

--place to start.

Who everybody is. And we need about 10 seconds here.

Today's-- what's the date?

The 6th.

I think it's the 6th of January, '94.

Did I take this? I don't think. No, I don't think I took that.

Today is January 6, 1994 with the Holocaust Oral History Project-- doing a second interview with Max Erlichman. My name is Tami Benau. And John Grant is videotaping.

Max, you were just starting to say something happened after our last interview.

Our last interview was, I think--

December 10. Yeah, the 10th-- middle of December. And I think it was on a Thursday or a Friday. No, it was on a Friday. It was Friday. That's right.

And in all these years, as I had indicated earlier, we knew what had happened to my mother. We knew the date she was picked up by. In fact, I don't remember.

And subsequently, after the war, through the Red Cross, very quickly I think at the end of '45-- if not the end of '45, early '46-- my dad was advised that his wife, my mother, had died on the 21st. However, there was no information on my older brother, who was 16 at that time in 1942.

I also indicated that when we arrived in Westerbork-- and I also stated I did not know or remember the date we got to Westerbork. I knew it was in November. I knew it was after my birthday, and I guessed mid-November.

And when my father went looking the day we arrived what happened to his wife and his son, he determined that my mother had already been deported to Auschwitz, but no information of my older brother, but for the fact that he had been deported one day earlier. And that is where my dad, that if-- that big letter "if"-- we would have come a day earlier, he undoubtedly would have been alive. But I didn't know the date.

In February last year, February '93, I wrote a letter to the Dutch Red Cross asking them whether they had any information in their files X years after the war regarding my older brother. So when I left the interview on Friday, December 10th, let's say, I said the very next day, I had a letter from the Red Cross in which they apologized for the delay regarding my request in February of '93.

And they could determine from the information in their files that my older brother, which they did not know the day he was picked up by the Germans, that he was deported from Westerbork November 20-- which, of course, now I know what day we got into Westerbork-- November 20 and that he died in Auschwitz on February 28, 1943. So that was-- at least so now I know.

That's such an odd coincidence.

Yeah, it was, also because they apologized from November, because they could have gone through the files. You could look under E and you find his name. And that's it. But bureaucracies as they are, this is what happened. But at least I knew. At least I know. And--

You had never written to them requesting some--

No. Oddly enough, I have tried to analyze, in fact, why because, broadly speaking, if I wanted to, I would have known about it within two days. Maybe three days, I would have known what happened to my brother. And for one reason or another, I didn't.

It's not that I consciously decide I'm not interested or I don't want to know. But I don't want to go into any self-analysis. I think it has something to do with the open gap that exists in mother/son relationship, because this is something that doesn't close. It's an open book.

It remains open because you never could say bye bye, mom or whatever. So most probably, had I not had the time, inclination, and opportunity to cope with my mother, I might not have wanted to know anything about my brother, because that would have been-- I don't know. I don't want to say too much.

One thing at a time-- so I never tried to. And apparently, I think last year, I decided, oh, wait a minute. I'm not 28 anymore, though I say I'm 39. People don't believe it. But I decided it's about time that, OK, let's find out.

And I don't remember the state of mind I was in when I did write a letter. I did. And then you get into-- you start thinking, a 16-year-old and on his own. And then of course, then who took care of him?

Who-- I am a father of seven children. And I'm a really Yiddish mama. There are very few like me. And my kids complain I'm overprotective, which I'm not. But it's a perception they have. So I think of my older brother at the age of 16 on his own, nobody to tell him, nobody to watch, nobody to guide, no support.

It must have been terrible. So I hope that some adult at that time probably hopefully watched over him. And then the same thing applies to my mother. But then, of course, that was only five days. But he was there from end of November, December, January, February-- three and a half months, something like this, or a little less.

But it's funny. Then-- funny. No, I think I know that I indicated that when we were picked up the 21st or the-- no, it was midnight. So we were picked up the 21st of November. And the city theater in Amsterdam was used as a collecting point.

And then from there, the people that they were "collected" then were taken to-- during that night or day, they were taken to the city hall's Harbor. And 6:00 AM-- and I think last time, I said by truck. It was, of course, not a truck. It was a streetcar. At 6:00 AM, a streetcar-- because there still was a curfew.

And they took us to the railroad station. From there on, everybody went to Westerbork unless they went to one of the other camps. Subsequently, after the war, they never reopened or rebuilt the theater. It stood there.

And in fact, we lived a block away from it. So we passed it daily. And apparently, I don't know, five or six-- three years ago, they decided to make-- how should I say-- not a memorial. They decided to dedicate that building to the purpose it was used for, probably the city and the Jewish community.

I don't know. I wasn't in Holland, so I never did go to see it. And then while I was in Holland now, on-- when was it-- last Thursday, I read a paper. And then there is an article in which they describe that now after a modification and blah, blah, blah, it has reopened and visiting hours from blah, blah, blah, the phone number.

And so I called. And I said, let's take a look what it is. And my daughter, Shelby, and I, we went there on the 1st of January. We flew back on the second. And yes, I don't know what it looked prior to the final work they put into it. But you have the inner courtyard that I referred to and the atrium. It's still there.

There's a pillar-- I don't want to say an obelisk, but there's a pillar dedicated, too, and the open yard. And as you come in, they have a Vietnam Memorial-like-- after the Vietnam Memorial, there are copies like this, I think, 50. I think today, everybody makes it the same.

As you come in, on the left side is a wall with all the names, family names, of people that went through there and never did return. So by family names, I mean that if there were in Holland, say, 48 or 88 families by the name of Thompson, the name "Thompson" only appears once. Otherwise, probably the wall wasn't big enough. Or the letters would have been that small.

And so our family name was on there. And I, of course, phoned earlier and said what was it. And they explained to me what it was prior to visiting it. And they have a record room, where you can go and find or get a copy of the records.

And I said it was January 1-- no, December 31, December 31. There was, of course, no time frame. He offered to make it. I said fine, and he made a photocopy of that particular page. And he mailed it to my daughter, and she faxed it to me yesterday. And so they have a record where you can go. And then you'll find basically the same information.

Is that your--

Of my mother and my older brother. Yeah.

Did you find your name?

No, only those that did not return-- only those that did not return. So Janowitz, the family that my dad got to go with us, their name doesn't appear because the whole family came back. The rabbi, Rabinovitch, it's on there because he and his son came back. His wife died.

So if a member of a family-- and Erlichmans-- we are basically the only Erlichmans, anyway. But if they were Rabinovitch, there might have been eight. And the name of it only appears once.

Then you go into particulars, first name and date of birth, which was incorrect for my mother. But I'll send them a fax today or tomorrow, seeing whether or not, even though it's very difficult for people. If it is on paper, it's like in marble.

Even if I come and say my birthday of my mother was not May-- wait a minute-- what does it say? 19-- no, the 15th of May, 1904, it's wrong because my mother was born April 19, because my father's birthday was April 15. Hers was April 19, and that was their wedding day.

So then she wasn't born in Moscow. She was born in Kyiv. That's a mistake. And also, I don't think she was born in 1904. I think she was born in 1905.

She was 26 when I was born. So I have to mathematically go back and see. If she was 26 when I was born in '31, take it back. So it must have been 1905.

Do you know where they got these dates?

No. No, no, no. But people are-- they like status quo. It's there. So I come and I said, look, that's wrong. I'm sorry. That's the way it is.

Look, it's a mistake. I don't care, we don't care, blah, blah, blah. Where did you get your information? Oh, it's from a proper source. Yeah, but it's wrong.

You need two sticks of dynamite in order to get people to accept the fact that what's there written or what their opinion, it's wrong. So I will basically give them the information, tell them that I doubt whether the bureaucratic system will allow them to correct something that somebody put there.

It's not a world-shocking event if they leave it as it is. But if you do it, you might as well do it properly. So please correct it. I'm not-- I don't care, because I wonder where they got that information. I don't know. I don't know.

