

So at 2:00 he used to pass the houses of the Jews and when he passed the entrance as he used to tell his dog by the word of dirty Jew, the dog would strain against the leash. He was going to eat us all up. So he was really a terrible man. But one day he died of natural causes and we were all happy about it. We looked at when they carried his coffin out and there was a band from his cronies from the First World War and they played this famous German song, "I Had a Comrade," in very subdued tones. So we were happy that he was gone.

What happened to his dog?

I don't know what happened. Well, he went also to his maker I reckon. No, he was really something that man. He was he was a violent anti-Semite for no reason but I can think of.

Do you ever recall his dog actually attacking a Jewish person.

No, no. He held him in a leash, very short, but he used to say [GERMAN] Dirty Jew, and the dog used to flash his teeth and he used to strain in order to get to you, but he didn't. He didn't let him go ever.

Do you recall any other incidents of adults attacking a child?

No, I don't remember one single case like that. And it does-- I don't I don't remember that-- No I really can't remember anything of that sort happened to me.

What would the teachers do? How would they treat you? What would they say to you?

Oh, I can't really recollect too much. But I remember this Krieger. He was an art teacher. He taught us how to draw and paint. And then invariably when he used to take red paint he said now you paint this red except the Jews. The Jews don't paint red because that reminds us of the blood of the pigs and the Jews don't eat pigs, they don't eat pork. So that sort of nonsense he used to say.

So a lot of it was just stupid stuff.

Very stupid. It made no sense to me even then. It makes less sense to me today. It just ingrained in people to be ignorant. If they would have thought a little bit, I don't think-- If a person would think, I don't think he would behave the way he does. I mean, there's no-- It's full of nonsense. I mean, I understand if a person has a dislike for somebody so it's based on some certain kinds of reasons. But there are no reasons to behave the way they did.

So I think it was just this constant hammering into their minds this propaganda on the media and in the newspapers so they followed along. But it didn't make any sense to me even when I was a child. And I wasn't really very much affected by it because I was a happy child. I was a playful child, so it did happen, big deal.

I was wondering. You mentioned the synagogue burning that you witnessed. Could you tell us the name of that synagogue?

No, I do not remember the name. I mentioned before that it was in the town of Szczecin, which is today Poland is called Techin. It was a very elaborate synagogue, a beautiful synagogue. And I think I mentioned it was a conservative one with an organ. I remember the cantor. His name was Reinovitz. He had an impressive, wonderful voice. And he was also a teacher in the Jewish school at the same time on Jewish subjects. And there was a big community there. The name I do not remember of that synagogue.

You mentioned that you lived across the street from a bar and that the people who spent time in the bar drinking and carrying on were the first people to put on the SS uniforms in 1933. Could you tell us a specific story about a specific person who went through this transformation period, and what kind of things he did before he was given this new title and responsibility? And then the sorts of things that he did after he got this new responsibility?

Yeah, there's very little except I remember one man very clearly. He was always unemployed and he was always drunk. As soon as he had a little bit of money, he used to go and drink. And from time to time he used to do small jobs for us, for my father. And my father used to give him some schnapps which my father brewed by himself. It was something he learned in Poland to do. Very strong, almost 100% alcohol. And he used to give him one or two of these things.

And he was attached to my father in a way. But then when the Nazis came to power he joined the SS and he had a beautiful uniform on. And I can't even say he became such an enemy of us. He continued to come very secretly into our house in order to get the schnapps. So he looked very peculiar in his uniform to be in a Jewish home. But I remember he was still on a first-name basis with my father.

But I don't remember any specific incident except for one thing. One day the street next to us bees got loose and they were swarming in the street. And he went there with his uniform, and he stood amongst them because he made himself out to be a hero but he got stung very soon so he rushed off and he looked incongruous in his uniform running away from those bees. That's a childhood memory that I remember of that man, but I can't really remember anything else.

Do you recall him doing any anti-Semitic things or saying anything against the Jews?

Not in particular, no.

Do you remember him ever helping a Jewish person?

