

But maybe, you know, I've done [? 180 ?] interviews. Maybe two.

Really?

Yeah.

Hold on just a second. All right, it's recording.

Today is September 29th, 1999. We are interviewing Max Weingarten--

Leo Weingarten

Leo Weingarten. We are at his home at 39 Buckingham Drive in Moraga, California. My name is Peter Ryan, interviewer, and Matt Binder is doing the videotaping. Could we begin by my asking you where and when you were born?

I was born in Vienna, November the 13th, 1924.

And how many people were in the family?

Well, we are four children and the parents.

What were with the parents named?

My mother was Clara Weingarten and my father was Heinrich Weingarten.

And the siblings?

Was Max Weingarten, Jack Weingarten, Betty Weingarten, and my name is Leo Weingarten.

And where were you in the four?

I was the youngest.

The youngest. Now, I know when I interviewed your brother he was born in Poland.

Yeah.

When did they come to Vienna?

I don't know exactly. It was after the First World War somewhere, but I don't know exactly what year it was.

OK. What kind of living arrangements did you have when you were born?

Meaning what?

Did you live in an apartment?

Yeah, in an apartment.

And do you remember it?

Yeah. I was even there to visit it.

Pardon me?

When I was in Vienna, I was looking up where we were.

OK, could you describe it?

Yeah, it was not very much. It was bedroom. It was a kitchen. It was another room.

What were the sleeping arrangements?

Sleeping arrangements was very poor. I mean, still my parents were still struggling when they came, but we were already in a position to change our whole lifestyle, to change the apartment. And in that moment was when Hitler came and we had to give it up.

OK. Did all the children sleep in one room?

No, no, no. We were divided.

Divided.

Divided.

Who did you sleep with?

I slept with my sister in one room. And Max was living-- my grandmother was in the same house so he slept with my grandmother. Something like this.

This was your mother's mother or your father's?

My mother's mother.

Your mother's.

Yeah.

What did your father do?

He had a store.

What kind?

Textile. Piece goods.

Mm-hmm, and did he make-- did he just sell them, or did he make?

Sell, sell.

Just sell.

A store, yeah. A retail store.

Fabric.

Fabrics, yeah.

[? Suit? ?]

No, no, no. No, mostly fabrics and small stuff for children.

Your mother stayed home?

No, the opposite. My mother was really the driving force of the business. My father was more-- you know, he was very religious. He was more in the temple. He was a good bookkeeper. He was the bookkeeper. Yeah.

So it was your mother --

The driving force of the whole family was my mother.

Uh-huh. Was it a very religious family?

Yeah. I mean-- yeah. But not all. My brother was not so orthodox.

Which brother?

Max, but the family was religious.

Mm-hmm. Were you?

Yeah. Oh yeah. I mean, the store is closed on Saturday even in Vienna and we had to go every day to the temple.

Every day?

Yeah, in the morning. My father took me to the temple. that was, our temple was a little shul you know and --

Did Betty go?

No, no. Women didn't go that time so much.

OK. Do you remember your early schooling?

Yeah.

When did you start? Five? Age five?

No, you start with age six in Austria. But they started a little bit earlier because I would become six in November and school started in September. So I had to make a test at City Hall.

City Hall.

At City Hall they made a test, yeah. They gave you some puzzles. They gave you a little ball. They say, this is iron, this is metal. Things like that. So I guess I passed it because I went to school.

You passed, huh?

I guess, because I came to school, yeah.

[LAUGHS] And what kind of school was it? Public school?

The public school, yeah.

Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood?

Not specially.

Not particularly?

No, no. In a mixed neighborhood.

Mixed neighborhood.

Yeah.

What district?

In Vienna?

Yeah.

I don't know how call it. Zwanzig Bezirk in German. It means it an area-- Vienna had 21 parts called areas. So we lived in the 20th area.

Was it downtown?

There wasn't a special downtown. There was-- everywhere was downtown. It's not like in America that they have residence and then downtown. Whole Vienna was downtown.

OK. Did you live in the heart of the city or near the outskirts?

Outskirt-- well, not in the heart.

OK. Now, when you went to school, where there both Jewish children and non-Jewish children?

Yeah, in the first four years they were non-Jews and Jews. But religious Jews like we were didn't have to write on Shabbos, on Saturday. We only were listening.

There wasn't school on Saturday?

There was school on Saturday.

There was.

There was school on Saturday.

Huh.

There were six days. Only Sunday was off.

I see.

But the Jewish children, whoever didn't want to, didn't have to write.

You could just listen.

Yeah.

Did you have both Jewish and non-Jewish friends?

Yes, as children. I mean how it was-- children who lived in the neighborhood.

Uh-huh. And you would play with both Jews and non-Jews?

Yes, as much time as I had to play because I had to go in the cheder in the afternoon. You know what the cheder means?

No.

To learn Jewish. To learn Torah.

Uh-huh. You had to do that every afternoon?

Yeah.

So how much time did that leave you?

Not too much. I mean, and then I helped in the store. I had to watch the merchandise that they shouldn't steal. So it was entirely different so on -- in Vienna.

Was it a big store?

Not very big. It was pretty good. Yeah.

And your father did OK in the store?

Yeah.

How many people worked in the store?

My father, my mother, and one employee. And the children helped whenever they could.

They were the watchdogs, huh?

Yeah, mostly.

And carry things from one place to another, that kind of thing?

No, more watch. No, you didn't have to carry a lot. It was everything in shelves and you had to measure the piece goods and so on.

So you went to that first school for how long?

For the first four years. The first four years. This is so -- And then you could go to-- I don't know how you call it here, but then you could go to another four years or you could go to gymnasium for eight years. So I made a test to go to the gymnasium and I was accepted. But then they separated-- also before Hitler they separated Jews and Protestants in one class and Catholics in the other class. So my father didn't like that. So he took me out and he put me to a Jewish school.

Why didn't he like that?

Because he felt already the separation. And he didn't like it. So he preferred me to go to a Jewish school.

What year would that have been?

What year was it?

1934 I think. huh?

Something like that.

Because you were born in '24.

I think, 34, Yeah. Maybe a year later. Because I still went to the gymnasium until they separated it, one year.

And so you went to a Jewish school then?

Yeah. This was-- till what year was this then? It was '38, yeah. Yeah.

Was that a big school? Small school? What?

It was a big school, yeah.

And only Jewish children?

Only Jewish children. Yeah.

No one else could go?

No, there were no other children.

OK. How big would the classes be?

How many people in the class?

Yeah.

You ask me a difficult question. to remember. Could be 25, 30 people.

Do you remember when Dollfuss got assassinated?

I remember Dollfuss. I remember very well how he looked even. Dollfuss. And after Dollfuss came Schuschnigg. Bundeskanzler Schuschnigg. And he was the last one. Then Hitler came.

Was there any anti-Semitism that you knew of as you were growing up before Hitler?

I really didn't feel it too much.

You didn't feel it?

No, I didn't feel it too much.

People wouldn't taunt you for being Jewish or that kind of thing?

Not really. I didn't feel it, no.

OK. Did you feel comfortable in Austria? Did it feel like home?

Yeah, I didn't know differently. I grew up-- I was born and grew up there so I didn't see anything else. So for me it was natural [? always. ?]

Who were your close to in the family? Which siblings?

With my sister.

With your sister. Because you were closest in age?

My sister and-- well, she was the second after me, yeah. She was 2 and 1/2 years older than I am. And between me and Jack was six years, and between me and Max was 12 years difference. So Max had already different prospects. He was going to university. He became a lawyer. He worked for a movie company. So he was already more--

On his own.

Yeah.

Yeah. Did Betty go to the schools that you went to? Did she go to a Jewish school too?

Later she also-- it was called the Krugerheim. This was also a Jewish school, but this was later. This was already when Hitler was there. I don't remember to what school she went really.

OK.

And only when Hitler came she was already in the Jewish school. This was across the street of my school. This was for Jewish girls.

Mm-hmm. Would you have your big meal at noon time?

Yeah.

And would your father come from the store?

No, we had a maid, and father and mother were in the store. But we didn't live far from the store, in the same street, only a few houses away. But we had a maid, which, when we came home, she was there. And we had the maid. the school --.

The children would eat together at noon with the maid? Or would you--

Max for sure not. And Jack was already-- in 1935 he was already in Israel-- in Palestine at that time.

So really it was you and Betty?

Me and Betty mostly.

And the maid.

Yeah.