Finding out this information about your brother and seeing this sort of memorial, does that give you some sense of completion?

No. No, no, no. The memorial-- no. No memorial-- a number of names. No. My older brother, it's a period like the period at the end of the sentence, most likely. It means that he didn't survive. We know.

But when and if I do want to burn a candle, at least have a date. So it's basically David that does that. No, but it was a coincidence, the day after I was here. That was it. That was it.

Shall we go back to where we left off last week? You had just finished describing the wonderful feeling you and your brother had as you jumped into a feather bed at one of the homes that you--

Yeah, the white sheets. Yeah, the white sheets.

What happened after you stayed in those homes?

I think we stayed there for about a week. And then the US army overall-- not just there, but overall-- started repatriating the prisoners. So we're put on a truck and driven to Wurzburg. And I remember that ride.

I know we took some mountain roads. The freeway-- the highways or Autobahn, they were basically bombed. So there was not a lot of traffic. So you had to go on byways and highways and roads. And we took corners on two wheels and driving with one hand and a cigarette.

It was funny. And we enjoyed that, because we could look. It was an open truck. So you could look. You could see the elbow out of the window and a cigarette. So he's holding that cigarette. Hopefully, it's the other hand on the steering wheel.

So we got to Wurzburg. And that is a general collecting area for Dutch, Belgian, and French prisoners. And in the collecting area were German army barracks on top of a hill. I remember, that was not bombed. They probably decided not to bomb it. They could use it once they came in.

And then we met some of the people that were taken earlier from our camp on the march back and that were subsequently liberated. So we went met the other ones again. We met some other people. And I think we stayed also about a week. Then we were put on a train.

Now, you were being given the food you need?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was under not British-- was it British? I don't know.

I think it was American. No, I know we're still in the American-occupied territory. Yeah. Yeah, the British were further up north. And the French had a section in the south. Yeah, we were fed and then the paperwork and names and dates and piece of paper.

Do you remember any specific conversations with any of the soldiers or how they treated you?

No. Oh, after we were liberated in Weissenberg-- yes, Wurzburg. Yes. I mentioned that they set up anti-aircraft battery outside of camp. And there were on the crew, I don't know, six. And there was one I used to sit practically all day daily, as long as we still were in Wurzburg.

And we chatted. I know he came from Chicago. In fact, I knew the name. I asked him for the name. And we chatted-- talked and talked and talked and talked.

And I had a name. He was from Chicago. And yes, there was nothing else to do. So there was not a lot of coming and going. You were basically sitting there. And we were basically waiting to see what happened to us.

Do you remember his name?

No, no, no. It's a pity. And when we got back to Chicago, I said, god, then going through channels to find out what anti-aircraft battery was stationed there at that point in time and what, blah, blah, blah.

I just got married. So there were other priorities that that was not that uppermost in my mind, like the feel of when the journals were found. That was also an army person for a record. So that should also be in the archives.

So it's basically a matter of taking the time and the effort and then what? It doesn't change. So I would have looked him up if I had remembered the name throughout, because by the time, it was in the '50s. And probably, there was a small piece of paper that I kept in a wallet. And by the time you open up, you can't read it anymore.

And I was 13, anyway. So no, we chatted for, I don't know, three days, all day, also because it allowed me to improve our mingling. And he was nice. I remember that.

So no, in Wurzburg, it was basically hectic. I remember the hectic movement and coming and going and trucks and people being brought in and being assigned and trucks leaving to the train station. And they were taken back to France and Holland and Belgium.

And I think we were also one week. And then they put us on a train back to Holland and also freight cars. And that's also when my dad cooked. When we stopped, they said, OK. Everybody in their assigned seat. We'll be here for two hours.

And my dad, I remember making lunch, a warm meal. And the bridges were bombed. So we went over Bailey bridges and British-- I mean Bailey bridge. So it was just the width of the rail, the track. So if you looked over, you didn't see anything but water.

So I always hoped that it'd still be there, the next piece will still be there, because you couldn't tell. And I don't remember how Amsterdam was liberated or not. I know that they took us to a city in Holland, Tilburg, southern Holland, because they couldn't take us to Amsterdam yet. I don't know why.

Whether organization-wise, they were not ready, whether the Germans were still there, I don't know. I know that we stayed for a while. I think maybe two weeks-- two weeks, we stayed there. And then by then-- oh, yeah. Everybody report there that you're leaving tomorrow.

It's too late-- day after tomorrow. I think three times, we were advised that we would be taken to Amsterdam. And then finally, by the river, by river traffic, they had a big barge, a freight barge. And they took us to Amsterdam and to find the rail station, because the River Rhine and the mass-- so you can go by river to Amsterdam or on.

And there was-- there, they had buses the names. And the bus would then drop off. People had given addresses. Whether it was their address or a relative's address, I don't know. We were the last one.

They took us to what used to be a Jewish hospital, the Portuguese Israeli Athletic Hospital, because, as I told you, Holland had a large percentage of Portuguese or what I think the Dutch would call Portuguese Jews, Sephardim. And that was empty.

So there, we were dropped off. And then it was basically a matter of finding an apartment.

Now, was there an organization there that was--

In that building, there was a cook. There were about-- it wasn't full. There might have been 25 people, 30, something like this. So we're two to a room, a kid my own age.

So we turned out to be friends for quite a number of years. And no, then we had breakfast and lunch and dinner. And that was it. And then, of course, it was a matter of finding a place to live.

Did they help you with that?

I think they did. Yes. But what do they say? If you don't have fingers, you can't make a fist. There was nothing.

Was there a name-- was there a specific organization there that--

No, I think it was basically the city. I don't know. My dad handled it. I don't know. But of course, there were not any partners.

In the latter part of the war, end of '45, I told you as Holland suffered very much. And at the end, they were eating tulip bulbs and birch trees, the bark, to where, I don't know, April or March or April, the Americans requested a two-day armistice so they could drop food with DC-3s to the west of Amsterdam.

And the German general, of course, they know they lost. So he agreed to that. And they dropped food. So it was very bad.

Then the winter-- the last winters were very cold. Of course, there was no coal, no wood. So what they did is they stripped the empty houses that Jewish people had lived in and the door, door frames, window frames, any piece of wood. So the whole house subsequently collapsed when the planks were gone and the door frames, windows.

The railroad-- the streetcar, I remember the tracks. It was paved or asphalt until the rails. And then between the rails, they had wooden bitumen-coated wooden blocks, two inches by two inches by three inches, between the two tracks I think basically because the fact that it would allow for maintenance easier or for expansion and dilation of the metal track. Those were all gone. Those were all gone. That's the way they tried to heat themselves.

So apartment-- it took quite a while. In fact, Holland even today, suppose you marry. You may have to wait three years until you get an apartment-- two and a half, two and a half. And right after the war, Holland promoted immigration.

Go to Canada. Go to South Africa and Australia. We'll pay you 10,000 francs. Get out. Just get out-- overcrowded. And that is why they did not support any or assist or allow any building of housing.

And people were married for four years and living with their in-laws. And then out of misery, they would emigrate-- Canada and Australian. And the Australian and the Canadian government, well, they're underpopulated, anyway. And they would contribute with no taxes. And a lot of farmers went.

A lot of people went, basically, because it was a Dutch policy, government policy, not to make it easier for people-- to make it easy for people to emigrate. And that goes until today. You cross the border into Belgium, you have the same problem in another format.

In Belgium, there are no government restrictions. So the problem there is you look at six apartments. You don't know which one to take. You can rent three, if you want to pay. And one mile across, one kilometer across, you wait three years.

Even today, you cannot. Even today, you can't. You have to register. And they look at you. And they say, OK, one person. We'll let you know. And no, it's still I think the only country in the world where they still have this.

So how long did you stay at this?

