

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW

OF

ABRAHAM GROSSMAN

June 19, 1991

Temple Beth Shalom  
San Francisco, California

APPEARANCES

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Ms. COSTER: This is June 19, 1991.

We are at Temple Beth Shalom interviewing Abraham Grossman for the Holocaust Oral History project. My name is Peggy Coster. With me are Tanya Zatkin and John Grant.

Okay, why don't we just start out today by going over who was in your family?

A. My family consisted of my father, my mother and four children. There was Jacob, the eldest, and there was Bernard and I was the youngest son. And there was one girl by the name of Tillie.

Q. And she was older than you?

A. I beg your pardon?

Q. She was older or younger than you?

A. No, she was the younger.

Q. When were you born?

A. I was born March 21, 1925 in Gustrow in the Province of Mechlenburg in Germany, East Germany.

Q. Could you spell that please?

A. G u, two things on top, s t r o w in the province of Mechlenburg.

Q. Were there a lot of years between your older brothers and you?

A. My eldest brother was born 1920; Bernard, my middle brother, was born in 1923 and I, as I mentioned

before in 1925. My sister was born in 1930.

Q. What did your father do for a living?

A. My father was, he had a shop where he sold everything to the surrounding villagers and the agricultural workers.

But he also manufactured jack boots, the shafts of the boots, and then he had the lower parts he had them made by a shoemaker. So we use to carry them to the shoemaker, he use to touch the lower parts, the soles and they were sold to either the shop or they were sold in quantity to surrounding shops.

Q. The jack boots, are they the same ones the Nazi wore?

A. Exactly the same. They looked the same exactly.

Q. Did he sell any to the Nazi?

A. Well, the Germans I suppose were members of the social Democratic party and they were all Nazi, I suppose. Whoever came into the shop they were sold to.

Q. So you didn't like sell them to the Army?

A. No. He had no contract with the Army whatsoever. He sold a lot. I remember he use to sell them even sometimes at fairs. He use to put them in stalls and sold them at fairs. I know he sold a lot.

Q. Actually before they were the German Army

boot they were the ordinary German boot?

A. Yes. The Germans, I think it was fashion. Many workers in certain professions use to wear those kind of boots. I don't think it had any kind of connection actually with the Nazi. They were just worn in Germany in those days.

Q. Were you raised in that town?

A. I was born in that town and I lived there until the age of either 11 or 12. I don't remember. I think until 1937.

I went to school there. In 1937 things got so bad and my father had died in 1936 so I was sent away to a bigger town, to the town of Stettin which is today Poland. It's called Tetchan today. I went into kind of a hostel for boys. I attended a Jewish school, in Stettin.

Q. Was the hostel connected to the boys school?

A. No, not directly. The director, he and his wife, taught in the same school. It had no connection financially or otherwise with that school.

Q. How big was that?

A. I think maybe four and six hundred children. Quite a big school.

Q. Did all the boys live in a hostel?

A. No. The pupils who attended that school

were from the town who lived and probably born in the same town of Stettin. They went to that school.

The only persons who were not of the town were the hostel, maybe 50, 60 children, boys, and they attended the same school.

Q. When you were at this school that was after the Nazi already had a lot of power?

A. Yes.

Q. It was a Jewish school. Did you encounter a lot of antisemitism from the surrounding town's people?

A. Yes, very much so, of course. I remember the day when the names of every male Jewish person, he had to his name was added the name of Israel. If my name was Abraham Grossman, but it was Abraham in those days was Adolph. My name is Adolph Israel Grossman.

The girl had to take the additional name of Sarah. If she had her own name then Sarah was added. That was kind of a thing to accentuate the fact they were Jewish.

It was their way of making you feel they are lower than anybody else. And antisemitism at that town was like anywhere else. I encountered it in the streets, I encountered it wherever I went. We had it all the time.

Q. Can you relate any specifics?

A. Well, how can I express myself?

It's the usual things. You went on the streets.

If somebody knew you were Jewish they would taunt you and shout and yell after you, you dirty Jew or whatever.

But I remember the 10th of November, the Kristallnacht, I happened to go on my way to school, I passed the synagogue. The synagogue was in flames. I didn't quite know what to make of it.

So there was a big crowd there. I mingled amongst the crowd. I was blond. I don't think I looked particularly Jewish. Nobody took notice of me.

I saw the fire brigade. They were not putting the flames out, but they were trying to keep the flames from spreading to the neighboring houses.

I stood amongst the people. I noticed especially that a young woman holding a baby in her hand. She looked so ordinary. I thought maybe she would have some compassion on the fact the house of God was burning but not so.

I remember the words like today. She said "It's about time the Jews know what the Germans are." She said in German, of course. This is translation. But it seems in my mind it never left me when she said that because it made such an impression a woman holding a baby would look on and look on without compassion, without pity that a synagogue should be burning.

While I was standing there, an elderly Jew, in

fact, the synagogue was a conservative synagogue. It had an organ in it. It was a beautiful synagogue. An elderly Jew with side locks and beard came running out of the burning synagogue carrying a Torah scroll. He saved it from the flames.

A big, burley SS man came up to him, pulled him by the beard and threw him on the floor. The Torah fell on the floor and opened up and he got hold of the elderly Jew by the scruff of his neck and commanded him to dance on the Torah scroll and he pulled out a revolver and held it to his head.

It was one thing in my mind is this person going to die or is he going to do what he is being told?

But now I understand that the saving of one's life is even more important than the Torah scroll. Like a zombie, he danced on the Torah in a very stiff sort of manner and it shocked me to my very core and I was only about -- I had just Bar Mitzvahed. I remember because my Talit and my Tefilin were inside the synagogue and they went up in flames. So I lost those.

When I looked up on this picture, this man dancing on the Torah scroll, and this terrible SS man in the uniform and the death skull on his cap pointing the revolver at the temple of this person, I know that's the day I became a Zionist. At the age of 13 I thought to

myself that if the Jewish people do not have a state of their own, if they do not have an army, if they do not have their independence, then something is wrong with this world.

So I continued and went to the school and everybody-- Apparently they already knew what was happening. That very day, that very time I came in the director of the hostel I lived in he gave a lesson and he pulled out a book and he read a story for us.

He hadn't even read two lines. Suddenly the door burst open and two Gestapo men came inside. Typical Gestapo men: Slouch hats and raincoat. They went straight to him and pulled the book out of his hand and asked "What are you reading?"

He said "I am just reading the story." They took the book and flung it into the corner in the most brutal way and they got hold of him and dragged him outside.

Outside was a truck already loaded with the rest of the teachers. They pushed him onto the truck and later on he was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He was released later. He came back somewhat broken, his hair shorn off. I was very, very much affected by this sorts of thing. I really never encountered, except the thing I just told about, this Jewish person who had to dance on the Torah. Really I never seen anything like



it. It affected me to such an extent it has never really left me.

Q. When you said that now you understand it is important to save your life does that mean at the time you felt the Jewish man shouldn't have danced on the Torah?

A. That's a difficult question. I felt, I was praying he would do what the SS man told him. I didn't want him God forbid to be shot. It would have been even worse.

Even now I, of course, grown up I have the same kind of concept that it is more important life be saved than the Torah scroll. After all the Torah scroll is holy to the Jewish people. We revere it. But I think life is more important. Torah scroll can be remade, it can be rewritten. Life can not be resurrected ever again.

Q. So the teacher went ahead and acted like it was a regular day even though all this stuff was going on outside?

A. I am sorry, can you repeat your question?

Q. The teacher kind of went on and acted like it was a regular day until the SS men came in?

A. I am sorry. You have to make, clarify your question.

Q. I guess I am thinking, a good way of handling when all this stuff is going on outside and there is really nothing you can do about it, that's the way the teacher handled it was to just kind of go on like it was a regular day. Did you talk about what was going on outside?

A. No. I remember I was very -- I was a child full of energy. I was bursting with energy. I was always joyful.

All of these things had no meaning to me. It absolutely didn't affect me. First and foremost, I didn't even know other things were part of one's life. Because since I remember we have always been mistreated. I thought that's how things go around.

I thought that's how the world goes around. I had no idea things were different. I was somewhat conditioned to that kind of treatment.

With this particular treatment was more than I had ever experienced. So it affected me and it affected me in such a way that it probably made my life and my whole concept of thinking that I wanted to go to a Jewish state.

In fact, in 1948 when the Jewish state was founded I made my way illegally on a Romanian cattle boat and I came over to take part in the War of Liberation. I took

part in that one and other ones.

But I think this was the effect that bothered me. I never wavered from it ever. I wanted very fervently a Jewish state. I put this in realization. I did go. My two sons were born in my country.

Q. You said the SS men acted liked a typical SS man?

A. Yes.

Q. What was the typical SS man?

A. In the town I lived in, Gustrow, in Mechlenburg, which I mentioned before, we had a bar opposite our house. There are lots of going on in that bar day and night, lots of noise and I sometimes use to go in there and make my way in there.

I was, you know, just a litte bit of a kid that liked excitement. I saw these people drinking. The bar was filled with the aroma of tobacco and beer. I saw these people drinking and drinking and sometimes they had a fight and sometimes they were thrown out in the street and the policemen came.

All these people who drank mostly, in 1933 the SS was founded, they were the first to be in uniform. They became big to us. Big mothers. They felt important. They had uniform, black boots. They were given, probably Hitler and his stooges, they needed these kind of people,

brutal people. These were probably the unskilled types at first. Later on many more went into the SS.

But in the beginning were those low types, those drunkards, those people who had no jobs. When they were given the uniform, wonderful black uniform, big belt and strap across the chest and pistol they felt great, they felt big, they felt important.

Q. Did they have any shows, marches?

A. Oh, yes. Very often they use to march through the streets of the town, the little town I came from and they use to sing those terrible songs about how they are going to finish off the Jews.

One particular song comes to mind. It goes something like that. "That when Jewish blood spurts off our knives." Even then I realize it doesn't seem even logical to me that anybody who has a wife and children would even think "When Jewish blood spurts off our knife." It seems ludicrous to me that anybody would sing such a song.

Where was the decency. They practiced religion. They went, every Sunday they went to the church and they listened to the pastor. They sat in the aisles and pastor was in the pulpit and he preached. I am sure they kept the Ten Commandments. But treating the Jews the way they did that seem to be a different category.

On one hand I suppose they kept a decent family life and I am sure they loved their wives in most cases and their children and yet they looked at Jews as something completely different. They were able to differentiate between -- They were living a middle class bourgeois life and then treating the Jews that was a different story. Now whoever can explain that, I am not able to. It doesn't make any sense to me.

Q. Do you remember anymore of the Horst Wessel song?

A. Oh, yes I know them all.

Q. Can you say the whole thing?

A. Yeah, I know. I won't sing it to you, but I will say it to you. In German?

Q. How about in German.

A. In German and I will translate. (The witness recited in German) The flags high, the holes are closed, the stormtrooper marches, with quiet solid steps. Comrades who were shot by the communist. March in spirit together in one whole.