And your mother and father would be at the store.

Yeah, they came up whenever they had time. They ate or what. But not specially that we all were sitting together at the table.

They didn't [INAUDIBLE].

This never happened unless Shabbos. On the Shabbos, Saturday.

So it had to be like a special day?

Yeah. On Saturday because the store was closed. We had Friday night services and light candles and sit together as I come from a very religious home.

Was your father political at all?

No.

Your mother?

No.

Did you have any knowledge of what was happening in Austria during that time? The political situation?

Well, I had-- I mean, I saw because you saw a different kind of parties in uniforms. So I saw what was going on. I saw those steel helmet soldiers from the Dollfuss party because there was also one time shooting going on between the party of Dollfuss and the Social Democrat and so on. I remember this, yeah.

Did you see that?

I heard it.

You heard?

Yeah, the shooting.

Did you know what was happening?

Yeah.

Uh-huh. Was there fear about that?

No.

No?

Was nothing with Jews or against the Jews.

Uh-huh, it was purely political parties.

Yeah.

Where were you when Hitler came in that day?

It was in the evening Friday night. I just was on the way home from the temple on the main street when the first German soldiers came in, which I saw. That was Friday night.

How did that feel?

Very bad. Very bad. Because all the friends and all the people which we knew and were friends with us, right away they switched and became Nazis. At least most of them.

You're talking about the people that were socially in contact?

Socially. I was a child with-- children which I played and so on.

Uh-huh. So the people that you played with suddenly didn't want to play with you?

No, we didn't have any contact anymore.

So you were left on your own just to be friends with Jews?

We joined later a Jewish organization, Hapoel Mizrahi. You see, every child wanted to go-- to leave the country to go to Palestine. To go to Palestine you had to be-- had to join one of the organizations-- Jewish organizations because they organized to get you out if you heard from the Youth Aliyah So to become--

What kind of training did they give you there?

Well, like I told you before, we were of Hachsharah You learn to work on a farm.

Uh-huh. So you got agricultural training?

Yeah, twice. Twice I was in things like that.

Tell me why--

But it depends. Other children could learn to be a tailor or could learn any other trade.

Yeah, there were a number of things you could do, yeah.

Yeah.

Why did people want to go to Palestine? Why did you want to go?

First of all, they wanted to go anywhere just to get out of Hitler. I mean, you were more than a prisoner. They could do with you anything they wanted. They could have killed you on the street. Nobody would say a word. But Palestine you wanted to go to-- we were in the Jewish organizations and we learned about Palestine, we learned about the Jewish state and so on, and our desire was to go there.

Weren't these organizations in existence before Hitler came?

They were.

They were.

They were. But I didn't join. I was very young. My brother Jack was in the organization. He was in the Revisionists like Begin. You know Begin?

Begin?

Yeah, his party. So he was-- he joined them. He was there before.

So really people wanted to go even before Hitler. Is that true?

Not too many.

Not too many?

No. Not too many, no.

It really came after Hitler came?

Yeah.

Then everyone did.

The opposite. I mean, we had visitors from Germany, which were already under Hitler. And we told them, why don't you leave? They say, no, we go back to Germany. We have a good life. And Jews which could have left and they had possibility still in the '30s, '33, '34. they still could--

Get out.

--get out. The real, real bad thing started in the Kristallnacht, November 1938. Then it started very bad against the Jews.

Now, after Hitler came, did things change?

A lot. A lot.

Can you describe?

Yeah. I mean, first of all, we were always afraid. Secondly--

Afraid for your life?

Yeah. I mean, sure. And they took away our store.

Right away?

We still had the store. They took-- well, I tell you what, my mother was the driving part and she was the strong one. My father was a weak person. And when Hitler came-- and we knew because all our surrounding stores were already-- came already the Gestapo and so on, we knew that they would come one day to us too. So we sent my father and my sister to a different area, in a better area than we lived.

Still in Vienna?

Still in Vienna, yeah. This was in 1938. This was in March, April, May 1938. And really I was with my mother alone in the apartment.

Where did your father go? To friends?

To our relatives which lived in a different area, in a better area. So really one day they came and they took my mother and me and they took us to the police headquarter and put us in jail.

How old were you then?

13.

13?

Yeah. Every businessman they took. Everyone who had a business they took and then put them in jail.

Now, when they took you to jail, did you stay with your mother, or were you separated?

No, I was in the same room where the woman were.

Uh-huh. They let you stay there?

Yeah. I was there for about eight days.

How did that feel?

Bad. But I tell you, I was young. I was a child, you know? I didn't think so-- it felt bad. But--

Were you afraid?

It wasn't tragic. I was not very afraid, no, no, no. Even if I saw how they hit the people. There was-- on the wooden bench where we lived, it was full of blood from people they hit and so on. But then my mother said to the inspector or whoever was there, listen, maybe I'm a criminal, I'm a Jew, but please can you let my child out? And really after a day they let me out.

Just you?

Just me, yeah.

Where did you go?

I went to our apartment and the employee from our store was with me. But I remember like today that my father didn't know that we were in jail. You see, he was a very weak person. So I went to a Jewish restaurant, which still was that time possible, and I bought some fish. It was Friday. And I brought it to my father and said, my mother sent you the fish so he shouldn't feel that, you know, something is going on. So he said, this fish doesn't taste like mother's fish.

And he didn't know that we were in jail. For the next six months he didn't know that we were in jail. Until one night came a rabbi. You know, I was learning Torah even the evening. There came a rabbi, a teacher in my house. And he was talking about it, and that way my father found out that we were in jail at all. Till then he didn't know.

Now, had he come back by then?

Yeah. After they let also my mother out and they took away the store.

How long did they keep her in?

Maybe two weeks or there. I don't remember exactly.

You got out in eight days.

I got early out, yeah, yeah. So I was the liaison between my father and this at the store.

When you took the fish to your father you didn't tell them that you were in jail?

No.

No?

I didn't even tell him that mother's in jail. I told him mother sent you the fish for Friday night. So he tasted the fish. He said, they are not mother's fish.

Did you not want to tell them that she was in jail?

No, no. Because I know that was not good. He was-- for his heart and so on. No, he didn't know. He didn't know till six months

Uh-huh. You were trying to protect him.

Yeah.

That was your role in the family?

It wasn't my role, but I had brain enough to do it because I knew my father.

Uh-huh. He had a lot of physical problems?

He was a weak person. A very weak person. And my sister too. So they were out there. But afterwards they came back in our apartment. But before this happened-- before this happened-- no, then my father was already in the house. Then one day-- it was in the evening, not the day-- there came some hooligans and knocked on our door.

Hooligan.

Yeah, on our door. And open the door, open the door, and my father didn't want to open. They said, yeah, open the door. I mean, they can break it in. Doesn't make sense. So they came in. They were screaming. They were this. But after a few minutes they left. This was not from the government. This was just people.

Did they take?

Did they--

Take things?

No, no. They just made a little bit-- you know.

A mess.

And they left. A day later-- one day later came the real thing, came from the Nazi party people because they came-- they want the jewelry They want, they take away things. They did whatever they wanted.

They took jewelry and what else?

They want to take. They want to take. But I remember my mother had the jewelry in a handkerchief like this, you know?

And where was the handkerchief?

In her pocket.

[LAUGHS]

In her pocket. But she did the thing-- she didn't think what she is doing. But when they ask where's the jewelry, she said, yesterday were already people here and they took it away, which was not true.

No, I understand.

Yeah, they took it away.

She was a quick-thinker, huh?

Yeah. As I told you, she was there. They took the jewelry away. But they still didn't believe and they looked around. But I remember like today, you know, we had the stove in the kitchen for heating in winter and there was a little box there with the coals for the stove. And when they looked-- when they look there, she threw into the coals the jewelry in the -- where the coals are. And they didn't find it. They didn't find it.

But anyhow, she said they took it away already yesterday. But the housekeeper-- the housekeeper of the house-- yeah, it was apart maybe thirty apartments-- told to the Nazis this is not true. The people didn't take anything. I was up there. They were only one minute in the apartment. They couldn't even have taken that.

So the two policemen took me out in the [? fore hall ?] and they hit me. They hit me. Tell me the truth. Where's the jewelry? I say, I don't know, I'm a child, in German. [SPEAKING GERMAN]. I don't know. Even if I knew exactly what was happening. And they hit me like this for half an hour. Hit me and ask me, hit me and ask me. And I didn't say anything.

