I'm Sandra Van Dion, I'm here with Al Batsdorf, doing part 2 of your interview, Al.

Yes today is the 12th of May 1994, and this interview is being done for the Holocaust Oral History Project. John Grant is our producer.

We very abruptly left off last time, with me asking you whether your parents had made any social connections in New York. And you didn't have the opportunity to answer. So would you give me it now, please?

Well, of course, as I mentioned before, I did not live at my parents' house. Actually ever since my abrupt departure Crystal Night when I really never lived at my parents' house anymore. But I left my parental house when I was 16 and it was, in retrospect, obviously, a very significant thing, because we were able to keep ourselves out of trouble and make a success of our. Lives and nowadays, when, you know, anyway, when our kids were 16, I was very concerned, very protective. And only once in a while I had to stop myself and say, well you've got to trust them. Because when you were 16, you were no longer under the supervision of your parents , and you were able to keep your nose clean, so. Anyway. So I I'm really not answering your question, yet but I'll come right back to it. I just wanted to say that my brother, of course, who is 6 and 1/2 years younger, and lived at my parents' house, and in their orbit, for a lot longer, is much more familiar with the ins and outs of my parents existence.

Now, as far as the social contact are concerned, as far as I recall. Of course, we did have quite a bit of family in New York. People who came out of Europe and preceded us. So, that was a very warm and supportive environment. Then, expanding the circle now, there were former compatriots of theirs. And other people who also came from the same town, same area in Germany. Actually, there was a society of immigrants from Breslau, in New York. Actually, my father-in-law was president, I think, of that society for a while. Well anyway they had their gatherings, I suppose it was once a month or something. And so we, first of all, we had the family. And then we had friends and compatriots. And I think about, first of all, on account of the language barrier and because there really was no opportunity for social contact outside of that orbit. Or most of their social life kind of revolved in that area. Afterwards, when my father became professionally active again, I suppose he met colleagues and other people. But I don't really recall that their social circle extended beyond the day the family and the immigrant society. There may have been some exceptions, but I don't recall offhand. Now of course, then after my brother went to college, he brought some of his friends home. But that is not necessarily my parents' social circle.

Before discussing your parents adjustment in the United States, what we were about, in the year 1944. And that was the year you married.

Yeah.

How did your life proceed after your marriage?

Well, you see at the time, we got married-- well we got engaged a couple of years earlier. And we really had scheduled our wedding for June of '44, thereabouts, because Sue was going to graduate school at Pratt Institute. And she was going to graduate in June. And so that was would be a logical time to get married. But I was working in New Jersey. As a tool and die maker. And I had military deferments because that's the type of work I was doing. We were supplying surgical instruments to the armed forces. So it was considered a critical industry. Well, we didn't feel that we wanted to continue this sort of thing. So we did not apply for any more deferments. I don't know, exactly, when that was, and for how long, what the time period, you know, the effective time period for deferment was, but I know that every six months, or whatever, you applied for one then you got it. Well, we didn't apply for another one. So we knew that time was going to run short. And actually, and that too, I don't know exactly the time sequence, but we must have gotten some communication from the Selective Service Bureau that things were moving forward. So we felt that we just didn't want to wait until June, because Uncle Sam may not have waited till June. So we got married in March. So that way we kind of changed the date. And as it was, we got married March 12th and we had five weeks together. April 17 I was inducted in the Navy. So how did we spend our married life? Well we knew, of course, that there was no sense in setting up a house hold of our own. So that would move back in with her parents. And so we rented a very small furnished apartment, in Brooklyn Heights. And that's where we spent our honeymoon, right? The first five weeks of our married

life . And then I moved in with Uncle Sam, and she moved in with her parents.

We you still working in New Jersey?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Because I was-- well, I worked in New Jersey ever since 1940, for the same firm. And I first served my apprenticeship, I guess we went through that as a tool and die maker, and then worked as a journeyman. The first year, I had a furnished room in the same area where my parents lived. And that was just impossible to carry through, so I moved over to New Jersey. And I had a furnished room there. And, you know, work with honor was a tremendous shortage. So we were up to 70 hours a week. So if you had to add commuting time to that was pretty impossible. So I just did it, came back on Sunday. Now, but then, after I got married, I gave up. When, before we got married. I gave up the furnished room in New Jersey. And yes, I did commute for those five weeks. Now, I think boss gave me generously, three or four days off for a honeymoon, which we spent in the Catskills.

And then we had this little apartment. And for five weeks and then, as I said, and Sue went back. And then I had boot leave. I came home for boot leave.

Where were you after? You were in the Navy? Were you at sea immediately?