Then, of course, the German song today the national anthem. Deutschland, Deutschland, Ueber Alles. But that wasn't the real Nazi song. There were so many Nazi songs, terrible.

Q. Do you remember the words to any more?

A. Anymore songs?

Q. Anymore Nazi songs?

A. Yeah, I do. Let me think a minute. We March to Berlin. We fight for Adolph Hitler. The communists, kill them one by one. Attention, keep the streets free. Something of that sort.

It's silly, stupid, really nonsensical songs. Everybody use to sing them. Every time they sang them, the cheering with the songs. Even then they seemed stupid to me, even as a child.

Q. Do you remember anymore?

A. Yeah, but I haven't got them quite ready. I am sorry.

Q. Okay.

A. If you would have told me before I would have prepared them.

Q. If you can remember anymore maybe next time?

A. I would gladly even sing them to you, even though I haven't got a good voice.

Q. No problem at all.

Okay. Next time if --

A. I will prepare you some songs. I have them all.

Q. So you heard these songs your whole life from a very young age. What did that do to your

self-esteem. Did you take it personally?

A. As I said, I was a child who was so full of energy and I was playfull and I played with gentile friends and it really didn't have much affect on me. I suppose it was part and parcel of my life to hear those songs.

I remember Hitler use to speak on the radio. We had a neighbor who had a radio shop. So he use to put up, all along the street he use to put up these -- Not microphone. The other end of the microphone.

Q. Loudspeaker?

A. Not many people in those days had radios. They couldn't afford them. He put up loudspeakers. Everybody was able to hear the speech of Adolph Hitler.

I remember I didn't really understand what he was talking about. I do remember he was always -- Every sentence intermittent with speculation against the Jews, that the Jews are instigators of all the troubles in the world. They caused the first world war. They caused unemployment. That they caused that people have no home.

In the end he use to shout "You Juden afflecka." Juden perish. Somehow it was frightening. When he use to speak we use to go in our homes and close ourselves in. In a way we were frightened. I wasn't a frightened child. My parents weren't frightened at all.

For safety sake we didn't venture out into the streets on those occasions.

Q. What would happen if you did venture from the streets?

. Oh, some person would have probably attacked us. Not the whole population, I doubt it, but some of these persons I mentioned before. The people who drank and, as I said, there was a bar opposite our house. They could have come out and maybe beat us up or something of that sort.

I remember one occasion, if I may tell this story. It was a Friday night. The whole family sat around the table. There were shabbes candles on the table, beautiful table cloth on the table, and two harlot on the table, a goblet of wine. My father had just finished making the kaddish.

When suddenly we heard a tremendous crash outside. So we all left the table and went outside. There we saw a burley fellow. He heaved a big -- one of those tree trunks which were used to supplied wood for making kindling. Everybody had it in their yards. We use to split kindling on this thing. He took it and threw it into our shop window. He was threatening us.

Later on we found that he had been drinking and he ran out of money. So the bar owner refused to serve him



any more, so he blamed the Jews. He blamed the Jews he had no more money.

He took one of those things and threw it into our shop window and set out to kill us. Anyway, my father, being a very impetuous man went outside. He was two head shorter than him. He lunged out and hit him in the face and he fell like a log. He was in a stupor in any case.

So the police came and dragged my father to the police station. They kept him there for one day, two days.

My mother, they were polish citizens. They immigrated from Poland to Germany. Because Germany in those days was a liberal country. It was a country where people could make a decent living and like many immigrants came to this country, to America. So many Jews from Eastern Europe came to Germany, to improve their situation because Poland was a terrible country. Terrible country. Stories I heard about Poland in my childish mind made me feel it was a terrible place to live in.

So my mother contacted the Polish counsel in the nearest town and after a few days he arrived. She spoke to him in polish, explaining the situation. I saw the scorn in his face, this condescension when my mother spoke to him.

Anyway, when I mentioned this to my mother and I said "Look this man, he had kind of an expression on his face as if he was saying or thinking at least the Jews caused nothing but trouble." So I told my mother about the impression I had about that man.

She said in Yiddish "He can go and be buried."

Anyway, he got my father out. And made me realize Germany was getting very bad for Jewish people. My mother always spoke my father let's leave, let's go to Palestine, let's go to a Jewish country. My father always use to say problems come and problems go -- he will go like the rest of them and we'll prevail. Of course, it didn't happen unfortunately.

Q. Was your family an observant Jewish family?

A. That's a very difficult question. I don't think consciously they were so religious. But coming from Poland from a very poor family was endemic to be religious, to keep the laws, to keep the <sup>HALACHA</sup> halarah (spelling). They kept all the Jewish customs. I don't think they understood what religion meant.

I am different today. If I would be religious it would be because of conviction I thought about it or read about it or discussed it. I think my parents it was a question of habit. Their parents and their parents and their parents and their surroundings were always

religious.

To be not religious in those environments would be like, how could I say, like rebelling, like jumping out of the circle. I think that would have been impossible not to keep kosher, not to keep the shabbat. I think that's the only reason they kept the laws, Jewish laws. I don't think consciously they were religious. Again I think it was a question of habit.

Q. You said if you were religious?

A. You want to know about my conviction.

Again, it's a very profound, very difficult question to answer. I do go to synagogue every Saturday. There is several reasons for it. I believe there is nothing else for me. Besides, I live in the Disapora. I don't live in Israel.

This is my conviction to Judaism. I look very, very strongly to be amongst Jewish people. Therefore, it's very interesting to listen to the sermons. It gives me a tremendous lot. I look at my Jewish fellow-man and I have great gratification. I think, without being too over modest, I think we are great people. There is nothing wrong with us.

So when I go there I take the sidur, the tanach, the portion of the torah being read, and I study, and I read and I find many things which can be found. I find

many things in it.

Q. What did you mean there is nothing else for you?

A. Well, I suppose we have all gone through stages; every single person goes through stages of kind of developments.

I know when I was 16 I lived in England and I belonged to trade unions and I became a member of the communist party and I became a member of the Fabian Society, which was founded by Bernard Shaw. Then I became a socialist. All kinds of things. I think nothing ever really stuck, except my Judaism. That's the only thing that remained strongly within me. It is unshakeable.

Q. Did you have a large extended family?

A. What does that mean?

Q. Cousins maybe?

A. Well, I think -- I know very little. My parents never spoke about their family. I know they had parents, of course, on my mother's side and my father's side and brothers and sisters but I never met anyone.

But I did meet and with your permission I'd like to tell you this story. My father had a brother. His name was Max. Max Grossman. When I left my mother she handed me a note. She said this is the address of your

uncle, your father's brother. He lives in Paris. And I kept it with me all the time. Not realizing that one day with this note I would find him.

The story goes as follows. Let me first tell you in a few words how we got to Paris. My father, my parents -- I wasn't born then. They decided at one stage in their life, I think it was 1926 to go to Palestine. They went to Palestine and they stayed there only half a year. They weren't able to acclimatize themselves to the climate, the food, the conditions. They thought it wasn't for Jews. So they went back to Germany.

On the way back, on the ship, and his brother Max also went with him with his family. One of his children got sick. They went off the ship in Marseille in France and the child was hospitalized. The child got well and went to Paris and he stayed there. In the meantime other children were born. My father went back to Gustrow where I was born and then I was born.

In 1944 I joined the Army, British Army and I had to transfer to the Jewish brigade. I was stationed in Germany. I was stationed in Germany, in a town called Beafelt in Westphalia. Our duties was to guard trains going all over Europe with ammunition, with prisoners, with provisions, with all kind of things.

I had a very good friend. He was very close to me. One day he received a notification that his brother had survived the concentration camp and he is in the south of France. He received leave to visit his brother.

I asked him "By any chance are you going through Paris?"

He said "Yeah, I am staying a day in Paris and I take a train to the south of France."

I said "Look, I have an address of my uncle, but I don't think he is still alive. He's probably been deported. He has a family, I don't know exactly how many children. But if you have nothing to do just take a look."

So he went. He met his brother. After ten days he came back. He told me about terrible stories his brother had told him what he had gone through and had survived and I asked him "Did you go to the address I gave you?"

He said "Yes, I saw your uncle and his children."

I said "You saw my uncle and his children?"

He said "Yes. They are still at the same address."

I said "I can't believe it. What do they look like?"

"Well, he's got four sons. He looks very much

like you ", he said, "The uncle."

I said "I can't believe it." I said "What about the mother?"

He said "They are all there."

I went straight to to my commanding officer and I asked for leave. He didn't want to give it to me.

So I went to the window in the office and got myself a pass, but it wasn't necessary because he came to me the very next few hours later and he said there is a train going to Paris. If you want to be part of that train, to guard it, I will put you on that train.

I said, of course. So I went on the train. It took a long time to get there. It use to stop. They use to change wagons and so forth. Eventually I arrived in Paris.

It was after the war in 1945. I remember it was in January. It was very, very cold. I had caught a cold in the meantime. I was -- the trains were drawn by coal and the smoke coming out of the chimney, I looked as black as anything. I needed a shower badly. We had no way of washing. We were quartered in Army kind of a hostel.

I remember I wanted to take a shower. There was no warm water. It was icy cold. It was January. I had no choice. I had to take a shower. I washed myself.

Nothing much came off in the cold water. Somehow I was the semblance of a human being again.

The very next morning I walked, I had a map of Paris and I walked towards that address. I found it. I remember it was Rattacoulie, the Jewish part of Paris. All the people that work in textiles. I came to the house and I saw the number and I went inside. Very old house. Steps were all worn away from usage, from hundreds of years.

While walking up the stairs a person came down. I looked at him and he looked at me and he looked very familiar to me. He looked like one of my family. Very handsome young man. He must have been -- Well, I was about 18. He must have been about 22.

When he saw me in uniform, of course, and he heard from my friend I am around and he assumed I might be coming one day, I might make my way to Paris -- Anyway, I walked up and he made a turn and he came after me. I knocked on one of the doors. A man came out reeking of alcohol.

I said "I don't speak French. Family Grossman."

He said "Upstairs, he told me."

I went upstairs. He came behind me. I knocked on the door and I heard the noise of sewing machines there. I opened the door. It was a little apartment, three,



four sewing machines and they were all sewing with those foot things. They were sewing things.

I saw my uncle. My God, he looked exactly like my father. They were not, of course, twins, but they were very similar.

He looked at me, I looked at him and he immediately recognized me. Probably I had resemblance to his family. Of course, joy was great. Immediately they packed the machines away. They were pushed under the bed. The cloth was rolled up and put up everywhere. It was so small, everything. Two girls were working there he sent them home on vacation.

And then we started to -- He was so happy. Immediately she served a wonderful meal.

It was 1st of January. It was New Year. They put bottles of wine on the table. They poured themselves wine. I remember big glasses. They drank it like water. I couldn't manage more than that. That was my portion. I couldn't. My head started to spin. Anyway, I stayed there about three, four days and it was a wonderful reunion.