They really wanted the jewelry, huh?

Yeah, and they wanted to find out really if it's the truth if they took it or not. And they wanted the jewelry. Sure did. They want everything.

That must've been frightening.

Yeah, but I don't know. Somehow-- today I wonder how I could all stand this. Will tell you more about this, what happened. And then Max, my brother, you know, when he was in the university, we had a typewriter in the house. But the typewriters were not like today. I don't know if you remember the old typewriters that are maybe 20 kilos so what we have -- together. So they came the two SR men and said to my father they want to take my father away. They took my father. And they said he should carry the typewriter.

Your father should carry?

He should carry the typewriter to the party-- where the party is. I mean the organization. So I say right away, I'm going to do it. My father's a weak person. He cannot carry. I will carry it for you. Even if I know I go in danger yeah, I go. So they went-- my father in the middle of the two SR or SS man-- I don't remember what there was-- and I in the back with guarded this yere. I let them go forward a little bit always.

When we came to the house where the organization was, on both sides of the entrance till the way on the sidewalk were women. And whoever went through, the Jews, they brought them up, they were spitting at them, hitting them, and so on.

Women?

Mostly women, yeah. And I was carrying the machine and went up. When he came up to the apartment, they put maybe-- were already 50, 60 Jews in that one room, which was maybe a room for 10, 12 people. And they were putting them-- also my father they throw in that room, pulling their beards and hitting them. And I saw this.

But I didn't look so Jewish that time. I had the typewriter in my hand so I went to a Nazi and said, listen, I brought you a typewriter from a Jew, and put it on the table, and ran away and ran out. And ran through out to the street. And all the children who knew me, the goyim, you know, the Gentiles, they ran after me, they took away the fountain pens.

I had the fountain pens that I got for bar mitzvah not long before and so on. And this way I came home again. And my father was in jail. I really don't remember how long he was. And then he came home. And we all always were waiting for--

What kind of shape was he in when he came home?

He was weak. He was weak. He was in the army kaserne. He was in jail there. So the army maybe wasn't that bad like the Nazis. They put them in a--

Was that the Austrian army or the German?

Austrian. There was no more difference, Austrian or German. But this was the Austrian. And then he came home and we were waiting to leave the country.

Now, what preparations were being made to leave the country?

The preparations were made that we always had 1,000 pound, British pound, in Palestine. And this was for-- when you had this over there, you could get a visa to emigrate.

If you could show them you had 1,000 pounds in a bank in Palestine--

In Palestine.

They would let you go.

You would get that certificate. It's called certificate. It's called [INAUDIBLE]. But somebody cheated us out of this certificate and gave it to some other people. And this was the lawyer of my uncle. He did this and we never got that certificate.

We always are waiting for the mail. We always went to the office, the Palestina [INAUDIBLE] was called. This was near the headquarters of the Gestapo. We always went there to look, and every day we were hoping, hoping, hoping, and it never came.

Leo, I wanted to ask you one thing. You had mentioned earlier that your father was a weak man and then you said Betty also. What did you mean by that about Betty?

You know, a girl. She was the apple of my parents to watch her. She was a young girl and so on. So we always wanted to protect her more. So we always sent her with her father.

Was she resourceful or not?

She was a very nice, sweet girl. She was with friends. She also was in the organization. She also was in the organization. We all we waiting. I went to Hachsharah twice, like I told you, from Hapoel Mizrachi And she was two years older so she was not Youth Aliyah. She was Halutz.

The older?

The Betty because was a year older. Youth Aliyah. was that time I think from 13 to 15, and she was already two years older so she didn't belong to that. So then they throw us out of our apartment.

How did that happen?

Well, because we are on the street, you see? Our windows were facing the street and no Jew were allowed to face the street because they always put flags or Nazi flags or so on. No Jews were allowed. So we had to go to a different apartment in a different street and even a smaller apartment.

Not the same apartment house?

No, no.

A different one?

Entirely different. Different area. They threwed us out.

Could you take your belongings?

Whatever was left, yeah. I mean, a little bit of furniture. A little-- I mean, the main thing was your life. You didn't look at things. It was also very hard for food.

I was going to say, they've taken the store away.

They took the store away. They closed it. They took it away.

They took your apartment away. How were you surviving?

Well, Jewish organizations helped. And then I had an uncle in Czechoslovakia. I don't know if Max told you. He was in the movie business. He was a very wealthy person. Helped us and so on.

He would send money?

He would send some money, yeah, through a courier send us some money. And the Jewish organizations, they had kitchens. We were standing in line and bringing food home and the little bit money they had.

Would you go to the lines?

Yeah.

And bring food home--

Yeah.

--for the family?

Yeah. And then--

What time are we talking about now?

1938.

Before Kristallnacht?

No, Kristallnacht we still were in the apartment. It was after that. Because I remember Kristallnacht, there the temple was across in the next street when they had the explosions, yeah. But then it started already being very bad. They took Jews to the street. They gave them a hand brush. They should lay down and clean the street.

You would see that?

Yeah, in our street. They took toothbrushes and we had the clean with toothbrushes. You had to clean a whole apartment or what. You know, just to--

Did they ever make you do that?

No, I had to do something else. You know, the garden of Rothschild. You know Rothschild?

Yeah.

The garden of Rothschild in Vienna. They took children to work in the gardens to pull out the weeds. But I tell you the truth, I never knew what a weed is, what a flower is, because I lived in the city, I went to cheder, I was learning from a religious home. I never knew something like that.

So what I did-- not purposely-- I pulled out some flowers and left some weeds. And the SS, they thought I did with purpose and they hit me half dead. Even if I really didn't know the difference between a flower and a weed.

How many times did you have to go to the garden?

Well, we were-- I don't remember how often we worked. Not me alone. There were all the children from the youth Aliyah went to work. I don't know. Once a week or twice a week. I don't remember exactly for how long it was.

Now, they have taken over that home, right? The Germans.

They took everything over. They took everything over. I mean, Jews were not allowed to go to the movie anymore. I sneaked in. I wanted to see a movie, you know. I was a child. I wanted to go to a movie. So I sneaked in when it was dark. And then it was still dark, I went out again so they shouldn't see me, you know? I was suspicious. They know I'm a Jew or what.

Did you have to wear anything?

No. But most of the Nazis, they had, you know, this sign. You know, a little-- how do you call the cross? The Nazi sign.

The swastika.

Swastika. Every party man had the swastika. Jews were not allowed to wear it. And then I remember even one day I went to the cheder on the street, and they came one policeman of the City Hall and he saw I don't have anything. So he kind of maybe thought I have it in the bag. And they see I didn't have it so he made with his boots in here and I sunk on the street. I fell.

He kicked you?

Yeah, with the boots.

Do you think he kicked you because you--

Because I was a Jew.

Because you were a Jew?

Yeah.

If you didn't have something, that meant you were a Jew?

Because most of them wear something like the swastika.

Yeah. So--

So before he hit me, he checked if I had it maybe in the bag or what. And if you had nothing, you're Jewish.

You saw the temple burning?

Exploding.

Exploding.

And burning, yeah. It was the next street.

That must have been a frightening--

It was the-- yeah, yeah. Then it started to be very bad.

Did you see anything else that night?

No, I didn't go out of the apartment.

People were afraid to go out?

Sure. So after that, they moved us to a different apartment.

Mm-hmm. Was it OK there? Were--

It wasn't OK anywhere but, I mean, you made the best you can in situations like that. But I went twice for Hachsharah twice four weeks and again four weeks. So I was with Jewish children. And it wasn't bad because this is out in the country where we were working on farms to learn.

You still did that?

Yeah, twice we did it.

Did you still go to school?

No.

No school.

No school.

Jews couldn't go to school?

No. No more school.

What age did you stop?

Well, after that I was 13 years. I don't remember even finished the fourth grade. Not the first or the second-- the eighth grade. I don't even remember if I finished. But then, you see, I always had my suitcases packed for me because we knew

one of these days we are going to Palestine with the Youth Aliyah when my turn comes. So it was always packed.

Who was going to go?

I.

Just you?

Just-- Youth Aliyah. The children from 13 to 15.

OK. And what about Betty?

Betty, no, no. Only Youth Aliyah. This I'll tell you later what happened with them.

Now, did you feel prepared to leave the family and go all by yourself?

Yeah, because everyone-- I want even to smuggle myself to the border, but my parents didn't let me.

To which border?

Because some friends left to Czechoslovakian border to go over. But my parents didn't let me go.