Yes, he used to do a lot for Jewish people before he had the uniform. He always used to go from Jewish home to Jewish home to help in order to get a little bit of money. And then of course he spent that money on drinks. But later on I only remember him that he came from time to time to the house to get the schnapps my father always used to give him. And he was on friendly terms even then.

Of course, one must understand those times that it was a natural thing to be in uniform. If you weren't in black uniform you were in brown uniform. But everybody was in uniform. Everybody was a Nazi everybody wore the swastika. So people are people. Although he had this uniform on, he still spoke to my father.

Do you think he was so much enamored by the uniform as by the ideology? Do you think he was all that aware?

No, I don't think so. I think that it gave him a sort of a lift up in his ego. Suddenly he was somebody. He was nobody before. And then having this uniform it gave him authority and he walked around very proud. He had nothing to do really except to be in uniform, to be present. But he had no specific duties except maybe to go to meetings or to parades and raise his hand and shout, Heil Hitler. But I don't think he had any specific task. Hitler apparently needed lots of people in his party, so at least he got paid on a regular basis, so that made him happy.

How did your father die?

It's not quite clear to me. Because my father died of an enlarged liver which pressed on his heart. And the doctor said, if I remember correctly, that while cutting the leather he passed it against his liver, which enlarged it and did something. Anyway, he was pretty sick. He was in bad. He couldn't work anymore. And then it went from bad to worse. And I remember the night he died my mother started to cry very loudly and soon some neighbors came in, Jewish neighbors, and he died that night. He was only 36 years old when he died. 36? He died in '36. No, he was 38. He was born in 1898, I remember.

Did your family have many Gentile friends?

I don't think they had many Gentile friends. They had a few who came. In fact, we also had not only this maid I mentioned, we had from time to time a girl used to clean the house and look after us. In fact, I remember we had a maid from Poland. Her name was Marie. And she used to put butter in her hair to make her hair really shiny. She was a very primitive woman. So she used to be our maid for many years. She was a Gentile, too, but she wasn't German, she was Polish.

But I remember a man called Wagner. He was a police officer, but not in uniform. He was a detective. And he used to come from time to time to speak to my father. And also my father used to give him the schnapps. They all liked his schnapps. Very fond of it. And of course the annushka. I don't think so many, except of course, our clients. All our clients were non-Jewish. My father used to sell army surplus like overcoats and army uniforms and they all came in to buy them.

There was a season for asparagus. So Polish workers were imported from Poland and they used to come and work on the surrounding farmsteads. And then when they had money they used to come very often to our shop and buy wares. And then when the asparagus season was finished they went back to Poland, took all the wares with them. And next year they came back again.

What were your aspirations before the war, before everything got so bad?

Before the war. I see. Well, I've told you that I've written a kind of a manuscript of my childhood. I have not passed my childhood manuscript. So it became clear to me there were two stages when I made a decision what I wanted to be. The first one was when a troop of German soldiers came into our street and bivouacked there. And one of the soldiers said to me, can you hold my horse? And he gave me the privilege of holding his horse by the holster while he ate his food.

And the horse always used to neigh and lift up his head, lifting me up in the air while I was holding onto the holster. And I was so impressed by this horse of his and his uniform and his iron rations. When I finished, he gave me as a reward some of his food. So I want to become a soldier. That was for sure I was going to be a soldier.

But then we had a yearly fair. There was a fair. And sometimes some Cossacks came from Russia and they did all kinds of daring feats on the horses, gyrating from the back to the stomach and galloping, holding onto the mane of the horse, shouting at the top of the voices. And I said, I'm going to be a horse rider like the Cossacks. That's what I want it to be.

What secular activities did you have?

Oh, there was a couple of cinemas there with still films, those silent films. So every Sunday at 2:00 we used to take 10 pfennigs and go to the cinema. And we used to look at those movies. We saw Tom Hicks and Rin Tin Tin and Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. I remember those. And who else? Well, German actors like Gustav Freilich and whoever. I forgot all those names. They used to put barrels up and they put planks across and there we sat. And then in the middle they used to come and check our tickets, and I, for excitement, used to eat those tickets up and then when I had no ticket they used to throw us out. So my brothers used to blame me for not having those tickets.