These were the only relations I have, I ever met, and they were all communist by the way. They were all convinced communist. In later years, when I lived in Israel, when they came to Isreal, they all changed their

mind. They all discarded their communism. They became very pro-Israel. When those things they talked to me they only contend Israel, not Israel but Palestine in those days. Thank God they came to visit me in later years.

Q. How did they happen to survive in the same apartment they lived in?

A. I asked my uncle what made him -- He went to Vichy France.

France was divided in two, into independent Vichy France. He took all his family to Vichy France. There they lived on a farm. I think two sons even joined the Machee, the French underground. They survived. Then when the war was over they came back. He paid the family lots of money to hide him.

Afterwards, Germans took over that part of France as well and they had the same things they did with the Jews in Vichy France as the rest of France. But he was able to hide and he came back. He came back to the same apartment he lived in.

He told me the apartment he lives in that wasn't really his apartment, but the apartment downstairs, which was very much bigger. But in later years he got that back.

Q. Both of your parents are from Poland, right?

A. Yes.

Q. You said you heard some horrible stories about Poland. What stories did you hear?

A. My parents spoke very little about their childhoods. But I gleemed from a remark here and some word there I gleemed that they had to start work at the age of 11 or 12. They no money. Their parents had no money to send them to school. They could neither read nor write. My father only knew how to read and write in Hebrew, in the Hebrew vernacular, the writing. But the Latin he didn't know. I had to read all the letters on newspapers to them. Both of them couldn't read or write.

They told me two or three had to sleep in one bed and Poles always use to taunt them and antagonist them.

The reason my father really came to Poland, to Germany, was that his father, my grandfather, my paternal grandfather was a glazer.

He use to strap some glass on his back and he use to go through the towns of Warsaw proclaiming he wants to repair windows. One day a Pole came and beat him up and broke all his glass.

So my father heard about it. He went after this pole and he beat him so much he thought he killed him. That night he fled Poland and went to Germany.

Then he brought my mother over and he married in

Germany.

All these stories, terrible, really left a terrible impression upon me this life in Poland, poverty and squalor and the ignorance and it seemed very black to me Poland.

In fact, this saved my life one day, this concept of Poland. Would you like me to tell it?

It was in 1938, I might have told this story, I don't know. About her Hershel Greenspan. Did I tell the story?

Q. Yeah, but tell it again?

A. The German society decided to take all the Polish nationals, citizens, and evict them from Germany to Poland. To cut a long story short. I was on that transport. I was sent to Poland. The woman saw me at the frontier, and she said "Where are your parents?"

I said "My parents aren't here. I came from the hostel Stettin."

She said "Have you got a passport?"

I said "I have none."

She said "I will say you are my son and I will take you over the border and you go to Warsaw and you will find your relations or even your parents probably across the border probably at a different place."

So I agreed.

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So she took me over. The official just stamped the passport. He didn't count her children and me. I was over in Poland.

All these things came back to me, these memories of Poland, these remarks of my parents. I went up there and said "I am going back to Germany. I am going to Germany. I am not going to Poland."

She said "No, what is the use of going back to Germany. Germany is no good."

I said "I am going back to Germany."

I went to the frontier and I spoke to the Polish official. I was sent back to Germany to Stettin, where I came from.

Eventually I was sent to England. If I would have remained in Poland I would have ended up in the Warsaw ghetto or in Auschwitz. So this decision saved my life. I was only thirteen years old.

Q. Were you caught between the two borders at any time, German and Polish borders?

A. No. There were a few who didn't have any passports. The Poles didn't want to take them because they had no passports. The Germans took them back. They went back on the trains to the homes where they came from.

We went back where we lived. But then, of course,

soon after was the Kristallnacht and things started, you know, after the Kristallnacht I was sent to England.

Q. How much time did this take, this going to Poland and back?

A. Forty-eight hours. Maybe 24 hours. They took me, the Gestapo came about two o'clock in the morning, took me to the jail. Everybody was there. Next morning we were sent on a train to the border. Probably 24 hours. That night I came back again. I was sent back.

Q. Did they give you food?

A. Yeah. They gave us sausage and, being Polish as I explained before, nobody had been non-kosher food. Nobody would touch it. I remember Germans said "When in need even the Devil eats flies. You better eat the sausage." Nobody would touch it. All the Polish Jews in those days were mostly religious or at least they kept kosher. I don't remember. Besides that being food, I don't think so.

Q. How did people treat you? On the train the other Jewish people how did people treat you?

A. There were families there. I was by myself. I was by myself. They had food. I don't remember that -- It was too long ago to remember small details. There were families, father, mother, children, lots of

crying, lots of confusion, lots of unhappiness. People being taken away from their homes, being sent to Poland where they came from years ago, full of premonitions and full of fears. I remember there was lots of hysteria going on on the train, lots of noise, lots of crying, lots of weeping.

Q. Did any of the children get together?

A. The children?

Q. Other children on the train?

A. Oh, I don't remember. I cannot remember.

There were lots of children I do know.

In a way I was terrified by this action, you know. I didn't feel too much like playing. I was concerned what is going to be, where am I going to be and so forth. Besides I was there by myself. I was the only one by myself. The rest were all with families.

Q. Where was your mother and sister?

A. They were all, later on they were sent at another frontier crossing and they also had no valid passport so they were also sent back. They came back and met me. They came to Stettin to the hostel. Suddenly the doorbell rang and there she was. Only later to be sent to Auschwitz, but that's another story.

Q. Did the Poles shout insults at you?

A. No. It was a frontier. There were no

Poles. On the other side in Poland we went to kind of an inn. I don't think there were any Poles there except the owner, who was selling whatever, tea or coffee. I don't remember. Sandwiches maybe. I don't remember exactly.

There were no Poles in that. It was filled with Jewish people who were being evicted, waiting for the train to take them to Warsaw.

Q. When you were on the train with the other families did anybody come and see that you were alone and take you in?

A. No. Only when we arrived at the frontier and I was standing there by myself. I was looked a miserable little, you know, very sort of pale and cold. This woman took pity on me.

She came she came to me. She looked at me. She started to cry. She felt a lot of compassion for me.

She asked me "Where are your parents?"

I told her. I said "They are not here."

"Anybody you are with?"

I said "Nobody."

She offered to take me over the border to Warsaw and maybe find my relations. Thank God I came to the decision not to continue for Warsaw.

Q. Did you have any money with you?

A. No, none.



Q. How did you get the train fare back?

A. The Germans did that. The Germans put me on the train back. In fact, when I arrived back in Stettin this office was still open with the officials who did the sending away. They were still sitting there. I knocked on the door and I came in. He thought I was a German child. I mentioned before I was very blond.

When I told him I had been on this train he said "Okay, you can go home."

I said "I would like to phone."

So he gave me a few pfennigs and I phoned and this director of the school, he was still up. He was so worried about me. When he heard my voice on the phone he was so happy he said "You could towards the hostel and I will meet you. I will come towards the railway station." This German official gave me some pfennigs and I phoned. So we met. I came back again home.

Q. I was curious because your memories of the antisemitism in Poland and from your parents' memories is so scary and dark and overwhelming and yet the antisemitism you are describing in Germany at that time was ongoing and daily and very menacing and it's interesting that the contrast --

A. My answer to that question is that Germany was -- My life in Germany was -- We didn't suffer any

poverty. We had a good life materially. My parents were well off. We had a shop. We always had enough to eat. Nice clothes. We had a nice house. The house was furnished. It was our own house. I went to school.

As I explained before, the antisemitism I encountered in Germany it was part of my life. I didn't know any difference.

In contrast, Poland, it seemed such a life full of troubles, full of poorness, people never had enough to eat. There was no such a thing as a child going to work in Germany at the age of eleven. The earliest a child could go to work was at the age of 14. And schooling, my parents had no schooling.

Germany was a very well organized country. This whole wasn't so virulent. Somebody use to abuse you, insult you, but it wasn't every day. Sometimes somebody -- We had German friends who use to come into our house. My mother talked to neighbors. I use to go into shops. It seemed kind of a ordinary life we had.

So we knew here and there outbursts, but it was no, how can I explain. It was no fear of anything happening to us in those days. Okay, it happened.

My parents were even use to that sort of thing in Poland, and I saw it in Germany, and I saw it from time to time, but it didn't happen every day.

Sometimes things were pretty tough for me in German school. Very tough.

I can remember an incident one day my mother went to Poland to visit her parents. When she came back she brought a sausage, a kosher sausage. Did I tell you that story? It was a wonderful sausage. It was full of garlic and I loved that sausage. It smelled to high heaven.

So the next day my mother made me sandwiches to take to school and she put a very generous portion of garlic on my sandwich and I took it to school and put it under my desk.

That morning Krueger came in, he was our art teacher. He had a limp. He was wounded in the First World War and he blamed the Jews for having this limp. They were the cause of his infirmity.

So in the olden days when the teacher came use to come in, all the children use to get up and we use to say in unison, good morning Herr teacher. We would bow down that sort of thing. He was already in his SA uniform. He raised his hand. He was going say heil Hitler. He didn't quite manage the Hitler. He said heil and he smelled the garlic. He wasn't able to finish the Hitler.

He pulled his nose up and he immediately knew who was the perpetrator. So he started to play cat and

mouse. He went from desk to desk to smell. He left me to the very last. I was there squirming. At last he reached my desk. He looked under the desk. He pulled out the bag of sandwiches and held them very far from his body for he shouldn't be contaminated by the garlic. Garlic was a food the Germans, that was endemic to Jews. They loved garlic. The Germans didn't like it. But that is a different story.

So he took the sandwiches, between his thumb and forefinger and took me by the scruff of the neck and propelled me to the door, opened the door and kicked me with his foot out of the door. I slid across the corridor against the wall and I hurt my head. He threw the sandwiches after me. I cursed him, that monster under my breath and I went home.

I told my mother the story. She took her hat and she hurried, took me by the hand and hurried back to school and had an interview with the director of the school.

I remember like today he said Frau Grossman, there is nothing we can do. We are living in hard times. That was the story about the garlic sausage.

Q. How old were you?

A. I was about eleven, eleven and-a-half. From that day on the children in the school use to accompany

me home and they in unison use to chant verses against the Jews. Jews with long noses and long dirty fingernails.

The next morning they waited in front of my house in order to accompany me to school. That went on for quite a bit.

Then my mother decided it's about time to go to a Jewish school because it was getting too much. But that wasn't every day. It was occasional. We took it in our stride. We were conditioned to it.

I didn't know any difference. That's the way the world went round with me. I didn't know there was anything -- I thought that's the way Jews lived. That's it. We had to take it.

Of course, today I have undergone metamorphosis. I wouldn't take nobody from nothing. I mean even to think that I would tolerate any kind of treatment of that sort is so alien to me. It wouldn't occur to me I should even tolerate or agree to such treatment. It won't happen to me again or to my children or my grandchildren, to nobody, or to no Jew.