I don't know. I don't know. I'd say about six months-- six, seven months. And then we still didn't have an apartment.

But in the meantime, my dad became friendly with a family, a Russian family, a couple, and very good friends. And

then, of course, he wanted to return to the United States to see what happened to his parents. He couldn't take Joe and me along.

Did he have any communication with them, letters or--

No. He may have had letters. But then, of course, it didn't mean anything because my grandpa-- father-- had already died in '44. And my grandmother was still alive, but had-- I don't know what it would be-- Alzheimer's. When he finally got there, she didn't even recognize him. She did not recognize him.

She didn't know who he was. And given the fact that they only had three kids, anyway-- my uncle-- a brother and a sister-- she didn't recognize him. And I think she died-- she died in '47, also in her 90s. And so he may have written.

But then where do they live? Do they still live where they lived in 1940? So writing is one thing my dad-- no, no, no. I do it personally, and then I get it done.

The only thing was, of course, getting to the US. All the ships were used to take back the GIs home. So there was no United Airlines, no Air France, no Pan Am that you booked. There was no passenger air transportation, period. It was by ship.

And they used every available ship-- the Queen Elizabeth and the New-- all the shipping was used for bringing back. But my father being my father, he got a cabin on a freighter. And that's why he did make it back.

And who did he leave, you and your brother?

And that couple, they said, OK. Have them move in with us. So we lived with them for about two years.

Do you remember their names?

Oh, yeah. Hochinov.

What is that?

Hochinov, the Russian couple. He died.

Did you get back into school or--

Yeah. Then I got back into school. And that had, of course, its angles. You see, whatever you heard about Germany is true. They are precise.

And they go by the book. That's it. Somebody told you, and that's the book. That's it. The rules were made by people for people and through people. This plays any role whatsoever. It's written, and that's it.

The Dutch have the same root. They're also Germanic, which is strange. There are also the Danes and the Swedes, but they are different.

So what happened when we got back, my dad had a friend whose son went to-- let us say-- let's take the reputation of Stanford University, not countrywide, but in this area, it's I think Berkeley. I'm not going to argue, but let's say it's the most prestigious university in this area.

And there was a gymnasium, a high school, which was called the Amsterdam Lyceum. And it had the same reputation, which means the mayor's son went there. And the Minister of the Interior's kids went there. Assuming the American ambassador's kids, then they would go there. It was for the creme de la creme.

So a plain little old-- no way would he or she be admitted. But what happened is due to the friendship and

acquaintances, my dad wanted to have somebody determine at what level had I progressed in the last camp. And I remember a friend approached two teachers at that school where his son went. And they tested me on two days, something like this.

And they said that I had reached-- OK. The schooling class is different at six years elementary, and five years middle school-- high school, not four, but five. Or if you went into vocational, then you went to a three-year.

But to go to a university or college, you had to finish a five-year. And my level was third and with the exception, of course, of Dutch and national history. And Dutch is language and style. They have grammar and style. It's not one language class. It's got two language classes.

That, of course, I didn't know. I was way behind. But everything else, I was way ahead. I don't know. But one day, I'm told, OK. Start tomorrow, you go to school. And I'm fine, great.

There was no public transportation, none. You had to walk. And lunch was from 12:00 or from 2:00 to 4:00, 4:15. 8:45 to 12:00, 1:45 to 4:15. So people-- everybody went home for lunch. But I had to walk something like-- I don't know. I wanted to do it.

I've been kidding with my sons. They have a bike and they want to be dropped off in the car. And when I say, when I was your age, they say, yeah. Yeah, you walked in the snow uphill both ways. And I wanted to determine what was the mileage, how many miles a kilometer it was from that building and the temporary residence to school, because I had to do it four times.

And then homework-- homework not only the normal courses, but I had especially to concentrate the makeup, catch-up. My father being one of those old-time dictators, I had to be-- how old was I? 14-- had to be in bed by 7:30.

If you consider that I come out of school-- school is out 4:15. By the time I'm back, it is 5:00. You have 20 minutes to fool around, then dinner. I had 15 minutes to do my homework and go to bed. And after a little, I said, look, that's not going to work.

What do you mean? I said, look, I'm not-- so very magnanimously, he said, OK. Fine. You go to bed at 8:00. He gave me another half an hour.

So it took me about five months. And then I caught up. It took a lot of work. It was the same thing like in a camp. My dad paid for it with food for me to learn.

And I'm not going to deny 20/20 hindsight that he might have done this also to create the future-- so nothing but death. And learn. You've got to learn because later-- so that he may have done this for psychological reasons, as well. But it doesn't make any difference. He paid for it in bread. So I had to study.

Did your younger brother go back to school, too?

Yes. He went to elementary school. Yeah.

Did your father have any work that he was doing?

No. No. Yes, my dad had a factory. So what could he do? He could get a job. His Dutch was not any better than it was.

So how did you have money for clothes and food?

OK. First of all, there was a reparation. First, he had insurance, pre-war insurance on the factory-- fire, theft, blah, blah, blah. And that, they had to pay. I remember. And I think he had it insured for then in 1944 10,000 guilders or \$10,000. I don't know what today's equivalent would be.

Then subsequently, he established a factory, shirts basically for the major stores, made to order-- so not off the rack, but made to order, just until I finished school so that we could return to the States. So it was basically temporary.

And this was before he went back to the States on his own?

No, after he came back. No, the first thing, he went back.

And he was gone for how long?

Quite a while. Quite a while, yes.

Was it two years?

No, he wasn't gone for two years. But he must have-- we lived with them for two years. Yeah. But no, he was gone for, let's say, six months. There was some property in Chicago.

And he was about six months. I may be off a month here or there. No, that is when he came back. And I was at school. And he wanted me to finish school, rather than switch. Finish that, and then we'll take it from there.

As I was already two years ahead, anyway, for my age, he said, OK. Then when we get back, you'll have to adjust and fiddle around with English. And then you'll be in your same age group or even a year younger.

What was the response of the people at home after you were liberated? Did they-- was there any antisemitism still there or did they make comments about you?

The fact is, of course, that even the people that had antisemitic tendencies after the war would be very careful, because just like the Germans created the National Socialistic Movement, the NSB, during the war, the Underground immediately afterwards turned into what they called the [NON-ENGLISH], Interior Forces.

They had blue uniforms. I remember blue coveralls, overalls-- blue overalls and blue pre-war Dutch army helmet. And they went after the collaborators and stuff like this. And so even though I was older then by the number of years when I'd been away, I might have been maybe more sensitive to antisemitism afterwards than before the war.

And I don't-- I don't remember. I never forget the years in the war or forget what happened to me. I personally up until today-- I don't-- either they ran away or they avoided it. Or they were afraid or whatever.

I never had any, not behind my back or a friend was, he-- or even openly. Maybe once-- maybe once. I had friends who would come up. And I said, I don't know. I don't know.

I never had the unfortunate experience of being involved in any of these clashes. I don't know, not in my professional career, not working in Germany in the high levels. And even if I worked with an older assessor who knew I was Jewish-- they all knew I was Jewish, of course.

And then from a certain age, if they had a certain age, I kept the arm's distance. I had friends my age or younger in Germany, very good friends, very dear friends, as dear as anybody. But from a certain age and up, no.

Because--

I don't know what they did. I don't want to have anything to do with it. And when they got too smart as I worked there and I was contacted by the board-- by the board, not by personnel, by the board-- because I was not German and I was Jewish. And it was the board of directors's decision.

And out of nine, two were against it. I don't think they were much-- I found afterward I don't think not so much because of the fact that I was Jewish. It's because the fact that I would be the only foreigner in an engineering department of 33

other people and the only foreigner and in addition to which I am Jewish.

And they were afraid that staff or personnel would get into conflict with me. So they voted in seven to two. And then I got offered. And I went to work.