Why not?

Because they want to protect me. I'm a child. I shouldn't go.

But they felt that getting you to Palestine would be safe for you?

Every parent wanted their children out to save at least the life of the children.

Yeah. So you had your suitcase packed.

My suitcases were packed, yeah. And I had a girlfriend, which my parents were not allowed to know because I was very religious. But in the organization I had a girlfriend. She was 14 years old, but she was a friend of mine. And it was in the new apartment already. This was already in September the 2nd, 1939.

September the 2nd?

'39. '39, not '38. This was already a day when the world war broke out. And it was Friday night and my mother light candles and suddenly a knock on the door. Heavy, very heavy. So my father said, no, don't open. Don't open. So I said again the same thing. What do you mean don't open? If they don't want to come in, they'll break in. It's better open door and finish.

So we open the door. In front of the door was my girlfriend. I was shivering. My father was [? looking ?] and I was like, what happened? She said, how come you are not coming? We are going to Palestine. I said, what do you mean you're going to Palestine? We're leaving. Take quick the suitcases. We're leaving. So she came with a taxi.

The way I didn't know because in the same afternoon they sent couriers out to the people who are going to Palestine the evening. So at the time I lived, let's say, street number 16 apartment number 5. The courier went to number 5 door number 16, and they couldn't find me. So he went back and didn't inform me. I didn't know anything about it.

And she said, like I told you before, that Palestina, the Jewish organization was near the Gestapo headquarter. So she saw all the children came only I didn't come. So she went to that organizer and said, listen, Weingarten is not here yet. They said, I'm sorry, I cannot leave the whole transport and wait for Weingarten. He was informed. He didn't know that

I wasn't informed. He was informed. He's not here.

So she took a taxi. She risked her own life. She took a taxi, came to my house, picked me up. I didn't even say goodbye to my parents or to my sister. This is the last time I saw my sister. And I went to the taxi, we went to the place where the bus was, and we arrived there. The bus was already moving. So my two suitcases were standing on this and we jumped on the bus in this way and left.

No suitcase.

No suitcases, nothing.

And how was it you weren't able to say goodbye?

I was running away. She said, quick, quick. I mean--

No, no, no, when she came to the apartment.

It came everything so quick and she was pushing. I mean, it was a matter of minutes, you see? We came there, the bus was already moving. So we jumped on the bus. The whole -- and we jumped on the bus and the suitcases even didn't come up. And then we went to Denmark.

To Denmark?

Yeah. This was a Jewish--

On the bus?

The bus, yeah. This was-- well, a bus to [Place name] in Germany, and then a boat to Denmark. We didn't know exactly what happened, but a women organization, a Christian women organization organized it that Danish farmers or Danish people took children in. So I came-- I was supposed to come-- you see, they took it by name. They didn't know who is who. The name Weingarten stays in Copenhagen, this one goes to the island over there, and so on and so on. So I was supposed to stay in Copenhagen.

Were you able to stay with your girlfriend?

In a Jewish family. In a Jewish family. And my girlfriend was supposed to go to an island far away in a farm. So she was so crying and I wanted to be with her to and so on, so I changed with the other boy that he should come, which he was very happy because he stayed with a Jewish family in Copenhagen. It was a wealthy family. And I went to a farm.

On the island?

Yeah.

And where was the island? Off the coast of Denmark?

This was-- I remember the island was called Mors. The capital Nykobing.

What was the name of the island?

Mors. M-O-R-S. And the capital Nykobing. And I came-- every farmer took one child. Only my farmer took two children, but not my girlfriend. It was another. But she had to stay somewhere else. But over there everybody got a bicycle. You know, in Denmark, everybody got a bicycle. And so whenever I could, I visited her and so on. And over there they didn't steal. You could leave the bicycle on the street for eight days. Nobody would even touch it. I came after eight days. It was the same place.

How far away were you from her?

Oh, quite a few miles. Yeah, but this was a Jewish organization. We met twice a week in the capital so we shouldn't lose contact between the Jewish children and so on. We met twice a week in the capital for a few hours and learned songs, Hebrew songs. You know, all Jewish, we shouldn't lose the contact.

Now, everyone would come to the capital on their bicycles?

No, not the bicycles. Buses. Because they had buses on all the roads. We came by buses.

What was the family like that you stayed with?

The family was very nice. I was a little bit lucky because he was-- the farmer, he was about 70 years old and he was once a gold-digger in America.

He was what?

A gold-digger in America.

A gold-digger?

Yeah. And he knew English a little bit and I knew a little bit of English so we could converse--

In English.

Yeah, and--

How big a family did he have?

Oh, he has a son, a daughter, a son-in-law, and he had some-- in Germany, the employees, they call it [GERMAN] in German. You know, like it's a slave. [GERMAN] is a slave, but they wasn't slaves. I mean, only the name. And I worked in a farm, but I didn't like it because the son-in-law had the bakery in the city.

You wanted the bakery?

No, I was in the farm. But I wanted-- his son-in-law had the bakery so I tried if I can come to the bakery. I was more interested to be in the bakery than in the farm. And they allowed it to me. So I went to the bakery. I learned a little bit with baking and so on, to deliver bread, so I had a little bit better life there.

How did you find the Danish people?

Very nice.

But I was the first Jew. They never saw a Jew over there.

They didn't know [INAUDIBLE]

They even want to keep us. They didn't want to let us go. They wanted to keep us, you know, for steady.

They liked you.

Yeah. Not only me, all the children, or most at least of the children.

Uh-huh. Do you think they knew that they were taking a risk?

They didn't take any risks.

No.

Hitler was not in Denmark.

Not yet.

It was a free country. There was a king, the opposite. Yeah. But I was very religious, very religious. I laid tfillin every day. In Denmark it didn't eat any meat for all the five or six months which I was there.

Not at all?

Not at all. Even my father wrote me, this you are a child alone. Do the best you can do and so on. But I say to myself-- you know what a yeshiva is?

Mm-hmm.

In the yeshiva, in the biblical schools, it's not a big deal to be religious. You cannot be differently. But now you have to see, and I didn't touch anything for five to six months.

Because it wasn't kosher?

Yeah. And I was laying tfillin every day. And they appreciated it. We are very good about it.

Uh-huh. They let you do that?

Yeah. The opposite.

And didn't bother you about

And I told them Yom Kippur-- it was Yom Kipper there. I told them, I am not working on Yom Kippur. So yeah, they were very good about it. The opposite. They appreciate it because I was sleeping with this other guy, a worker, in the same room. And he was praying every night also. He was Catholic.

OK, go.

OK, let's pick up from the farm. How long did you work on the farm before you went to the bakery?

Maybe two months.

Two months. And what kinds of things did you do?

Everything. I fed the pigs. I milked the cows. I pulled out the weeds from the ground. Everything that was necessary.

Uh-huh. Now, had you had some of that kind of training in Austria?

Not really.

Not really.

Not really. In Austria it was more a game, you know? It wasn't really hard work. The main thing was to keep Jewish

children together over there. It wasn't hard work, you know. It's in Austria.

Right. But in Denmark it was hard work.

Yeah, it was work. It was work. We had to work. I mean, the people were very nice. And every three hours you eat there. Every three hours they ring the bell and they came in from the field and eat.

Really?

Yeah,

What a little bit, or what?

We got to eat always something.

Yeah?

Yeah.

Now, you said there were two of you.

Yeah, one girl and me.

And were you friends?

She was from a different organization. She was from Hashomer Hatzair. Which were not religious. I was religious, yeah.

Uh-huh. Did you get along?

Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, sure. Listen, when you are in this strange country and two Jews, you stick together. I mean, yeah.

And so then you went to the bakery.

Yeah, and I worked in the bakery.

And what did you learn there?

First of all, we delivered bread, we delivered cake. I eat a lot of cake. I learned the first time to make rolls with two hands, which is not easy to make from dough to roll with two hands. This I still know till today.

Did you like working in the bakery?

Yeah, yeah. I liked it.

Uh-huh. How early would you have to get up to deliver bread?

No, it wasn't too bad. Wasn't too bad there.

So a lot of--

I didn't do it alone. We went with a car with the owner.

Oh, you had a car.

The owner had a car to deliver this. I was with him. And they liked me very much. And he was very interested about the whole thing. We always had to talk about what happened in Germany and from Palestine and so on. He was a very nice man.

Yeah, he was--

He was not a farmer. He was interested in things.