Q. The last time you said something about antisemitic verses kids yelled at you?

A. In Poland? No, I was never in Poland, except on the frontier. Only in Germany.

Q. I don't remember. I won't ask it now. You mentioned about last time about how there were two streets a family lived on in Warsaw that became famous.

A. I heard that my mother lived in the Olevia and my father lived on the Kaufmana.

I heard as a child they use to speak in Yiddish. They spoke Polish only when they didn't want me to understand what they were talking. But Yiddish I speak and understand very well indeed. It's very close to German.

Very often they talked about the Olevia and Kaufmana. I came across these two streets later on. They were part of the Warsaw ghetto.

I read several books on the Warsaw ghetto and I saw maps. There the two streets were right in the ghetto.

I assumed my parents lived in the Jewish district of Warsaw, in the poorer district. Anyway, in films I sometimes saw the streets, films on the Warsaw ghetto, so I recognized them.

Q. What was life in your family like?

A. I think my father the kind of, how should I say it, he wanted his children to become doctors and lawyers.

We couldn't make it. I don't think we had it in

us. Besides, he was a simple man, as I described before. He didn't know how to read or write. He never went to school. Except maybe how to read a prayer book.

Fundamentally he was an uneducated man. Neither was my mother. They had this cleverness of simple people. They knew how to shape their lives and make a good living and in a way were good merchants.

He bought a house and he bought another house and he had a nice shop. He raised his family. There was nothing wrong with that. He never went to school.

Like all Jewish parents they wanted their children to become something. But we had the wrong kind of conditioning.

In the school my learning was stunted. I couldn't think of learning. I was always thinking of what is going to happen next? What is the teacher going to do to me next? What are the children, my fellow pupils, going to do to me next. I could never really concentrate on learning. I was stunted completely.

My whole thoughts were focused on "I hope it's going to be, class is going to be over and I am going to be able to get home without my fellow pupils accompanying me home and shouting these terrible verses after me."

The next day again what is the teacher -- He always made terrible remarks about the Jews. My whole

mind could not be concentrated on learning at all. That happened to my two brothers as well.

My sister, I don't know. I don't remember. It followed me very long in life. I didn't have this fundamentals of learning which any child I think is most important years of life and he gets the rudiment of learning. I didn't have. I just couldn't study.

But later years, thank God, I think I got a little bit of wisdom. In fact, I educated myself, I think. I read a lot.

What I do do is I think a lot. I am always thinking. I read a lot. Thank God, I think I am a late bloomer. I got some knowledge and some wisdom, so to speak, in later life.

I was never able to fulfill the dreams of my father to become something. So I think my father was a little bit frustrated. He saw that his children couldn't be what he wanted them to be.

He was also an impetuous man. He was quick tempered, but he never touched his children. I think the whole question of livelihood under those circumstances were a strain on him.

But we had nice Chaverot and we had nice holy holidays and so forth. On the festivals we all went to synagogue.



My father sat down with us in order to learn a little bit of the tanach the old testament.

I don't think he was such an expert. He wanted us to learn. It was a middle class family. It was lots of love in our family. I think there was nothing out of the ordinary within the framework of our family, except of course the surroundings were tough.

In fact, I don't know when I told you, last year I went back to the town I was born in after 50 years. I looked around. All those memories came flooding back to me. I saw the same streets. They hadn't changed. Same cobble stones. In fact, I saw the same people. Of course, it was a new generation then. There were people my age.

I went to the school in order to find out pupils, you know, fellow students, but I wasn't able to, because the records were not there. It was too long.

The contemporary director, principal of the school, he said he didn't have any records. I was dying to find somebody to speak to and maybe remind them what they did to me. Anyway, I wasn't able to.

People didn't look any different to me. I don't know whether I am wrong, whether I am right, given the same circumstances I think nothing has changed in Germany. It could happen again. It happened before not

so long ago. But no change, except in myself. I was a changed person.

In the olden days when somebody use to speak of Jewish people they use to say don't talk so loud. You are making rishus . The word rishus means you are creating antisemitism. Don't dress too ostentatiously. Don't do this. We were a frightened people.

There was motorcycle racing in the two days I was there. My friend took me there. I looked at the people. I was the only Jew who had ever come back to that town, the only person.

I looked. He didn't know what he was talking to me about motorcycle. I had seen once or twice. It was enough for me. Again and again. It meant nothing to me. You seen once you seen them all.

My mind was wandering. I saw my parents and those memories kept flooding back into my mind. I looked at these people. When the race was over there were a million beer bottles lying there. They were all pointed towards me.

I thought my God, you just tell these people the Jews are the cause of your troubles, for 50 years you had communism, for 50 years you were deprived of the good things the West had, you have no work, you have no streets and you have these terrible cars you are driving

and you see in the West they drive those beautiful cars and they make a wonderful living. It's the Jews. It's the Jews. I felt --

Q. Did you actually hear that when you were there?

A. No. There was a phenomenon there. I met a friend there, actually a friend of my father. He was older than me. He lived opposite our house.

Seeing each other was a tremendous experience for me. He was very close to the Jewish community. His father was kind of a socialist, a communist. He always played with the Jewish children. He brought back so many memories. He had so much knowledge about the Jewish community and what we did as children. He amazed me what I knew. I only thought that I knew them.

But he came out with such things, I was amazed really. Truly, I was amazed what he knew, that he should have kept these memories. To me they were close. To him they must have been not important. He knew them all.

What did you ask me?

Q. If you actually heard --

A. He introduced me me, he was a well known personality. Everybody knows him. He introduced me practically to maybe a hundred, 150 people. He said this is Abraham Grossman. He was born in this town. He is an

Israelie. He lives at the moment in America. There wasn't a single question. Really, how is America? How is Israel? When did you leave? When did you come back?

There was no reaction whatsoever on the part of the Germans. He must have introduced me as I said to many, many people. They just said hi.

In fact, he introduced me to an elderly man who he told me had been in prison about 50 years for killing people, Jews maybe.

But he said well, you know -- He tried to excuse him. I was standing right next to that man. He looked an ordinary man to me, ordinary face. He was 50 years in prison for murdering Jews. I was standing next to him. He had been released from prison. He had served his time.

He introduced me to him. There was no reaction. He wasn't frightened he wasn't embarrassed. Nothing.

One incident I would like to tell you about. The day I left.

I had rented a car in Hamburg and driven with that car to this East German town. It had West German marking of course on the car. It was in front of the inn I was staying, kind of a hotel, kind of family hotel. I was lugging my suitcases out and storing them away in the boot when two elderly men pass.

They saw this West German sign on the car. One came up to me. Took hold of my hand and shook my hand. Said "Where are you from? From Munich, from Frankfurt, from Hamburg?"

I said "No, I am from Jerusalem, in German of course. He went like this. He held his ear.

"Where are you from?"

I said "Est be Jerusalem." He said "Vee, vee, vee?"

I repeated again. "Est be Jerusalem. I am from Jerusalem, Israel."

So he turned to his companion and said "He is crazy, he is nuts and he walked on." He thought I was nuts. So that was the only reaction I had from being introduced.

Q. Why do you think he thought you were nuts?

A. I don't know. It was so incongruous to him that somebody should come from a country like Israel to this town. For the last 60, 55 years there had been no single Jew in that town. I was the only one. The only person to have returned to that town.

When that happened he was also a younger man. I went to his head that anybody still alive should come back to that town, I don't know. I have no idea. But the interesting thing, I wrote a letter to the mayor. I

didn't bring that letter. I promised to bring it last time. You know, complaining about the fact he knew I was coming. I asked him to arrange lodging for me. He had done it and he knew the day I was coming and I really thought he would invite me to his office and speak to me, welcome me or send the press even. After all no Jew had ever come back. It was an occurrence. It didn't happen. I wrote a letter. I also translated into English. It might be interesting to here.

That letter was published in the local newspapers in German. A maid of ours, she must be 90 now, read that letter. One of her children wrote me, a tearfull letter. Before she died she wants to see me.

So that was the only kind of reaction I can tell you about. The rest, there has been no Jewish community there. Not a single person who knew a Jew or my parents, except for my friend who lived opposite. But nobody.

Q. Did he talk to you about the war in those times?

A. Yes, he talked a lot about it.

Q. What was that? What kind of relationship did you develop? What kind of things did he talk about?

A. He first of all talked about his Army service. He was a mechanic. He served in Italy. He was captured by the Americans and incarcerated. Then he came

back.

He hated the communist regime. In fact, one of his sons tried to flee East Germany to West Germany. He was caught at the border. He was in prison for three or four years for that. He hated the communists.

In a way he was kind of a patriot. He took me to a museum. There was a local sculpture. Sculpture? He showed sort of a pride this sculptor was born in this city. I felt he had some pride of his town. After all he lived there all his life. But otherwise --

Q. Did he express compassion for what had happened to the Jews?

A. No. I have sometimes spoken to people about what was done to my people, very often. I have spoken vehemently about it, accusing. It always turned out sour. Nobody liked it. Nobody liked it when I spoke. I expressed myself forcefully.

I said time of reckoning hasn't come yet between the Jews and the Germans. The time will come. The Jews have a long arm. And we have a long memory. We shall never forgive. Don't you worry. That sort of thing.

I felt I was in his home and he took me to his children home. They avoided talking about it. I felt I made this mistake of speaking, I estranged people. Not that I care so much, but sometimes you are together as

people.

In fact, let me put it this way. I was after the Six Day War I went to Germany. I went into a traveling agency and of course the whole world was behind Israel. You know, the Six Day War they admired the Israeli arm and what this little Army had done to beat so many armies in six days.

So I asked him about a fare to Israel. He said "Are you from Israel?"

I said "Yes."

He was so enthusiastic. Then I started this tirade against Germany.

He said "I understand you, but Israel needs friends. If you talk like that you will estrange people." It taught me a lesson. I can't do much. If I give a speech and I have an audience and I can say what I want. But I felt the man was right. It's no use letting myself go and giving vent to my feelings. It won't get me nowhere.

So there I was in his home. There I was in his children's home. The children were even born after the war. I know he was a good man. I know his father was a good man. His father was always for the Jews. He never put in his window for instance a sign which everybody had We do not serve Jews or dogs or something of that sort.



So something can be said for his family.

So if I would have brought up the subject of the holocaust I think I would have estranged him and brought in the aura of embarrassment.

Q. You are talking about the friend in your hometown?

A. Yeah. I think it was an opportunity to talk to him. I felt that he was a patriot. After all, he grew up in the town, the children were born there. However bad, you have a feeling for your country. I think it's a good thing actually.

I never spoke to him about the Holocaust. He asked me "Where is your mother? Where is Tillie, your sister?"

I said "They died in Auschwitz."