No. No. No. No. First of all, there was always a fiction that, if you were asked what service you would choose, then they would give you the opposite billet. Well it didn't work that way. In my case, I chose the Navy and I was put in the Navy. And I went. I was sent to boot camp of course, which is the terminology for basic training in Bainbridge, Maryland, outside of Baltimore. And I spent, I guess was eight weeks, I know exactly. And then you usually had to leave. So that-- during boot training, you don't have any leave-- so then you come home after you-- And, so I came home for leave, and then came back and got my assignment. Now, of course, I was not a citizen at that time. And the United States Armed forces elected that non-citizens could not be sent abroad, because you had no protection under the Geneva laws. If you were not a citizen of the country and whose armed forces you were serving, then you did not-- you could be-- I mean if somebody-- although we had lost our German citizenship, if somebody would have not realized that you would be really fighting against a country that you may belong to, for--

Anyway, to make the long story short, non-citizens were not sent abroad. Now since the Navy, of course, is not necessarily a part of the armed forces that is stationed on the American continent, something had to be done with people like us, who were waiting to get their citizenship. Which of course you got, automatically, after I think it was three or four months of honorable service in the armed forces. So we had to get parked somewhere. And so, being a skilled mechanic, I was assigned to the CBs, the construction battalions, and they had a shore based installation in Rhode Island. Davisville, Rhode Island was a CB base. And I was assigned to the CB base at Davisville, Rhode Island. And that seems to have been true for many non-citizens, who were waiting there-- in this waiting pattern between boot camp and an overseas assignment. And I was working there in a repair facility. And we lived in barracks that were assigned to foreigners. So it was a regular United Nations situation. They had all kinds of languages, and you met all kinds of interesting characters. And I met some lasting friendships there. And I met some people who we were a little bit careful about. There was a nephew of Adolf Hitler in our barracks, and there was-- I mean, I think that if I remember right, there was also a fellow by the name of Grabult there, who was also claimed to be a relative of the infamous one. On the other side of the spectrum, I met George Einstein there, who is a nephew of Albert Einstein. And we became great friends. And we are still great friends today.

So it was really very interesting--

Did you have any sense of what kind of political point of view this nephew of Hitler had?

Well he was an Englishman. And I don't recall it exactly, now. I think Hitler's sister went to England, because she had a relationship with a-- I mean that was all much earlier, long before the Nazis came to power in England. And he was

You mean in Germany.

And, pardon me, long before the Nazis came to power in Germany. So she was Hitler's sister. And this fellow who

served in our outfit was the illegitimate son of this woman. So he had the name of it although, because he was her son out of wedlock. So, but he was born in England, he was an English citizen. But as I said, these were not only German citizens. And but I was not a German citizen. I was stateless. I lost my citizenship. And so he was an English citizen.

And how long did you remain in Rhode Island?

Well until, well, we got--

Roughly.

I can tell you exactly. Until October. And we got our citizenship. And that I can look up. I don't know exactly. Probably around June or so. And then after I got citizenship at the district court in Providence, Rhode Island. And then after we got our citizenship, we were eligible for assignment to an outgoing unit. And this was a very peculiar set up. And it was really like a hiring situation. But the outgoing units were being organized there. And they all had their different offices. And depending on what rumors you heard about, which skipper, and what is a good unity and what's a bad unit. You signed up to a unit. And they usually had a time period of two weeks or three weeks where you could sign up. And then they would close the voluntary sign up and then they would just pull people in to complete the complement. And so George Einstein, myself, signed up to a construction battalion, maintenance unit, which is a small unit. I think about 205 officers and 250 men. And then after the unit is organized, that unit goes to unit training, so to say. We're training that make the--

First of all, you move together into the same barracks, so you establish a social cohesiveness and get to know the people that you're going to be serving with. And then the unit goes through exercises, as a unit, and we went through various schools-- chemical warfare school, and warehousing school, and field maneuvers, and shooting range, and all that sort of thing. And then, in October, it could have been September, where it was determined that we were ready to go out, or go get an assignment. And of course a lot of rumors of where your assignment was going to be. And we went on a train. And of course everything is terribly secret. You know, nobody's going to tell you. But just like we noticed very quickly that the train wasn't going North or South, it was going West. And so, then one day, we had sleeping cars, and one day the skipper opened the orders, and he said well, he called us all together and said well our first assignment is to build a seaplane, no, pardon me, an airstrip in Oxnard, California. And so that was my first visit to California. And it was a long train ride. And I think we first landed and Oakland. We stayed on Treasure Island for a night or two, I think that so. And then were bussed down to Oxnard. And Oxnard, they had a Oxnard County Airport, which was a civilian little airstrip that was taken over by the Navy, to retrain carrier based pilots, who were out on leave and then had to retrain to some carrier duty again. So we had to refurbish the airstrip and stake out an area that resembled the flight deck so that the pilots could learn how to land and take off there. And we lived in a tent city and that was our first assignment, we were totally independent. We had our own cooks and bakers and so on. So we lived there and I took correspondence courses with the University of Chicago. And so--

What subject?

Calculus. I wanted to get a head start on my college education. So I signed up with Chicago. They assigned you to the Armed Forces Institute, I think it was called. And then they give you a mentor at one of the universities and you-- It didn't work out very well, because it took-- especially after I went overseas-- it took ages to get your lessons in and get them back. And of course it was an engineering subject. And in a sea breeze, construction battalion, all your officers are engineers. So I need a little help. I went to our commanding officer, and I said can you help me. And he kind of scratched his head and looked at the problems. And he says, well you better go to the junior grade, because I forgot much. And I went to junior grade and he said I, go to the answer, and he was just out of college, he probably remembered. So it wasn't very easy to get help there. And it just looked good on my record and maybe helped me to get into college, when I finally did, but it wasn't otherwise very constructive.

