sequence, and you had to know them. I think that the teacher thought it best that when you studied Hebrew you learned it word for word. Then of course when you said the sentence, it didn't make much sense and we had to put it back in the correct grammatical order, to give it meaning in German. That way you learned words.

Q: Was there anything like a Jewish day school?

A: Not available! There was none available to us. The closest school which I can remember was in Hanover. There was one in Bielefeld (spelled by PL) which was to the west of us in Westphalia, which could have been reached. Naturally there were yeshivas (Jewish schools) in large cities like Cologne, Berlin and Frankfurt on the Main, but they were out of range. I would like to backtrack here. My mother's basic education was in a religious school in Cologne. She went there for, I believe, eight years. In her particular surrounding, in the city of Cologne, that was the normal thing to do. Jewish kids went to the Jewish school and the Catholic kids went to a Catholic school, and what the Protestant kids did that didn't make a difference (transcriber attended primary school in a small town in the Rhineland area where the only public school which existed in town, and to which one had to go, was a Catholic and Protestant Parochial school. All the Jewish kids went to the Protestant school).

Q: To what extent did you associate with non-Jewish children?

A: To a large extent. Most of our social contacts, you see we were too young to really date or to have girlfriends, as a matter of fact we were in the age where you went to great distances to keep away from saying this girl or that girl was your girlfriend. Our association was mostly with non-Jews, but we did have a youth group in an embryonic form. We used to get together for particular reasons, when that was called for, in addition to being together on Sundays for religious studies. We had, for instance a ping-pong club that was a real saving later on, when we were ostracized from the non-Jewish community. This ping-pong club consisted of only Jews and I still have, in my diary the place where we used to meet at

individual people's home, just by having our ping-pong games there. However the other sports in which we participated such as soccer we, by force, had to participate with non-Jews. Swimming was a big thing. We had to have swimming training. We got a certificate as a "Free Swimmer" which entitled you to swim without requiring supervision in the big river. You had to pass tests to show that you could swim but many Jewish kids passed. There may have been one or two who took classes but most of them had it.

Q: Were you invited into the homes of non-Jews?

A: Very often. Religion, in the pre-Hitler days did not become an issue. Maybe, from the standpoint of interest sometimes they wanted to know for instance what holidays it was for us, to get a passing mark in their religious subject because some of them came from a gentile community and did not pass their religion course and had to pass make-up tests afterwards. So they found a Jewish kid to compare religions and find out that our religion was equal to theirs. You know, there was nothing anti-Semitic about it, it was just a matter of interest and the question did not come up very often. They all knew, in our little town, that we went to religious services on Friday nights and on Saturday mornings and that they went on Sundays. They accepted that fact and we grew up without any personal hard feelings.

Q: Before the Nazi (National Socialist Party, which was the party led by Adolf Hitler) occupation (there was no Nazi occupation when Hitler was appointed German Chancellor and the legislature, i.e. the Reichstag, approved him he was the leader of Germany), i.e. the Nazi coming to power, to what degree was there anti-Semitism?

A: No! No! Only from remarks our parents made did we know anything about anti-Semitism. There was some anti-Semitism because of business competition. We knew the word anti-Semite (said in German and English by PL) early in the game. We heard it used around the house. We heard about it from people, other than Hitler, we learned about it in religious school that there had been anti-Semites. Roman Emperor Titan and others were some. The rabbi talked about Haman. He mentioned other names of famous anti-Semites.

Q: German anti-Semites?

A: Yes, German anti-Semites. We were taught things such as that one of the biggest friends of the Jews was Frederick the Great, who made it possible for Jews to be accepted in some of the professions and the businesses. He was not successful in allowing the Jews to become farmers. I recall the remarks of the rabbi who taught us this particular lesson: he said that the blame was not with the king but with the Jews themselves who, by that time, were making a good living in other professions and did not want to regress and become farmers. Those who had a chance to live in the country were picked as cattle dealers and that was an entirely

different profession then. However at the time when we were taught the term of cattle dealer had already a little derogatory meaning and was used as anti-Semitic propaganda. Cattle dealers were practically exclusively Jews.

Q: Do you recall any incidents of anti-Semitism in your school or community or the newspapers?

A: Not prior to Hitler although the Jews were victims of the propaganda machine. However long before that my parents talked about anti-Semitic remarks by a firm or outfit with particularly anti-Semitic bias against hiring Jews, but no real outstanding examples.

Q: How did they deal with that practice?

A: They were very quiet about it, they felt that we always have some hate mongers and don't get excited about it. Generally, my mother always saw black in everything that happened. She saw herself and the family threatened. She would like to take legal action or illegal means to defend herself. She usually calmed down and would get talked out of it by my father, who was more calm and quieting.

Q: Were your neighbors the same way? I mean were they both Jewish and non-Jewish?

A: As a rule they talked about the anti-Semitic elements as being idiots and that with despicable elements around this was something to be expected. There were people who didn't know anybody.

Q: Did you ever, or do you know if your family ever spoke about anti-Semitism to gentile associates? And if so, what their reactions were?

A: The subject came up in conversations. It was always treated lightly, like something you might want to talk about, something unimportant. It was taken like anti-religious remarks by anybody would have been. Like expressions such as, you know: "The Pope is a Bastard!" which obviously would rub the Catholics the wrong way. My mother used to get livid, if someone did that. A little German anti-Semitic song which the kids used to sing did that to her. I remember the little teasing song in German which translated something like the "hep-hep-hep" slogans here, which used to be anti-Semitic slogans before WWI; you may have heard them.

Q: Can you tell us a little more about them? Such as why were they anti-Semitic?

A: Because they were taken as such by the Jews. These had the effect on my mother and her peers who were sensitized to it, as if you were called a "kike!" The verses of the limerick went something like: "Jude, Jude, Jude. Hep, Hep, Hep, Steck dein

Kopf in ein Wasserscheck!" It was something of the dialect of Cologne but freely translated into "Jewboy, Jewboy, Jewboy, Kike, Kike, Kike, Stick your head in a water basin!"

- Q: Something like "Go soak your head." (Actually it meant more like "Drown yourself").
- A: Yes, go soak your head would be good. It continued, but I don't remember the lines anymore, but something like: "When you die you will get buried in a moduling box." You can guess what the thing looked like; however it was a kid's rhyme. That is one which my mother used to tell me they used to sing to them when they went to school. They got even with the gentiles and used to say it in rhyme. Some of the incidents like that happened to show that anti-Semitism existed. However, my question is: "Was it really anti-Semitism or was it just a nursery rhyme which the kids used to say, you know kids teasing each other?" Kids are cruel. I don't know whether these kids who used to sing the ditty when they saw Jewish kids, grew up as anti-Semites or got to be Nazis. They may just have said it but they had learned it somewhere. However to her dying day I will remember that "Hep" ditty. It would always get my mother aroused, you know angry.
- Q: Did you get any of this personally?
- A: No! No! When anti-Semitism came there were other ways. "Hep! Hep! Hep!" had disappeared. Just like on the American scene, calling people "Hamon", "Kike" and so forth. No, the words got worse. They had more contemporary meanings than that.
- Q: Do you recall when your town in Germany was occupied by the Nazis? When that came about?
- A: It was a gradual thing. (There was no occupation as such. In 1933 Hitler was called on to form a government for the Weimar Republic under President Hindenburg, when he was able to get a majority of votes in the Reichstag, the German Parliament. Then all the other private armies became illegal and Hitler's people were used as auxiliary police and even soldiers). We were too young to really follow all the vying for power per se. There was the Putsch in Munich (On November 8, 1923 Hitler attempted a coup d'etat in Bavaria with himself a Chancellor and General Ludendorff as Dictator. The coup failed and Hitler went to prison after that he gradually built up the strength of his party). We were told about that. A lot of Jews thought that was something to talk about (as early as 1920 Hitler had denounced the Jews); but they never thought that something would come of it. The first scare, so to speak, we got from the reaction of the adults was when the Nazi party (These were the letters which identified the party led by Hitler) got into (by the number of members voted into seats in the Reichstag) into the number two position. Then in the next election (in July 1932)

they were number one. The realization that we were going to be persecuted came about slowly. The first incident was when the Nazis arrested a member of the Jewish community of Rinteln, a barber by the name of Maas (spelled by PL). He was a member of the Jewish community but had married a gentile. His wife participated in Jewish affairs, considered herself a member but had never converted. They did not have children. It was rather a sensation amongst the younger set to talk about things like that, when we found out why the Nazis arrested this man. He had apparently molested a nine- year old gentile girl in a Passover incident. He was arrested but, after being tried locally he disappeared. Now, later on it was being picked on for several reasons. One of the biggest Nazis in town was also a barber by the name of Stroehl (spelled by PL). This man was a leader in the anti-Semitic action and later on he was the guy who took pictures of people who went into my parent's store. Then of course there was a little plaque which was marked "Franz Stroehl, the barber replaces Maas the barber" and said that he was to get rid of this man. That was the first time, I think, that we heard about concentration camps. Maas' wife was distraught. There was no word of communication. She didn't know what happened to him. He just disappeared. The local police got to be uncooperative and told her not to bother them, that if she did she would be punished, that her husband was a criminal. Then they added: "You are not Jewish, how come?" The man just disappeared and then the community as such, was told about concentration camps. The second thing which bothered us was as youngsters came from the Nazi party not only anti-Semitism was the Hitler Youth Movement (the movement organized by the Nazis into which all "Aryan" youth were expected to go and which was the training ground for all future party recruits) which some of our best friends had to join. In the so- called "Hitler Jugend" (translates into Hitler Youth) they got to wear uniforms and got demerits or get dressed down because they socialized with Jews, if they did. They freely used to tell us that they are sorry, but the Gauleitung (the county leadership for the Nazis) had left directions for their youth group leaders that they were instructed that they could not associate with Jews (that was particularly easy to enforce in small communities where everyone was known). Kids, at that time weren't even given a reason just that they are a lower type of life, that they had been misled (into formerly associating with Jews) that (Jews) have all nasty characteristics and that Adolf Hitler had pointed it out to them. Goebbels told them how bad the Jewish influence was for them. In order to be left out of things and not to be demoted or get demerits they would have to stop playing with us. However the thing which bothered us was when our parents told us where some of their gentile peers had been arrested and taken away or were arrested and fined -- even given prison sentences because their children had informed on them. The way we heard the stories was that the parents had made some anti-Nazi remark; maybe threatening; maybe just joking; that the kids had then told their youth leaders about this. It got to the authorities and the parents got picked up as anti-social, a euphemism for non-Germans. some of them who were not Jewish also disappeared, at least for a while. When they came back they had horror stories to tell about what they saw in these concentration camps, until they were released again. This used to bother us. We were afraid that if we made

any remarks about Hitler being a low lifer, or cussed him with what we knew in Hebrew and in German and it got reported, that we would get into trouble. The next thing was that we were not allowed to go swimming either in the public pool, or in the river accompanied by non-Jewish children. Later on we were not allowed in at all. They put on signs reading “Juden sind hier unerwünscht” meaning “Jews are not wanted here” at gates and other critical places. I don’t know if they felt that we would pollute the water. Now, this was the start and also the estrangement from our soccer teams was hard to take. We still used to play. Again we rationalized that my brother and I used to win a couple of soccer balls. They were wanted items since not everyone had one and if we didn’t show up with our equipment they had to wait around until somebody found a ball; but as time progressed that was enough of an excuse anymore and we just weren’t allowed on the public playing fields. We were no longer allowed to participate in sports. Then we joined a Jewish sports team. That involved quite a bit of traveling to get to the place where we could play, where Jewish men and boys were numerous enough to form a team. We had to go to Hanover which was a half -day’s ride by bicycle or to Minden which was only a three- hour ride. However I did join a soccer team in Minden while I was still in high school. Most of the piece- by- piece arrival of the anti-Semitic movement is pretty well known, but to us children it was a gradual thing. It was one event after another. The time came when the Nazis made a ruling that only the children of Jewish war veterans were permitted in high school. So my brother and I could continue because our father had his discharge papers and all kinds of records from the German armed forces from WWI. Then came the point where they added other requirements, not this varied from locality to locality but in the Hanover-Minden district the high school enforced it this way that you could attend high school if your father had been a WWI veteran but only to the point that the number of Jews did not exceed one percent of the total high school population. It did come down to the point where either my brother or I had to quit because in those days there were no other Jewish boys who were attending our particular high school. There were girls in the two parts of the high school of which one was the gymnasium and the other was the lyceum...the two were separate. In the lyceum there were some girls. One family had at least three.