He said "Your mother was so beautiful." She liked him. She always gave him to eat. She called him Boobie, he said. She sent him sometimes to the ritual slaughter, to take a chicken to slaughter.

He explained to me how he slaughtered the chickens. He explained it so well, exactly how it happened.

Anyway, I felt that it wouldn't serve any purpose at all to speak to him about the Holocaust.

I did speak to a pastor. Pastor was very

interested to meet me. He left a message. He heard I was in town. He had a very nice church. We had long discussions about this. There I accused Germany. He was a very compassionate man. I think he was a just man. He was also too young to have taken part in the Holocaust, definitely. He was a child, a bit younger than me, but definitely not the age where he could have done anything.

Also he was full of compassion. He tried very much to resurrect the memory of the Jewish community, to put up a monument, to resurrect where the synagogue use to stand. It was burned, of course.

Part of the cemetery is still standing. And where they use to bring the dead people to be washed. What is that called in English? To burial. Jewish custom a person who is dead is prepared for burial. He is washed completely and shroud is put on him. He is prepared. In the cemetery they have kind of a building. He gave me pictures of all these things, which I have.

My friend told me the following story, which I have written in the letter to the mayor. After the Kristallnacht, you know, the night of the broken glass, they took all the Jews, the remaining Jews of the town and put them on the Jewish herse. He said you had a beautiful herse. I don't even remember a herse, which was drawn by horses. To the cemetery, from synagogue

where the dead person was put to pay respects and he was put on the herse and it was transported to the cemetary.

So they put all the remaining Jews on the herse and had the two most prominent Jews put instead of the horses and made them pull it through the town while all the population jeered and jeered. He told me that story. I wasn't present then, of course.

Q. What kind of things did the pastor say?

A. What did he say?

First, he wanted me to recount all I knew about the Jewish community, which was very little because I was too young. I remembered most of the times. He had lists, including the names of my parents which he had taken out of the marriage certificates or -- He got them all out and he gave me that list.

He had pictures of the synagogue from the inside and outside. He had pictures of the cemetary. He had pictures of the building where the dead are prepared for burial.

In fact, in my letter I wrote to the mayor and he asked the mayor for an interview. He wanted to speak to him to get funds to put up a monument or even to get Russian Jews to settle in that town. He was going to do something.

So when he came to the mayor the mayor showed him

my letter. He didn't know I had written a letter. So he was very much touched by my letter.

Maybe if there is an opportunity I will bring that letter next time and I will show it to you. He spoke to me about the terrible crimes the Germans had committed. Which is unforgetting. He was in my way a true Christian, in the very true sense of the word. A man of compassion, a man of forgiveness, a man of deep thought, profound thought.

His biggest wish was to visit the State of Israel, he and his wife.

He knew also, of course, all the details about the Holocaust. He couldn't forgive himself what his people had done to my people. In fact, he wrote me several letters after I returned to America. He went to one of the West German towns and he went to a synagogue and he took part in the services. He was very much moved and touched by the service.

The letter was full of his experience in that synagogue. And a most curious incident happened when I had this interview with him. It took me a few hours. I went to my friends home. Just when I entered the telephone rang. He phoned and he spoke to my friend. I didn't know what they were talking about.

My friend turned to me and said "Look the pastor

wants to see you again. It's very important. Could I come tomorrow, ten, 11:00 o'clock."

I said "You know, I am leaving tomorrow about 12. I am going towards Hamburg to catch a plane to Israel and return my car. At ten o'clock, for half an hour, it will be fine."

He told him I would be coming at ten o'clock. So on the way there I saw a flower shop and I bought some flowers for the wife. That was part because I felt he was a decent man. I also wanted to show to him, I don't know, I have the feeling that if such things can be done to people there must be something wrong with those people. Maybe they have horns. I had to prove to him that I have the same at least the same culture he has. Part of the culture is to bring flowers to his wife. I needed to prove to him I am a human being. Maybe it's a negative kind of thing. I don't know. I needed to prove to him we have the same mannerism, same culture.

Maybe he had forgotten about it. Maybe because of all these things he has read and heard there must be something perculiar about us. I wanted to show him I was an ordinary person, with ordinary manners and I looked the same as he does and, as I said, I don't grow horns.

Some people have understanding Jews have horns, something wrong with them.

Anyway I came there. I brought flowers to his wife. She was very moved by it, that I brought her flowers.

She said to me "I have to ask you a very important question. Could you answer?"

I said "I don't know. I am really not an expert on the Jewish religion. I have a general knowledge about it, but please ask."

She said "Look, we intend to go to Israel. We will be saving to go to Israel. First thing we do we want to go to Israel. My father is Jewish. He lives in a village nearby. Of course, I am Christian, I am the wife of the pastor. How is Israel going to receive me?"

That was a simple question. I said Israel is going to receive you like any decent human being. It makes no difference in Israel what color, creed, religion you are. I can answer absolutely this question is I can answer you a hundred percent you come to Israel, if you want to mention your father is Jewish and you are Christian and you are married to Christian pastor, you will be treated with respect. There will be no discrimination against you.

If you don't want to mention it that's also fine. Nobody will ask you."

She was very pleased. She gave me from the

scriptures from the new testament, for the journey, some kind of a prayer. She said "I haven't got anything to give you."

I said "This is more precious than any gift you could give me."

They said we hope you have a safe journey. So she embraced and kissed me and he embraced and kissed me. It was very, very moving.

Q. You said when you talked about the beer bottles all pointing towards you and you said you felt like when you were in East Germany in this town the same thing the Holocaust could happen all over again. What gave you that? Did they talk, did you hear anything antisemitic?

A. No.

Q. What gave you that impression?

A. None because I was reminiscing. I was thinking back of the days of younger and they looked the same, the children, the young people, the young girls and young men. They looked the same. They looked no different. They were blond and clean and everything.

A little incident. I had too much of this motorcycle racing so I went to the side. There was some trees. I laid down and I fell asleep. I was very tired. I couldn't sleep at night there because of the memory and

because of the bad food. I didn't eat any meats. I only ate cheese. But the cheese was so bad. It's unbelievable that cheese could be made in such a fashion.

Anyway I had a tough time there with sleeping and eating. I lay there and suddenly a policeman came up to me and knocked me with his foot. He said "Get up."

I opened my eyes. I didn't know where I was for a moment. I had fallen asleep.

He said "Get up." He probably thought I might have been drunk and fallen asleep under the trees. I got up and said in German "What do you want?"

He said "Where are your papers?"

I said "What do you want my papers for?" It's customary in German he asks for papers he shows the papers. I am not German. I don't take nonsense of that sort of thing. I am an Israelie.

He said "I want your papers."

I said "I have no papers."

He said "What have you got?"

I said "I have got a passport."

"Show it to me." Very curt sort of thing.

I pulled out my Israelie passport. In one side it's in Hebrew and other side is in English.

He said "Vas is das? What is that?"



I said have a look on the other side. You will see. I was very curt and annoyed with him on purpose.

He said "Israel?"

I said "Yes."

"What are you doing here?"

I said "I don't understand what about it is your business what I am doing here. I have a visa. You can see I have a Visa. I will do what I want."

He called another policeman. They talked. Leave him. And they walked off. Very reminsient of treatment by the Nazi, that sort of thing.

All these small things. In fact, this motor racing was done when I was a child. It was the only diversion they had. There was one cinema. There was nothing, no theater, no nothing. I don't know what the young people do. I don't know.

I asked my friend what do they do?

"What can you do? They go to the bars and drink. When you go to the bars and drink, it goes in, it comes out. You drink and you drink enough and you run out of money and beer isn't good quality the way it should be then you have to find a scapegoat."

So all this I saw. Hopefully nothing will ever happen. But then I am susceptible to, I am very much on my guard concerning Holocaust and security and Israel we

are always thinking of security.

My whole being is conditioned on these things, you know, what will happen. I have children. I have grandchildren. My sons go to the Army. In time to come my grandchildren will go to the Army. My whole concern is about security and about antisemitism which is a very important factor in my life.

When I looked at these people hopefully nothing will happen. But my parents said it can never happen. The Americans say it can never happen. I don't think it will happen.

But Germany was as good a country as America, liberal. It was an enlightened country. It was a wonderful country to live in. Jews were tremendously rich, tremendously educated. They gave so much of their intellect and of their skills to Germany as a state and as a society that it was not feasible to even think that Germany would do what they did.

So what can I say? I say I have to be strong. I have to be united. I have to believe in my own destiny, my own strength and I can't rely upon anybody else.

I don't think any agreement or any pact is worth the paper it's written on. We have to be strong, we have to be united and we have to take care of ourselves fundamentally. That's what I think.

Q. When you went into East Germany to visit what was your impression of the difference between East and West Germany?

A. That is a very nice question. You see, when I passed the frontier into East Germany and I drove the Volkswagen, west German Volkswagen. I had the music on. The commentator was talking in German. They were even talking in Platt, which is a vernacular which I use to speak as a child. Platt German in Mecklenburg. If somebody speaks German he will not understand that. It is almost a strange language.

So it came back to me. It came flooding back to me. I saw the trees and the woods and those trees that didn't even speak when this was happening to my people. All these familiar surroundings came flooding back into my mind. I was shaken by my approaching my town.

I saw very soon the signs 30 kilometers to Gustrów. Twenty-five kilometers and then ten. I had recurring dreams I would be returning and I would come to my front door and I was about to enter our house and I always woke up. I was never able to enter my home.

There I was approaching it. I was approaching it. I said either you will have an accident or you will have a heart attack. You will never do it. I came. Suddenly I saw Gustrów, the sign. That was the sign of the town

where I was born and educated.

So I got out and took my camera and I photographed the sign which said Gustrow. A woman passed.

I said where is the center of the town, the Markplatz. That's where city hall is and church. The center of the town. She said about a hundred meters. I couldn't believe it.

When I got in the car the car wouldn't start. I got in the car. It started. A beautiful new car. Two minutes later I was in the center of the city.

I looked around and everything is just the way it was. Cobble stones and the old houses. Only more decrepit. No paint. Everything was peeling. I didn't quite -- The street from our house is a minute from there. I didn't quite now how to approach it.

I asked a man passing tell me where is Baustrasse? He said you go here. I drove my car around and I saw Baustrasse in gothic script. You know how the Germans write. I can't believe it. I am in Baustrasse.

I drove to the street to the very end. I didn't see our house. I didn't see it. I said my God. Our house was right next to a big huge commercial school. Opposite was the fire brigade. How do you say it in English? Fire station. I didn't see the fire station with big doors where the truck use to drive out, an old

Daimler Benz. I didn't see that. I didn't see it. I went back and didn't see it again.

There was a man standing there. I thought I made a mistake. I said "Where is the Baustrasse? From where does it go?"

He said "From right where you stand to where your eye can see, not far. Maybe four, five hundred feet. Not very long."

I said "There was a fire station."

He said "It's right there."

I said "There was a commercial school. Didn't you see?"