I know when you left, or I believe, Suzanne was pregnant.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We have always been pretty efficient in our life. And, yes we Suzanne was pregnant, and actually our oldest one was born on December 19, and I was still in California then, and was able to come home in

February. Because I was-- we finished our mission there and we're ready for our next assignment. And so we trained again in California at Port Hueneme, which is, I don't know whether you realize, it's between, it's in the Ventura area. And they had all kinds of Naval schools there so we re-trained for overseas service. And then, before we left for overseas, we were given an pre-embarkation leave. And that's when I came home in February, and I saw my son. And then when we came back, very soon after I came back. I think in May we shipped out, that would be May '45. And we went we went to Okinawa.

And the war was just about ending around that time.

In fall, yes.

So you went to Okinawa?

Yeah.

And how long were you there?

Well, I was there until January. When we arrived there, I remember that 4th of July, we were sent over on one of Liberty ships, which was a converted freighter, that was really converted to transport. So we went over on the Liberty ship and it wasn't really very seaworthy. And we broke down three times on the way over. So it took us 60 some days to get from Port Hueneme in California to Okinawa. And the Japs had just blown up an ammunition dump. And so it looked like fireworks. So that's why I remember it was the Fourth of-- that the connection I made. And so it was 4th of July when we landed there. . And I know that, New Year's Eve I was still in Okinawa. But my discharge was from Naval service was the 31st of January. So sometime, during the month of January, we were shipped back to the States, landed in Seattle, then train ride to the East. Lido Beach, New York, which was somewhere on Long Island, was a discharge center. And from there we were discharged. So all this happened within about four weeks.

And by now your son is about a year old.

By now, our son was a year old. Of course, all this helped, not only was very enjoyable, and we were very proud of the family. But you see, your discharge, went by points. So if you were married, you had more points, than a single person. If you had a child, you had more points than a childless person. If you had overseas service, you had more points than people who didn't went overseas. So that's why I was discharged earlier than, let's say, this my friend George, whom I mentioned before, who was not married at the time. So, and then once your point-- you know, you were eligible for discharge, you were still overseas. But then you had to get a ride home-- and we're hitchhiking, right? And of course you could wait in a camp until a transport went home, but you could also hitchhike. So there was an aircraft carrier there. And I always swore I would never forget the name but, now it doesn't come to my mind. And I actually-- you see now, these big ships. Of course, part of their complement would have been discharged, so they didn't have a full crew. So you could sign up to belong to a ship's company on the vessel, so that you could come home. So it's really like hitchhiking. So I got myself a job on the aircraft carrier. And they were tied up there in the Harbor, and were on their way back to Seattle, so I said take me along. So that's the way I came home. Ticonderoga.

OK. So it must have been quite startling to your son, to suddenly see you as a member of the family.

Well it was very-- well it was startling to both of us. I guess, just to renew our acquaintance. No, I guess he was kind of reluctant. And of course, my brother-in-law, Sue's brother, preceded me by, I don't know, a few weeks anyway. And so he was home, and he was really much-- I mean, our son was a much better relationship with him, than with this sailor, who was just coming home. But it didn't take this very long to establish a relationship of our own, and Sue had rented a little apartment about a block away, from where her parents lived. And so we established our first home in Brooklyn.

And how was-- how were your parents doing, at that point?

My father has had passed his necessary examinations. He had set up medical practice. He had gotten courtesy a couple of hospitals. I think he was at Mount Sinai, a hospital in New York. And so they of course, as there was-- as his practice

increased, there was more money available, and my mother didn't have to do this painstaking piece work anymore, that kept them somewhat above water during the earlier period. So I guess they-- and they had a nice apartment. Modest but nicer by that time. Unfortunately, both my parents died very early. So we're not right there, I mean they lived many years after that, but they died relatively young.

How many years?

My mother was, I'll have to figure it out, which I don't want to do while the movie is running, about 65 and my father was 71. So that meant they both died within a year of each other. And really never lived to see-- to be able to use the fruits of their new life here. I mean they never were able to travel to Europe or something like that. But--

They never returned to Europe after that they came to the United States.

No. No. I mean my parents in law lived much longer, and were able to travel to Israel and to Europe, and so on. But my parents never got out of the United States.

So when you returned, did you immediately go to school? Or you got a job?

No, when I returned, I had to-- I mean we had to go back to work and, I, actually, wanted to take a few weeks just to get readjusted. In fact, the government had provided for that by granting what they called a readjustment allowance. So I went to apply for the readjustment allowance, and they said, well, if you're a tool and die maker, you can get a readjustment allowance because that is for people who can't find a job. But there's plenty of vacancies in your line of work. So you have to go to work. So I actually got a job right away. And then negotiated with the people who gave me the job to give me a week off before I had to start work. And of course, I went back to work as a tool and die maker, but my ambition was to eventually go to college. And I think I told you that while I lived in New Jersey, well I had sent in my records to the Board of Regents of the state of New York. And they said that my high school records were just fine, except for a deficiency in American history and English literature. Which stands to reason. So I studied American history and took an American history exam in New Jersey before I left for the armed services. So I still had to take care of my English deficiency. And I took a evening course at Bayridge Girls' High School they had an evening course for that. And so then I got my high school graduation certificate there. So I was very proud to have graduated from Bayridge Girls' High. And so I did that in the evenings. And then that permitted me to go to college. And I was admitted to City College evening session. Because when I came home from-- you see, Sue and I always took turns working and studying. So that-- you see, while I was in the service she was working, and then I came home from the service, she went to Columbia to get her master's there. And so I worked, and then I went to evening school. And then when she, for the first year of, college I did evening. And then she got her degree at Columbia, then she went back to work. And then I went to college, daytime, and then after I graduated, of course we moved to Delaware. And she quit working and we augmented our family, and

You had a second child.