But there was maybe some Hanukkah party for the grown ups once a year. But I don't think was anything else. And except those motorcycles, I think, but there was very little in the way of entertainment in those days. Of course, there was no television. Even radio. I don't think we had. We had an old gramophone, those things you used to wind up. But yeah, Jewish friends used to come in. They used to play cards. And then of course was a synagogue on every Saturday. But that was entertainment of a sort. And the high holy days once a year. But otherwise--

Well, I had no lack of entertainment. I used to play on the streets with my cronies. I used to play marbles. And we used to-- Oh yes, we had this Zionist organization, the Maccabees. So we used to go on outings. Sometimes there were outings from the school. But I don't think for the grown ups there was much recreation, or very little of it. But I don't think they expected that as much as they have today.

How did your family spend their evenings?

Oh, we sit at home. We sat in the yard. We played outside when it was summer. And we sat. I don't know what we did. I forgot we had a swimming, it wasn't a pool, it was a kind of institution for swimming. We used to go there and swim sometimes. I revisited it on my recent visit there. It's still there, but it's not in use any longer. And there was of course two lakes. On weekends we used to go out to the lakes and we used to picnic there. Or my father used to rent a little boat and we used to go on the boat and go out into the sea. But not really much, I don't think. People used to sit at home.

My mother used to clean or cook and my father, I don't know. Not much one could do.

Did you talk to your parents much?

Nothing about serious things. My parents, my mother constantly used to admonish me because I was full of tricks. She used to say, don't do that, and don't play with those children, don't play with those children. But actual talks I don't know. I was too young to speak to my mother on any serious kind of subject. None.

Did they communicate to you a fear or concern about the growing Nazi--

Not to me. I heard my parents spoke to each other in Yiddish that things don't look good and maybe we should think of emigrating. But my father had established himself and he had built up a business. And to liquidate a business and then restart again, and he had no real profession, he didn't think that it was possible to. And he had this experience before when he went to Palestine and it didn't work out. He came back. And anyway he died when he was 38 and my mother was-- She remarried then.

So they made no real steps to--

No. None whatsoever. Not many people thought that what did happen could really happen. That is something out of this world to have thought any human mind could think in these terms that the Holocaust could have happened. That is an extraordinary phenomena, and nobody could have even thought that such a thing could have happened. OK, so you had anti-Semitism, but they were so conditioned to anti-Semitism all their lives, in their childhood, in their adulthood, and even when they came to Germany until 1933 it was fine. But from 1933 immediately when the Nuremberg laws were inaugurated--

But I suppose a person gets conditioned even to bad conditions to bear circumstances. And then you draw your conclusions. You think, oh, these things will pass. If you look at Jewish history, you will find that there have always been oppressors against the Jewish people. Then things pass and there's a rebirth of a flourishing Jewish culture. And people made a living and they did very well for themselves. And my father comparatively did well for himself. I don't think he could face liquidating and then restarting. It is no easy thing to do, especially when he had four children.

When did he go to Palestine?

In 1923.

Did you talk about any incidents at school or problems at school with your parents.

Yes, I told my mother that I didn't want to go to school and I pretended that I have a stomach ache and my leg hurts and my arm hurts and my head aches. But she knew exactly why I didn't want to go. I was fearful of going to school. This what is going to be tomorrow? What are they going to do to me tomorrow? I couldn't face it. To face the next day going to school and sitting in school and being made fun of, or being not spoken to like an ordinary person, it affected me. So I asked my mother, I can't go to school. I don't feel well, and so forth.

But mostly my mother didn't allow. You had to go to school. If you didn't come one or two days to school then the police would come. You would have to go to school. And if you did not appear at school, you'd have to have a certificate from the doctor to say why you didn't appear. Even I as a Jewish child there was a law that I had to appear in school. This law applied to everybody.

How come your parents when to Palestine when they went?