And sympathetic, huh?

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. Was there much talk there that they were afraid that something might happen to them?

No, no.

They felt safe.

No, I never had a word about it.

Uh-huh. I mean, they didn't think Germany might come into their country?

No, I didn't hear anything about it.

Yeah. So you were in contact with your parents?

I was in contact with my parents, yeah.

You would write to them?

I wrote to them. They wrote-- I don't know how often. Maybe one or two times. I don't know how often.

But they knew where you were.

They knew where I was.

And that you were OK.

Yeah, in Denmark.

And in Austria, your mother, your father, and Betty?

And the sister was left, yeah, in the apartment.

OK, and what did you know about what was happening to them?

Not really nothing because nothing happened. They were waiting to get out.

OK. And where were they going to go?

They wanted to go to Palestine also.

All three?

Wanted to go there. If they would have gone to China, they would have gone to China just to get out of Hitler.

Anywhere.

Yeah.

OK. Were you worried about them?

Yeah, sure. I was very close to my sister and the parents. And don't forget I was only 13 years old or 14 years. '38. No, I was already close to 15 that time.

OK. So we're talking about early 1939, huh?

This was in September '39, yeah.

September.

When I left was September '39. And I was there till February 1940.

February?

1940.

1940. And what happened then?

Then we started again traveling. So we flew to Holland. From Holland we went by train I think along the Maginot line in the French to Marseilles on a boat. In Marseilles in French. It was a boat which transported soldiers to Syria because Syria was that time French.

Yes. Was your girlfriend with you?

Yeah, the whole transport. The whole transport was on the same boat.

And you were going to Palestine?

We're not going yet. We're still staying in the harbor. And that was already-- and I was already seasick.

Seasick.

In the harbor. It wasn't even going yet.

[LAUGHS]

I was already seasick. So they put me between the horses. You know, we had the horses in the middle of the boat where the less-- they put me over there. I was so sick. But finally we left.

How long were you in Marseilles?

Maybe a day or two.

I see.

Yeah, on the boat.

OK. Was the trip from Holland-- from Denmark to Marseilles, was that uneventful?

Yeah, uneventful. It was OK.

No problem?

No problem. The only problem was that when I went off the plane because that time a Dakota plane was the name or whatever, 23 people. This was already big plane, 23 people that time. I didn't hear for maybe six hours after I went down because the noise of the motor whatever. This was the only thing what happened.

But then we went on the boat. We went in the Mediterranean. But in the middle of this, there was shooting going on. And we were all afraid. What happened? Did the German shooting at us? And the girlfriend said to me, come, let's jump together in the water.

I'm sorry, say again?

My girlfriend said, let's jump together in the water.

I see.

I said for jumping I still have time. Let's see what happened. And this was only exercise from the-- this wasn't any shooting going against us. This was exercise on the boat.

There was a practice.

Yeah.

And people didn't have to jump in the water?

No, no they didn't. But nobody knew what happened. They said, maybe we're going to sink. Let's jump together.

Who was shooting? Do you know? Was it on the boat?

On the boat.

I see.

On the boat, yeah.

I see. Now, did they expect any difficulty when you go to Palestine about going in? Were the British going to let you in?

Oh, this was legal. Usually I was legal. We had our certificate, sure. This was legal. So we went-- from Marseilles we went to Beirut to Syria.

Yeah, Lebanon.

Yeah, Lebanon. And from there we went by bus to Palestine on the border to Ras-el-Nakura, the name where the entrance was. And there I came to the Youth Aliyah. And there I came to a village where are farmers, and I was a working there half a day and a half a day learning.

What kind of learning?

Jewish history, Torah, everything. Half a day work, half a day this.

Still close with your girlfriend?

Yeah, she came to the same village. We were very close.

You probably thought you were going to get married, huh?

I didn't think that far. We were together for two years. We didn't think that far. There's story which came later why we didn't marry and so on.

I'll wait.

If it's still-- if you're still interested in it.

Yeah. So how was it there?

There was OK. You were working on the farm because the farmers, they couldn't live out of the farm. This was only-- he had one cow and a little bit of ground where he was growing apple trees or things like that. So the farmer went out to work. They went to work, and the children run the farm.

I see.

So we were milking the cow and whatever was necessary to do. And he went out to work.

What kind of jobs did you have?

Everything to run the farm. [INAUDIBLE] milk the cow. It was OK. You're young. Nothing was hard. We did everything.

Did you feel-- did you feel comfortable there? Could you speak the language?

I tell you, I knew-- many people didn't know at all the language. I knew a little because I was learning the Torah a lot. So it's only the way to-- you pronounce it differently but you knew words. I didn't speak Hebrew, but I knew a little. It wasn't strange to me. And you were learning, like I told you. You are learning half a day.

How long did it take you to catch on?

Every time more and more. I mean, you progress. You speak the language when you are there and, you know--

Everyone spoke Hebrew?

Tried to speak Hebrew. You learned it. And you try to speak the language.

Yeah. When you were with your girlfriend, what language would you use?

With her?

Yeah.

German. German.

Mm-hmm. How did Is-- how did Palestine appear to you?

Beautiful.

Yeah?

After Hitler, every corner in the world would be beautiful. And I had a brother in Israel already. I told you that my brother left in 1935.

Jack was there.

Jack was there three years in [INAUDIBLE] Israel. He was studying there. So I had already a relative there. He came to visit me and so on.

He would come to visit you?

Yeah.

Could you go visit him?

I think one time I went there to visit. It was a very exclusive school that time.

That was nice to see him?

Sure.

How long--

I was very close to my brother.

How long had it been since you'd seen him? Three years?

Since 1936.

'36.

Because he came on his vacation-- school vacation. He came to visit us to Vienna.

OK, so this was four years, huh?

It was since 1936 to 1940.

Mm-hmm. OK.

Yeah.

So did you stay on this farm?

For two years.

Two years.

Well, this is the way it works. Two years you stay there. Then when you're 17, you go out, you go wherever, or you could go to kibbutz. Many people went together to a kibbutz. They made a new one. They created a new kibbutz or went to old kibbutz's or went to all kinds of things. Some people went to the city. Anybody could do whatever they wanted to.

What did you want to do?

I tell you, while I was there in 1942, my parents came. They came-- I don't know if you heard about it. First of all, they came illegally on this little boat like the exodus. They were for a few months on the boat. They were so small boats. When a few people more on one side, the whole ship turned. It was very bad conditions on the boats. But it was a blockade of the British Navy. They didn't let any Jews into Palestine. So they caught them.

They caught them?

They caught the ship, yeah. And they caught a few ships and they brought them to Haifa, to their part of Haifa. And there was a very big boat. It was called the Patria. And all the people from a few small boats, they put them up on the boat and they want to send them away to Mauritius.

To where?

Mauritius in the Ecuador or somewhere. Want to send them over there. But the Haganah, the Jewish organization-- you know the Haganah?

Yeah.

They're Jewish. They didn't let it happen and they put some explosives and something went wrong and the boat sank and about 300 Jews drowned. 300 Jews drowned.

I remember seeing a film about that.

They drowned in the port of Haifa.

The bay, yeah.

But my parents were saved.

How?

Well, why were most of the people killed? Because you know, they had their little bit jewelry, whatever they had left, whatever they could save from the old country, they had it on. And when the ship started sinking, everybody want to run down to grab. And my mother said, no, to my father, let's down-- slide down to the water and were saved. And they came to a detention camp in a British camp. They kept them for six months in the camp in Palestine.

Leo, can you tell me how they got out of Austria?

Illegal. Also illegal the transport.

Where did they get the boat?

Well, they went with a train to-- I don't remember, I don't know exactly-- to Czechoslovakia. And from Czechoslovakia. I don't remember where they went on the boat. It was a small boat.

Was this one of the boats that came down the Danube?

It started out with the Danube somewhere. But anyhow it was illegal. Not a legal way. And my sister also went illegally along with the Halutz and they got stuck in Yugoslavia. They got stuck over there. And over there she was shot.

We didn't know about that. We didn't know about all the time. But my brother in Palestine that time wrote to the-- or Israel already, wrote to a Jewish organization in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, about the name and so on, and they returned us the letter that they found the mass grave of 600 children and all were shot in the neck, and my sister was between them.

The name Betty Weingarten. And my parents never knew about that letter. They did not till today. Till they died they didn't know about that. We didn't tell them.

Who did the letter come to?

To my brother.

Jack?

Yeah.