Second and third child. We had two sons and who we were born in Delaware.

Now what are the names of all your sons.

Well Ronnie, we'll see some pictures later on. Ronnie is the oldest one and he was born in 1944 in December. And then of course was a long gap due to the armed services and the education. And then Sue had a miscarriage when we lived in Brooklyn. And then we moved to Delaware and Jonathan was born in 1951. I mean I graduated, 1950. And that-- we moved to Delaware then in '51 Jonathan was born. And in '53 Benjamin. And that it. We have three sons.

Why did you move to Delaware?

Well actually, we had no ambition to stay in New York City. We thought New York City was a terrible place to bring up kids. And, I mean, we only had one but we wanted more. And yet, we didn't want to be too far away, because both of our parents lived in New York City. So we actually looked for jobs either in the New England area or South of New

York City. And, so, I got this job. It was very hard to get jobs at the time, but I was very lucky. I also you see. I had not only now, my engineering degree, but I also had nine years of experience as a tool and die maker. But anyway, I was an experienced tool and die maker. So I had both the practical and the theoretical. And that helped me really, get the job. And I was the second one in my class to get a job. I got a job with International Latex Corporation, the people who made girdles and, at that time, they just, they were mostly in the girdle business. Now they do brassieres and baby goods and all that. And but they also were involved with military hardware. And I got into that area. And was active in the high altitude helmet design. And I designed one of the-- well I was participating in the design, and then designed helmets myself, for first space exploration.

And so this was as an engineer you were doing this.

Yeah. And so how long did you stay in Delaware 1950 to 1955. And Dover, Delaware was at that time, a one industry town. And I mean, as far as hardware is concerned. They had a chicken packing house but I wasn't into that, but-- so if you wanted to change jobs, you had to move away from there. And I wanted to change jobs. First of all, well there were some personnel changes there, which made it less pleasant, and secondly, I had to diversify. I mean this was my first job as an engineer. And if you don't get around a bit you become too much of a specialist in one area. And we also felt that maybe a closer vicinity to the city would give our children a better chance of education and culture. And Sue was not ready yet, but certainly was planning to go back to work, eventually. And so the vicinity of the city would give her better employment possibility. There were a number-- and we had outgrown our house. And so it meant that we had to move further. So all these factors came together. And I got a job with Rohm and Haas, the people who make Plexiglas, in Bristol, Pennsylvania. So we move to Pennsylvania. And lived there longer than we had lived anywhere else. We moved in 1955, and lived there until we moved to California in '82. So all of our jobs, and there were a few, were all in that suburban Philadelphia area.

And were you able to visit with your parents in New York.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. We-- well there was no regular schedule, but I mean, we did see each other quite frequently. Yes. At first, it was much more difficult, because the roads were and what they are today. And there was no bridge over the Delaware Bay, and you had to take a ferry over. And then move and drive up the Jersey coast. But things got better and better and we saw each other quite frequently. And yes, our parents came. And--

You mentioned, I remember, that your mother was quite involved with her grandchildren.

Yeah. Well, well, I mean we did-- she came, sometimes, and she sometimes actually came and stayed for a week, and so on. And then my father would come and pick her up and so. But she loved to play with them, and she was so artistic that she loved to do projects or sew for them. And made all kinds of-- and she was very creative. And it's always nice for little kids to have somebody who can occupy them in a constructive way. And yes, they had a pretty good relationship.

So I presume your parents had died by the time you left for California.

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Actually, all of our parents had died. I mean my mother-in-law reached the age of 87. But actually, we-- this was a conscious development. I mean we did not want to leave the East, and leave our parents there. So it was after my mother-in-law died and we, of course, all three of our sons had gone to California at one time or another. And our two brothers, I mean Sue has a brother and I have a brother and they lived in California. So that the entire nuclear family had kind of slowly gone out West. And so we felt that the family belongs together and we wanted to be with our grandchildren, and so on. So that they see something of their grandparents other than just talked over the phone. So we decided to move out. We took early retirement. We thought if we would move then, that would give us an opportunity to build up a meaningful life there, rather than just retire to California.

Did you talk to your children, as they were growing up, about your experiences as a German Jew during the '30s?

Oh, we always did. Yes. Because we never believed and hiding any of this. Now, of course, you do it in what they call age appropriate manner. But you're certainly always keep-- I mean, we felt that we should always keep our children informed. And of course, the same thing held true for our grandchildren. And well I you something. I mean, I certainly

feel that it's not only-- that we really don't have a choice in this matter. I think it's an obligation. And just like this particular project here, is proof of this type of thinking, that it's an obligation for us to teach, and teach our history. The history that we went through, Because it's part of our heritage, and part of our children's and grandchildren's heritage. And it's very peculiar. I woke up to this in a very peculiar way and. I obviously, we realized that we-- what our own history is, but I always was an impression that our children American born kids, and they grew up in America, pretty average kids. And then we went to a meeting of people who came out of Europe, like I did, and went to England on the children's transports. And they had a meeting in San Francisco. And they, some of them brought their offspring along. And because that was a program devoted to children of immigrants. And they all talked about the way that their parents history influenced their own existence. And when I came home, our kids weren't there, they couldn't make it. When I came home, I said to my son, I said I never realized do you feel that your life is different from that of your friends because of who you are what your parents. And so he said, you better believe it. You know, I mean, I never realized that really, our history, has become so much part of our children's existence.