Q: Can you tell us a little about what you were mentioning before, about the campaign when Hitler came to power? Can you speak to that? How the election took place?

A: No, not really. There was radio and there were newspaper advertisements. At the time anti-Semitism wasn’t the main issue in this campaign although it was there. However the slogan: “Die Juden, die sind unser Ungluek!” meaning: “The Jews are our misfortune,” was utilized, as I mentioned earlier but his main campaign was on getting jobs, getting people to go back to work and “Getting the bastards out of Politics! Get the foreigners out of the country!” (Also it was a virulently anti-communist campaign. The private armies of the Stahlhelms -- a rightist party which used the steel hats of the militarists as a symbol and who, in 1933, allied

themselves to the Nazis -- the Nazis, the Communists and others were parading and fighting in the streets during the campaign) Hitler was going to save the country by going back into hyperinflation. His campaign was conducted by people who even hadn't joined the party. But, by the looks of things, it was a fairly conducted political campaign; no strong-arm tactics that we noted (that however was not the case all over Germany, but strong arm tactics were used by the several private armies, not only the Nazis) just propaganda such as making promises to the people who were all afraid of starving to death, of losing their jobs, of the country quickly going down the hill. I was really a little young to pay attention to everything, but I remember from those advertising they were not even so obnoxious. My mother was very concerned because the anti-Semitic foundation was there. It didn't affect anybody personally, but still all that campaigning -- radio was in its big day then -- the newspaper ads were visible, but the main thing were the parades with the banners. The people who were going to vote for the Nazi party had banners which proclaimed that they were going to see that Germany was going to be a big power again, that everybody had a job, that everybody could buy an automobile (around 1930 automobiles were not plentiful and to own a private car used only for pleasure or for going back and forth to work was the height of luxury in Europe) that everybody would have a radio -- there was no television yet, not even telephones in every residence. The other parties especially the Social Democrats (a central party) countered them with equal promises. It was these economic promises which probably swayed most of the people to vote for the Nazis.

Q: So the general reaction was what? Were the people enthusiastic?

A: Yes, most of the people, as far as I can remember, were. When we said, "We don't like them, because they are going to throw all the Jews out!" They didn't want to know about that or hear about that. They said that it was a lot of "Quatch" (the German expression meaning "nonsense") that it is just a sideline, that one should pay attention to the main thing such that they were all going to be made healthy and wealthy and that they are going to make it so that Germany would amount to something. The children forgot what happened in WWI and in the occupation of the Rhineland and all that nationalistic stuff. The propaganda was particularly aimed at a nationalistic field originally. Germany was going to be superior and initially it was catching, but there was no distinction made between Germans of any particular racial background or religious persuasion, not then! It was only alarmists, such as my mother, who could see the handwriting on the wall. By all means, she was propagandizing against voting for the Nazi party.

Q: She did so publicly?

A: Yes, she did talk in the store. Some friends told her after a while that she had to cut that out when they did come to power because, it would lead to trouble. However during the campaigning she was a star public campaigner for the Social Democrats. She addressed people, she wrote some funny poems about the

coming of the Nazis, because it should be avoided. They were used at Jewish gatherings. I don't know anymore exactly where. One time she addressed a local meeting of the RJF, which means the Reichsbund Judischer Frontsoldaten, the German state society of Jewish soldiers who had served on the front. This was a fairly large organization of which my father was secretary-treasurer of the local organization. The area for the local organization encompassed the same five cities which I mentioned before, when I talked about the rabbi. My mother addressed the local meeting of this organization concerning the danger of the coming of the Nazi party.

Q: What were these placards?

A: They were cases of Jewish caricatures. The long nose, the baldy head, the bulging eyes, it got to be the stereotype of what a Jew looks like in color cartoons, with slogans written underneath, such as: "They are the people that starve you!" "They are the people who have all the money in the country" "They are the ones who influence all the foreign countries to be anti-German!" "They are the criminals!" If you were not Jewish maybe you didn't pay much attention to it but it hurt even the kids to see things like that on banners carried around during a parade.

Q: What was the reaction by your friends and peers?

A: Most of them were sympathetic.

Q: To the Nazis?

A: No! No!

Q: Against the Nazis?

A: Yes, against the Nazis. Because of their parents they probably believed some of the things which the Nazis promised. However they were sympathetic enough so that they could play with us. Sometimes they looked sheepish, however it was the same story after the war. Then it was like a bunch of sheep. They said: "We had to!" "Remember we were not allowed to talk back!" "You know that if I tell them that you are my friend I will be ostracized!" "I can't participate in the party's sports!" They were apologetic. However there wasn't any element around, at least to our knowledge, there may have been some opposition people, of course there were, who truly spoke up. However the people were mostly apologetic. There were a few who got to be out and out bad people, who enjoyed this Jew-baiting bit. The son of a doctor who moved across the street from us sent several messages to me that if he and his friends would ever see me swimming in the river again they would drown me. He got to be a captain, or at least somewhat higher up in the youth organization. He felt his oats and let it be known that he was a toughy.

Q: Had he been a friend of yours?

A: Oh yes, a good friend. He had been the guy who studied with me, and who during the summers and in school had been my special friend, but he swung exactly the other way and then enjoyed being a Jew baiter.

Q: What was your reaction to this switch?

A: Mostly hatred. In those days I would have gladly beat him up, particularly when his messages came through that he was better than I -- you know all the nasty things he could say about Jewish kids. There still were enough people on my side that if there had been fisticuffs he would probably have gotten the worst of it. Later on it became silly to think about that because there were too many like him who were forced into it or who maybe, really enjoyed the feeling of superiority. However he was the first one and I remember his name. His father was the family physician of us kids. His name was Kufenberg. His first name was Berndt (spelled by PL). I tried to look him up during the war but he wasn't around, he may have been a war victim.

Q: How did the Nazi coming to power affect your everyday life in more detail, for example in school, shopping, your religious life and business for your family?

A: Let me see how much I can recall. First of all the religious training in the school had stopped for the younger kids. I was already out of the lower grades. They could have no religious training anymore. We could not participate in public sports, as I have stated. That came about gradually. Initially we were allowed to have Jewish clubs, Jewish groups, and so forth, which we did. The attacks became more vicious. I mentioned the fact that the barber by the name of Stroehl who was one of the party leaders, he was in charge of the little black box where all the criminals, you know the prostitutes, the no gooders, the pimps, etc. were displayed. He had taken photographs of customers entering the store and put them into the black box and said: "The party will take proper action concerning these Jew lovers!" Initially nobody thought that anything could happen. Then it got to the point where people got afraid to go in and there was a boycott. (Early in the Nazi rule of Germany on April 1, 1933, there was a one day boycott of all Jewish stores set up by the government and enforced by armed Nazi storm troopers being stationed at all doors) when people were fairly afraid to come into the store. My parents were fairly well known in the vicinity; if we went and ate in a restaurant and there happened to be some of the especially younger, party members present they made anti-Semitic remarks. There was no direct aggression. There were words which you heard but wished you didn't. They went far in public in order to annoy you. Business suffered to the point where our parents were not operating at a profit anymore.

- Q: Did they put a star on the window? (The regulation of indicating Jewish homes came much later).
- A: No! No! The first sign of this kind of vandalism was when they did paint swastikas (that was the official sign of the Nazi party which later was imprinted on the German flag) on the synagogue. The city did not like it when they had to clean it. They cleaned it up under protest. This was a development that became more and more noticeable to the point where my parents had to give up the business. By that time we had said that because of my mother's agitation that things were going from bad to worse. She was the extreme opposite from the doctor's wife in the Holocaust TV mini series. (that was the four or five evening series shown on TV which showed a family of four Jewish people living in Germany who starting from an upper class existence in Berlin became victims of the Nazi drive against the Jews and gave the impetus to this oral history project. The doctor's wife was brutalized and finally killed off in the TV series, one by one). My mother wanted to get out. I believe that I mentioned that one of us -- my brother or I had to leave the gymnasium. I did. In order to learn a useful trade, something which I could conceivably use in Israel (that was then, of course, Palestine) I managed to get an apprenticeship in the city of Hanover. I moved away from home.. I lived with a Jewish family in Hanover and started to work as a carpenter's apprentice. That didn't last too long. The Nazi party got stronger, the rules and regulations got tougher (the rules and regulations as well as the territorial demands under the Nazis were increased by the sausage theory i.e. one slice at a time, each slice being tailored to what the former allied powers would tolerate). The carpenters guild put pressure on my employer to let me go. He didn't want to so they passed a law -- actually it may not have been a law, just a local rule stating that all the Jewish boys who had come to the big city to learn a trade, whether it was myself in the carpenter trade or some of the others who were learning to be welders or metal workers; we were no longer allowed to attend the trade school. One of the criteria which one must meet when you accept an apprenticeship was that you had to go to trade school and learn things that go along with the trade. Well, two things happened; the pressure of the carpenter's guild on my employer plus the fact that they kicked all the Jews out of the trade schools, legally cancelled our apprenticeship contract and I had to leave. I tried to involve that in a claim which I had against Germany. (After the war, in 1948, the German State established a law under which people could obtain financial restitution for things done under the laws which the Nazis established. There was restitution for interrupted education, loss of a job, loss of business, days of imprisonment, injuries while in concentration camp, etc. That is undoubtedly what PL is talking about) because I was disabled but unfortunately the way my departure from the apprenticeship was, the way in which I was fired was prior to the time when I would have established any rights under the German social security system -- so I could never collect for the few months which I did work either unemployment or as an old age pension. I had to strain to prove that it was not my choice to leave. If it hadn't been for the Nazi pressure I could have stayed and contributed to the social Security system. I had the necessary tenure, but I

employed some good attorneys and it didn't work. In any case, because of the Nazi pressure I had to leave. By that time my visa with the Youth Aliyah (the young people who were to enter Palestine -- at that time only youth, below 18 could enter Palestine under the British regulations) to go to Israel (Palestine) was almost ready to go. You see, I had joined in Hanover, a youth movement which exists here, in the United States, it is International, it is the Habonim Nun which was to associate Jewish kids who went on trips, even after we were no longer allowed to have public gatherings of Jewish youth anymore. We got on our bicycles and went someplace where we camped out and had instructions in Hebrew songs and dances. We learned to speak Hebrew. We called it Evrit at that time, that is pretty close to what they call it today. However when I had to leave Hanover, I had to drop my membership in Habonim and come back home where in order to keep busy and make a little money my father and I got to be peddlers on our bicycles. An uncle of mine in a northern German city still had his business going. He relied a lot on the main, on catalog business. He gave us some samples and the catalogs and we went on our bicycles to visit our former customers in the villages. There were a lot of people who were very nice and friendly to us. They even gave us an occasional order. We met quite a few who had been converted to being extremely Nazi-anti-Semitic minded and kicked us out and stuck the dogs on us. We met others who were just careful that they might lose some benefits. Especially the farmers who did business with a Jew would lose out. So we kept busy and made a little money. We kept on doing this until our visa came through to come to the United States. I did mention that I almost got to go with a youth aliyah out to Israel (Palestine). We had a couple of setbacks but both my brother and I caught yellow jaundice and looking like we were sick ruled out both my going on the boat to Israel or going to the United States (probably he means on a children transport, several of which left Germany during these years although PL does not state what he means there); so we got put back on the established list. Both my brother and I recovered sufficiently so that we could go in front of the United States Counsel in Hamburg and to get our permits to come to the United States.