Well, it was before my time, of course. But I heard that my father had a partner and something went wrong and he lost everything. And then he said, in any case, I tried to explain the concept of religion. They had the same concept about Zionism. It wasn't real political Zionism like I say I want the state of my own. I want a government of my own. I want an army of my own. I want to be free. For them it was a concoction, a mixture of religion and sentiments. But it wasn't

really in the sense of what Theodor Herzl wanted of a Jewish state and later thinkers.

They went because they always heard, next year in Jerusalem. A Jewish state. But I don't think it had any real meaning to them. They thought, maybe if we're amongst Jewish people it'll be better for us. But this ideology of creating a state, I don't think ever occurred to them. Because they didn't last very long then, maybe half a year or so. So it wasn't really rooted in them. Even if a person is an idealist, he will go to Israel or to Palestine in those days and he wants to achieve a Jewish state.

To them, if it wasn't good they would leave. And it didn't work out so they had no real attachment to neither an ideal nor to a Jewish country. They wanted to go where it's good for them. If Israel, Palestine in those days, would have been good to them and easy for them, they would have stayed. But they had to struggle. And it was hot and it was primitive in comparison to Germany. They had no motivation at all to stay there. So after some time they returned and then I was born in 1925.

What was the first violence you saw?

Oh, that was in the bar. But that was by Germans against Germans. There used to be rowdy lot in that bar. And a lot of singing a lot of noise. And from time to time somebody went beyond his usual behavior. So he had some chucker-outers, some people--

A bouncer.

Oh, that's in English you call them bouncers. So they used to carry them by the shoulders and by the feet and they used to shout in unison, Ho! and they used to throw them out into the street. And this had used to hit the pavement with a sickening sound and they just left him there. And then when he slept off his stupor or the police would come take him to the jail and he would sleep, the next day he would come back again to the bar as if nothing had happened. That was the first thing I ever saw.

There used to be a lot of fights, especially amongst kids and grown ups. You know I've been here 10 years in America. I have never seen a physical fight between two people, not even once. I know they exist. I know there's crime, I know there's drugs, but I personally haven't seen any of these things ever in America. But in Germany you see fights all over. Every five minutes you see people fighting. And the policemen come and take you to prison.

I've seen handcuffs put on here in America, but in Germany in those days, even today, I saw it last year in Germany, a person was handcuffed and then the policeman come with the truncheon and beat them all the time, and beats him and beats him. That is an indication of what kind of a people they are. I've never seen anybody being beaten in this country.

You saw that last year in Germany?

Mm-hmm.

What part of Germany?

I was in Hamburg. And I was walking a little bit, I was going next into the plane and going to Israel, And I was walking through the streets a bit before I went to my hotel. Suddenly I saw an elderly policeman dragging out a man out of a bar, handcuffed, and with the truncheon he was beating him all the time like this. And the man had his hands up, trying to sort of fend off the beatings. It made such an impression on me that really, really honestly I think nothing had changed. You talk about democracy in Germany, you talk about freedom, but the concept of freedom has not really set well with the Germans yet. It needs a lot of time for them to become like any normal persons. If they can do that, they can do it to somebody else.

I don't quite trust the Germans. In fact, I saw a similar case when in '45 I was stationed in Germany. And a time train passed, one of those trains. There were two conductors. And they said to a man, it's full. You can't come here. You have to wait for the next one. And he didn't want to, so he clung on to the railing. And so they took him the same way. They

took him by the shoulders and they threw him onto the pavement. I've never seen-- It is so cruel. You know, I've seen people being pushed around in Israel and so forth. I've never once seen such kind of treatment from one human being to the next.

And on various occasions I saw that in Germany. In the times of Hitler, of course I've seen it. And this one occasion in '45, after the War. Of course I told you about Hamburg when this policeman with the truncheon hit this man he dragged out of the bar. And the man wasn't violent. He was just sort of trying to guard his head.

What was the first violence you saw against Jews?

I told you the story about Kristallnacht when I saw this man being forced to dance on the Torah. And then my teacher being dragged out of the class.

That was the first violence you'd actually seen.

Yeah, and you know I haven't seen any violence afterwards because I left Germany.