And he didn't tell?

Nobody told. He knew. I knew. Nobody told, no.

You wanted--

Because this would be too hard for them to-- so it's that unknown. They don't know it. Was easier.

So they were put in a detention camp.

Yeah, for six months. And then they let them out.

Were you allowed to see them?

Yeah. It was near Haifa so I couldn't go that often, but I saw them. I don't remember if they let me-- if I saw them behind barbed wire. I don't remember this.

Mm-hmm. And this was, what, 1942?

This was 1941 or [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Could be it was 1941. November '41. I don't know because it was close to my birthday so I thought it's a birthday presents. So yeah.

So what happened when your two years were up in the first place that you went in Palestine?

When my two years were up, my parents were already out and they had an apartment in Tel Aviv. So I went to their apartment in Tel Aviv and I started working.

What kind of work?

In a shoe factory. I started working in a shoe factory. And I remember I earned one pound a week. This is maybe some money at that time. Not much, but one pound a week. This was my salary. And I worked in a shoe factory till--

I think I told you before that the Sochnut the Jewish government in the British government [INAUDIBLE] didn't let any more people should get the job. They were interested the Jewish people should join the army. Whoever's in the age of the army should join to prepare them. They were thinking ahead-- maybe it will be a Jewish state one of these days-- that you should have trained people and so on.

Particularly military training.

Yeah, but I forgot to tell you, while I was in the Youth Aliyah in the village, we got also training already, military training.

You did?

Yeah. Because always in each village was a police station. The police station was a farmer who was the police farmer. So they gave us the weapons out from the police station to the Jewish people that we should train and there were in connection, one village with the other. And when the British officer came, one informed the other and they put back the weapons. This is the way we learned how to-- this was when I still was in the Youth Aliyah in the village.

So what did you learn how to use?

A rifle, hand grenades.

Did they have the Enfield rifle?

We cleaned bullets. Pardon?

Did they have the Enfield rifle? What kind of rifle?

Oh, the British. The British rifle.

The British rifle.

With a magazine of 10 bullets or what. 10 with 1 bullet in the rifle. But then we had also weapons underground so we had to clean them all with steel wool.

Hidden?

Hidden, yeah, because this was--

Illegal.

Yeah.

Yeah. Now, when you go to Tel Aviv to be with your parents, what happened with the girlfriend?

She also went to Tel Aviv. She also got a job. She was a beautician. She was a beautician.

So you were still together.

Yeah. Yeah, still. But then one of these days my parents said to me, listen-- my girlfriend was two years older than I was. When I started, I was 14, she was 16. And that time I was 17 close. She was already 19.

So my parents said to me, listen, this is not fair to the girl. She lost her parents. She lost everybody. She's alone. You're not able to get married. You're 17 years old. You have nothing. You are young. Why don't you let her go and she could have a chance to get married, to find somebody and so on. So I had no choice. So slowly, slowly we separated.

Was that hard?

Very hard. I didn't eat for six months. I mean, not didn't eat but, you know, I was so-- I lost maybe 10 kilos at that time.

She didn't want to do this, huh?

She didn't want to do it. I didn't want to do it. But the logic said it has to be done. And she married-- American soldiers were at that time in Palestine also. She married an American Sergeant, Sergeant Jacobs.

Jewish?

Yeah, Sergeant Jacobs. A very nice man. And he had maybe two supermarkets in New York. And she's in America there, yeah.

You in contact?

I saw her when I want to visit in Florida my daughter. The first contact I had with her when I came to America, I had a cousin, a lawyer in New York and he went to the dentist and she lived near the dentist. So I went to visit her.

So the first thing she told me when she saw me, it could have been different. So this is the way. But this was much later. I mean, when I came to America. In the meantime, a lot happened till I came to America.

So how long did you stay with your parents in the apartment?

I was working and I stayed with them as long as they had-- as I told you, they had to join the army but I could get a job with the British army. So it was the same thing, yeah.

And what did you do?

I started out as an assistant in the NAAFI. NAAFI means the Navy Army Air Force Institution, which is the same thing like the PX in the American army. Canteen service, all the service--

Supplies.

--for there. Not military supplies.

No, no, no.

Like, you know, like the PX in the American Army. So I worked. I worked until I became assistant manager, manager. And worked there for about five years near the Egyptian border, [INAUDIBLE] Gaza. You know all these names now from coming up. I worked there about five years. So I came there. Every week I went to Tel Aviv. for my day off.

Did the British pay better than--

Well, you had your pay, and you had also to make money on the side over there.

I see.

But if you had to pay every employee, you had to pay them separate. But this was the way it worked there. You had to do it. If you want to be very honest, you couldn't survive. They would throw you out. But anyhow, I worked there for five years.

From '42 to '47?

From '47, yeah. And this was exactly December 1947. And it was already between Jews and Arabs. They knew already the British would leave and everybody tried to grab whatever they could grab and land and so on. And Jewish buses or cars didn't go anymore this direction to the Egyptian border because it was all Arab territory. Only in convoys.

Wasn't safe?

No, only in convoys. And with Haganah, you know--

Guarding.

Guarding. And that was at the camp. I didn't know how will I get back to Tel Aviv. I was close to the Egyptian border. How will I get there? In the camp they were safe because the camp commander called Arab and Jewish employees, everybody and said, listen, if anything going on, you shoot here, I shoot you. I let you shoot. Here in the camp there was peace.

And I was thinking, how will I get to Tel Aviv? And they had the Arab boy, whoever, you know, he was my like servant. When I shaved, he cleaned my shaving razor. And he was very devoted to me because I made him from a boy like this, I made him to assistant. He was very devoted to me.

So how do I get there? The only thing I went to the quartermaster and said, listen, if you don't send-- that time when you wanted to buy a bottle of beer or anything, you had to bring an empty bottle. It was wartime, you know? You want a bottle? Bring an empty bottle. I think also it was in America that time that they bring own paper bags and so on.

And I told him, if I don't bring empty bottles to Sarafend-- Sarafend was a very big army camp but not far from Tel Aviv. If I don't bring the empty bottles, you wouldn't have any beer for Christmas. And no beer for Christmas for them is no-- they drunk already the morning eight bottles of beer. So this was-- so when he heard that--

He was eager to have you do that, huh?

So when he heard that-- there were boxes. There's 48 bottles I remember. Gold Star beer. He loaded an army truck with the empty bottles and one soldier with a rifle on the truck, the driver, and I put myself in khaki

Uniform?

Not a uniform. Was not allowed a uniform a civilian. But khaki pants, khaki this, you know? And I took that Arab boy with me because I knew I'm not going to come back. I didn't tell the quartermaster this. I tell him I go they to bring the beer, but I knew when I was there, I go to Tel Aviv and finish for me. So I took the safe key with me, the key of the safe for the money and so, and they knew I will send their safe key back with the Arab boy over there. So I took him with me.

And we start going towards Tel Aviv-- I mean, Tel Aviv, the road. Before, we came to a village which is called [Place name] An Arab village. And this was already a murder village in peacetime even. The truck started smoking. Smoke came out of the truck. So the driver had to stop.

He said, listen, maybe we can still go to still the village. And I thought, when I go to the village, this is the end of mine. So I told him, listen, this morning two soldiers were killed over there. Don't go in the village. And in the meantime-- yeah, and I gave the boy some empty bottles. He should go in their orange groves, you know, on the side] the orange groves, and he should bring some water for the car, for the truck.

He came back empty. He said, listen, they're all guards over there. They think I'll steal oranges, they're going to shoot me. But in the meantime came already refugees, Arabs from Yafo You know Jews in this [INAUDIBLE] they are already shooting there in Yafo and we are already refugees. They went south on the road with their donkeys and so on.

And they saw us standing there so they went around us. What was going on here. And I spoke Arabic pretty good so I saw how they called that boy who came with me, and they heard how-- they called-- they told him [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. It means, this is a Jew. We have to slaughter him. So the little boy swore to them that I'm a Christian. I work with him. And he also saved my life, the boy. He swore to them that I'm a Christian.

So I paid them. And you see, I wonder how I could-- my nerves could stand this, not to-- you know, not shivering when I understand what they are talking. And I kept pretty cool. And they called that guy, one of the Arabs, and we said, I give you half a pound if you bring us some water. And really they gave us some water. And this is the way we came to Sarafend, to the camp. And from Sarafend there was already Jewish convoys to Tel Aviv. And this is the way I came to Tel Aviv.