Q: Were you able to shop in other stores although people were not allowed to come to your store?

A: Yes! We left before these things became too rigorously enforced, in the small towns. In the larger cities some of the small specialty stores (at least that is what it looks like since the signs "Juden sind hier unerwünscht" i.e. "Jews are not wanted here" were prevalent all over in Frankfurt) which had gone completely Nazi, already had signs posted that "Jews are not welcome!" They made it appear, at least, that if you were Jewish and you came to the store you would be asked to leave. In our little city, most of the merchants whom we visited, where we did business were on our side until the day we left. Remember that we left as early as 1937. We only heard stories from our relatives after they came to the United States, how bad it had gotten after we left. Remember that we were no longer in Germany for Kristallnacht (that was the night of November 9-10 1938

when the synagogues, Jewishly owned stores, assembly halls, etc. were torched, Jewish homes were ransacked at will (broken crystal, glasses, etc.) and Jewish males arrested in a wholesale manner). No, the merchants allowed us still to purchase things. The recreational establishments were a little more scary. An incident happened in Berlin, where there was an anti-Semitic movie which the Nazis had made. It was shown in one of the bigger theaters. During some of the most anti-Semitic remarks the audience made little raspberries then they shouted against them something like "Big Lies!" The Nazis blamed that on the Jews. They got out a big cartoon which was supposed to be characteristic of the Jews and displayed it in the papers and described it over the radio. It read: "To be brave in the dark is a Jewish trait!" All the people who made that noise, the anti-Nazi remarks, had been arrested. As a result of that Jews were no longer permitted in movie theaters. That was so stupid, that the little town movies then had no one in them. (During the pre-World War II period all movie performances, which were the main form of entertainment in Europe, included a newsreel which in Germany always did include objectionable or favorable items to the Nazis). The president of the Jewish community tried to get it changed, but he couldn't. His business was hanging in the balance so he didn't try to buck the system because he didn't want to get into trouble, just to buy tickets for the movie.

Q: Were there any other merchants who tried to resist Nazi pressure?

A: They all did, but Nazi pressure made it difficult to conduct business, but gradually they all went on the bandwagon, particularly since their youngsters and their kids were the people who were the first to be affected. The parents had to follow suit. They had to become Nazis and contribute to the party, display the party slogan. They had to make sure that they didn't employ Jews or somebody who might be a Jew, maybe of Jewish descent or whatever. If one of your grandparents had been Jewish you had too much Jewish blood in you and you could not be accepted (it is believed that this is an error: one grandparent was acceptable but two were too many). Now it never got to the point where you needed to go to the third generation back. By that time the "Final Solution" (i.e. the killing of all the Jews) had been put on paper and the rule pretty much stayed that way. If you had one Jewish grandparent you were suspected (on the other hand you could emigrate from Germany only if you could "prove" that you were not an Aryan, so that became a thriving business for would be emigrants to prove your ancestry.

Q: How did all of this affect your Jewish religious life?

A: During my time in Germany it made it a little more scary but we were determined to have our religious service. The rabbi had been threatened and he could no longer travel freely from Obernkirschern to our town of Rinteln so my father took over to be the religious leader. He was not the community president. He never wanted it and he didn't have that much time. Remember that that was a tremendous presence and it just wasn't possible for him. You know he had to make a living for us. For him to become an officer of the community was just

unthinkable. That never came up. Now we were Progressive, as an Orthodox community. Long, long before I was Barmitzvah men and women started sitting together (it is traditional in truly orthodox congregations in Judaism that women and small children sat in the balcony and only men and older boys were allowed to sit on the main floor of the sanctuary). I remember that earlier, when I was little, women were sitting on one side and the men were on the other side. In Buckenburg, where there was a bigger synagogue the women were upstairs and the men were downstairs. This change was probably gradual but during the Hitler years when we were threatened and the synagogue was not looted, but vandalized the outside walls were painted. Hardly a day went by when it didn't have slogans or swastikas on it. We had services and my father conducted. He directed the High Holiday services and he had some help from another Jew. This other Jew was brought to us by the Nazis and put in an insane asylum. That is truly what it was. He didn't really belong there. He knew enough religion to daven (say the proper prayers in Hebrew) and such things on the High Holidays (the period of the Jewish New Year from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur) or if not the High Holidays then on any other Jewish holidays, when they would let him out. He would help my father. He kept that up until we left. We were some of the first of the community to leave, that is other than youngsters who had gone to Palestine. When they found out that we were going to get the immigrant papers from the United States so that we were going to leave they knew that they didn't have anybody to conduct the services. There was another Jewish family where the husband was rather sickly. He couldn't stand up anymore to conduct services, especially since we had to conduct them in Hebrew. We found out soon after we left that he was arrested on some trumped up charges. We don't know what they were. We never heard from him again. His name was Levy. He had owned a nicer store than my parents did. He mainly sold men's ready to wear and shoes. Much later we met one of his daughters in New York City where we were visiting for some reason or other. We found out that he died in a concentration camp. We never found out what the charges were. He was just picked up. He was the only one left who knew enough Hebrew to conduct services. So it went then for a while and Levy conducted services as he had learned to, mostly in German. We were gone so we don't know when it happened that they picked him up. Then they locked the place up, and they were prohibited from conducting services.

Q: You say that the place was vandalized. Was there any more vandalizing after that?

A: Oh yes! I never bothered to go unto the synagogue; I never bothered with that. It was ultimately burned (all known Jewish Houses of Worship in Germany and Austria were ransacked and burned during Kristallnacht i.e. November 9-10, 1938). I can't tell you what year that was since I didn't find this out when I came back there while I was in the service. I don't remember if I told you that story before or not, when I went there with a couple of G.I.s (this stands for Government Issue and was the slang word for American enlisted men serving in World War II) and looked around, when we had a couple of days off.

- Q: We will have to speak about that later.
- A: That burning must have occurred earlier, before the war started. It was burned by Nazi vandals, hoodlums. (Kristallnacht was actually orchestrated by the German government).
- Q: Can you tell me what happened to you when Hitler came to power? You were speaking about how your mother reacted in front of your father, brother and yourself?
- A: My brother was just a kid. We were used to living in the open. I was shocked! When I first lost that independence I wanted to learn a little bit more about what the Jewish community went through; how the Nazis came to the Jewish orphan's home in Hanover and threatened all the kids, and looked around to see if they were hiding some "Aryans" (presumably all Aryans were tall, blue eyed specimens in contrast with the Jews). I know that they hauled away quite a few of the instructor and teachers and nurses and doctors for a service that was "more immediately needed for non-Jews. All the boys, it was a boys' orphanage, were taken to some refuge haven administered by some international organization after they were taken away that was after we left. The Nazis took over the orphanage. I came back as a tourist to Hanover after the war and I found out that the larger cities suffered a lot more than those in the smaller cities. We could still get someone to buy the remainder of our business, of course the money offered for the goodwill and the merchandise was less than it was worth. The Nazis, in our town listed everything we had in cash and confiscated it except that I think that we were allowed to take 25 German Marks a piece for us.
- Q: Out of the country?
- A: Yes, out of the country. However we were still allowed to take all of our furniture with us. The furniture was shipped in one big box. Valuables such as gold, diamonds, silver plates and so forth, no, we had to leave them behind. They had a guy in uniform and a civilian come by to check what went into this big box for overseas shipment. The Germans called it a "lift" in those days (that term "lift" in ordinary language means an elevator cage and actually the box looked very much like that; today it would be called a small container shipment, about one quarter or one half the size of the present day containers; it was loaded as one piece on trucks, or onto the holds of ships). The inspectors made sure that we could not smuggle any incriminating documents, or forbidden valuables or such out. Listen, for example, they took away from me a thing I had been working on for many years, a family tree. This family tree was a fairly complex thing. The family tree went way back to the years of the Spanish Inquisition. I had traced ancestors, both males and females. It was a hobby which I had developed during the Nazi period. It showed where I came from. They felt that it was incriminating to the party and so they said that it was a lie. The party said that the Jews hadn't been in

Germany that long, that they came from foreign countries. Well, I had planned on hiding it, but my mother didn't want to take a chance, so I gave it to the official when he asked for it. Some of the things which we lost was because of blanket rules which the Nazis had. For example they had passed a law that it was a lie that there were veterans of the World War I of the Jewish faith. This was by an edict from Goebbels (Joseph Goebbels was one of the leaders of the Nazi party and served Hitler as Minister of Propaganda. He, his wife and children killed themselves by swallowing poison on May 1, 1945) that it was a Jewish invention, that there were no such veterans. So all the books, which had been published, were collected and burned. I don't know why I got two books of that nature out of the country but through them I have the list of names of Jewish war veterans killed in action and a list of the members who had been in the German air Force, i.e. Jews in the Luftwaffe. They may have been mixed up with other books. We brought quite a few books out with us. There were religious books such as some for the Holy Days. But people who left later were no longer able to take such things with them, because the Nazis collected the books right after the Kristallnacht set a big fire and burned them.

Q: Do you have some copies of books which were burned on Kristallnacht?

A: Yes! You know for certain celebrations, Thanksgiving and such, they always celebrated with big fires (Thanksgiving is not a German celebration but that is not relevant to the story, they used big bonfires at many occasions). For some reason or other they grabbed books with a Jewish title, or anti-Nazi books or something of the kind and threw them in the fires. That was great sport. We had already left. They just collected them and burned them. Torahs (The Jewish scrolls on which the five books of Moses are copied) were burned during the High Holidays. We could take all of our German prayer books with us. I guess those two books which by then had been declared a lie and therefore were illegal and Jewish propaganda slipped through. They were not worth much, just a list of names, but I still have them. Historically they are of some value, but they are as stated above and I believe that I still have them. I am straying a little bit I got on that subject when you asked what happened to the rest of the family. My brother was more or less unaffected. He was affected only in later years. He knew that we had to go. He was just afraid that he would be separated from our parents (at that time the brother was still eligible to leave Germany on children's transports due to his age; many youngsters were saved from camps by leaving on children's transports -- but such departures were dramatic). He could have gone to Palestine in those days when my parents could not find their transportation to the United States.