When you were in this crowd watching the synagogue burn, what did you hear people around you saying?

It's not what I heard them saying but what they didn't say. Nobody spoke in sympathy of the Jewish people, or like I mentioned this house of God burning. I had only this woman say what she said, it's about time that the Jews will taste what the Germans are like. It's about time that they are taught a lesson. But everybody was looking on and not objecting and not voicing an opinion that this is wrong. Not so much as what they did say what they didn't say. Nobody objected.

I mean any decent society, if you see a church burned or any house of God or gravestone, I should see the day when a Jews would turn a gravestone or put a pipe bomb in a church. It doesn't seem right to me. It's ridiculous to me to even think about such things. So I don't know what to say that such things could really be perpetrated by human beings against another.

When did you first see a Brownshirts?

Oh, that was even before 1933. Hitler, I think, established this SR, it's called the Sturmabteilung, I think before 1933. That was his party. That was the Nazi Party. But they came most prevalent in 1933. Hitler came to power in 1933 so they were, all of them, they even used to dress babies in uniform and taught them to say, Heil Hitler, a child which couldn't even talk yet but they could teach a little baby to say a few words. The first thing they used to teach. It's a real replica of the uniform with the hat, baby maybe six months old, one year old, and they dressed them in this uniform. And they made them-- And if child usually says a clever word they say, look! My child knows how to say, Heil Hitler. But actually in 1933, they were all party members. Every single one.

When did you first see a Brownshirt parade?

In 1933, all the time. They were always marching through the streets with those standards and those hundreds of flags and their jackboots. All the time there were parades. Every little occasion they made parades to show presence. And it was pretty frightening the way they walked through. All young men, all vicious, and all found now their position in life. So many.

When did the SS start joining the Brownshirts? No they didn't join. They were the SS. Schutzstaffel. They were the lifeguard of Hitler. That was Hitler's personal lifeguard. And they also came into being in 1933. They were the elite. Only specific person, specific background maybe, specific height. They had to look a very Germanic way. And to get into that in those days was kind of a privilege. That was privileged.

Did any of your friends or neighbors participate in the Brownshirts?

Oh yes, all of them.

And the Gestapo?

Gestapo? Oh, SS. I can't say except this one man whom I talked about. I don't recall. But the SR, I think everybody became a member of the National Socialist Party. Whoever didn't, I think he had a hard time of it. He had to join.

Did anybody ever exhibit embarrassment about--

No. It was a proud moment when somebody could don this uniform. It was an accepted kind of honor.

Did your parents change as they noticed the Brownshirts and the SS become more prevalent? Did your parents kind of become quieter or change in any way?

Oh, I think they became more fearful. They saw the signs on the wall, I think. They realized that things are turning from bad to worse. But to undergo this change of emigrating, to do something about it, that was a different story. Because they thought this is only the beginning until everything gets settled and the government will be OK. And only the beginning one needs to use certain methods in order to gain power, in order to subjugate other parties.

But all in all, I think that people were expecting things to do to get really bad in Germany. Because when the Nuremberg Laws, I think they were published in 1933 if I remember correctly, when they came out everybody knew that things were going to go really bad.

I heard or read one time that it didn't get really terrible until after the Olympic games.

In 1936?

Yeah. Did you notice a big change then?

I can't say. I only remember an incident when Jesse-- what was his name-- Jesse Owens won so many gold medals and Hitler couldn't take the fact that a Black person won against a white person. So then we heard disparaging remarks about Blacks. And then of course, there was an American Jewish boxer called Max Baer. And he was a very good boxer. And I think he defeated Schmeling. I'm not sure. Schmeling was a world master in boxing, German.

And of course he fought against Joe Louis, American Black boxer. And Joe Louis finished him off in the first round. He knocked him out. He KO'd him and finished him. That was a terrible blow to the Nazi Party that a Black man, American, was able to defeat the world champion Max Schmeling. You heard of Max Schmeling? Oh yeah. He's still alive. He lives in Hamburg Joe Louis, of course, died some years ago. And he defeated him. And that was also a terrible blow to the Nazi movement.