Mm-hmm And this was in '48?

This was December 1947.

'47.

December. Christmas 1947.

I bet you didn't tell your parents that story either.

I don't remember. It was a good story. I mean, I was alive so what--

Did you get involved in the war?

This comes later. Now, my father-- well, you had to join the army. You had to join. I mean, they start already the Jewish organizations to recruit. So I was relieved because my father passed away.

When?

This was March '47-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] in '47. He passed away in '47. I remember my mother passed away '74, he '47. The same numbers. I just want to remember their months. In Jewish it was [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Anyhow, he passed away so they let me off a little bit not to join the army. But finally I had to join. So I joined the Army, I came to training, but the training wasn't so-- we didn't have any weapons really. Maybe we had one stun gun for 10 people for training and so on and so on.

And then we were-- one day we were standing in a row and they ask, who talks Hebrew? Who knows a little bit Hebrew? I said I didn't know Hebrew but I knew a little bit from the Torah, like I said. I thought maybe I'll get an office job when I know a little bit Hebrew. I said, I do. So they took us and so on, and what they do is just to give to us training for a special unit. Very dangerous unit. Very special one.

What were they to do?

The unit-- you didn't have any guns that time. I mean, canons or things like that. So this was called in Hebrew [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] means sabotage. And you had to take your thing on your shoulder--

Explosives.

--and go in the place where you want. And this was a special unit. And they trained me there.

Doesn't exactly sound like office work, huh?

No. You know this story like they said the same thing when they said, who plays the piano? So they said, yeah, I play the piano. They say, oh, carry the piano up the fourth floor. Carry the-- it's same thing what happened. But anyhow, in that training--

Actually speaking Hebrew had very little to do with what you were going to do?

They wanted people-- oh no, yeah, you have to speak Hebrew because the way they train you in the Hebrew language. If you don't know, listen, a little bit of this, it goes.

Yeah, OK.

But anyhow, to make the matter short, something happened, an explosion, and we were wounded.

Did it go off prematurely?

I tell you exactly. You see, we were standing around in a circle. And in the middle of the circle was the teacher, the trainer, yeah. And [NON-ENGLISH] means something like mercury. A thing which has mercury in it.

Mercury.

[NON-ENGLISH] it's called. A detonator in English. And you rub with the finger like this. It can go but can take you off a finger or whatever. And this makes the small explosion to make the big explosion, the detonator. And this is treated in the army like an egg. Each one separate nicely and so on. Very dangerous.

But we were all underground, all illegal, and the teacher had about 100 things like that in one bottle. In one bottle. And this was not far from-- my wife knows because it was [INAUDIBLE]. It was near Tel Aviv where the course was. So we are standing in a circle. He was in the middle. And he said to a guy, listen, go to the garbage, bring me a can. He needed a can to this here.

[? Somehow ?] it wasn't organized. [? Army ?] didn't go. I said, I go. And I turned around and they went maybe 20 steps and the explosion. And the guy who had bottles in the hand-- you see, what he did is he turned the bottle to get out one, turned it and out one. Sun was shining on it and it explode and he was in pieces. And you know, and everybody was wounded in the eyes, in the-- I was wounded on my hand.

So this was the first case which happened. Then one other case happened that we went on patrol and we opened the door from-- the village there was already Jewish, in Jewish hands. And I go in and behind me the guy goes, and he lost a leg. He stepped on a mine. I must say, touch wood, I was lucky there that God was with me. The guy went before him and he stepped--

And you didn't step on--

He stepped on one. Lost a leg. This was the second case. This third case was they called the [INAUDIBLE] professional already-- professional [INAUDIBLE] to diffuse a mine. Diffuse it. He also was killed. So our course-- our training was so demoralized that they said no more. Because they couldn't go on anymore like that. We all were -- what happened, what happened. So they said that people are demoralized. They finished the course.

So after I was in the hospital I came to a camp, you know, where they again reorganized wherever unit you go. So they were looking for people with experience to organize the [INAUDIBLE] means the same thing the NAAFI, the same thing like the PX, but for the Israeli army. So I have experience. It was five years since the army, so I was one of the organizers of the [INAUDIBLE] which was the canteens.

We started ours as a canteen service. We had cake, we had some soft drinks, some cigarettes, and things like that. When I left was a really big department stores. You see, I opened the first store in 1950, the first store for the families of the army which get special rations and could buy cheaper things and so on.

How long did you do that?

I was in uniform about 2 and 1/4 years. I was in the army. But then whenever I was released of the army, I continued as a civilian.

In the same place?

Yeah, in Tel Aviv. I opened stores and so on in the same organization, yeah.

Were you intending to stay in Israel?

I intended to stay till my parents said, listen, maybe go out and see something. I hadn't seen Max for 20 years. My brother in America was already in America. I hadn't seen him for 20 or 21 years. So go there and see and this and so on and so on, you know? I didn't leave with my full heart.

You didn't?

No.

Were you still single?

But I tell you, before I left-- before I left I saw this was-- yeah, this was November 1956. You know, November 1956. I saw already-- I had already my American visa. I had everything to go. But I saw something is going on in Israel. Right away I could recognize if something is going on because buses disappeared from the street, you know? You saw more soldiers. I say, something happening here. Something is going on.

So really I came home. I had already been ordered to go to camp. This was the time-- I remember 1956, the Suez Campaign when the Israeli parachutes went down and then France and England went to the war for the Suez. So I was-- still was in the army there for one month, again, because I didn't want to leave. I see what was going on. And my brother was there. -- I didn't leave. So I was one month in the army. And after this was all over, I went to America.

And was the purpose to see your brother?

To see my brother and see what was going on. Maybe it's better to be in America. I don't know. I really don't know. But I didn't like it.

You didn't like it.

And after one year, I went back to Israel.

What didn't you like?

I tell you, you were used to live in Israel for so many years and my heart was there. You gave everything there. And here you come between [INAUDIBLE] which I was not used anymore and so on. I was always looking for a Jewish company and so on. And I went back and my wife-- she wasn't my wife yet-- was there still. So I went back to get married.

You knew her from before?

Yeah, I went before. And I went back to get married. But then my brother left and my mother was already here. I said, what am I going to do alone here?

Jack had left?

Jack left, yeah.

To come to America.

Jack also went-- yeah, he also went to America.

So you were there--

I know that he's going to leave. I know he's going to leave also with his whole family. So I said to my wife, listen, let's go and try and see in America. So we all went to America.

And where did you come?

Well, I came to New York. But the business where I work before, that one year, the father-in-law heard that I'm there. Yeah, the boss wrote me a letter to Israel. Listen, the work is in a big mess. We would like you to come back fast. I still have this letter till today. And I say to my wife-- first we tried something in New York. It didn't succeed, so we went to California and I went back to the work which I left.

The same company you mean?

The same company.

The one who asked you to come back?

Yeah. And I was there for 35 years till I retired.

Did he have business out here too?

Here in California. In San Francisco.

When you came the first time, were you out here?

It was always in San Francisco, yeah.

Oh, I see. OK. So you tried it in New York for a year and--

No a year, a few months only.

Few months.

Yeah. With my brother we brought some biblical playing cards. We thought maybe this is an article but it didn't go. We were two months or three months. I don't remember. And then I went back and-- but I have to tell you a funny story. You know, when we came back, I started working and my wife had already a job prepared for Jewish organizations.

In Oakland there was a store like I. Magnin like that but in a better clothing store for women, and she started working there. And the owner was also a Jew. So one time they were talking and he said to her, you know, there is the Israeli girl. And my wife was working already there some time. He said, you know there's another Israeli girl working here, she comes from Israel and so on.

So she said one day they were sitting in the lunchroom so they started talking. So she asked, what is your name? She said, Weingarten. And [INAUDIBLE] down from Denmark and so on. She said, me and my husband also was in Denmark. And she said, is his name maybe Leo Weingarten? She said, yeah. It was the same girl which was with me on the farm in Denmark who was working in Oakland in the store with my wife. This can happen once in I don't know what.

Oh yeah.

So since then we became friends again with the whole family.

She's still around here?

No, her husband passed away and she went back to Israel. So this is my story.

So how has it been for you in America?

Pretty good. I cannot complain.

Does it feel like your country?

I mean, I have to be thankful to America. I mean, first of all, America is a big help to Israel also. And I mean, I cannot complain here in America. But you know--

You have to be thankful, but what does your heart say?