Did he say of what the impact was?

No I don't think we really ever had a very profound discussion. It may be interesting. Because I think, certainly within the framework of this particular evening that we went to, the children talked a lot, I mean children-- they are all grown up people now-- but they talked a lot about that. But, of course, it affects different people differently. And just like our history. I mean some people lost all their religious beliefs. Some people became more religious. I mean the people don't react the same to similar experiences, because we are not machines. We are all individuals with our own psyche in our own way of accommodating events that we are exposed to.

Did you find that any of your children or grandchildren were particularly interested in your history. I mean to pursue it?

They are all very interested in it, and-- but we have never really-- every once in a while, the topics come up with-- open up a series of discussions again. You see, we had never had any desire to revisit the town we were born in. Because, first of all, we just don't feel like it. And secondly much of it was destroyed during the war, so certainly the house that Suzanne and my family lived in was destroyed. Not the house where she was born. But the house where we they moved to later on, where we lived. And of course, Jewish people are no longer there, and even the non-Jewish people that we knew, had to leave Breslau, because it was repatriated. There are Poles now there, because it became Polish after the war. So that the non-Jewish native population, the German population was repatriated into Eastern and Western Germany at that time. So that, the people aren't there, and the buildings aren't there. And so what is there. And we never had any really great ambition to go back there.

But then we realized, by going again to this meeting that I just referred to, were the offspring of the immigrants were talking, and they talked about what a tremendous experience that was, to be taken back to their parents birth place and so when we had the boys together, once, I said well, look, what do you feel about that. And the more they talked, the more they got interested in this project, which hasn't been which hasn't come to pass yet. But they really were interested in the idea of visiting Breslau. I mean, there certainly are some things standing. I can say that this is where I went for a walk with my father. And that's where your mother was born. And this is a University where your grandfather taught. And so on. Some of the landmarks that are there. But they're really quite turned on. And we actually thought that we'd make the trip this year. And then there were circumstances that prevented it. So we told them that you better hurry up, because you know, so far we're very grateful to be strong and healthy and we can do it. And it'll be so much more meaningful if we could do it together. So we may be able to work something out next year, but--

So they are interested in going back. I mean, I wouldn't want to-- once we go there we try to connect it with something that is a little bit more uplifting. We thought maybe connected with it a trip to Israel, to a thing like that. But so far, it's just a dream, but maybe we can make it come to, yet.

Would your sons wives and whatever children, would they go to?

Well, I really don't know. I mean I our-- well wives-- I really can't answer that, because they're all different. Our three daughter in laws are all completely different people, and some may, and some may not. As far as the grandchildren are concerned, of course, our oldest granddaughter is very independent. You know she's 23, 24. And I don't know how

much, Sue told you about the grandchildren, but Ronnie had two children from his first marriage. And he lost a son in an accident. And he would have been 25 now, and the daughter is 23. And she's a very, very independent lady.

What's her name?

Eloise. Eloise. That's our oldest granddaughter. And then, of course, with a second marriage he has little Aaron, who is going to be 3. So that's a spread of grandchildren that we have. And then we have Ben well that's our oldest son is Ronnie. So he has a daughter and son. And our second son is Jonathan, who lives here in Santa Rosa, who has two children, and Eric, who is starting college next fall. So I don't know whether he would come. And Lisa is two years younger, so she's going to be a junior in high school next year. And then our youngest son, Benjamin, he has one son, Samuel. And he's going to be 11.

So you have quite a spread there.

Yeah, but the spread is really all Ronnie's doing, because--

Did you and Suzanne ever return to Europe, and Germany, in particular. Well we have been in Germany, yes but we have not been to that area where we lived. We have been to Germany because, first of all, I worked for a multinational firm for a while, so I had business in Germany. And Sue, or I had an aunt in Berlin for a while, until she died. She's a non-Jewish lady who was the widow of my father's brother, who survived the war in Berlin. And so we took up connection with her after the war and went to see her a couple of times. And Sue had a cousin in Frankfurt, or rather her father's cousin. And so we went to visit there, and then she has some friends, who went to school with her, who were loyal to her, and non-Jewish friends, and we visited with them. Where-- we didn't ever go vacationing in Germany, really. A then of course, we went to Germany for Suzanne's beatification, which she probably talked about, so there were occasions when--

What was your impression, and what were your feelings on returning to Germany the first time?

I don't really recall, now, the first time. I mean generally-- but let's say the non-business related trips are different, because you go to visit people. And when you visit people you go there because you want to visit people. And that's usually a nice experience. You definitely feel like a foreigner. The only advantage is that you have to understand the language. I mean, if I go to Italy or to France, I'm just-- I mean, I feel the same way, I'm just a tourist. I mean I certainly do not feel any affinity. The only thing is, I say, it's nice, if you know the language. And so I mean I feel the same way if I go to Switzerland. I'm also a tourist, and the language, I have no feeling. As far as the people are concerned, you're always very suspicious of the older people because that from the history, that if everybody would have been this Lily white and pure as they now pretend, there wouldn't have been any Nazis. So and the younger generation, you would treat with the benefit of the doubt. But you treat everybody with the benefit of the doubt. But the younger generation, you have no problem with. And actually, you have no problem even discussing your own history, and the past, and all that. And they're very interested, and they want to know. I mean, certainly, also younger colleagues I've worked with professionally, because they just don't know. Because they don't certainly in the family, and so on. They don't hear the stories that they hear from us.