"It's right there." I sat down. Put my hand, my face into my hand. My heart was coming into my throat. I was so moved by this being there. I reached it. If you reach Mount Everest or something.

I went slowly. There I saw the fire station with the brigade. I said diagonally across must be our house.

There it was. Number 34. I saw the 34. I thought my God. This is the house where we lived in.

The show window had been taken out and two windows in the living room had been put in.

I parked my car opposite. I looked at the house. You know, the same handle. I remember we had a huge key to open the door, this old fashioned key. The same

lock was there.

I said "Look my parents touched this and I touched this as a child."

I saw two people living there. There were two bells and two names. I rang and rang and nobody answered. I rang the second. Nobody answered. Suddenly a young woman came up and she started to ring.

I said "You don't have to ring. Nobody is there. I rang."

She said "Who are you?"

Well, I said "This is my house. I was born in this house. I lived there until the age of eleven."

She said "Who are you?"

I said "I am from Israel and I am Jewish. This is the house of my parents."

She said "Yes? She said "You have come back." As if she were saying you are still alive. She might have thought every Jew was dead.

I said "Yes. I would like to see inside. Who was living here."

He said there is a girl with a child living downstairs and a girl with a child living upstairs. We had about eight or nine rooms upstairs and downstairs.

I said "Who are you?"

She said "I am an insurance agent. I need to see

those people."

Then she suddenly started to cry.

She said "I am so sorry for you."

I said "Don't be sorry. Why should you be sorry for me?"

"What we Germans did to you, to the Jewish people" she said to me. She have must have been about 28, 30.

I said "Well, what can we do? There is nothing we can do about it now. Maybe you should teach your children to be concerned and not to practice any of the things your parents did."

I said "You know this street? I use to play in this street. This was my street. You see all the surrounding. This was mine. That's where I grew up. "

She really cried. Tears were running down her cheeks.

I said "My heart is full of terrible memories. My parents went to Auschwitz. They died. My little sister died."

But I said to her "The only thing you can do now is to educate your children towards understanding towards the Jewish people, to make up to the Jewish people what you Germans have done."

Anyway, what was the question?

Q. Did you get inside the house?

A. Oh, yes. It took me two days. Then I only went to the inn. Then I went to the inn.

The woman I had written her, I delayed my coming for a little bit. I made a mistake. I wrote her I will be coming three days later than the established date, which we had fixed upon.

When I came in she asked me "Who are you?"

I said "My name is Adolph Grossman." Oh, she said. "We reserved a room for you. Unfortunately we have a room with two beds. You will have to pay more." It was an no problem. I thought it was East Germany. It was West Germany. Even then it was so cheap.

So I said "No problem. Why didn't you answer my letter?"

She said to me how long it takes to receive a letter. I didn't quite believe her. When I sent picture post card from my town to various people it took two months to reach. It's crazy. There is something wrong with the whole system.

Anyway, I went into the shower to shower. I had been from San Francisco to Germany and, to Frankfurt. From Frankfurt to Hamburg from Hamburg to Gustrow I was 24 hours on the way. I wasn't exhausted. I was full of excitement. I needed a shower.

I said "Have you got a bathroom?"



I went in there. I undressed. I am in the shower. I opened the water. Two drops came out. So I dressed.

I said "What is wrong with your shower?"

She said "Herr Grossman, we have got no materials, we have no craftsmen, no people who can repair anything. You see those tiles? We waited seven years for those tiles. But you have a little bit more cold water" she says to me. "If you can wash cold that's fine."

So I washed with cold. There was no hot. Two drops only.

So I changed clothes and I left my car there and I walked towards our house. On the way I went into a restaurant.

I said I will eat a bit. I will find something to eat. I looked at the menu. It was all in Marks. I didn't have any East German Marks, only dollars, only a few West German marks.

I said "Do you accept dollars?" "No dollars."

I said "Do you accept West German Marks?"

She said "Oh, yes."

I said "Have you got anything vegetarian?"

She gave me potatoes, cheese. Awful food. When it came to paying I gave her West German Marks. West German Marks are three times as much as one East Germany Mark. She cheated me. I was pleased she cheated me. It

showed it was not only the Jews that cheat but also the Germans. It really wasn't very much.

After I had eaten I went to the house of my friend. I knocked on the door. Nobody answered. So I opened the front door. There was a hallway there. The plaster was falling off the wall, the bannister was hanging and stairs were all crooked.

I walked up. There was a door and his name was on there. Johnnie Komushka. Right next to that was an outhouse, kind of a toilet. It was terribly primitive.

I knocked on the door and a woman's voice said "Who is there?"

What should I say? I said "Can I come in?" She opened the door. She was an elderly woman. She was cooking.

There was a sink, cast iron sink, with a cold water tap and little heater geizza for hot water. Do you know what a geizza is? It's a hot water heater. It's called a geizza.

I asked him later "Do you have a shower?"

He said "No. For 50 years I have been washing over the cast iron sink with a geizza."

I said to the woman "Das family Komushka live here?"

She said "I am frau Komushka."

I said "Is your husband Johnnie here?"

She said "Yeah."

I said "Could I speak to him?"

She said "Johnnie."

I heard a gruff voice from the living room. "What do you want?"

"You have a visitor." He said I got no nerves for visitors." He is fed up with life.

She said "He wants to speak to you.

"Leave me in peace."

Suddenly he appears in the doorway of the kitchen. He was dressed in physical training clothes. What do you call shorts, vest, sleeveless vest, horn rim glasses.

He looks and looks and looks at me. He said Oye. He recognized me. I can't believe it. I was eleven and he was about 40.

He took me and he lifted me up and embraced me and kissed me and carried me into the living room.

He said "I can't believe it."

I sat down on the decrepit sofa. It was a horrible living room, like a poor person. They had a repair bicycle shop. Everything was in disrepair there.

We talked and we talked. He made a plan. He gave me a book, dedication. He holded the Shalom and so forth. He suddenly burst out. The only decent people

still around in the world are the Jewish people. He hated everybody. He hated everybody. All the Christians. Everybody. The communists and socialists and capitalists. "The only decent people in the world are Jewish people." He meant it. You could see he was annoyed with everybody.

So he made me a plan. I went home very excited. I couldn't sleep a second that night. I was staring at the ceiling.

I saw the Jewish community and my parents pass in front of my eyes. I just couldn't fall asleep. Then the stomach juices came out, the essences from the terrible food. People are conditioned to that food. I wasn't. I am use to good food.

The next day we went everywhere. I said "I'd like to take out a birth certificate. My birth certificate I have still has a swastika on it. I don't want a swastika."

We went to the ministry of whatever it is where they take out birth certificates. There was a stamp of the East German on it. A compass with a hammer. My birth certificate is a hundred. She found it straightaway.

She said "Five marks."

I said "You will get no five marks from me."

She said "Why not?"

I said "If you wouldn't have done what you did to me I wouldn't have needed a birth certificate. You better give it to me for nothing."

She said "You can have it."

Five marks was nothing. It was fifty, sixty cents. It was a question of annoying them.

We went everywhere.

He said "You see this meadow here?" I didn't think he even knew.

"You remember where the cows with and milkers use to milk the cows and we would come with cups and put the milk from there and we would drink it. Do you remember that?"

He remembered the smallest nuances, the smallest details. The things I thought I wouldn't even mention to him.

He mentioned "Do you know who lived there."

I said "No."

He said "You know the man with the parrot"

I had forgotten the man with the parrot. We had to pass a passageway where we played hide and seek. Every time you pass the door of the lonely old man the parrot use to shout in German halt who goes there in a shaky, squeaky voice like a parrot.

From time to time I use to go to the man. I use to run errands for him. He use to give me sticky candy which I would exchange with my friends for marbles and frogs and bugs and so on.

Anyway, I said "My God, I had forgotten about that parrott."

He reminded me of so many things which were in my mind but many things I remembered I didn't want to mention. He mentioned them. He remembered every Jewish person in that town. Amazing memory.

The fact he remembered the things which were close to me and not close to him that amazed me completely.

I stayed there for five days. They were eventful days. The only trouble is I couldn't express myself. I was numb. Usually I am volatile, I can speak, I can explain, I can think. I was completely numbed. I couldn't speak. I couldn't think. My head was in a vice. Kind of euphoria in the bad sense.

Q. In shock?

A. It wasn't in shock, but it was a numbness about me.

Then I walked through the streets and I saw hundreds of people walking there. I thought these people live in this town, people going to work, shopping, standing in line for ridiculous super markets with

terrible wares, terrible food.

In fact, one morning I went to his home. I always went for five days to his home to eat breakfast with him. I didn't really want to but he insisted. It was really a good thing. Where could you eat? There was no facilities. You can't compare it to -- I don't know. If I compare it to America there is no comparison.

One day I went into kind of a store. I wanted to bring him something. I didn't want to come empty handed and eat. I bought things. I looked at these wares. There were a few things from the west like yogurt and little bit of cream and so on. Bread was gray. Butter wasn't butter. I bought quite a few things.

When I paid for it she said "Why don't you take the things?"

I said "Have you got a bag?"

"No. You have got to bring your own bag."

I said "I haven't got a bag."

The man next to me said "Buy a newspaper and put it in there."

I bought a newspaper and put it in there. It boggles the mind you can't compare it to the west.

You can't compare it to Israel.

Like here in America you have wonderful foods. The bags you put it in are the standards of America.

They have these ridiculous machines where they punch in the money and ornament things like 50 years ago. They haven't got the computers today. It doesn't exist.

One morning I didn't want to come so early so I went to a baker shop. I went to a baker shop to have a cup of coffee and cake.

I wanted to remember the days I had those cakes.

There was beinsthake and Napoleon shnichte, German cakes which were wonderful in those days.

I opened the door and I went in and sat down and nobody came up to me.

There were four girls sitting at a table smoking. Everyone was smoking. In America one doesn't really smoke anymore. They didn't come up to me.

After I was sitting there five, six minutes nobody came up to me.

I said "Can I have some service?" in German.

She said "Not eight o'clock yet."

The door was opened by mistake. I didn't know.

Exactly eight o'clock one got up and said "What would you like?"

I said "Can I have a cup of coffee and a cake?"

She poured me a cup of coffee. You should have seen the coffee. You should have seen the cake. It was maybe a week old.



I said "This is stale."

She said "We only bake once a week. What do you want?"

I said "I want nothing. How much do I owe you?" That's East Germany. These were eventful days. I swore to myself I would never go back. But since I received the letter from this maid of ours, maybe I will revisit this town.

Q. When did you make this trip?

A. Exactly a year ago.

Q. Was that before the reunification?

A. Yes. I needed a Visa to get in there. The Visa could be taken in San Francisco. There is a travel agency that dealt with visas. There was quite a business to deal with visa. You could not in those days go to any country of the eastern block without having accomodation.

That is why I wrote to the burgermeister, to the mayor. I told him I was born in the city. It's difficult for me to make arrangements for hotel because I don't know any hotels.