So if I dealt with somebody of that age, then I say you might have been on the Russian front. You might even have been in Mauthausen or Sobibor and the other camps. I don't know. Since I don't know, I don't want to have anything to do with you.

And as my contact was saying way, way, way upstairs, which everybody knew, if anybody got smart-alecky, you've never seen a bulldozer run over somebody. I would run-- with this staff, I don't know. I cut them like this to little pieces. And they couldn't do anything.

So not because of anything-- professionally. If they did something wrong and I said, please correct it, they say no, no, it's fine. I say, no. No, I'm telling you it's wrong. I want you to correct it. In my opinion, I said, look, nobody cares about you. Get it done. And if you don't get it done by tomorrow, you'll see.

And then it was done by the next day. And that happened once or twice. In general, no, I cannot say that I had any encounters. No, I worked in 12 countries. I lived there for two years, four years, six years. I don't-- no, never.

I climbed the career ladder irrespective, faster than anybody else, with non-Jewish companies. Now, with Jewish companies, I might not have made it. That, I accept. Yeah. I am too blunt. But I'm proud that I inherited it from my dad and some other things.

No. No, I don't. The problem that I had is when we came back and I went to them the same, I had just caught up. And I'm telling you it was tough, the language. I spoke better Russian and better French and better German and English than I spoke Dutch.

And then I have to catch up school Dutch and tests and essays. God, I didn't even know the language. And national history-- that we had an admiral in the 17th century who beat Trump and the router and stuff like this and the 80-Year War and Hundred Years War.

And who wanted history in Europe at that time? All you did were years and wars-- the 80-Year War, the War Between the Roses, World War I. I didn't want to learn about prior wars. I had enough with the last one. So all you did, you had to remember the dates and a piece of there and a piece of this and the war of this and the war from then to then. So I wasn't too crazy about national history, anyway. But I had to.

Oh, yeah botany-- plants. All that, I didn't do. I didn't do Hebrew in grade school. I didn't do botany in high school. I simply didn't participate, and that's it. Plants-- who does that-- plants. The name of a flower, it was not going to do any good.

And I don't know much about flowers. I know a rose when I see the tulip. I know a chestnut tree because it has six leaves, long leaves. That's about it and the oak-- no, I wouldn't recognize an oak-- a birch. Yes. So when I finally caught up, then I said, oh, I made it. Now, I'm on the par.

You have to consider I was by two years the youngest in the class and the smallest by height, one of the smallest. And the other factor that doomed it was the school was situated at both sides of the street with an overhead passageway. So basically, the teacher went from class to class, with the exception of physics. They went to physics class and the lab, any lab work.

And there, I meet-- or he meets me-- the dean. And he sees that little-- my class, 3B. And here, I am. And he says, who are you? I said, I am me.

No, I mean-- oh, my name? My name is Max Erlichman. Oh. What class? 3B. OK. Fine. Thank you. Go.

The next day, my dad gets called-- his friend. We get called. And I had to wait in the anteroom. And I was told to grab my bags and get out.

Why?

His explanation was that I had entered school without his knowledge. And that really burned me up. That burned me up, because in addition to which-- I don't know. We lived in Chicago. We moved to San Francisco. Then we moved to Sunnyvale.

And my girls, I would take them to school. When it was April and September or January, I took them the next day to school. And that was it. In Holland at that period, you couldn't. You had to wait till September.

So if anybody would have moved to Holland with children, let's say, in the month of October, you can't put your kids to school. You had to wait until next year September for them to enter school, because that is the school year, September 1 until July 30 or something like this, six weeks' worth. Somehow, they were six weeks.

So people avoided moving except during vacation, because the kids would be running on the street. And then they didn't have a truancy police, but they would be caught. A, you couldn't walk to-- there was school. And you're supposed to be in school below the age of whatever, 16.

But in Holland, you couldn't go to school because it wasn't September. So this was going back and forth. This is typically Dutch. Left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Oh, later on, they improve. So there I was.

When did I get to school? That must have been six months. So we came back in May. September, October, December-- so in February, out. I wasn't going to take it in February. You have to wait till September. So here I was.

My dad tried to get me to school. He went to the Department of Education. They said, I'm sorry, but I'm sorry. That's it.

He said, so is he supposed to run the streets? Yeah, I'm sorry. September-- but he has to enter in September. School year's September to July. And then I got angry. I am not aware of it then. I am aware of it now.

You mean through all of that-- I always said something. Through all of that past-- these past experiences in history, to run into something like this, that was a little bit too much. There are rules that are chiseled the marble. And that's what makes me a rebel.

I don't take that, not for my kids. And I have never taken it. there I was. And then I got angry. I said, OK. And heck with it. Whatever. And then I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything for a while.

And then they established a Jewish high school. So then I went to a Jewish high school. I decided to go to the Jewish high school. And I was admitted. And that did not last very long, because then they merged.

And then the Dutch government established-- finally, they established what they called the Community Course for Hidden Children and Camp Children. And they were high school. The only thing is you did the whole school year in six months. So in one year, you did two school years, which again really stoked the fire and get going.

And I left the Jewish high school because I got into trouble with the teachers. I got in trouble with the teachers to the extent that I think of the whole high school, I was sent to the principal more than everybody else together. It got to the point where I knocked again.

And Dr. Jacobsen, he had half-glasses, reading glasses. And then knock, knock, knock. And I told him to come in. And he says, no, not you again. What is it? Come on. What is it this time? That's the way it was. I had run into conflict with the teachers.

Laws, rules-- don't come with me with rules. No. No, not after what I went through. I don't want your stupid rules. And I'm not talking about rules. We have to abide by rules. I set rules for my kids. But if they're moronic, then I don't accept it. I don't accept-- in that school, I don't accept stupidity, not from staff, not from teachers.

That's what I got made the conflict. And that's why I was repeatedly sent. I was never punished, never penalized. Fortunately, my dad was never called to school. I could kiss him for that.

Came at my dad-- would you please come? We will discuss your son, Max. He never did that because I was right. He was old enough. He was in his 50s. He was old enough to know that I was right. And I knew that I was right, and I knew that he knew that I was right.

So he never argued. He said, OK, fine. Yes, but you have to understand, she's older. And you don't do it in class. I said, when do you want me to do it if not in class? After class?

It was something, for example, for-- I'll give you one example, social studies. The British after the war, war debt was 15,812,000,000 pounds sterling. That's what she teaches. I know-- I read quite a bit. And I know what goes on.

So I know that according to the British white paper, the after-war war debt was 24 billion, something like this. She says 15. And when she says 15, I know it's incorrect, because I had read three days earlier the white paper. So I said-- let's not use her name.

I said, I don't know, but it may be correct. But I think that the war debt really is 23 billion, 28 billion. And she says, what do you mean? I said, no, just exactly what I say. How would you know? I don't know. I read it.

So what did you say? So you read it and that's-- then you know, like this, insulting and condescending. And then I got angry. And then I said, now, wait a minute, with your age, you ought to be a lot more intelligent than you are, because nothing that you know today you didn't get out of books, which you read which was written by other people.

So why would what you read be correct and what I read be incorrect? So you stand in front of the class of 28 kids and you teach them wrong. So say you are mistaken. Maybe I'm right.

So don't talk to me like this as if I read the wrong-- then she, out. OK. Fine. Out. Then I went to upstairs. And again, I said what, blah, blah, blah. I said, what was she going to do with me? I'm right.

I remember he said, yeah. But you should have done-- waited after class, after class. Then I had to take the whole class apart and say, wait a minute. This is wrong. It really is.

No, if she doesn't know, then she should become a dishwasher. I don't care. Let her go. But let her not teach something that is incorrect. And I'm not going to wait. I'll tell her there.

And if she doesn't like it, it's her problem, not mine. OK. Fine. Wait outside till class is over and then go back, stuff like this. That will get me up the stairs back and forth, back and forth.

So did you finish the program then?