I mean, we had a young medical student visit us here, who was the son of the friends of Sue. Well the son of a friend of Sue who afterwards married a doctor in Germany. And then and so the son studied medicine, he came over here. While he was here, he visited with us. And when we spent the day with us. And we got to talking about it. And he said he'd never heard anything like that. And when he went home he confronted his parents. And it made a terrible, terrible scene there, because they said it was none of his business to know about these things, and he should just worry about his own affairs. And not about his parents past. And so that-- well

So is this--

So this is just one example, you know--

So do you feel that, in general, some of the older people are trying to suppress those stories.

Oh, yes. Well I tell you something. When I was going there on business, of course, everybody realizes that I also am an American. I speak German fluently. And so how come. And then you know. Well I established, very early in the conversation, my historical background. So that we really know where we're coming from. And we know the keep out areas. Because when you're there as a private person, you can talk about things, even if they become controversial. But if you're there in a business related situation, you're representing your company. So you have to be very correct. And you have to get your work done. And so the best thing is to just consider certain areas of conversation, even after hours, taboo. Which you would do, which you would not consider taboo if you had a private relationship with these people.

Did you feel any anxiety, as a Jewish person, coming back to Germany?

No I didn't feel any anxiety. I just-- for my personal safety? No, none at all. I just felt uncomfortable-- you now, one gets-- it it's really a prejudice, practically. You know, you see people in a beer house, sitting very happily around the table and singing their old drinking songs and so on. And which is probably perfectly natural and innocent and wonderful. But in your mind, you make associations. So this is a prejudice, that you-- but you're not making anybody else suffer under your prejudice, you suffer because of your preconceived notions and your associations. So that's why you feel uncomfortable. I mean we spend a few days in a guest house there after the beatification, and the owner, his first name was Adolf. So you know everybody knows. Sue said well, you know he was a younger fellow, so probably his parents must have been very taken with the regime and named them after the fuhrer, but that's certainly not his fault, you know. What he was named. But you always have these associations. So you you've got to get away from it because you suffered. You don't--

Did you have any question or anxiety about being a Jew and meeting anti-Semitism.

I have never experienced anti-Semitism in, I mean--

In Germany.

In Germany, on our trips. I've never seen any signs of it. I have, I think the only experience that I recall, that really gave me the shivers, and it wasn't an anti-Semitic experience, per se, but when we were in Cologne, for the beatification, the following Shabbat we went to services in Cologne. And when we went to synagogue there, there were security guards and two or three doors to go through and you had to show your identification and all that. That gave me the shivers, you know. It's not that there was anything anti-Semitic, but the fact that the synagogue was locked, and you have to prove that you-- and so something must have prompted them to take these security measures. But I think the same thing may be true in New York City. I haven't been for a while. Because, look, we've got crazy people everywhere. But I don't know whether it's more and-- I mean, I really don't know. I mean I certainly, you asked me for my experiences. And I don't have any recollection of anything like that.

Did you meet any instances of neo-Nazi packs.

No. What's your general thinking about the neo-Nazi movement, particularly in Germany.

Well, I tell you something, it's again that we're suffering now, under our association. I would think that it is probably no worse than it is right in our own country. But we're associating it with our past in Germany. And therefore it seems so much more ominous. Now we know, for example, that it's a crime to print anti-Semitic literature . In Germany you know that all the literature is imported from America. I mean this is where it's printed. I mean, we got-- I think that it's probably just as bad. I mean, long as there's Jews there's anti-Semitism and intense hatred of minorities. And we happen to be one of them. And whether it's foreigners or the Turks and I mean, when I visited Germany, and they were talking about what they call the fremdarbeiter, which means the workers who came from, like immigrant labor, and the Turks taking our jobs. The same thing. I mean, sure, you get very perturbed about it. But we have it here too.

And people may-- it's not as popular. People don't-- are reluctant to speak as freely, as they would there, probably. But I mean, if you get to the bottom of it, I think you have social anti-Semitism here. You have and you certainly it's not only anti-Semitism. I think anti-Semitism is just one of the prejudices. And I mean, we had the discrimination against the

colored people in America, certainly, I mean, I'm not talking about now. But in the past. Was probably what suppressed anti-Semitism, because people have a scapegoat, you see. And they have somebody to blame for social ills, and so on. And so here was the Negroes there was a-- No. No. I mean the Blacks. Right. I'm going back to that time. But I really, I think objectively speaking, it's probably no worse in Germany. Now, there is, of course, the revisionist and the right wing element, which may dream of the glorious days of Third Reich, you know. And still some of that into the younger generation. Or maybe the younger generation, you know dreams of these glorious days which weren't, after all, so glorious. But so there is another component in Germany.

But I think I'm not really qualified. I mean, you asked me for my impression, that what I gave you. But I'm not qualified to really assess it objectively.