Q: I like to ask you a question about what happened in the normal day- by- day activities to your family and to your Jewish friends, the people you knew. Could you get me their reactions to the Nuremburg Laws?

A: Let's go back a little. The laws which were passed, I don't believe that we knew them as the Nuremberg Laws (the actual Nuremberg Laws were passed one time,

in 1935, when the Reichstag met in that city, there specifically depriving Jews of German citizenship, forbade Germans to marry Jews and made the swastika the national flag of Germany). I would have to do a little reading and see just why they are called that now (the above information came from the World Book encyclopedia). Perhaps they had a party congress in Nuremberg. We knew about the laws (anti-Jewish laws were passed all the time from 1933 through 1945). At that time we did have gentile employees in the store. In spite of the law they all stayed until the store was closed. (There was no Nuremberg Law which would have forced them to quit) at the time when the business had to be given up for other reasons. We had maids and this; in the United States that sounds a little degrading and derogatory. It was not (only a few German households, in the early 30's had such conveniences as refrigerators, gas burning stoves vacuum cleaners, etc) then. We had our maids from the same farm family for many, many years. When one of them had had enough and wanted to go back to the farm, maybe she had a boyfriend or wanted to get married, then her sister would come in and work. I visited this family by the way, during the war years just to see what happened to them. However they stayed, they stayed as long as they could. (In 1937 laws were passed specifically covering maids working in Jewish households). In our little town they were not threatened with arrest. Maybe because my father was looked up to a little more he had no trouble. There were others who were more vigorous, who had participated in politics and who were attacked personally. They were threatened with arrest, or maybe arrested, if they did not follow the letter of the law. Jewish boys in schools were no longer allowed to date and then soon they had to leave the high schools anyway. It was upsetting because of the things I mentioned but we had gotten used to this fact. It wasn't just because of the Nuremberg laws. We had been restricted by laws even before that. But paradoxes existed such as Hitler and his command, in order to conserve food had already invented the modern day weekly "Eintopfgericht" (spelled by PL) (actually the difference in the cost of the food served that day was to be contributed to the Nazi party; this was not a conservation of food program). This means that the meal was to be served in one pot like a stew, soup, etc. This was to save and be just as nourishing. This was for the main meal of the day, it did not concern itself with breakfast and the evening supper. It came about that there were too many poor people who could not afford regular meals, so every citizen was assigned a poor family or could choose a poor family, a family who was disadvantaged for some reason or other and you shared your Eintopfgericht with that family. Jews were not allowed to participate because it was told to the general population that they would poison you. That was not the case in our town. There were certain Jewish families who were expected to share their Eintopfgericht. We took ours in a little carrying thing like people have lunch in. There were three different little buckets in that lunch. I remember carrying that to a family what had been assigned to be our guests. Our relatives in other towns, in the larger cities, were surprised that we even participated. One of the daughters of this family had worked in the store. One of the sons of this family had been one of our friends. The father was a blacksmith and he had gotten sick. They were in a bad way. They were not poor enough to get public support. We always took

the food over to the people. Either we boys did, or our parents did. An incident there occurred, when a couple of Nazi bullies didn't beat up my father but, while he was on the way to the family with the food, they took the food and threw it in the public square and told him that what he was doing was illegal. Now they were not officials. The family which used to participate in our Eintopfgericht with us were a little upset, but they were scared out of participating any longer. When our parents had to give up the store our family finally said, under pressure of some of my mother's family in the north, that we had to leave. It was just as well because we then also had to give up the living quarters which we had, and move into a makeshift arrangement with another Jewish family which owned their home. We didn't have a maid anymore because my parents no longer worked in the business and had all day to take care of their own household and so forth. So getting along without maids wasn't a hardship. It fell right into line with the maids leaving us and going home. The employees in the store all got severance pay and left. There were some Jewish operated businesses which continued to go on in our town and still have employees. How they solved their problem of having female employees working for them I don't really remember (if they were partnerships or incorporated businesses with "majority ownership by Aryans" they were not affected). I do remember that the law had been passed and that it was being enforced. For so many years they had been working for those Jewish bosses and, all of a sudden, they had to leave them. This law was taken relatively lightly in our town. The worst thing was when the kids could no longer go to school.

Q: With all this happening, the personal relations between the Jewish bosses and the gentile employees were they changed?

A: The relationships remained like they had always been. They were above reproaches, they were excellent as a matter of fact I can remember the employees giving a party for my father preparing for their leaving. They were not happy. They were losing their livelihood. They didn't know where they were going to find work. These gentile people getting together and having a party, I mean singing and reading poems they had written, things like that, as a farewell. It was a little embarrassing in the spirit, not so much for us, but what would happen to them. Perhaps also, with stronger measures taken by the Nazi party, someone would accuse them of being soft against the Jews. The party took place, but in order to keep away from any possible adverse consequences we thanked them, we closed the store early and the next day we all left to visit relatives. I think that my brother and I went to the town of (transcriber can not understand the name); we spent a day or so with my aunt. We were concerned that somebody would come and arrest us (the principle was that if they couldn't find you just when they wanted to make an example of you they would forget about you). Nothing happened however. I vaguely remember the thing; my mother worried that they were making too much noise so that they would attract attention to the party.

Q: Were there any Jews in the town who were really affected by the Nuremberg Laws such as a doctor?

A: There was no Jewish doctor in the town.

Q: Did the gentile doctor continue to care for you?

A: The gentile doctor continued to see Jewish patients. The doctor who took care of us kids did. I don't know why but my father had a different doctor, my father got his first heart attack while we were living with these Jewish people, after the sale of the store. However he was not hospitalized and I cannot recall now whether that was because of anti-Semitism or because the doctor who took care of him didn't think that was necessary. He did have a heart attack. A couple of Nazi hoodlums who knew about it, found out the location of the room where he was and sang loud anti-Jewish slogans; however they were both stinking drunk and the language which they used was something which would make you raise your eyebrows.

Q: What kind of words were they?

A: Filthy ones! Oh, it was odd, they were picked up by the police and arrested for drunken and disorderly conduct. There were no apologies. The parties didn't offer to replace the broken windows. My mother was worried about my father probably getting another heart attack, but the doctor didn't come over. Now the same doctor later on, when my father filed his claim against the German government for his "Wiedergutmachung" -- you probably remember that word -- it is the claim for reparation, literally of "Making Well Again" (these were laws established after 1947 under Chancellor Adenauer to compensate individuals against private losses of any kind under the terms of laws promulgated by the Nazis). The doctor refused to testify since he was too old. His daughter was also a doctor testified that he didn't have a real heart attack, that he just had some safety needs to get out from under prosecution and consequently there was no basis for injury claims for himself. There were some other Germans who recalled the incident, fortunately, and then testified. These witnesses said that he really was sick, as claimed. So he finished his claim against the German government for the prosecution of the claim. It was granted shortly thereafter. However the doctors, both Dr. Kuppenit (that is what it sounds like), I may have mentioned his name earlier, incidentally his son got to be a leader in the Nazi movement, and the other doctor, whose name escapes me for the moment, maybe I will think of it later, did take care of Jewish persons. For example during the days when I was going on the bicycle, peddling with my father, I was sent out, at the request of the customer, to come and collect some money, which they owed us. It happened that they had a fairly vicious dog whom they kept on a leash inside, they did not stick the dog on the little Jew-boy, me, you know, as the story goes. I went to the door and knocked and the dog bit me in the thigh. The people disinfected it, but knowing about dog bites and first aid and all of that, I wasn't satisfied. They gave

me the money and I got back to my parents and then stopped at the office of this German doctor. He wasn't my doctor, but he was closer, physically. I told him that I was a Jewish boy from the community and I normally went to his competitor but he took care of my wound, dressed it and sent me on my way without remarks. It took some time for these things to sink in, it wasn't an overnight affair (for the anti-Semitic laws to filter down to everyday level), for the doctors to say, "No, I am not going to take care of Jews anymore!" (Later laws forced the doctors hands and other laws took doctors licenses away from Jewish doctors). That was true especially in the small towns. The other thing we talked about; the employees we had were not so convinced yet, in 1936, that Jews were such an abomination. They kind of felt a little bit awkward about the laws being passed that a Jew had to lose his rights (here the tape is very poorly audible and CK announces the end of the tape).

Q: This is the second tape with Mr. Paul Leeser done Wednesday afternoon August 23, 1978. We are beginning with a sequel to the section of the Nuremberg laws.

A: As a consequence of these laws many of the professional entertainers, movie stars and teachers and so forth had been able to earn no livelihood anymore. They could not perform in public. I believe that the teachers continued in the schools (that is not the case -- after these laws were passed Jewish teachers were dismissed except from Jewish schools, but that was outside of PL's knowledge). There was a lot of what, in today's language would be called moonlighting, on their part. The Jews in 1936 had, in existence, already an organization called: the Kulturbund, loosely translated into the Jewish Cultural Organization, where lecturers, performers and other people who were well known, such as movie idols, gave public performances to gatherings of Jews. These things were not outlawed because there were not that many of them. There were public invitations. They rented halls. They were willing to go to dues. They charged admissions, actually they charged in admission more than what the performers asked for. Actually the performers worked for very little because most of the performers, the Jewish performers, especially those who did participate, had achieved stardom and had some money which had not yet been taken away from them. A lot of them didn't think that it was bad enough yet, for them to have to leave yet, although a few of them did. We used to go to Minden which was the closest bigger city with large enough facilities to see lots of shows. People would never think that we were destined to see them otherwise. The performers, I can't recall all the names, but Jewish stars in the German movie industry gave quite some interesting shows. These shows were of a nature to which you could take the kids. The teachers who were not as well off, financially, as the performers got jobs in instructing people in languages of the countries which they thought they had to immigrate to. Now there was a rule which allowed the performers to have public gatherings of large groups, that was in 1936, otherwise groups were prohibited. Teachers coming to the house were very much afraid that they were doing something against the law. They came under all kinds of guidance, to make sure that you were secure. They used to instruct in English, in Hebrew, in French and in Spanish, whatever your

choice was. They needed the income. They needed the meals. They used to come to our town. As I remember I had had instruction in Hebrew ever since religious school and then during my Habonim days in Hanover, but we needed instruction in English. I had had one year in high school. My parents and brother knew nothing about it at all. We had a young gentleman coming, bicycling, who taught in our town and surrounding ones to all those people who could afford him. You put him up for a night, feed him a couple of meals and gave him a little money. He was pretty good in instruction in basic English. He, himself was headed for Israel and that wasn't too easy for someone without the means to go. For the kids, yes, it was easy to go to Israel, there were organizations. Adults had to have money of their own or an assured income, or had to find a sponsor or some way of getting the fare, so this young man was a lay teacher. He made a little bit of a living by teaching foreign languages and the laws and customs of foreign countries to people who planned to emigrate. Kotoban (obviously PL now talks about some of the lectures but the word does not mean much to the transcriber) was a big name for me. We never had thought it possible to listen to him in person, to see those people whom we had seen in movies. We were very proud of the fact that they were Jews. Now the star from UFA (spelled by PL), it was a big German movie house, something like MGM is in the United States, and now to have seen him in person and be in the same room, close enough to talk to him, that was something. However we couldn't understand why we got to go to these meetings of the Kulturbund. I think that it was not until late 1938, that they were officially cancelled. Why we could go to a meeting of the Kulturbund, where we could hear the singing and the performances, and it was not legal to have a teacher come to the house is something I could not understand. We had to keep quiet about that. Our parents and our teacher warned us about that. They warned us not to let even our closest friends know about the fact that we housed an instructor. Maybe looking back on that through these instructors we learned quite a few more things than just the foreign language and the customs and the laws of the countries. They also gave us news on the side, which otherwise we would never have found out about. As a teacher, we had one young man who just taught English. He also taught us the laws of the United States that we, as immigrants should know about; what it took to become a citizen. What it took to get a visa to come to the United States; who you had to contact, and so forth. We learned, for instance, that the only country which did not require a visa where, if you had the money to purchase the passage to go to was Shanghai. (That was the door of China which had been forced open after the Boxer revolt). We also learned that, for some reason or other, Germans had already started following up on which Jews leaving for neighboring countries like Holland, like Denmark, or France; England wasn't so bad since it was separated by water. America, if you had the money, then all right, it was a good place. Israel, go ahead if you want to get killed (starting in 1936 Arabs in Palestine had rioted under the orders of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and massacred Jews wherever they could). But Shanghai, if you want to go to Shanghai, we will let you go tomorrow. I didn't know until later, since this I did not learn from the English teacher, that you could go to Shanghai, even if you were in a concentration camp (actually other