Then they established GICOL, G-I-C-O-L, the community college for-- community school for where I went through a whole school year in six months. And then I switched from there.

I had established a chess team at school and a soccer team. I was asked to do that. That was the time that I was told to come and see Dr. Jacobsen. And I said, god, wait. Wait a minute.

What did I-- I didn't do anything. If I did something, I won't go. But I didn't do anything. So I really very slowly up the stairs. Why does he want to see me? I don't know. I didn't do anything.

The last thing was with the PE teacher. And I told him he was an idiot and a stupid son of a gun. But that was settled. And I waited.

And he-- I knocked on the door. He said, would you wait? OK. I'll wait. And then he asked me. I'm going to-- because I know I'm going to get in a row with him because I didn't do anything.

And he was too nice a fellow to get into an argument. I don't want to get in an argument. He was a wonderful individual.

He says, our school, the Jewish high school, we decided-- know the teachers and him-- we decided, faculty, that we would need and we would like to have a soccer team and a chess team. Would you like to take care of it? And I said, sure. And that's what we did.

Then they established GICOL. And then I went to GICOL. But GICOL only lasted-- in fact, GICOL already existed. Only I didn't know about it. So I never did finish high school.

Did you ever talk about your war experiences with your classmates there who obviously-- did you ever talk about it with them?

I've been asked this in the past, but it was never a subject. We had other things to discuss-- girlfriends, girls. All of a sudden, you start noticing girls.

So we talked about war? She's pretty. Do you like her? I like her, too. Why don't you ask her? This was important.

There was a whole school. A lot of them were hidden during the war. A lot of them were in camps. So there was nothing to discuss. It's not that I was the only one. They'll say, were you?

Oh, go. What was it like, like you take a three-day excursion to Hawaii. They pick you up and they take you there. And they feed you and they bring you back. Everybody had gone through the war one way or another.

Even the GICOL, the course or the school set up to speed up-- also, these were from Indonesia. They were imprisoned by the Japanese. There were a lot from Indonesia, which was called the Dutch East Indies at that time. So we all had something to tell us all.

Oh, I don't want to know your story? What do you help? It was not-- it was not a subject. We were talking about the intercollegiate chess tournament once a year. And then we get the tournament. It was board one, two, three, because there were 10 boards and the soccer and the school and the girls and the friends.

No, it-- I do not recall that it was ever any subject, which doesn't mean that I might not have been asked, where were you? I'd say, several. Which one? OK. Fine. I will name you some. You won't even know.

And they will say this. Oh, OK. Fine. But that would be as far as it goes. If you form part of a group who would have gone through the same identical-- almost-- experience, what good would it do for us to exchange experiences?

That you were there three years and eight months and I three years and four months? Or that you were in Sobibor? I know what Sobibor was like. Why would I have to ask you? So what kids did, I don't think it was on purpose.

And I think basically, it was enough. The war was enough. And it was history and past. And now, let's go ahead. And this is why my dad had me learn and go take classes in the camp, this.

And he would say so. He would verbalize it. I don't care. And when I say, no, no. Just sit. Fine.

But there's a tomorrow. So go on. OK. Fine, fine, fine. OK. I'll do it. There's a tomorrow. So I don't-- a lot of people get stuck. And today, they're still there.

I've met them. I've met them six eight weeks ago, the first time I attended a group of what they call "hidden children." Even though I was not hidden, my wife-- my first wife-- was. And as I never made an issue and never made-- belonged to any group or team-- soccer team, yes, soccer team, yes. boxing, yes-- I did jujitsu. Yes. Chess, yes. I coached chess here.

But none of-- no political, no. So I was asked, would you like to come? I said, why not? At least I could see some other people who'd gone through this at this stage of my life, not when I was 14 or 15, and see-- a matter of-- no, not a matter of curiosity. I like people, period.

I study people. Yes. Yes, I will go. And I went there. And I encountered that in 1993. Yes, there are people that have one leg still there. And she started crying because of some-- and what can you do? How do you rationalize it?

You cannot take her and say, OK, come on. Come on, like I would take one of my children when they fell. Come on. It's OK. Now, get up. Let's go.

And so, no. No, I did not. This is why the last time, when you ask questions, I really have to delve. Other people can in their dreams and their sleep, you can ask them questions. And they will answer every single little bit.

No, I really have to go with a shovel and go back deep what happened there. And then I remember things that I didn't think about, I don't know, 40 or whatever, since the cave in Westerbork. It was one of the most important things in my life during that period. It was it.

This one is something tremendous. And I forgot about it. So, no. No, we didn't talk about it as kids. And I think basically, it's not because we sat down and said, OK. Now, let's not talk about it, OK?

I don't want to hear your story. I'm not going to tell you mine. Basically, it was not a subject, period. It was not.

When did you begin talking about it? Or did you?

I never did, because it was never-- how do you talk about it? How would it come up? Let's see. I know. At work, I have six managers-- engineering, construction, drafting, accounting, your friends.

I don't think there's any occasion where you say, hey, wait a minute. Do you know I was-- first of all, what for? What for? A, who wants to hear?

If somebody wants to hear, he would not even know that I had been in a camp. So it is not that I hid it or made a secret of it. I never made an issue out of it or a subject of discussion.

What about with your family? Why did you--

Oh, yes. They want to know. Oh, yes. They want to know. Oh, yeah. Then yes, of course. Oh, yeah. No, they would ask. And like now, they would say I am this. And I would tell my story and how was it there and was like this. Oh, no. Then I-- no, they all know. They all know.

The only thing they hated was that it would come up piecemeal. And they wanted-- piecemeal, that is what they disliked, because by listening to one little piece, they would forget. Oh, yes.

But honestly, no. It's mine. It's not yours. It's not anybody. It's mine. It's mine. I paid for it, so it belongs to me.

You want it? Make your own experiences. I don't know. I never made an issue with-- and can I say, I did not hide it. Nobody would know. So there was no reason for them to ask. And if I wouldn't bring it up, even less reason.

And how do you think these experiences affected your life afterwards? Changed it or--

I think I thought about it last night or night before last. I don't know. I can only explain it in the following manner. My kids would have their ups and downs in school.

They would fall and get up. And they would be sad. They flunk the class or something like this. Or they did something, and they lost out.

And then I would ask them every-- from the age that they were old enough to understand-- not at the age of two, but when they were older, I would ask them, how do you make steel?

There was years ago-- I go to Japan quite often. In fact, I'll be going there next week. And I made a movie way back, how to make a samurai sword, a katana sword.

You know how they make that? They take a piece of metal. They hit it to white. And then they fold it. They beat it out. They fold it. And they do it 80 times.

So what happens is the linear molecules are shaped in such a way you can cut a piece of iron with a samurai sword. It goes through iron like butter. But it's heated. So I always say, you know how you make steel? I'll show you. And then I would put it.

It was an eight-millimeter movie. And I would-- yes, eight. It was an eight. Yes. Then I converted to 16. Then I had a 16-millimeter movie. And that's the way you make steel.

You get beaten, beaten. You beat, beat. You get beaten. That's the way you make steel. So what you go through, that's what is needed to make steel out of you. That's the way you make steel, by beating.

And that's what they, all of them, have been told from the day-- this, you can only draw pictures, you see, and visually, when you can bring it to the child in a visual manner or equivalent. I said, general law of relativity. Dad, what is this?

How can you explain to a six-year-old or eight-year-old law of relativity? If you can-- with an adult, I can tell, OK. You're in a capsule in space. And there's no point of light around you.

It's all glass. You see nothing. Are you moving or are you standing still? Or are you not moving?

And then you see the eight-year-old, he says or she says she doesn't know. So I don't do that with a child. Depending on the age, I would say, OK. Mark-- I remember Mark-- Frank, David.

Now, imagine that you sit on a stove, a burning hot stove, for five minutes. You see, this would seem to you like an hour. But you sit with Diane in the park for an hour, it seems to you like five minutes.