Then, of course, the travel agent, that would have taken a long time. He arranged it. He gave it to one of his -- an office that deals with tourists.

She wrote me and said we made arrangements for you to come to this inn. So he knew. I told him I would be

coming from the United States. When I wrote the letter, which I mentioned, I receive an answer. It was scathing answer against the man. I received a response from him. He answered.

In fact, he said because of the reunification his mind was taken off and he set my letter aside to answer the letter at a later date and he forgot about it. He was very touched by my letter. He wishes to apologize. The next time I could that he will receive me.

I thought maybe he would name a street in my name. To receive me, I am not interested in he should receive me.

Q. I am going to go back to your childhood before the time of Kristallnacht when the armies were marching, the SS were already marching on the street and singing the Nazi songs and the fervor.

I was just wondering when you were with the other Jewish kids if there were incidents of antisemitism or with the Nazi marching in the streets what were your attitudes with each other?

Did you talk about it or say anything about it?

How did it affect your relations? How you acted with each other?

A. I mentioned before that all these events and occurrences were a natural phenonom. Nazi walking down

the streets and parades and bands and flag waving are part of our life.

Usually when that happened we did not dare go out in the street because our parents told us to go inside and not be seen outside. Those were the times usually when the population was in a state of fervor and upheaval and they were made being made to -- or told -- Then it all came up this whole think of antisemitism and it took hold.

The best thing for us was not to be seen in the streets, usually. Sometimes there were parades by the Wehrmacht, by the Army. Those things were usual occurrence.

When the Nazi, the SS, the stormtroopers, SA, brown shirts. SS were dressed in black. They use to march in the streets. Usually we went into our homes and we locked the doors, locked the windows and tried to keep a low profile.

Q. When the incident happened that you really felt that inside you made the decision there needed to be a Jewish state did you ever talk with friends about those ideas and those feelings?

A. Well, we use to belong to a Zionist youth movement called the Maccabee. This was also a sports kind of movement. This movement transcended all

other movements. It had no political affiliation, except for the fact all the Jewish children took part in it. It was kind of a movement for Jewish children. It was a Zionist movement without affiliation to any specific trend.

We use to go on outings and sit around a bon fire and would talk. The leader gave a talk -- Leader, I hate that word. For lack of a better word, the person in charge of us. He use to talk about Israel. He might have been once in Israel. He came back with stories that were beautiful to us. It showed us a life that was a free life.

He talked about the agriculture and Jews first hand working physically, which was also a phenonom to me. I didn't know any single person, a Jewish person who worked as a laborer or craftsman. They were all middle class or intellectual, like lawyers, doctors, and shopkeepers.

Suddenly you heard they worked the land, worked the factories, which was completely alien to me.

He explained to us, I remember like today, the social structure is like a pyramid. The very point at the top and broad base at the bottom. The broad base being the proletariat. The middle the middle class and very top the intellectuals. With the Jewish people it was

the other way around. It stood on its point with the Proletariat at the bottom, very few and the middle class and intellectuals, the very broad base. So he told us it should be turned around the natural way, that it should stand on its broad base. People must work the land. By working they get in touch with the land and they love the land and they build up the land.

So that's maybe one of the reasons we go to universities. There might have been opportunity at some time.

There was a philosopher called Adie Gordon, in Palistine. Not Israel. That was his theory. A Jew must be tied to the land and work the land and work in factories in order to be a natural people.

We listened to those stories, became enchanted by the stories. We listened very carefully. We wanted to go to Palestine and build up the land. We thought of building up the hand by sitting by the bon fire and singing beautiful songs.

It didn't occur to us how hard back-breaking work it is to work in the orchards and the orange groves. But I suppose we built up a country and it's a good country.

Q. When you were telling earlier about being in school about how it was hard to study because you were always thinking of what was going to happen to you next

and how could you avoid it maybe, was this in all of grade school?

Did you have several teachers who would torment you?

A. Not all teachers were virulent antisemites, but they were all inclined to if not positively and not actively, but they would sort of have a dislike for us.

Even if they didn't have this, they couldn't show any affection for us. So they didn't pay special attention to us. They behaved in such a manner as to be not aware of us.

Q. When you say they couldn't behave with affection towards you was that political?

A. Definitively. They couldn't show any kind of kindness towards us even or attention towards us. That was impossible.

If they would have done that they would have been called Jew lovers. They couldn't do that. In fact, I remember a specific case where a teacher didn't treat me so well in school, but he came in the evening to apologize to my parents. He said "These are the times. There was nothing I can do."

At least he had kind of a conscience about it and he knew he was not treating me the way he was treating the other children so he came and felt he had to explain

why that is. He said he could do nothing about it.

Q. What were the differences between how he and other teachers would treat you and how they would treat other children?

A. Well, the non-Jewish children were always treated in sort of a different way. It's very difficult to explain. For instance, when school was over, when vacation time came along, there was always a ceremony in the yard by where the Nazi flag was raised.

Then the Horst Wessel song, Deutschland Deutschland Uber Alles, German national song was sung. German national song was song. Everybody raised his hand. We of course did not raise our hand. We were not allowed to. We didn't want to. We were not allowed to. We could not partake in the singing of it.

For a child not to be able to take part even in that is being discriminated against and we felt it all the time.

The Christian children, non-Jewish children, were treated as ordinary children. Good pupil probably treated better than the next. But we were all treated with some kind of dissent. It's difficult to explain.

I can't say that every teacher really treated us intentionally badly.

Q. Can you think of anything specific that you

A. Let me think a minute. Not too many incidents, except that one day I had a fight with another pupil and I broke his leg. Then I knew that I was in great trouble. So I run away to the woods. Only very late evening I returned home. I was very hungry.

I made my way into the house. There my parents were waiting. They were wailing. They were frightened.

I don't know exactly how we overcame this. I know that the thought of us, the mood was terrible. I don't recollect today exactly what happened. Nothing good came of it. I don't remember exactly how the whole thing ended.

Q. What kind of things would the children taunt you with, would they say to you?

A. Besides what I told you about taking, accompanying me home or from home to school, not always but from time to time they use to call us dirty Jew or they use to call us they said schweinjuden, which means pig Jew. I can't say they always did it.

We use to play together. We use to go in the school yard during recess we would have games. So it only came up at times when maybe a report appeared in a local newspaper that some Jew had done this or something of another sort.

Not always did they taunt me.



We were children and children played. We use to play marbles. We use to exchange all kind of valuables like all children do. I can't really say this was constant. It was only at times.

Q. Did the adults ever insult you when you were on the street?

A. I remember one particular case. It was a neighbor. Three, four streets away. All the shops -- I don't know exactly when it was. The shops had a sign in their windoes which said we do not serve Jews. So we couldn't go in the shops. I don't know how we managed to get food into our house.

One day my mother said to me go to the bakery and get some bread. So I went in there. When I was there this neighbor came in. He ignored me. He ignored me completely. He spoke to the shopkeeper.

He said "I thought you don't serve Jews?"

She stammered, was taken aback.

She said "You go now. We don't serve Jews."

I walked out. I said "Look, mom, he won't sell me bread."

It's difficult to recollect how we got all these foods. After time I think it was lifted and we were able to go in to the shops again and buy food.

Oh, yes, I remember down the street on the

opposite side was a man. His name was Engle. He use to erect fences. He had a big Alsatian dog, German dog.

At two o'clock every day he would take his dog by the leash and he use to pass the houses of the German people. They use to stand in the doorways sometimes.

So at two o'clock he use to pass the houses of the Jews. When he passed the entrances he use to tell his dog by the word "Dirty Jew" the dog would strain against the leash. He was going to eat us all up. So he was really a terrible man. One day he died of natural causes. We were all happier about it.

When they carried his coffin out, there was a band from his cronies from the First World War. They played this famous German song "I had a comrade" in very sober tones. So we were happy he was gone.

Q. What happened to his dog?

A. I don't know. I don't know what happened. Well, he went also to his maker. No, but he was really something that man. He was a very antisemite for no reason I can think of.

Q. Do you recall his dog actually attacking a Jewish person?

A. No. He had him on a leash very short and he use to say schweinjuden, which means dirty Jew. His dog would bare his teeth and strain on his body. But he

didn't ever let him go ever.

Q. Do you recall any other incidents of adults -- Like adults attacking a child?

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

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

A. Oh, I can't really recollect too much. I regular this Krueger. He was an art teacher. He taught us how to draw and paint. Then when he -- Invariably when he would take red paint he would say 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 use to say.

Q. So a lot of it was stupid stuff?

A. Very stupid. It made no sense to me even then. It makes less sense to me today. It just engrained in people to be ignorant. If they would have thought a little bit I don't, if a person would think, I don't think he would behave the way he does.

It's full of nonsense. I mean I understand if a person has a dislike for somebody, it's based on some certain occurrences or reasons, but there were no reasons

to behave the way they did.

So I think it was just this constant hammering into their minds propaganda on the media and in the newspapers. So they followed along.

It didn't make any sense to me even when I was a child. I wasn't really very much affected by it, because I was a happy child, I was a playfull child. So it happened. Big deal.

Q. (By Mr. Grant) I was wondering, you mentioned the synagogue burning that you witnessed. Could you tell us the name of that synagogue?

A. No, I do not remember the name. I mentioned before that it was in the town of Stettin, which is today Poland called Stettin. It was an elaborate synagogue, beautiful synagogue.

I think I mentioned it was a conservative, it was with an organ. I remember the cantor. His name is Reinowitz. He had an impressive, wonderful voice. He was also a teacher in the Jewish school of Jewish subjects. It was a big community. The name I do not remember of that synagogue.

Q. You mentioned 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 the sort of things he did after he got this new responsibility?

A. There was very little, except I remember one man very clearly. He was always unemployed. He was always drunk. As soon as a little bit of money he use to go and drink.

From time to time he use to do small jobs for us, for my father. My father use to give him some snapps which my father brewed for by himself. It was something which he learned in Poland to do. Very strong. Almost a hundred percent alcohol.

He use to give him one or the of these things. He was attached to my father in a way.

Then when the Nazi came to power he joined the SS and he had a beautiful uniform on. I can't even say he became such an enemy of us. He continued to come secretly to our house in order to get the snapps. So he looked very peculiar in his uniform to be in a Jewish home.

I remember he was on a first name basis with my father. I don't remember any specific incident. Except one day on the street next to us was bees got lose and

were swarming in the street. He went there with his uniform. He made himself out to be a hero but he got strung very soon so he rushed off.

He looked incongruous in his uniform running away from the those bees. That's a childish memory that I remember of that man.

I can't really remember anything else.

Q. (By Ms. Coster) Do you remember him doing any antisemitic things or doing anything against the Jews?

A. Not in particular, no.

Q. Do you remember him ever helping a Jewish person?

A. Yes. He use to do a lot for Jewish person before he got the uniform. He always use 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 he came to our house to get the snapps my father use to give him. He was on friendly terms even then with my father.