My heart is here. I just came back from Israel. I was in Israel now. It's a different life there. It's a different life. It's a different life.

You wish you were there?

I have my children here. I have grandchildren here, you know? It's not so easy. But my wife has a sister there. She has one daughter from her first marriage there. The grandchild was just released of the army and so on.

Mm-hmm. Now, when your mother came to America, where did she live?

She lived in Oakland.

Oakland.

Yeah. She passed away in 1974.

Yeah. Did she adjust to America?

Yeah, pretty good. Yeah.

Did she like it?

Very good, yeah. You see, my mother, like I told you, always she was a dynamic woman. She was-- she well -- went to Jewish center, made the laughs for the Jewish soldiers in Israel and played cards. She was OK. Yeah.

How about Austria? You've been back?

I was twice back in Austria.

When was the first time?

After a long time. A long time. Maybe 15 years ago or what.

Was the first time?

Yeah.

Did you not want to go back before then?

I didn't have the desire to go back, no. But I went back because I wanted to show my wife and the children where I lived and where I come from.

Mm-hmm. Did you?

Yeah.

Yeah?

I showed it to them.

Still there?

Still there, yeah. Still there.

How about the business?

This was taken away from us.

Yeah, was the store--

Other people-- yeah, not the same. The store is there, but not--

Not fabric.

These plastic things and things like that, yeah. But I was back already twice in Vienna afterwards. On the way to Slovakia and on the way to Hungary we went back there for a few days always.

How do you feel when you go there?

I was wondering how Jews can live there, you know, especially when you see Jews with beards and with all this-- still how.

I mean, how--

You know, it's funny because my brother has some friends still in Vienna, which after the concentration camps, after this, they all stayed there. And one said the good thing is that it is very bad for me that I stay here in Vienna, but it's even worse for you to come to visit me in Vienna.

Why is it worse? I don't understand.

Because that you go back--

I see.

--to that country which you suffered so much. We threw you out and all. That you still can live there and he lives there. He said it's bad enough I live there, but it's bad enough that you come and visit me even, that you come to-- you have desire to go to Vienna.

I see. Does it pull any strings for you when you go to Austria?

No.

No?

No. So many years. It's--

Does it feel like a foreign country to you?

It's funny. Sometimes I feel good there, you know? Like I was born there, I know the language, and I know every place

were like--

Very familiar.

Yeah.

Yeah. But not yours.

No, not mine.

Someone else's.

I wouldn't like to live there.

You wouldn't. No.

Absolutely not. I went through enough there as a child.

Did Austria ever make compensation for the people who were driven out?

Yeah. Yeah, they compensate. They try now more even.

They don't invite people back like the Germans do?

They did. They did. Not me. Not me. But some of my friends yeah, got invitations to come for a week to Vienna and so on.

If they invited you, would you go?

I don't know. I don't know if it would go.

You don't know if you would go?

No, I don't know. I mean, some-- I know Vienna. What would I do there for eight days? Just, I know everything there. No. I don't know if I would go. Beside that, it's only for you, not with your wife.

Oh really?

It's only for [? your ?] [? person ?] as far as I know. As far as I know. Maybe I'm wrong, but--

Yeah. How do you feel about being Jewish?

Very good. I'm proud to be Jewish.

Mm-hmm. Did you ever wish when there was trouble because you were Jewish that you weren't Jewish?

No, never. Never occurred to me. Never.

Have you ever wanted to go back to Denmark?

Those people-- I mean, they are not alive anymore. They were elderly people that time. I don't even remember how to go there to that island or what. No, not really.

But basically good memories.

Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

They were helpful.

They were nice to me. I cannot complain.

Leo, do you think we could have a Holocaust again?

I don't know if you could have a Holocaust again. But I tell you, I was wondering about the world, even America, which lost so many people in war which was created through Hitler, they lost so many lives, that they still cannot allow a Nazi party, even if it's a Democratic country.

But I mean, I think there should be a limit even if it's Democratic and not allow a thing like that to happen. Because what you know today with the internet is all this. You get more and more. You never know who is a-- in Vienna you didn't know who's a Nazi. You didn't know who is a Nazi.

I mean, you think they were all the friends of the Jews here. Yeah, good, good. This next day when Hitler came they were already in SS uniform. You didn't even know that they were illegal Nazis. And this I still wonder until today that they can allow a thing like that.

You think maybe democracy allows too much freedom?

In a case like that. In a case like that, which they knew what happened years ago. And I mean, they were the reason that it all happened.

The problem is when you start outlawing a party, where do you stop?

Do you put criminals in jail? Do you ask where do you stop to put criminals? Where? These are criminals.

Yeah. But I mean, you know--

You know very well they are against the government. You know what did they do with that black guy. They chained him onto this and slaughtered-- I mean, a dog you wouldn't slaughter like that. And this is allowed? This is my opinion.

How about these-- how about these groups up in Idaho and, you know, these--

I know what you mean. With the training weapons and things like that?

Yeah.

Survivalists.

You think we should outlaw them?

Yeah. In my opinion yeah. It's against the government. I mean, which government allows to be-- I mean, OK, you can have a party, opposition party, the Democratic and Republican leaders, things like that. But you know, they train with weapons. What do they train it for? To kill the people, to kill the government or what. Should that be allowed? In my opinion, no.

Are there any things that you would like to add to what we have talked about?

I talked too much. Not really. I mean, I have to be thankful to America. I cannot complain. I had a good life here. If you have freedom--

You think this is a good country?

I think so, yeah.

Uh-huh. Are you proud to be American?

I'm a Jew.

Mm-hmm, first?

I'm a Jew.

More than American?

I'm an American Jew.

OK. Well, I want to really thank you, Leo, for being willing to give us an interview, to tell us about your life, your experiences, and--

[INAUDIBLE].

Really appreciate it.

My pleasure.

Thank you very much.

My pleasure.

I'm recording, and which one are we looking at first?

This is my father and this was me. This was in the 1930s.

You were about 10?

About 10 years old, yeah. Then we went to-- my father was always sick we had to go to a spa so he shouldn't be alone so I went to see him all the time. This was in Vienna.

No, you're right. It is really-- you can't see it for some reason. OK, we're recording now. Go ahead.

So this is my father, and here I'm about 9 or 10 years old, which I went with him because he was in a spa and so he shouldn't be alone. This is here when I worked with the British army and I was in charge. This is me as a manager. These are the people, Arab and Jews together, which are working for me in the canteen service.

Is the little Arab boy who saved you there?

No, I don't see him here. No, he's not here. And then this is already in the army, the Israeli army. This is already when I was manager in here for the stores for the Israeli army which I managed.

That's the store there?

This is only part. This is only cosmetic department. This was a very big store. We made about \$200,000 a day turnover.

Wow.

Which is pounds at that time, not dollars. I just give an example. This was a very big store.

And what was the one above it?

Also this-- this I talk to my assistant. This was my assistant.

And how about this? What is this?

This was in the apartment in the Israel. The apartment, yeah. and here also this was-- this was in Israel when I still was young and good looking.

[LAUGHS]

OK.

Yes.

This is still in Vienna when I was a child, and these are some friends of mine.

OK. Which one is you there?

Here, this one. This is me. This was my sister and her girlfriend. Both were killed in Yugoslavia. Both were shot.

Any idea when that picture was taken?

No, I don't remember. This is me. This is in Denmark, and this is the girl who saved my life. This was my girlfriend, this here. And here is already where I showed we were in training in the farm for two years.

Which one? With the horse?

This and this. I told you half a day we were working, half a day we were learning. These are our teachers which I was learning. This is me in the middle. This picture is in Denmark.

OK, hold on.

And here's, again, the girl who saved my life. This is Denmark.

Oh, you mean saved your life by getting you--

Out.

Telling you--

Yeah. Come to pick me up.

And you're holding her hand there? That's you holding her hand?

This is me. This is her. And this is me and this is her. And this here is of Hachsharah This is still in Austria.

That was the Jewish organization?

Yeah. Yeah, of Hachsharah.

Where are you in that?

Here. This here us me.

Not holding her hand in that one.

No, well, we changed a little.

[LAUGHTER]

And this is me again on the farm after work.

Oh wow.

And this is her and this is me. This is me laying down.

And the woman that you met in Oakland afterwards who was [INAUDIBLE]. Is she on that haystack?

She's not here. No, she's not here. She's not here.

OK, that's a big haystack.

I want to get my glasses and look at the pictures here.

OK.

OK, I'm going to stop.