Now, do you understand what I'm trying to tell you? Yeah. OK. Fine. That's out there.

So same thing with steel-- what camp did to me, that's probably what it did to them. I don't know. I don't know. I went into the year, into the camps, already with something. I don't know what. And it only developed during the years.

I don't know hate or revenge. And I teach my kid hate will only eat yourself. So don't hate. Revenge? What?

Basically, what a camp did, it allowed me to know human behavior. I'm a very good psychologist, very good psychologist, even if I say so myself.

Human interaction-- I know when I'm right 100.1%, not 99.9%. When I'm 101%, that's it. I don't care who you are. That's another thing what I do with my kids also, power of your conviction.

Dad, I want to play football. Mark is 5' 5" and he weighs 120 pounds. Youth football? You're out of your mind. He wants to. And he won't quit. He won't give up. For five, six months three times a week, dad, I want to play football.

Look, would it be worth it to have a broken collarbone or an arm and then wind up losing school for a year? It's not worth it. And he kept at it, kept at it.

And then one day, I said, OK. Come here. Why? What is this? I have told you no. When I tell you once or when I tell you twice, it's no. Why do you-- you see, this is it. If I told him twice no, it's no.

And he kept at it. OK. Now, convince me that I should let you go. And he managed to convince me, which he finally did. I said, OK. Go. But in the meantime, I dragged it out for about eight, nine months at the age of 14. And that is where the boys get-- David was like this.

And at the age of 14, he went on this. And the second spurt is 17. So David from a little tiny, like this, he now is 5' 8 and a half or 5' 9". He weighs 100 and God knows what. So I dragged it out.

So the power of conviction, this is what David-- and that's what they do. And they know how to do it. And I think I mentioned last time the only one that doesn't know exactly the line was David. He will be 99% sure. He'll be wrong 1%, and then he'll act as it.

So that is why. I don't want a war. It was a school. And I don't know whether the school was geared towards one subject. It was an overall-- how people behave, what people are. And if you study them, it's fun.

How did it affect your religious beliefs?

Ah. That one came up. When was that? That came up. I know. That came up not too long ago.

My religious belief-- oh, no, I mentioned it. I think I mentioned it when I took David to the rabbi in Peninsula. My relationship, mine, I have none. I have none. Whatever I have is between me and whoever is up there.

Now, as I don't believe there's somebody up there sitting on a chair looking down. So now, will Max-- no, I don't believe that, I don't think. But if there is something within me or within every individual single human being who he or she means or expects or thinks to be some higher power, the more power. It's something within myself.

Yeah. That's it. I have no further explanation. No. I think what people-- when people go to shul and they down, they don't do it to somebody out there. They do it to themselves, because I think that synagogue exists within every single individual.

In fact, I think by law, you don't need a synagogue. We don't have churches-- every home, wherever you are. And two subjects I avoid are Communism and religion as a subject, period, because very , plainly people have a conscience.

And when it is something wrong, they go to church or synagogue or to the mosque. And they pray to the Almighty to forgive them. Or I don't know who they're talking to. I think they're talking to themselves, to their own conscience.

And if it benefits them, wonderful. I don't think you have to spend \$8 million in a building and ask me for contributions. This is none of your business.

So you're saying that you don't think your experiences during the war affected your religious beliefs?

No. And let's keep it at that, because if, then it would be more negative than positive. So let's keep it at that. Let's keep it at that. Let's keep it at that.

At one point, you said that the camps made you a comedian.

OK. What I mean is I must have been a comedian already before the war to some extent. Some of the things I did were comical. And I did them from that point of view.

The camps-- oh. You see, it's perception-- perception. Two people can look at the same thing and see two completely different things.

My daughter-- last week with my daughter, she was down or something like this with my grandson or something like this. And I said, why do you look at the shadow side? There are two.

There's a sunny side and a shadow side. Why do you have to walk this? Why can't you move over? You can. And I said, wait a minute. Why would I be able to tell you what?

It's about a perception. You can look at things any way you want to-- any way you want to. You can see the misery. You can see the drama. You can see anything you want to and go to bed and not sleep and wake up-- nightmares.

That's one way you can look at it. But the same event or the same thing that is happening, you can look at it. And you will find if you see it, if you want to see it-- a lot of people don't want to see it.

They're too happy-- I don't want to say they're masochistic. But they're happy when they can see the negative. It doesn't cost any more to look for the positive. There's something in there that's funny. And it's overall.

In the overall-- what is it, those idiotic words? The overall scope of things? I don't know how you call. They're funny. Yes, they are funny.

You see, I don't know, a German sergeant who ran with in Germany a little cart with a garbage can and swept the streets. And now, he's an over sergeant. And he now-- but then, of course, you don't have to be anywhere because you can see it anywhere.

In the minute somebody puts on a uniform here or in Holland or in Belgium, I make an appointment with the director of the post-- PDT in Holland, the post and telegraph and the telephone company or the director from here. I'm going to make an appointment. I need to talk to him. I come in the gate.

The porter, I said-- he has to open the door. What can I do for you? I want to see Mr. Whatever his name. What is it about?

I look at him. I said, what do you mean what is it about? First of all, it's none of your business. And if that Mr. Peterson thinks you need to know, then let him tell you. He has a uniform. And he's asking me why the subject I want to discuss with the gentleman, the director of the post.

So it's funny. It's a joke. It really is funny how a blue piece of material and some gold braid or silver braid all of a sudden makes you to something. He gets home and he gets beaten by his wife. And he doesn't dare to open his mouth.

And outside, go to the German Autobahn. Have you been in Germany? Then I sent my kids, Frank, Mark, and David, when we went on vacation a couple years ago. And we went through Germany.

And we got out of Belgium into Germany and the Autobahn. And there's no speed limit in Germany, you see? And so you have those BMWs and the Mercedes. And they do 120 miles an hour, 130 miles an hour.

And I had a Ford Torino. That's still 3,300 pounds. And they go by you like whoo. And then my car goes like this.

So here, it was '83. That was funny, you see? This is funny. So the first time when we got out of Belgium on the Autobahn, that's where it started. And whoo. The three kids, they're six or seven, seven and 13 and 15, something like this.

And they don't believe it. What's this? So from then on in, all the way from the border to Switzerland-- we went to Zurich-- they sat and they watched the car come. And I said, when I-- they timed it, the three of them.

As it went by us, they would yell, "Geronimo!" When we came back-- yeah, Mark was-- no, we went to Japan. No, Mark was in fourth grade, something like this. And he had to tell in front of the class five minutes or 10 minutes where they were and what they had done, blah, blah, blah, and what was the most-- what left the greatest impression.

And he talked about the German Autobahn. We went to Belgium, Holland, Germany. And we had so many experiences in those four weeks. All they knew to remember was the German Autobahn.

And I can go into a discussion why, why, because it has nothing to do with the way the Frenchman drives or the Italian or this Ferrari sport. That took in completely different reasons. And if you're studying-- you think it through and you really study it and you know the German mentality, then you know why.

And it's funny. It is really a joke. So yes, this is what the camps basically taught you if you wanted to learn. If you didn't want to learn, of course, you came out as dumb as you were when you went in. And as I say, I read a lot, which is a matter of curiosity-- curiosity. So it's still curious. I am still learning. No. No.

Did you ever go back to try to find your home that you lived in before the war?

Immediately after the war, I think the day after we got back. Did I go alone or did I take my brother? No, the day after we got back, yes.

Of course, there was no public transportation. So we walked there. And of course, somebody else was living there when we rang the bell. We lived on the first floor.

And I said to him, we used to live here before the war. Would you mind if we-- no. No, come on up. So I think Joe was with me. I remember I--

Was your father with you?

No. He probably did it on his own. I don't know. But as I say, my dad has-- we just got back. He had a lot of things to do that he did. We divided the responsibility. He took care of us, and I took care of myself.