Oh yes, there was a Jewish-- Helena Meyer, and she was in the Olympics and she fought for Germany in fencing. And she won the gold medal for Germany. And of course, they didn't publish the fact that she was Jewish, but she was Jewish.

What do you recall about the day the Nazis placed Brownshirts in the doorway of all Jewish businesses?

Oh, I remember that very well indeed. They didn't allow anybody to go in and buy in Jewish stores. And whoever did go in was assaulted and was photographed. And their photograph was published the next day in the newspapers. So whoever did go in was a very courageous person, but very few did go in.

Did you know the man stationed at your shop?

Pardon?

Did you know the man stationed at your shop?

No. He was a stranger.

What was his attitude?

A terrible anti-Semite. He was a completely idealistic Nazi. He had a job to do and he did it well. All Germans do their jobs well, whatever it is. And he stood in front of our shop and whoever wanted to come in he said, don't go. Don't buy from Jews. And if he did go in then his name was taken and his picture was taken and it was published in the newspapers. So there were very few who were that courageous. I mean, you can't really blame them.

Did anybody go into your shop to buy?

I think one or two that didn't care for the Nazis so they did. Those days, even if you did the worst thing that could have happened to you, as I mentioned, that was that their name was published in the newspaper and their photograph. But no more than that. They weren't imprisoned or incarcerated in concentration camps.

Did you ever wish when you were a child that you could join the Hitler Youth for the acceptance and the hikes and the fun things?

No. In fact, I wanted to be also in uniform. When I was a child, I dreamed of being in uniform like the rest, wearing jackboots and having this SS, Nazi and the swastika, sure. I thought I was underprivileged. All my friends had it, why shouldn't I?

Did you ever express this to your parents?

No. No, but I had it in my heart I wanted to become one of them, sure.

When did you totally lose that?

Oh, when I came to the Jewish school and I came amongst my Jewish compatriots. Because we had so few children in the town where I came from that one couldn't really express oneself. But when I came amongst Jewish teachers and Jewish surroundings and Jewish children, a new world was opened for me. I was taught Jewish subjects and I saw how wonderful these teachers were and how compassionate and kind and lovable. Such a contrast between those teachers I had before and then certainly Jewish teachers who were tremendous, wonderful people. Quiet, nice, educated people. I felt even at that age the education and the culture they had within the--

I mean, the Germans couldn't get near those kind of-- Despite all these tribulations, despite all these terrible things which were done to us, we never lost our faith. We never lost our belief. I mean, those teachers, every single one of them, the rabbi and the cantor and the ritual slaughter and the teachers, the male and female teachers, they were beautiful, wonderful people. They taught us with such love and compassion and some wonderful educators. And then of course, all the children there were wonderful children. There was no hatred, there was no spite, there was no running after me calling me [GERMAN]. And brilliant children amongst them.

I know today children, a few from this whom I know, they are lawyers and doctors and one is one of the greatest people in the Israeli National Bank. A very capable people and most of them modest people. Despite all that, we kept our image of God. a different world was opened for me. I started to live. I started to breathe. And the first time I could even think and learn without all this terrible residue on my head, these terrible apprehensions which I had. It was a bit late, I was only two years whatever I gleaned that I have today it's probably from that period.

How did your family get through the Depression and all that inflation?

Oh, I don't know. It was before my time. But I know we had in our loft big coffers full of money. 100 million marks. And I was told about that. When you got your wages and before you got home, you couldn't buy a pair of shoes with a month's wages. I heard about these things. The fact that the money was in our loft, and I used to say to my father, I said,

what is this money for? And then he explained to me.

But you see the trouble started right there. Jews were plenty smart. They bought property. So property didn't go. So when all this was over, they bought the property. They had houses. They had whole streets. They had half of a city. They owned all that. And of course the envy and the jealousy of the Gentile population was reenacted through all this and Jews were blamed even for this Depression, for the inflation. Maybe you are not allowed to be too clever. Maybe one should keep a low profile. I don't know. But then why stop it?