survivors have told that if any individual could prove that he/she would be admitted to any foreign country he/she would have their German passport validated and be released from any camp until 1939) that was still true in 1936 and 1937. If you could prove to the concentration camp administration, let's say a wife, that she had the means for herself and her husband to give up their livelihood in Germany and go to Shanghai you were released. Now that we didn't learn until we were in the United States, as a matter of fact not until recently, but the fact that you could go to Shanghai, even if you couldn't go anywhere else, we learned from these instructors. We learned, as I mentioned before, where the concentration camps were; that some Jews who were sent there were never heard from again; that in the camps you were not beaten but that you had to work very hard and that prisoners didn't eat too well but that you could not bring anything to prisoners unless you managed to bribe one of the members of SS (these were the Nazi so called Schutz Staffel, Protective Guard, the black uniformed elite troopers who guarded and administered the concentration camps and the secret police, amongst other duties) guards. Now it was perhaps for this reason that the German government in those days frowned on the private teachers who went into the homes to teach languages. I don't know so much about the aftermath of the Nuremberg laws (it is remarkable how much PL could gather so much information in spite of his youth since he was just 14 when the laws were promulgated) so we better go to the next question.

Q: Mr. Leaser, can you tell us what prompted your family to leave when they did. What happened when they left and what sort of assistance you had in getting out.

A: Right! We set the wheels in motion about the days of the Nuremberg laws. I remember these Nuremberg laws now because we just stated what we meant by them. We didn't know them under that name then. We decided to leave when you could see that the business no longer was profitable. We knew that we would have to go someplace. Fortunately my mother had two sisters and a brother who had left Germany for the United States earlier. A maiden aunt had left in 1924, another aunt left in 1928, the first two because of the depression in Germany and of the inability to get work there. The other aunt left because she had two sons and that she was afraid that she could not give them the education and the opportunity in Germany and that she had all kinds of glowing reports from her younger brother in the United States who had left also. They had visited us again in 1932 when Hitler already was a bad word and they had promised that, if things got worse, all three of them, two aunts and an uncle, would see to it that we get the necessary sponsors in the United States to get us to leave Germany. When the Nuremberg laws were passed the proceedings were still in progress. We heard all kinds of scary rumors what was going to be happening to Jews, as far as making a living is concerned. My mother left no stone unturned. She made me contact my friends in Hanover to expedite my exodus to Israel and to find out if I could take my small brother along. She wired the relatives in the United States that the time had come when an immediate departure was essential. My aunt in Cincinnati set the wheels in motion immediately. The laws in the United States had not been

changed but were enforced more severely (due to the unemployment, no doubt) so that the sponsors would have to show that they had the necessary funds to fully support the new immigrants from Germany, for I believe one year (it was actually for an open ended period to prevent draining Federal and State welfare funds, in case of need). If there was a family involved you had to have several sponsors. Or the sponsors had to be fairly wealthy. My aunt here, in the United States, found two gentlemen in New York who were in the clothing business and had no dependent children of their own and were willing to sponsor quite a few people. They sponsored a lot of my relatives. They got the necessary papers ready. They forwarded them to Germany to the consulate. Our visas were delayed, as I believe I mentioned before, because of my brother and my appearance, but around the middle of May 1937 we were given our visas and we purchased passage on the United States owned ship SS Harding. My parents thought that it would make a better appearance if we arrived on a United States owned ship rather than with one of the luxury liners, although they were allowed to pay for the passage before any money was confiscated (by the Nazi government as price for letting Jews leave) they could have come over on one of the big German luxury liners. A United States ship appeared to them to be preferable. So we boarded the SS Harding.

Q: Mr. Leeser, you weren't always sure to come to the United States, you also mentioned going to Palestine or to Prague, or different places?

A: Yes. Most of the Jewish families who had made up their mind that things were getting from bad to worse decided to leave. We had several choices. I believe that I mentioned briefly Shanghai. This seemed too far removed, we didn't know anybody there. The United States were always in our mind as a goal because we did have relatives here, but since the quota system (immigration to the United States was regulated by a law passed in 1921 and revised in 1927 which limited the number of immigrants to specific yearly numbers which were divided amongst the several countries of birth of family heads in proportion to the make up of national origin claimed by the United States inhabitants in 1922 and 1927. This favored numerically would be immigrants from the British Isles and Northern Europe) bothered us and we didn't know how soon we could get out. I had also been in contact with the Habonim organization with the Youth Aliyah (that is the movement of young people to return to Palestine which was mentioned previously) to come to Palestine/Israel. I had had my application in with the Habonim group for a youth transport. The way was clear. The papers were in order. As luck would have it, if we hadn't gotten our United States visas, as a family, I would probably have two weeks later, been on my way to Palestine through Switzerland. The route usually taken was through Austria, then to the Italian coast. Some of the Youth Aliyah groups didn't and went through Switzerland. We were to pick up a contingent of young people and a ship somewhere in an Italian port. We did have enough time to notify the Habonim in Hanover that our papers were coming through so that they could give any reservations which I had to someone else.

Q: Was there any international organization, specifically a Jewish organization which had helped you obtain your visas?

A: No. Fortunately we did not have to rely on any help from an international organization, although we knew that they were active in helping people. I vaguely remember.

Q: That is the organization which worked for the development of land in Palestine.

A: They were giving all kinds of help to Jewish children, either orphans or children from families which could not get away. They lined them up someplace and placed them with organizations who would take them to Israel, but they were not really very open. I guess they were reluctant to reveal their sources for transportation and where the money was coming from because even in late 1936 and early 1937 the plan already existed that some Nazi organizations, either the SA (Sturm Abteilung -- these were the masses of Nazis, the brown shirted storm troopers) the SS or the Gestapo -- Geheime Staats Polizei -- the secret police which often used SS people as their cadres) and what have you, latched onto their things and made difficulties. I guess they used headlines to put their names in front of the public. They confiscated the money or arrested the leaders as Jewish vagrants and so forth. So the organizations didn't say too much. They relied on your guidance. If you left, you had to say good-bye to your family and friends, but then you went by means of transportation which they had provided. They didn't make it public. (There was also active rioting by Arabs in Palestine who tried to forcibly prevent new settlers from entering the country, if they could prevent it). I only learned about it later on, from news from family including a cousin who went to Shanghai. She did get across the border also with the help of an organization which took care of transportation. They had to trust these organizations that they were not Nazi agents who would take them to a concentration camp.

Q: When did you say that you left?

A: Mid May! I think that I remember the date. It was the 15th when the ship left. And it was May 27 I believe when we landed in New York harbor.

Q: You would say that you had no intermediate stops?

A: No. We left Bremerhaven on May 15. The ship landed in Southampton which was the regularly scheduled stop and then we sailed to the United States. I remember that trip. We stayed in a cabin and had a good time, and I wanted to find out what was going on on American ships. I got friendly with American people.

- Q: Was there a problem getting from your home in Rinteln to the port of embarkation?
- A: None at all! However, in order to get space on the ship it took a little bribery of the officials of the shipping lines. I know that there was some exchange of folding money when we met the officials of the shipping lines. This man was an American. (Here follows some statement as to what level the person who took the bribe was but the tape here is of such quality that it is not possible to transcribe) citizen. You had to bribe to get the cabin you wanted.
- Q: Was there any anti-Semitism on the part of the consular officials?
- A: Yes! Maybe it was just for show, however the second time we came there at the consulate in Hamburg, I was put down by the consular personnel. He asked my parents questions about my health and my being over the yellow jaundice, as it was called in those days. I guess it is some form of hepatitis. He told me in a fairly direct way, that I should not sound like a loud mouth little Jew-boy and that when he asked my parents questions I should keep quiet. He said it in such a way that he was trying to impress any listener who might have been listening and who was a Nazi, because he stressed that "Jew boy" business pretty much. Altogether he made me shut up and he continued the examination and then he put the proper stamp on the passports and other papers. Then he sent us on our way. The transportation between my hometown and the port was not difficult because it was beginning of 1937. My uncle from Herford was still allowed to drive his automobile. It came later when they took the drivers licenses away from the Jews. He drove us to the port. He and my aunt came to the cabin with us and we had our good-byes on board the ship. I was still afraid and I didn't breathe easily until we were out at sea, away from any German influence. Then we got our first look at American newspapers with anti-Nazi cartoons and we were allowed to laugh about what it said about Hitler in public. It was really a relief to be away all of a sudden to be away from the pressure and to see things from the anti-Nazi propaganda, we felt really loose after that.
- Q: Can you describe your arrival in New York?
- A: Yes. For my brother and myself it was a great adventure, both on board ship and then seeing our first shoeshine boys in New York harbor. It was more tedious for our parents because they had to clear customs. We were called by name. We expected to see our two sponsors. They had sent a letter to my mother on board. It was delivered to the cabin, but then for a reason which at the time I didn't understand we were called out as a family and were transferred to Ellis Island (that was the Federal prison in New York harbor where prior to the immigration acts of 1921 and 27 all emigrants were taken off the ships and examined. The laws of 1921 and 27 transferred the examination procedure overseas and only those where questions had not been straightened out in a timely fashion went to Ellis Island where they could be deported readily back to their home countries.

Ellis Island is within easy sight of Beloes Island on which is the Statue of Liberty). Now my parents had heard about Ellis Island. That was the place where they took the would be immigrants when there was something the matter with them. Actually it was only a fluke. They had just decided to take some twenty people there for examination and we happened to be amongst them. We were taken in front of a judge with a black bailiff. That was the first time that we had seen a black man in action as a civilian government employee. There also was a black interpreter. The judge asked a simple question: "How much money did we have with us?" And who was going to see to it that we were not going to go on welfare. He also wanted to know what our destination was and whether we would sign a little certificate on the passports and on the immigration permit. Then we were free to go! Of course we did not know where to go. However luckily the people who were our sponsors and who had heard from the port officer that we had been taken to Ellis Island, they met us out by the port. My mother relaxed a bit, she didn't feel so completely lost anymore. However my parents were eager enough to get going and not to stick around where any one else could take us back to Ellis Island. These people invited us to stay with them and spend a couple of days in New York. We got acquainted with my mother's sister who would take us, as fast as possible, as they could arrange for transportation to get us to Cincinnati.