Do you think the Holocaust could happen again, in Germany or elsewhere? Well, I think that if you read the papers and about the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Or they read about the tribal wars in Africa. And I mean this-- I think what we don't have, and I think, is a government sponsored extermination by law. It's not guerrilla fighting, of groups against groups. It was a government sponsored extermination by law. That, I would hope, cannot happen again. However, if we look at the reluctance of the United Nations, today, to promote armed intervention to overcome social-- or no, not social-- military aggression of people against people, I would say that if such a thing were threatening, like a holocaust, what mechanism, do we as a world, as a society of nations, United Nations, or whatever that what. We don't have any mechanism in place actually to combat it. And if there is no mechanism to combat it, then people would a demagogue, would not have to be really afraid of it. But again, I really, I am giving you my opinions. But I'm really not, I do not feel qualified, these are just my own thoughts. Which was a layman's approach to big problems.

Did you ever consider living in Israel?

Yes. I may have. Not, let's say-- I think, not very concretely. I mean, I certainly am very fond of Israel. I don't know. I mean, certainly, I'm a very great family man. I would certainly not feel like I would want I mean-- want to live in Israel, when my whole family that left to live in America. And this is probably a much stronger feeling. But I feel very fond of Israel. I personally am a very, very poor linguist. And although, I think I have learned the English language fairly well, especially when I write it, because I don't have an accent when I write. Only when I talk. But I find Hebrew an insurmountable problem. I mean I am fortunately able to keep myself going in prayer setting, but as far as colloquial language is concerned, conversational language is concerned, I always make an attempt and it's always with disastrous consequences. So I think that more than-- I mean, aside from the family situation, I would find that very, very difficult. And it's difficult to be a foreigner in any country. But you're only half a foreigner if you mastered the language. I mean, you can live in America, you always feel somewhat of an at least you never forget that you're really somewhat of an immigrant. But you mastered the language, no problem. There it just would be just the opposite. You probably feel pretty much at home. That portion would be pretty good. But you don't know the language, so you'd feel pretty much out of it for other reasons.

So you never entertained living there in the earlier days, when your children were younger.

No. We had our parents. Were had our-- I don't think we would have. I mean we were always kindly disposed towards Israel, I know-- look I had an uncle there who always worked on me. He said, look you wouldn't have any of the problems that you have here, and there's no football games and stuff. But if you have problems with your kids who want to go to a football game when you want to have a Friday night dinner and-- But I don't, I don't think that, this was-- and of course, Sue, whose profession is so much connected with the literary scene too, I mean, I can't speak for her, but I think she would have probably found it very difficult, because you don't only have to learn the language. You have to master the whole literature and but I don't want to speak for her.

Well, it sounds like you have lived and raised your children in the Jewish tradition

Yes. Well, I mean you do what you can. And again, your children are individuals. By now they're mature, I must admit, middle age. Middle aged kids? And now they have families of their own. So, yes, we have come a long way. I mean we have not-- I mean our own religious observance has changed over the years. We have become more observant through the years. But our children were all brought up with-- they all went to Hebrew school and they all got-- well not only

sent to Hebrew school and otherwise sterile environment, we always observe the holidays. And Shabbat, and not necessarily the way we do now, but it was always a very important attribute of our family life.

I presume your sons were all bar mitzvahed.

Bar mitzvah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. They were. And so I think they all took to it in a different way. The oldest one is now. What was really kind of got away from his religious commitment-- or if he ever had one. I mean he got away from religious observance. But now he is quite involved, and they have a kosher home, and they belong to a synagogue, and it's like-- with his second wife and, they follow the observances pretty closely. And our second son, Jonathan here in Santa Rosa, he goes to attend Shabbat morning services, and they have a-- they don't have a kosher home, but it's a they're committed and very involved with the synagogue, so it certainly plays a big part in their lives. Our youngest son is married to a non-Jewish woman and they have absolutely no religion, any sort of religion does not play any part in their existence. So that's where it's at.

What do you think, was it that changed your religious observance. You said that it changed over the years. Did you become more observant?

Yeah, more.

More. To what do you attribute that?

Well first of all there are changes in your thinking that you that you cannot attribute to anything, because we just aren't what we were born, fortunately. We were mature in a certain way and we can't always control the direction in which we change. However, I also feel very strongly that being part of the remnant puts the obligation on us to make every day count. In other words, if we would abandon our tradition, then we would give Hitler his posthumous victory, in other words. I feel that having-- been granted the privilege of surviving the Holocaust, put that obligation on us, to carry on the tradition, to the fullest extent possible. To propagate and to preserve it, and to teach it and practice it. You can't teach without practicing. That is hypocrisy. So you've got to practice in order to teach. And if we don't do that, then the Holocaust will have destroyed. So the obligation falls on fewer of us, because so much of it was destroyed. So that those of us who have the privilege of being able to carry it on, should carry it on. I think it's an important part. I think that if we belong to a tradition which has certain practices and certain obligations, we should fulfill the obligations, and follow the practices. Because it's not a pick and choose thing. I mean you either commit yourself, and then you commit yourself. But if you join a club you read the bylaws if you don't like the bylaws get out. But if you're part of it. Then, I think you're should follow the rules of the game.

Do you feel that you've had any changes, or revolution, in a belief or thinking about a God, over time?

That comes in waves. I mean there's certain-- I didn't know we would get philosophical here. But I think that it is, yeah, you go through certain periods, I think, definitely. I really think that the creation it's not that there's a moving power in the universe. There's a creative power in the universe. I think that biologically we can create bodies. And that's why we have kids. But that the soul is the still, I mean there's still the divine part and each one of us. And it just can't just happen. I think that is there's a law of indestructibility of matter. We know what happens to our bodies. You know, they go underground to decompose. So we can reason that. But we don't know. But I think the soul must also be indestructible. So something happens to it. So we do that. There are great mysteries. And I think God is one of the great mysteries. But maybe he is the boss of the great mysteries. He or she or whatever. I mean I'm not hung up on gender neutrality, because I'm using a masculine term does not give it a masculine connotation. Because I do not make an image of it. But so you excuse me if I say--

Yes.