So I don't know what he did. I know that I went. And I went through the park. And I remember.

And then you remember. It was a nostalgic trip. This is why we went through Germany and Europe in '83 is to show David, look, you were born in this hospital. And that's where we lived.

And I took Frank to Antwerp. And that is where-- in the maternity clinic, that's where you were born. And that's when we all lived in a penthouse. We had the penthouse when he was born. And then when our kids were old enough, then we only had a house with a yard.

And then we had that house. And David, where he was born in Spain-- and that's where he went to school, kindergarten, in the school in Spain. Yes, I did that. And I allowed my kids to do that. I took them there, as well.

And I went to see the high school I was at, GICOL, that course, but limitedly. I didn't really go and follow all the steps. No.

When you went into your home, did you see anything that was familiar?

No. That became German property or whatever. I don't care. The only thing that would care would be, let's say, the photographs and some of our set. But otherwise, there were not-- materials, chairs, furniture, material things.

Well, what is it? It means nothing. You have your father and your brother. And if you had your mother, then who cares? The physical items or assets or paint on the wall, no, I didn't go look for it.

And even I had seen it, I wouldn't have wanted it, unless there was something. Hey, could I have this? No. Do I need it to remember? No, I don't need that. I don't need that. That was it.

When did you and your father and your brother finally come to America?

He came-- my father and my brother came first, because I got married in the meantime. And so they came in 1950-- '49, '50, something like that. And I married Ruth. And her mother and sister and brother-in-law, they live in Israel.

And as my dad and brother had left for the States, I said, OK. We go. Then she says, no, I want us-- because I had not met the family. I didn't know how lucky I was then. Like they say, friendship, you choose. [HEBREW], you take it.

So I said, well, not now. We just got married. How many-- I had studied electrical, not engineering because there were, of course, no funds or finances or budget. There were no scholarships. They didn't exist in Holland. They needed labor.

So I went in as an apprentice. In the summer at school, I went a smith and a furniture maker. That's mainly because my dad forced me to. In the summer vacation, you spent six weeks here with a furniture maker, six weeks with a smith. I liked that very much at Stiegman's.

And six weeks with an electrical contractor-- he says, you learn, learn, learn. OK. Fine. He said, you learn. So you spend.

So I know very little about vacations. I have had some, but very few. And I don't miss it, either. I never did miss it.

So by that time, I was working. I knew enough that I could work as an electrician, as a journeyman. And so we wanted to come to Chicago. She said, no, I want to see-- let's go and see my family. I said, the family? Why now?

With the money we have, let's go first and get settled. And then two years from now, then we'll go and visit your parents. No. no. I said, I'm not going.

But then you know who wears the pants, because she was very, very clever. She knew me well enough if I say, no, it's no. So what she would do is she said, fine. I go alone. That's the way Ruth managed to-- knowing that I would, of course, not let her go alone. And she would have gone alone.

I said, look, the trip and the-- and then, of course, I expect you to bring a whole grocery store, because at that time, people were starving to death in Israel. There was nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing. The people survived from what people would send them.

So I said, by the time we go out and back and we supply them a year and a half of food, we're broke. No, she-- OK. Fine. But for how long? OK. One month, and that's it, because by the time, she was already pregnant.

So when we got to Israel and I met the in-laws, I said, let's go. We don't have to stay here a month. Two weeks is enough. And no, we stay there a month. And then they talked her into staying.

I said, why would you want to stay? I don't know. I have to admit that she was a Zionist-- not 100%, but let's say 60%, 65%. She was telling me because she was hidden, she had not lived with the experiences in the camps as I had, where I learned to know people, humanity, let's say, the human being and various human beings from various groups.

Everybody has his own traits. So she was so Zionistic. And so the whole family worked on her to stay. I just want to get out of there now-- now.

So I run up against a brick wall. Well, let's wait at least till the baby's born. I said, fine. The baby can be born in Chicago, as well. No. No, here. You can take away my daughter? I said, first, she's not your daughter. She's my wife. And she was your daughter-- no longer.

So Ruth got between the devil and the deep blue sea. Whatever she would do, it was wrong. In these cases, people tend to do nothing, to make the decision not to do anything. And as I saw this, I said, fine. OK. We'll stay.

But the minute you find out that this is enough, you tell me. And we'll be gone two days later. OK? So I had to go back to Europe and then get the whole shebang-- furniture-- because we went there as a tourist with a suitcase.

So we stayed there. And after six months, Bella was already born. She says, I have enough. I am getting sick. Let's get out of here-- the Mapi and Mapam and the Hesani Jews and the Jews from Egypt and the backstabbing and a continuation from the camp, which you did not see in other countries, like in Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, United States, France, Italy. I don't care where. But you saw that in Israel.

What do you mean a continuation of the camps?

The interaction between people. In the camps, people would steal a piece of bread from somebody else's pillow. And it was hid, because he was hungry. There were some people that would go and say, psh if they would get the ration.

What is integrity in a camp? Oh, there were very few people that had backbone and integrity. My dad-- I couldn't be bought. No, I'm not talking about myself and my dad. But the interaction between human beings under the worst of circumstances sometimes brings out the worst in a human being, as well as the best.

And I've seen them. Unfortunately, the majority-- 90% or 85%-- it is always the worst. And then like a diamond, you see a human gesture that makes up for all of the misery that you witnessed the past two weeks, that one little gesture. And I would keep this with me.

And I would not forget these things. And I would say, see, there are still people that can do that. And that attitude, that battle and fight for survival-- they would climb over bodies in the camps, which is-- yes. And also Westerbork, Yes. In the last camp, no, because it didn't work. That didn't work.

And when you came to this one, you saw the same thing, only worse-- worse. You didn't see that here. Let's say that you came out of the camps and came straight to the United States or straight like we, Holland and Belgium and France, Denmark. There were not that many. The Danish Jews went over to Sweden in one night, anyway.

No, you didn't see that attitude. You saw it in Israel. And when people would ask me why and Ruth asked me why, I said, very simple. And a lot of people don't like it. But then sometimes, truth is painful. People don't want to hear it.

In Holland, the Jewish survivor or in Belgium behaved more or less acceptable because, as I say, he or she formed part of a community. It was not a little island. Everybody saw it. So he behaved.

Israel, there were no goyim. There were no Christians. They were just Jews. So who had to be ashamed? There was nothing to be ashamed of because they were all Jews. That is what Israel lacked in these years. A 40% Christian population, and they would have behaved like human beings.

But she saw as a Zionist. I knew it ahead of time. I know. I said, a week, out. And it took her maybe three months to see it, because you can close your eyes and not see it and then take the guts and now to see it and tell me, Max, that's enough. Let's go.

So it took six months. And then it took us six months to get out. I needed an exit visa. They wouldn't give me an exit visa. They wouldn't give me an exit visa. No.

I went to the army headquarters in Jerusalem. I went to see the commanding general. And I broke two windows. I drove my motorcycle into the hall. I said, I'm not going-- now. And I really raised my voice. I don't.

They drafted me for the army. In the army? What are you talking about? I didn't come here to enter the army. Yeah. And

then, of course, as an electrician, young, they had dentists and doctors and lawyers and ganuvim.

I don't know. But technical people, there weren't any. A Jewish engineer? There were no Jewish engineers. Jewish electricians? That was one of the things they-- one of the reasons.

Anyway, they did. They managed six months to stop me. Everybody else would have caved in and no way, until finally then draft. That was the last thing what they did is they drafted. I had to report to Jeff again, like two pairs of pants, two pairs of slacks, two pairs of underwear.

I said, what are you talking about? I might as well have said, what? You must. I must? No, I must not. And then I went to the-- and there was a Venezuelan embassy, a consulate in Israel. And this one was in Rome.