Q: Your sponsors lived in New York?

A: Yes! They were two New York men. They had a long established clothing manufacturing concern. They would have liked to see us stay, but then they took us, my brother and myself, across the Hudson River on a ferry to New Jersey to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad terminal. My father insisted that he pay for our own tickets. My parents were truly independent and proud, they were used to taking care of their own. They did not want gifts other than what was absolutely necessary. My father bought our tickets to Cincinnati. We traveled by coach. We took off for Cincinnati where our relatives met us at the Union Terminal the following morning.

Q: Could you describe some of the problems which you had in getting established and also some of the difficulties in Cincinnati?

A: We two boys had hardly any problems. We had an aunt, actually we had more relatives than that but one aunt took charge.

Q: How was she related to you?

A: She was the older sister of my mother's. My mother had two sisters there. One was a nurse at Children's Hospital and the older aunt who was employed at the Jewish Convalescent Home in Cincinnati. Another one, I believe sold insurance. Her last name was Sandmel or Samuel. All of them went by their maiden name. I had one uncle, his name was Otto Samuel. He was married, he had a wife who

was a nurse and a little girl, maybe two years old. We still see her. The younger aunt who was at Children's Hospital was called Hanna Samuel. She later got married but divorced before she died. The older aunt had two or three sons, she went also by the name of Miss Samuel. She had been married and had the three children, but that is another story. However she is the one that took charge. She lived in a suburb of Cincinnati, in Price Hill. She saw to it that we got in touch with the Cincinnati Jewish Agency. One part of that agency was to see to it that the newly arrived Jewish immigrants got on their feet. We didn't even want help so they enlisted us immediately in getting us a job selling papers in a downtown for a couple of hours. My father got a job in a downtown clothing establishment, a clothing manufacturer. He didn't care too much about it. My mother was offered a job in a Jewish bookshop, through the Cincinnati Jewish Agency. She did not like the bookshop because all she could do was sell books. She wanted to be more independent. Then she worked for rooming and boarding houses. She made lunches and so forth. So with a little help from my relatives we got a bigger apartment in Avondale. This was the Jewish suburb of Cincinnati. (located just north of the Cincinnati zoo). She advertised in the paper of the agency and got two old ladies to take care of. She also established her position as being a good hostess for meetings by ladies auxiliaries and societies which wanted to have a catered luncheon and they used to come to our really big apartment. However catering the luncheon got to be too much of a chore in addition to the family so she met household expenses by just having these women boarders. The agency was glad to find a home for these ladies, as a matter of fact, she kept that up working through the Jewish Agency until maybe late in the 50th, providing homes for elderly people who lived there and she took care of them. My father had more of a problem in finding a decent job. Of course in the middle 30's jobs were not that easy to find. I don't remember the details but someplace he ran into a friend or a man whom he thought he recognized at a function not of Jews from Germany but for ex-Germans. The function was run by some of the Over the Rhine organizations of strictly gentile Germans for the newly arrived Jewish Germans. They wanted to extend a welcome hand toward them that showed them that even though they had anti-Jewish activities by the German-American Bund of Cincinnati (the German-American Bund was an organization of German Americans who favored Hitler Germany and opposed the pro-allied policies of the Roosevelt administration in all aspects, it was active until the United States entry into World War II) these were not their feelings and they wanted to make it easier for these German Jews to be Jews, rather than foreigners and to get them to participate in their German activities.

Q: Did the newly arrived German Jews accept that?

A: It was not very successful. There was some acceptance. There were some contacts made; however the newly arrived Jews were so afraid that these might be German spies or that there might be something later on to this special interest. However my father went to them. The biggest reason he saw was the possible association with the churches. Exposing himself to Christianity. The original

Messianic Jews were participants. However, as luck would have it, he ran into a party and he recognized him. This social contact turned out that they had not seen one another since 1917, when this fellow was the mess sergeant of my father's German Army outfit on the Russian front. My father who had been a medic had been assigned to be a kitchen helper from the hospital. So my father worked for this guy in the kitchen peeling potatoes. So, after their meeting, they had a little reunion and talked about World War I and they found out that my father was not in a job which he particularly liked. So this fellow asked him whether he would like to come to work for him since he was the chef of the Hotel Alps. So my father got himself a job in the Hotel Alps kitchen. He was given a job which he particularly liked. He was made supervisor of the pantry. He had four or five colored people, as they were called, working for him. He did not know how to get along with them. He made a go of it. He was the man in the kitchen for years under the stewardship of the chef. So my father worked there until he retired. He got promoted to what you call Second Chef. He worked behind the stove most of the time. When the job became too difficult for him, after he had several heart attacks in 1964, I think, he left that.

Q: Was there any language barrier?

A: Not too badly. The English instructions which we have had from our teachers helped quite a bit. However my parents had problems with the conversational portion. The only problem we had was in the first three or four weeks. We had difficulties when we went to the grocery store. One of the big factors was that we started speaking mostly English at home and when our parents spoke to us in German we answered them in English. They did really well. They were able to help themselves. School was no problem, since the public schools had had such an influx of students, not only of Jews. They gave classes at several of the public schools for foreigners in all kinds of things such as English, basic English and advanced courses in English literature etc. My parents participated to the best of their ability. We didn't have much trouble with the language. Friends of ours couldn't understand it. It was very tough for some other people whom we knew. We were just lucky to be able to make an awful lot of friends.

Q: Did you receive any type of aid from other Jewish organizations?

A: No, my parents refused.

Q: It was offered though.

A: Yes, it was offered! Money was offered from our sponsors in New York. My parents didn't want it. They soon earned their own living, as a matter of fact the first time my parents really accepted any kind of assistance that was a scholarship in Cincinnati, after high school. They didn't consider that as charity. However any other offer for help was rejected.

- Q: Mr. Leeser, could you tell us something about your acceptance into the Jewish community? Besides these material offers, was there a different kind of offer. Were there difficulties in becoming acclimated to the Jewish community and to American life in general?
- A: No, I don't remember any. Some other people had a little more problems than my parents but there were many Jews who were phased into life totally from the social as well as the religious life. Many people who came ahead of us had a social group immediately. We didn't have that. As soon as we left Price Hill people were real friendly but we couldn't understand their religious services and their religious preferences. Once we were established in Avondale we were invited to come to a reception at the Jewish center near Avondale. We found out immediately as a matter of fact when we were approached by one of the authorities, to form a club under the auspices of the Jewish Center for newly arrived Jewish youngsters. I got to be the ringleader or the first president but it grew very quickly until we had 22 people who participated in our once a week meetings. We got introduced to other Jewish kids. Several of them became friends. Some of the youngsters were actually born in the United States whose parents saw a need to belong to a group with strictly German background. Still we attended that group regularly. We felt that the organization needed to have a name. we called ourselves "The Vivalet" which is Tel Aviv spelled backwards. Our group attracted native born American children who were generally of a strictly German background. It was a membership requirement that all the kids were Jewish.
- Q: Wasn't there another organization established of German-Jewish youngsters?
- A: There were two. One of them was short-lived. The other one is still in existence. I can't remember the street right now where it is. It was the forerunner of the present (transcriber cannot understand the word here) congregation. It is a good sized organization with a synagogue which is strictly super-Orthodox. When we first came, because of their own objectives, my parents did not immediately join a Jewish congregation. Because of one of the tenants we had, one of the elderly ladies who had been the organist at Rockdale Temple, most of her life, we were introduced to the President of Rockdale Temple to Dr. Reichart (transcriber is not sure of the spelling) and of the Rabbi Emeritus, whose name I cannot recall right now. (Here CK suggests some name to PL but it does not ring a bell.) they found out who we were and, in appreciation of the fact that my mother took care of the retired organist they induced us to membership by the way of cutting our dues. That means that the monetary contribution was so that we could make it without any hardship. I was one of the few newcomers of Rockdale Temple who was of German origin because this type of Reform was foreign to us (Reform Judaism in post world War I Germany was relatively close to Conservative Judaism in the United States in both philosophy and ceremonies). We had no reform movement. The freedom to preach and the absence of certain symbols, pomp and circumstance was new to us, even the overall effect appeared to be close to a

church. As you probably know, this type of reform service has been modified during our lifetime at HUC (Hebrew Union College i.e. the School which was then centered in Cincinnati which alone, educated and ordained rabbis for the Reform Jewish movement). This was too much like a Christian service for us. It did not seem like home to us. Most of our other refugee friends from Germany went to religious services elsewhere. They tended to become leaders in the German congregations or they switched and they moved to North Avondale, then they became active in that congregation.

Q: Was there any friction between the native born American Reform Jews of German background and the German immigrants?

A: No. The friction existed only between Eastern European Jews and the new German immigrants. (Such friction had existed in Europe between German Jews and those from Eastern Jews who had been forced to live in ghettos and therefore were less sophisticated, something which the German and other Western Jews had been brainwashed as being something to be ashamed of). The Native Americans were perhaps even too paternalistic, there was no friction at all. They didn't want to downgrade us; they were perhaps even too helpful, especially those who were very wealthy, but in all cases they wanted to do for us, more than what was required. Never was there any friction with the existing community of Cincinnati. If there was any difficulty it was with the businessmen and lawyers and doctors, never with the journeymen, even that didn't last very long. I had a very interesting conversation with the man who became my father-in-law on the subject. I was a refugee, while he was not. All in all we faced a real welcome. The thing which bothered my parents the most is that when we told about our experiences of Nazi oppression and persecution and what early on we had learned about concentration camps, we could not find anyone who would believe us. We could see by the attitudes of the people we talked to that they thought that they were gross exaggerations, that that couldn't possibly exist. It bothered us how we could make those people believe that it can happen here! That you can't trust the Nazis! That you can't laugh about the very active German-American Bund, that you really have to figure then out,

Q: You were trying to get people to believe?

A: No. When it came around in conversation when the questions were asked something like: "How was it in Germany?" or "Why did you leave from there?" Then the disbelief and the smirks of the people. This was not just with the Jewish population, the same thing happened in school. For instance, the first few days during our civics class, the only one who believed that we were telling, literally exposing, how the Jews were faring, what was happening, was the teacher. The other children failed to understand that maybe things like that could happen, they wanted to be protected, they didn't want to hear it.

Q: How would you compare life in the United States with that in Europe, when you came here?

A: That is really hard to say, especially for boys our age. Everything is a great adventure. You learn something new. You meet new friends. German sport is mainly soccer and a type of field hand ball which is not played here. We learned about baseball. We even started to play at the Jewish Center. Maybe that was when our uncle took my brother and myself to see a baseball game. We had never even considered that as a sport in which we could participate. Well then the baseball season is passed and you have to learn all about football. Another consideration is that we had to earn money. We didn't mind learning in the United States high schools. That seemed to be too simple for us.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: The amount of studying one had to do and the amount of attention one had to pay in class. The relatively short hours which you spent in school. They used to serve us truly luxurious lunches in school. We had, as first impressions that going to school was a pleasure. The studying we had to do in the high schools in Germany compared to what we had to do here was a lot. It was so much easier here. Being fully trained in memorizing and studying in Germany made it very easy for us, to get by without much work. I don't want to give the impression that I am some kind of a genius but I finished high school in three years. My brother could do the same thing. He was one year younger and he was behind me. He got used to staying after school to do extra curricular things. I never participated much in such activities. He finished his schooling in four years.

Q: Did you have any problems making friends in your schooling?