But, so in that way, I feel that there is some power that creates. I don't know whether I feel that way about the control.

The personal element.

Yes. Well as I say, you go through certain phases. And then certain aspects. I mean I have had some wonderful experiences. And some very miraculous experiences in my life. And I can't go through life without having some body to thank for all the blessings that have come my way. And I think that's why I think I need that sort of thing. I need to give my thanks to somebody. However, the implication is, well does it mean that he is at fault if somebody is not as blessed as you are. Well I think that' their problem. But if I see my-- when you have happy occasions and you have good relationships and then you feel blessed. And then certainly, you know that you haven't done anything to create this relationship. So this is-- I mean you, didn't do anything to bring it about. And if you did it then, maybe it was a divine inspiration that you don't even know of. It is another mystery. So I certainly I believe that there's a lot of mystery and that there's a lot of-- which isn't even that important to-- you don't have to analyze. You don't have to analyze. I mean as an engineer, you shouldn't take that point of view. But I feel, that I love to have certain areas that I'm just accepting and take for granted. And feel that it isn't really my obligation to categorize everything. To explain everything. To codify everything. Let there be some-- I mean, if you want to go for a walk and you feel happy. I don't have to say why do I feel happy. Now let's analyze it. Accept it. I mean just say and be thankful that you can be so happy, and the birds singing, the sun is shining, and you feel healthy and good about yourself. But you don't want to always-- that's why I hate you know, there's a psychologist, and I hope you're not one. But I mean you have to always-- Yeah, but I mean, if I'm ill, I might want to go to somebody. But you don't have to analyze every one of your actions. And you know, why do you feel this way. Why do you feel that. I could accept it and be glad.

Oh. Yeah.

Do you think, or do you have any message you would like to leave at the end of discussing these things?

Well you see you are asking all these difficult questions that one ought to prepare for.

You don't have to.

No to come-- I mean, I tell you something. As I say, I think I'm very happy and I think that probably, some of the things we have done are the right things. And I think it's important but you there's a million messages. You know the messages and human relationships. And messages and you know, personal philosophy or whatever it is. But I think that as far as human relationships is concerned. Which I think we have been very, very fortunate and blessed with. I think the message is worry about somebody else and not yourself. And see what you can do. Because if you do for others and others will do for you. So the bottom line is still very positive for you. But if you concentrate on yourself. And I lived with it. I think you get a great deal out of orienting your outlook towards those around you, and let them worry about you. I other words, don't put yourself in the center of your existence. But let somebody else put you in the center of their existence. I think that makes for a wonderful relationship.

Yes.

As far as our heritage is concerned, as I told you before, I really feel that we, who have come out of Europe, may consider ourselves the remnant, but if we look to the Jewish community as a whole. It is that we have and in other words, we are reduced to a fraction of who we were. So I feel that everyone should see himself or herself as part of that and participate as you do in this way. Everybody has his own level of participating and carrying on the tradition. But some people do it and in the synagogue and some people do it with projects. Or they do both or whatever. But I think it's important because. Not only because of an idealism. But because the people, who may say we want to have nothing to do with it. They're still the result of that tradition. So they are depriving their children and their society of what made them what they are. So in other words, it is they're really not living up to their responsibility. Because if somebody's down the line would not have done what they did they. Wouldn't be who they are. They are the result of their history. It is irresponsible for anyone to say, with me, it stops. I mean you cannot be the first one to break the chain. And that's the way I see it. So I think it's an obligation for us to carry on our tradition. And help each other and try to make the world a little bit more, a little better, a little better than we found it. Even if everybody did that I think, a little bit of a little grain of sand makes the whole desert. But we don't want to end up with a desert. But let's say a little-- let's use a different comparison. Well you could think of one. Well a little star, every little star makes a whole firmament. Maybe that's much better than the grain of sand.

Is there anything else that you might think of, that you'd like to add.

No. I think you're doing a wonderful job. I don't know whether anybody's ever going to look at this, here. Or read it. But that's not our problem. Our problem is to establish it. People don't take advantage of it, that's fine. I think that it's not only that, we are leaving something of ourselves behind when we are no longer here. I think also while we did it. It was a little bit of catharsis. Yeah. You come to terms with your own thinking. You certainly asked some very incisive questions. And it was good to talk and if somebody can learn something from our experience. Or our outlook which is as a result of our experiences, and maybe it's another way in which we were able to contribute something to our world.

Well I want to say thank you to you, for your compliment. And for doing this interview, for your generosity. And for the excellence of the interview.

Well I don't know. I did the best I could. And hope that-- and as I said, I don't beat around the bush. And I just say it the way it is. And people don't like it. I can't help it. And but I won't say anything that I don't mean.

Well I thank you for that. Your honesty.

Yeah.

And articulateness.

Yeah. Well thank you for inviting me. It really was a pleasure. And I think, as I said, the pleasure and the satisfaction that we may have added just a little sliver to the totality of your effort here.

Yes. Thank you again.

Thank you.