So I went to Jerusalem to the army headquarters with that little piece of paper. And I wanted to see the commanding general. They said, you can't. I said, I can. If I can't, then who can? And what is he here for? I want to see him now.

And I really raised hell. I did. I raised hell, H-E-L-L. And I don't want-- and I didn't know the ranks until I got in a big office. And I think I did recall it was a big office. And the furniture, yes-- yes, it's like the prime minister in Britain.

So that must be-- I'm told I'm not going. I'm not an Israeli citizen. I came on vacation. I live here. I'm out. Already four months, you're preventing me from leaving.

Now, you come with this here? No way. Forget it. First of all, I'm not an Israeli. Secondly, I signed a document that there's an Israeli law that anybody, any Jew, among entering automatically becomes Israeli.

That law-- nobody knew that that law existed, you see? They didn't publicize that. I knew. I knew. Nobody else knew. In Holland, nobody knew. When I mentioned it, what do you mean? Yes.

So before we went there, Ruth and I, we went to the Israeli consulate. And they said, you may have form number 44. What? Form number X and Y set 12. There's no such form. I said, please, don't play games with me. No.

Now, I want a form now. And I want it in triplicate. I want three copies, three. And if you don't do it now, I make a scandal. And I'll break down the building. I want it now.

Then they found it. And that form says that I hereby-- Ruth and I, we both signed. I hereby declare that upon entering Israel on whatever basis, I will maintain my present nationality.

And we made three. I gave them one, and I kept two. No, you want two. I said, no, make a photocopy. There's no way. I keep two. One goes in a safe here. And one, I take with me.

And nobody knew that that law existed, that particular law. So we kept it with us. Then we paid for the trip as a tourist. So when you wanted to get out, first, you had to prove-- I had to prove that they didn't pay for my trip. I said, no. I don't have to.

You prove that you paid for my trip. I don't have to prove it. No way. You can. I can't? Oh, yes, I can. And then little things like this, everything-- so by that time, I was as mad as I have ever been in my life. I was so angry here.

I don't want to go into that, but my anger could have moved mountains. And I'm telling you, mountains. And every step forward-- two steps ahead and three steps backwards. They did everything to prevent you from leaving.

And the more they put obstacles, the angrier I got. So at the end. I know very well my fuse was like my dad's, like this, only a quarter-of-an-inch fuse. No, I know it. And I am aware of it, and I tried to hold it back.

So I count to 10. And I said, why the hell should I count to 10? I've counted to 10 long enough. And then there, I made a spectacle.

They said, yeah, you have to go. I said, I have to go? Who tells you? Who the hell are you to tell me I have to go in the army? I'm not going in the army. I'm leaving. And if I have to swim, I'm leaving. You can keep it, you, not me.

Yeah, you remember-- I said, besides which, if I join Israeli army, I lose-- like in the US law. You have your passport. If you join a foreign army or swear allegiance, you lose. So I said the same, which I get in the army, I lose my Venezuelan citizenship.

And you see here. He said, may I have it? Yes, you may have it, because I still have a copy. You may read it. And then he sees it. And he, of course, knows that that law exists. So now, he doesn't know what to do.

So he has somebody, an aide, come help. So the aide goes away and comes back in five minutes. And then the general or whoever, he tells me, no, the Israeli law only tells that if I volunteer-- volunteer-- for service in a foreign army, then I do lose my nationality, which is true.

That is the law. He's right. And I said, what? Where did you get this idea from? Look, I as a Venezuelan, you're going to teach me Venezuelan law.

I don't know where you got that fantasy, but forget it. I'm losing it. And I don't know. Don't teach me the law. That's it. I want out. And this-- what you do is in contradiction with the document signed. I stand by this. I want out.

And I think something like next week, Monday or Tuesday, I had to report in Jaffa. And I said, I want you to know the following. You-- there were something like six people in that office. I said, you all understand English well enough.

I am supposed to report to Jaffa military-- I don't know-- 11 o'clock. I won't be there. I'll be home. I'm not going anywhere. I'll be home. So you can rest assured that I will not change my mind.

So you can already now instruct and give orders to a Jeep with four MPs come and pick me up. And you drag me out of the house. The minute you drag me out of the house, there goes a telegram to the Venezuelan embassy in Rome that they are holding against his will a Venezuelan citizen here in Israel. Let's make a diplomatic scandal out of it. Go ahead.

By that time, it was already December, already December. And I left. And I went home. And I stayed home that day. No, nobody came, no MPs, no Jeep.

And then December 29, I get a letter. I have 10 days to leave the country, 10 days. A, they don't want to let you go. Now, they give you a deadline, 10 days. We had to go in 10 days.

Fortunately, the Nakba, one of the ships-- so we got out. We got out. And Ruth was-- we got out again, and we started breathing. And it took me about-- I think it took me about two months to-- the camps, no, I didn't carry anything over.

When I was liberated, I forgot it. And the beds were wonderful and the feeding and the driver with his-- the Black driver with his one arm out the window, cigarette. And I say, buddy, come on and like this. That was fun. I enjoyed it.

I did not carry anything over that I had to. I don't know this charge. But getting out of Israel, it took me two months to get rid of that and left a very poor taste in my mouth-- very poor taste.

I've been back there since. Oh, yes. I've done purchasing in Israel, yes, for millions of dollars. But religion-- you asked-- you were talking about religion? Don't. Don't ask me or my dad about religion or religious influences.

I contribute-- I've always done it-- to CARE and the Salvation Army. Those are the two, the Salvation Army because they are about the only organization. that when I donate \$1, \$0.94 is used. Only \$0.04 is used in the administrative.

That's the only organization. The others say it was 40%, 65%. They paid themselves salaries. United Way, what is it? \$188,000 a year plus private plane.

The Salvation Army, it's because they give. They don't ask who you are, what you are, where you're from. You need it, they give you. And they only use 4% or 6% for-- and CARE.

In 19-- that's a pity. You should have known my father. In 1940-- I think in '45, not too long after we get back to Holland, let's say May, June, July-- let's say July or August, we get a postcard. I remember that postcard. And you are hereby requested to come such and such a day to such and such a day to pick up your CARE package and Jewish community, blah, blah, blah, blah.

So my father throws it away. I said, well, I don't have anything to do with it. Come on, let's go. No. At least you give them the honor. Give the honor to yourself. I'll go.

So we went. We both, he and I, we went there. And I'll never forget this in my life. It's impossible to forget.

When we walked into the office, whatever, up the stairs, and there's a large room. Probably they removed two walls and made a large area, shelves and racks in the back. And they're all packages, CARE packages, half a package per person, which means we get one and a half.

So I go there with trepidation, knowing my dad thinks he-- and also, I had not even been to Israel yet. So we stand there, I, my dad. And about five-- no, four feet to his left is one of the religious Jews.

So there are two ladies and a gentleman behind the counter. And they get a card. So they take a package and half a package. And this gentleman has half a pack in front of him.

But I didn't know that CARE packages did not come in one format. There were different kinds of CARE packages. So my dad stands there. And it's unavoidable.

So he looks over. And he sees sugar and this and butter and the whole shebang. And we have milk powder and green beans.

So my father says, excuse me. Is there a difference? So they say, yes. Yes, there's a difference. I say, may I know what is different? I don't know what is the difference.

He's Russian. Yes. And this-- he's Orthodox. And he didn't eat meat during the war.

He didn't eat meat during the war. We had rutabagas for a year and a half. So he takes the package. And he throws it and hits that shelf. And it kicks off something like 50 cans and takes the other half one.

And he said, shove it down your throat. You mean my kids ate meat during the war? So I'm supposed to grow? And we walked out. So my own experience plus the input from outside from my dad, his experiences, undoubtedly left its mark.

I am sure you have to understand. He actually didn't eat meat during the war. He didn't eat meat during the war. And that was even in Holland. That was not in Israel.

And then I built a cement plant while I was in Israel.