A: Most school friends, initially were non-Jews. Most friends around home, the ones with whom I played baseball, went to the movies with, started dating and so forth were Jewish. The group we studied with contained as many non-Jews as Jews.

Q: There were no difficulties of a personal nature?

A: How do you mean that?

Q: Finding a job, going to college?

A: No! I had no trouble doing either. My brother had no difficulties either, he could have gone to college but he landed a job through an advertisement which he answered. He had a steady girlfriend who was not Jewish. He started dating her as a freshman in high school. He needed more money for his personal appearance to impress this girl which he was trying to go out and date. He finally got his degree after four years in high school. I felt that I wanted to finish my education. Because I was one of the better students, I got a fairly generous scholarship. I

didn't need to use it up because my studies were interrupted by my military service and then I finished up on the GI bill (that was the United States law which granted benefits to servicemen from World War II who had been discharged honorably -- one of the benefits from that was to pay for an ex-serviceman's education in proportion to the number of months he or she had spent on active military service; it paid for the schooling and the books and the fees, up to a monthly maximum and gave the ex-serviceman a monthly living allowance). I went to school and I had no difficulties adjusting to meet my needs.

Q: Mr. Leeser, how did you get into the military service and what were the experiences you had when you went back to Germany while you were in the armed services?

A: While I was in college in my sophomore year, I tried to enlist. However, unfortunately in those days I was still classified as an "Enemy Alien", so I couldn't do it. I was in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). I had joined the Pershing-Rifles, which is an ROTC honorary organization. Then I was told that I was an -- I forgot what the section is under the Selective Service Act of 1940, and that until I was fully investigated I could not become a member of the armed forces. The FBI was all the time investigating, I mean it got all the people all excited, especially when they were told that they could not tell my parents that they were asking questions about their boy. Naturally as soon as the FBI agents left, all the neighbors called my mother up and told her that they were after me. However I had been told in school by the ROTC instructors that this was the course of action which was being taken. Towards the beginning of my pre-junior year, at the university. I received my greetings (the letter notifying individuals that they were being drafted into the World War II military service started with the word "greetings" therefore that term was used for notification to present oneself for induction). I didn't make any attempts to delay my induction using continued schooling or another excuse. All of us at the university wanted to serve in the armed forces. So I was inducted in 1941 or '42, and it staved off any consequences.

Q: Did you feel any sense of revenge?

A: Oh yes! I wanted to go back to Germany and get revenge. Of course I had a list of what I wanted to see could be done. I carried this list throughout my career and as luck would have it I was selected for Ordnance Corps and went to Aberdeen Proving Ground for basic training. Oh, I had my choice, I could either have gone to OCS (Officers Candidate School) or to ASTP (Army Specialist Training Program, this was a program which the United States Army had at several colleges and universities throughout the country many of them leading to bachelor's degree if you were allowed to stay with them; the United States Navy had similar programs). My commanding officer told me that although being an officer might be fun, I would be so much better off, since I had started college, going to the ASTP program. Following his advice I went, after a brief delay en

route and several camps, and stayed in NYC at the billets at CCNY (College of the City of New York at 139th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan) waiting for an assignment; then I was sent to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Unfortunately the army decided after three months that they needed more bodies across the ocean, in the fighting forces, so they had to discontinue the ASTP program, as well as similar programs for the Navy and the Air Force (the Air Force was still a part of the Army until after World War II). Then we were assigned to fighting units. I was assigned to the 78th Division at Camp Pickett. That was an infantry group. I learned to be a B.A.R. man on a weapon's carrier. BAR stands for Browning Automatic Rifle. On the weapon's carrier was a fellow twice my weight and my height who had a much easier time carrying a case of ammunition than I had with the Browning Automatic weapon. However before the division sailed for overseas, openings came about for personnel ordinance training. So I went to the light ordinance maintenance company of the division. I went overseas with that company to Germany. (He actually means to Europe). We landed in England, there we went to the south shore for organizational and developmental purposes. We stayed near Southampton in a place called Christ Church, more for vacation than for military services. From there, right after the invasion of Normandy (that was June 6, 1944) we went on a transport to Le Havre. Then the division got into the normal fighting up to the Rhine River and across it to the Ruhr valley. I stayed with the ordinance company as an instrument and fire control repairman. When the fighting was practically over our division went to Berlin as an occupation troop. In between I had several opportunities to observe what happened to places about which I had known. When we lived near Aachen, I got permission from my captain to take a truck to the city of Cologne, and to take time off. That was the last known residence of my maternal grandparents. I went to the cemeteries and found the tombstones. The cemeteries like most other cemeteries had been pretty well vandalized. For two packs of cigarettes and a chocolate bar we got German masons to re-erect the stone of my grandmother in one cemetery and of my grandfather in another one. We cemented it down and they didn't want to take the little pay we had with us. You know currency wasn't any good. They were so scared that people were going to execute them on the spot for the little work they did. The stones, from what I hear from relatives who have been there since, were put in better than they had been put in the first time. However, I didn't find any traces of Jews or of Jewish life in Cologne since early in the fighting. When I went further inland I had the opportunity to visit Rinteln, the city where I had lived most of my life in Germany. I caused quite a furor when I and two of my then Jewish army buddies arrived in town. We called on the Burgermeister (the mayor of the town) to tell him who we were and ask him whether any of my friends were still around. I had gotten a letter from my mother out of which the censor had cut out quite a few of the words, but all the names of the Germans who had done us dirt -- with whom I wanted to get even -- were left intact. Oddly enough none of those names, the big time Nazis, including the barber about whom I spoke, the one who had been the main attacker of the store, were there any more. It was reported that when the barber had heard that there was a Leeser coming back to town, he left hurriedly.

Afterwards he was never heard from again. He went to the Russian front and probably met with an accident. One Jewish lady, actually this lady was not Jewish. She had married a Jew and then, had turned Jewish. Their children were brought up as Jews. Their name was Rosenthul. She was the only one who had come back to Rinteln this early in the game. She had been hiding. She had her son, who was still being careful not to be seen around because they couldn't be certain that there weren't any hidden SS people, although for them the war was practically over. She told me of other Jews, or half Jews (these were people not all of whose grandparents were Jewish) who had remained and had planned to come back to the town. However the local authorities, the Burgermeister, who was in the British Zone (Germany was divided into Russian, British, French and the U.S. Zones in May 1945) left word with the British occupation troops that this visiting American was causing a ruckus, that he acted like a prize fighter, and that he didn't want any trouble. So the British commander invited us for dinner, the three of us. They filled us full of booze and good spirits but by nightfall or early morning we were not ready to look up any of the ex-Nazis and do to them what we had meant to do. We were going to find some SS people and hang them up by their heels and let the ants eat up their heads. Now we had seen, not necessarily Jews, but people whom especially the SS people had done dirt to, had met their revenge that way. It was not a very pleasant sight, but we thought that it was a well deserved fate for some of them. Well, the Britishers, in town, with the guidance of the Burgermeister saw to it that any of those people whom we didn't trust, who had not been caught by the de-Nazification court got out of town fast. They may even have arrested them even possibly put them in jails. In any case they got them out of sight because there was no trace of them in the city of Rinteln. They didn't know it but we had some friends; there was a little village, where the homestead was of the family from whom all our maids had come, a little village by the name of Wellenhamp (spelled by PL) On our bicycle rides from Rinteln we had gone there. It is about ten minutes by car. The three of us pulled into the farm, which was this homestead. The family name was Junkers. They recognized me immediately and we had a real homecoming. Three of their daughters who had been our maids were married with families and were living on the parental farm. The old people had died. We had a tearful reunion. They had to know everything that had happened to us. We didn't know how much time we had away from our base; that was unfortunate. We didn't eat with them. We had heard that farm families, even though they were growing a lot of things were not too well off with foodstuff. So we showed them our "K" rations or "C" rations (these rations were packaged food units which American troops carried with them). While they eat their meals we spent most of the afternoon talking. My two buddies didn't speak German. I learned from them the fate of most of the Jewish community from Rinteln. I wrote a long note about that to my parents in the morning. They were interested in knowing what happened to every one of them. I learned that a young lady who had been my girlfriend, so to say, in terms of 15 or 16 years old in Europe (dating was much less advanced than in the U.S.) had been drafted from a concentration camp into the service for a Berlin hospital, first for the terminally ill, and then highly infectious diseases. She caught one of those

diseases and died in the hospital. I also learned that I had a cousin by the name of Hilde who had reportedly been back to Buckenburg looking for relatives, looking for anybody who had been in a concentration camp and that, perhaps, I could find her somewhere. Well, we had to get back to camp. We said our good-byes and hoped to see them again. Since that time my brother had been back there, that was long afterwards as a civilian. Quite a few of them had died. They still remembered my calling on them. I knew that some of their family had turned Nazi and had been nasty to the girls who had worked for us. They had thought that maybe I would take a torch and burn the town down. Well I had actually considered doing harm to the town. Then I started to worry about my cousin Hilde. After I got back to camp, this was before we were in Berlin, we were then near Kassel, I got in touch with the UNRA (United Nation Refugee Agency) representative to find out how I could find this cousin of mine. They helped me. All of a sudden my captain got a call that one of the DP camps (camps for Displaced Persons, those were the camps where all the people who were homeless and therefore wandering through Europe lived in temporary shelter for as long as several years until they could be resettled in some country in the western world) was looking for one of his soldiers by the name of Leeser. I got a little worried (at that time the U.S. Army had a "Non-Fraternization Policy" where all those who talked or otherwise made contacts with Germans, except in the line of duty, received a \$64 fine and possibly a court martial and the Germans were jailed); but it was a call from the Russian UNRA worker to the American Leeser. Through their good offices I made arrangements to meet my cousin in Buckenburg. That was not too far away from where we were, in a car anyway. I got official leave from my captain, drove to Buckenburg. We didn't know where to meet so we met in the courtyard of the home where our grandmother used to live. It was quite a reunion. She told me her story. I helped her get in touch with a DP camp where the UNRA talked to her. She got in touch with my folks in Cincinnati so that she could come to the U.S. She had quite a tale to tell. She was arrested with her parents and her young brother. She did not know whether it was the Gestapo, or maybe just uniformed German police officials. They were all taken to Buchenwald (this is the camp south of Berlin and west of Dresden which was liberated April 12, 1945) first and then within days were moved to Bergen Belasen (this camp was located near Hanover) on a long and painful, train trip. Shortly after they arrived in Bergen Belsen came the by now well known shower scene. A German soldier had already latched on to her. He promised her that if she would be his servant and shine his shoes and cook his meals and clean his room and sleep in his bed he would see to it that she had enough to eat. From him she learned that there was nothing she could do about it but when her parents asked to get undressed and take a shower that she was not to go with them. He said that he had work for her, that she should mention his name. When they left in the parade, which, according to her, was very shuffling she stayed with her German soldier friend who was then a private and became later a sergeant and moved away from the concentration camp into duty on the front. She went with this soldier friend and, close to the Russian front this particular unit of Germans surrendered after heavy fighting, but that is another story, and I will cut the entire

story very short. She was with this soldier for maybe three years, maybe as long as four years. When the fighting on the Russian front got a little heavy, we, the Americans, were attacking from the other side. Her sergeant and his comrades all ran for it. They thought that they could make it back to the American lines, because they would rather be captured by Americans than Russians. Their hired help was left behind in the camp, with no food, no clothing, no water. Hilde and a few other survivors then started walking. They tried to find maybe some potatoes from one of the farmers. They were rescued and interrogated by the advancing Russians. Both her feet were frostbitten. The Russians took her to one of their hospitals or first aid stations. They asked her to identify herself and maybe they believed her, or maybe they didn't. She had a language problem with them. They told her that she had to sign a piece of paper which would allow them to amputate all but the big toe on one foot. They told her that, otherwise she would lose a foot. She didn't have much choice but to have it done. Later, as the Russians advanced, the two lines (Americans and Russians) met, they transferred her to French troops which took her to the American zone, to a DP camp. She knew about her American relatives. She knew that her parents were dead, but she didn't know about anybody else in the family. Later, through the efforts of UNRA, they located me, another Leeser, because of the family name. Hilde is still living in NYC. She is married. Because of the treatments which she received from the Germans in the concentration camp, she can't have children.

Q: I would like to get back to your life now, but before I do that let me say that I am not sure that when you came to this country how long did it take you to become a citizen. You talked about being investigated by the FBI.

A: No! My parents became citizens the routine way (eligibility for the hearing by the judge after five years) We all went and got what is called the first papers. (That is a formal first application which is a notice of intention to file for citizen papers and which made one eligible for such things as the military draft) just as soon as we were allowed to do so. In order to become a citizen you had to prove, to the satisfaction of the judge, a proficiency in English and in American history. We all went to classes in the U.S. My parents actually became naturalized before I did because in the service, in order to become a citizen, you had to have your application transferred to the jurisdiction where it belongs. After I went to Aberdeen it went to Baltimore. After I left Aberdeen Proving Ground and I went to New York City it went to Albany (PL is mistaken here because the judge of the Southern district Court of New York, located in Manhattan was a competent authority). When I left CCNY for MIT my papers were sent to Boston. The papers caught up with me. The commanding officer got the letter for me, stating that I was required to appear in front of the district judge to be sworn in as a U.S. citizen and that I needed one witness with me. He came himself and that is how I got my middle name. His name was Jerome Browning, Captain Browning. When the judge said: "Is there a middle initial?" he spoke up and said: "This boy is going to be named after me! It is Paul Jerome Leeser." So I was naturalized in Boston. It was no big deal. Everybody who was in court was wearing a uniform.

You didn't get preferential treatment as a soldier except for the fact that if you were in the service they expedited the forwarding of your application to the proper jurisdiction, better than if you had been a civilian. (Actually, if you were in the military active service, that means the army since the navy did not accept non-civilians, the five-year waiting period for eligibility was waived). This is why my naturalization papers were made out in Boston, Massachusetts.

Q: Can you describe your present life now, in terms of occupation and religious practices?

A: We were married in Cincinnati. We belonged to Rockdale Temple until we left Cincinnati. Because of the job situation we went to Wisconsin we were in a rural situation where there was only one couple.

Q: That was what year?

A; That was early in 1946, when we were married. We left for Wisconsin in 1949. We joined the temple there. The temple there, because of the influence of a wealthier congregant was very conservative. However the congregation was large enough to have two rabbis. Actually it had both a temple and a shul, actually it was not a temple but a synagogue (Reform Judaism calls its Houses of Worship temples whereas both Conservative and Orthodox Judaism call theirs synagogues). While we were there the community was challenged that whatever funds you raise we will match so they built a one million dollar building. It looked like a nicely growing community. For reasons which I can't figure out they didn't grow. I got to be an officer in the congregation, the secretary, for all the years we lived there. I belonged to B'nai Brith (the Jewish benevolent organization whose formal name literally means 'son of the covenant') My wife Becky belonged to Hadassah (Women Zionist organization). In a small town you can't avoid joining organizations if you want any social contact with other Jews and we did. I was working a (transcriber cannot understand the name) concern. I had been involved with machine tools all my life and I was the first Jew whom they ever hired. There were several Jewish employees after I had the job. We were pretty close to the Jewish community, most of our friends and social contacts were Jews, except for our neighbors. In that area there are no ghettos. The only people living close together might be a sister and a brother, both married, having inherited a large estate which they split, otherwise neighbors just find each other. Since our neighbors were gentile, we had quite a few gentile friends. We always had neighborhood parties. When we had friends over from the Jewish community we didn't think anything because the neighbors also used to entertain, every now and again for their particular church groups. None of us thought that this was strange at all as a matter of fact we could mix them; if you had the church group and one of the neighbors who was pretty close to you from the favors standpoint and knew you were entertaining they helped you, and we did the same thing for them when they had their Sunday school teachers' picnic. So the minister and everything, from one of the Presbyterian group came over. It

didn't make any difference what their religious background were. That was much less than is the case in Richmond, today. The Jews were totally integrated. There were nominally anti-Semitic activities which you have anywhere, where there are some very wealthy Jews living. The derogatory remarks were made which sometimes are not meant to be derogatory, For example, this expression is more predominant in Richmond than it was in Wisconsin: "To Jew someone down!" Now I know what it means, however some of our friends got fighting mad about it. Did they really mean to be anti-Semitic? Who am I to answer that. I really don't believe so. I think that we can debate that point. I know that one of our students was very upset about it and said that it was an example of latent anti-Semitism. I am well acquainted with that. However in Wisconsin we had less of that than we had in Indiana. There is no active Klu-Klux-Klan in Wisconsin, people are too independent. Of course there also are no blacks to pick on up there. The black population in Wisconsin is very, very low, there are a few in Milwaukee. Blacks don't like the climate. In the little town where we were there was one black family. They had an easy time there. There was no anti-Negro sentiment there either. At least, in the past, there was very little anti-Semitism there.

Q: Do you speak English in your home?

A: What do you mean? Yes, practically exclusively. Except when my daughter and I get together and we want to buffalo my wife into something, then we may speak German. Becky doesn't speak either of the foreign languages. My daughter taught quite a few languages in school but otherwise we speak only English. We utilize some Jewish expressions. We know some people who speak Yiddish fluently and we try to keep up with them, but I had to learn Yiddish after my marriage to speak it. Becky understands every word, but if you were to speak it when she would have trouble understanding you. Her mother spoke it. So practically only English is spoken in our house.

Q: How often do you attend services?

Q: Regularly, on Friday nights and on Holy Days. Unfortunately my health does not permit me to still do it now. I can't walk and I feel out of sorts readily.

Q: Do you feel that the synagogue is the center of Jewish community life?

A: In a small town yes! In a large town I don't think so anymore. There are too many synagogues. They are not the center of community life. Rather the Jewish social services and the Jewish center whatever you may have.

Q: Do you mainly associate with Jews?

A: I have to think about that. Most of our associations are with Jews, although in general, when we were in Wisconsin, all of our neighbors were non-Jews. We

were good friends with our neighbors across the street and those next door and they happened to be of various Christian denominations. One of them was a Seventh Day Adventist and one of them was an atheist, so we had a pretty good mixture. You know, you mingle with them, they come to your house, they break bread with you and maybe you share a meal. For bigger social events though the guests are usually Jewish or you are invited out somewhere in the Jewish community.

Q: When did you come to Richmond?

A: In 1963.

Q: That is about 15 years ago!

A: Yes!

Q: Do you find the Jewish and non-Jewish community life similar or different to that which you have experienced in Europe.

A: Oh, vastly different than what I had experienced in Germany. Even before Hitler came to power that was the case. There was a truly integrated Jewish community. It was the exception if in your social groups, in your playgroups, in your theater groups, or your bowling team there were gentile people or when you, as a Jew, participated in public sports with a gentile group. That was just the beginning of it. You may recall how proud we were of our one Jew in the soccer ball team of the city. Organized sports were a great thing. This was just the beginning, otherwise and by your own choice you were restricted to your Jewish associates. That is the way things were done. There was nothing written about it, but it was a way of life. Compare that to the relationships between students and teachers today. When I was a kid, sassing a teacher was unheard of and today it is a way of life. So, naturally the difference between the relationships of the Jewish community to a Christian community then, in Germany, and here, today, is not so much the difference of Germany versus the U.S. but of the 1930's versus the 1970's.

Q: What other activities did you engage in other than Jewish activities?

A: Prior to World War II I used to participate only in Jewish activities. Later I participated in Toastmasters which is not necessarily non-Jewish. Every time I saw a Toastmaster chapter we had one or two Jews however you got there by coincidence, not because they advertised it that way. I dropped out of sports activities completely, except for golf. We were members of a country club in Wisconsin. When we came to Richmond we had the choice to do it, but having been a member for some ten years we knew the advantages and the disadvantages and we didn't think that it was necessary. In the list of professional activities, since I am in the engineering field I now decided, in my old age, I could do well

with a few college courses, where the students may, or may not, know that I am Jewish. I couldn't be less interested (whether they knew or not). It was odd that one of the more subtle of the girls in my wife's remedial class wanted to know, "What makes you Jewish? I know so little about it. What is a Jew? Don't you believe in Jesus?" It does tax you once in a while how out there, in the middle of Indiana, actually right on the Indiana-Ohio border, there are lots of people who don't even know. They know that there are Jews, but they don't know what a Jew is, what makes him different.

Q: Since the war, did you ever return to Europe?

A: Yes, once! I went on a trip as an interpreter. I had wanted to spend more time doing some interviewing about what had happened, along, but unfortunately business pressures and the people who were our host who was an ex-Nazi prosecutor from out of Czechoslovakia, who, I am sure was Jewish. He was one of those who did not want to disturb passed history. He wouldn't tell anybody much and I didn't have much to, again, search for the Jewish community, or to go to the cemeteries. However during my trip back and the people who met me there, the lawyers several interpreters whom we didn't need because I could talk myself, the court officers all knew that I was Jewish but they didn't let that faze them. They showed a surprised expression when I asked. Then, also, we were rushed, we were strictly on a business trip where we had to have some legal reason for our stops. It didn't even surprise them, nor did they ask questions, what an ex-German was doing there. They welcomed me back. They relatively made me feel welcome, rather than the people who may have been puzzled by a Jew.

Q: How do you view your daughter's life as different from yours?

A: She is too Americanized! Although she had all the Jewish education and training she could have had here. She does not see the significance which we feel must be somewhere in a Jewish life. She feels that she can be a Jew without practicing the religion. You know, young people like that apparently are in the plurality today. The return to being a Jew, but also practicing their Jewish religion I am glad to see is on the upswing. However during her generation, and it isn't so vastly different from yours, there was a lot of kids just wanting to be known as Jews for Israel. They would like to go there and help, they like to support the state, they like to live there, but don't talk to them about God.

Q: How do you see your experiences with the young as influenced by your cousin?

A: Oh yes! Particularly since the early days when she came, she stayed with us. Things were tough when I got out of school! Becky had to work! As a matter of fact she went back from Wisconsin for a while and worked in Cincinnati, where she had a job because in Palmyra (this is a tiny town of about 1,500 inhabitants in 1985 near Whitewater, Wisconsin) she couldn't find suitable work. She could

have found a job as a beauty parlor operator. In those days nice Jewish girls didn't do that kind of a job. Linda, from being with my parents so long, she understands German well, hearing all their fears and seeing pictures of the Nazi years, she understands pretty well what it was like. She is also a little more convinced than her peers that it can happen here. She wants to be Jewish! She is interested in History, Jewish History, but her Jewishness does not go into religion.

Q: OK! Thank you very much.