Of course, one must understand those times that it was a natural thing to be in uniform. If you weren't in a black uniform you wore a brown uniform. Everybody was in uniform. Everybody was a Nazi. Everybody wore the

swastika. People are people. Although he had this uniform on he still spoke to my father.

Q. Do you think he was so much enamored by the uniform as the ideology?

Do you think he was all that aware?

A. No, I don't think so. I think it gave him a lift up of his ego. Suddenly he was somebody. He was nobody before.

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 parades and raise his hand and shout heil Hitler. I don't think he had any specific task. Hitler apparently needed lots of people I guess in his party. At least he got paid on a regular basis so that made him happy.

Q. How did your father die?

A. It's not quite clear to me because my father died of an enlarged liver which pressed on his heart.

The doctor said, if I remember correctly, that while cutting the leather he pressed it against his liver and it enlarged it. Anyway, he was pretty sick. He was in bed. He couldn't work anymore.

Then it went from bad to worse. 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 it would be 38. He was born in 1898, I remember.

Q. Did your family have -- You said they had some gentile friends. Did they have many gentile friends?

A. I don't think they had many gentile friends. They had a new came in.

In fact, not only this maid we mentioned but we had from time to time a girl who use to clean the house and look after us.

They changed. In fact, I remember we had a maid from Poland. Her name was Marie. She use to put butter in her hair to make her hair really shiny. She was a very primitive woman. She use to be our made for many years. She was a gentile too. She wasn't German. She was Polish.

I remember a man called Wagner. He was a police officer, but not in uniform. He was a detective. And he use to come from time to time and speak to my father. My father use to give him the snapps. They all liked his snapps. Very fond of it.

And of course he had Jomushka. Of course, our



clients. All our clients were non-Jewish.

My father use to sell Army surplus, like over coats and Army uniforms. They all came in to buy them. There was a season for asparagus. Polish workers were imported from Poland. They use to come and work on the surrounding farmstead.

Then when they had money they use to come very often to our shop and buy wares and then when the asparagus season was finished they went back to Poland and took the wares with them. Next year they came back again.

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

A. Before the war? I see. Well, I have told you I have written kind of a manuscript of my childhood. I have not passed my childhood manuscript. It became clear to me there are two stages when I made a decision what I wanted to be.

The first one was when a troop of German soldiers came on our street and bivouaced there and one of the soldiers said would you hold my horse. He gave me the privilege of holding his horse by the holster while he had his food. The horse always use to neigh and lift 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.

When I finished he gave me as a reward some of his food so I wanted to become a soldier. I was so sure I was going to be a soldier.

But then we had a yearly fair. There was a fair. Sometimes some cossacks came from Russia. They did all kind of daring feats on the horses, you know, gyrating from the back and galloping and holding onto the mane of the horse, shouting at the top of their voice. I said I am going to be a horseback rider like the cossacks. That's what I wanted to be.

Q. Did your father, anybody in your family, like what secular activities did you do?

A. Oh, there was a couple cinemas. There was still films. Now the silent films. Every Sunday at two o'clock we use to take ten pfennigs and go to the cinema. We use to look at those movies. We saw comics, Rin Tin Tin and Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. I remember those.

Who else? Well, German actors like Gustav Froelich, and whoever. I forgot all those names.

They use to put barrels up and put planks across and there we sat. In the middle they use to come and check our tickets.

I, for excitement, use to eat the tickets up. When I had no tickets they would throw us out. So my

father use to blame me for not having those tickets.

But there was maybe some Hanukkah party for the grownups once a year. I don't think there was anything else. Except for the motorcycle racing. 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 an old gramophone. Those things that use to wind up.

Jewish friends use to come in. They would play cards. There were of course a synagogue. On every saturday that was entertainment of a sort. And high holy days once a year.

I had no lack of entertainment. I use to play on the streets with my cronies. I use to play marbles.

We use to -- Oh, yes, we had this zionist organization, Maccabees, so we use to go on outings. Sometimes there were outings from the school. But I don't know.

I don't think for the grownups there was much recreation or very little of it. I don't think they expected as much as they have today.

Q. How did people spend their evenings?

A. Oh, well, we sat at home, we sat in the yard, we played outside when it was summer. And we sat.

I forgot we had a swimming -- It wasn't a pool.

It was kind of an institution for swimming. We use to go there and swim sometimes.

I revisited on my recent visit there. It's still there. Not in use any longer. There was two lakes. On weekends we use to go to the lakes and picnic there.

My father use to rent a little boat. We use to rent a boat and go into the sea, but not very much. People sat at home. My mother would clean and cook. My father, I don't know. Not much one could do.

Q. Did you talk to your parents much?

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

Q. Did they communicate to you a fear of their concern about the growing Nazi?

A. Not to me. I heard my parents speak to each other in Yiddish that things don't look good and maybe you should think of emigrating. My father had established himself and built up a business. To liquidate a business and restart again and he had no real profession; he didn't think it was possible. He had this experience before. When he went to Palestine. It didn't

workout. He came back. Anyway, he died when he was 38 and my mother remarried then.

Q. So they made no real steps?

A. No, none whatsoever. They didn't that -- Not many people thought what did happen could really happen. That was something out of this world to have thought any human mind could think in these terms that the Holocaust could have happened. It was extraordinary phenonom. Nobody could even have thought such a thing could happen.

Okay. You were so conditioned to antisemitism all their lives, in their childhood, in adolescence and after they came to Germany in 1933.

Until 1933 it was fine. From 1933 immediately Nurenberg laws were inaugerated. I suppose a person gets conditioned even to bad conditions, to bad circumstances. And then you draw your conclusions. Things will pass.

You know, if you look at Jewish history you will find there have always been oppressors against the Jewish people and things will pass and there is rebirth of flourishing Jewish culture. People made a living and they did very well for themselves.

My father comparatively did well for himself. I don't think he could face liquidating and restarting, which was not an easy thing to do, especially when he had

four children.

Q. When did he go to Palestine?

A. In 1923.

Q. Did you talk about the incidents at school with your parents?

A. Yes, I told my mother I didn't want to go to school. I pretended I had a stomachache, my leg hurts, my arm hurts, my head headaches. She knew why. I was fearsome of going to school. What is going to be tomorrow? What are they going to do to me tomorrow? I couldn't face it.

You know, to face the next day going to school and sitting in school and being made fun of, 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 it. I had to go to school. If you did not come one or two days to school the police would come. You had to go to school. If you did not appear at school you would 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 I had to appear in school. This law applied to everybody.

Q. How come your parents went to Palestine?

A. Well, it was before my time, of course. I

heard that my father had a partner. Something went wrong. He lost everything. In any case, I tried to explain their concept of religion. They had the same concept about Zionism. It wasn't real political Zionism, like I say. I want a state of my own. I want a government of my own. I want an army of my own. I want to be free.

To them it was a concoction, a mixture of religion and sentiment. But it wasn't really in the sense of what Heitzl wanted of a Jewish state and later thinker. They went because they always heard next year in Jerusalem a Jewish state. I don't think it had any real meaning to them.

I think they thought maybe if they were amongst Jewish people it would be better for us. But this ideology of creating a state didn't occur to them because they didn't last a long time. Maybe half year, three quarter year; so it wasn't really in them.

If a person is an idealist, he will go to Israel or Palestine in those days. He wants to achieve a Jewish state. To them if it wasn't good they would leave. It didn't workout. They had no real attachment to neither an ideal or a Jewish country. They wanted to go where it's good for them. If Palestine for them would have been good to them, easy, they would have stayed. They

had to struggle, it was hard, it was primitive in comparison to Germany. They had no motivation at all to stay there. After sometime they returned and then I was born in 1925.

Q. Who was the first violence you saw?

A. That was in the bar. It was by Germans against Germans. There use to be a rowdy lot in that bar. There was lot of singing and lot of noise. From time to time somebody went beyond his usual behavior. So he had some chuck out, some people. you know

Q. Bouncer?

A. In English you call them bouncers. They use to carry him by the shoulders and by the feet and shout in unison and throw him in the street.

The heaviest would hit the pavement with a sickening thud and they left him there. When he slept off his stupor the police would come and take him to the jail and he would sleep that night.

The next day he would come back to the bar as if nothing had happened. That was the first thing I ever saw.

There use to be a lot of fights, especially among kids and grown up. Ten years in America I have never seen a physical fight between two people, not even once. I know they exist. I know there is crime. I know there



are drugs. I personally haven't seen any of this ever in America. But in Germany you see fights all over. Every five minutes you see people fighting.

Policemen come and take you to prison. I see people with handcuffs put on here in America. But in Germany those days, even today I saw it last year, in Germany a person was handcuffed and policeman would come with a truncheon and beat him and beat him and beat him. That's an indication of what kind of people they are. I have never seen anybody being beaten in this country.

Q. You saw that last year in Germany?

A. Yes.

Q. What part of Germany?

A. I was in Hamburg. I was going next to the plane and going on to Israel and I was walking through the streets a bit before I went to my hotel.

Suddenly I saw an elderly policeman dragging a man out of a bar, handcuffed and with a truncheon was beating him all the time like this.

He was sort of trying to fend off the beatings. It made such an impression on me really 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 person.

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 in 45. I was stationed in Germany. A tram passed. Two conductors. They said to a man it's full. You can't come here. You have to wait for the next. He didn't want to. He clung onto the railing. They took him the same way. They took him by the shoulders and threw him on the pavement. I have never seen that. It is so cold. I have seen people pushed around in Israel. I have never seen such kind of treatment from one human being to the next.

On various occasions I saw that in Germany. In times of Hitler, of course, I have seen it. This one occasion in 45, after the war.

I told you about Hamburg. This policeman with a truncheon hit this man he dragged out of the bar. The man wasn't violent. He was just sort of trying to guard his head.

Q. When was the first violence you saw against Jews?

A. Pardon?

Q. What was the first violence you saw against Jews?

A. I told you the story about the Kristallnacht when I saw this Jew being forced to dance on the Torah

and my teacher being dragged out of the class by the Gestapo.

Q. That was the first violence?

A. Yeah. I haven't seen any violence afterwards because I left Germany.

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

A. There was -- It's not what I heard them saying, but what they didn't say. Nobody spoke in sympathy of the Jewish people, like I mentioned this house of God burning. I heard only this woman say, she said "It's about time the Jews will taste what the Germans are like. It's about time they are taught a lesson."

But everybody was looking on and not objecting and voicing his opinion this is wrong. Not so much what they did say, what they didn't say. Nobody objected.

I mean any decent society if you see a church burn or any house of God or a gravestone. I should see the day when a Jew would upturn a gravestone or put a pipe bomb in a church. It doesn't seem right to me. It's ridiculous 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.

Q. When did you first see a brown shirt?

A. Oh, that was even before 1933. Hitler, I think, established SI. Called 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.

They even use to dress babies in uniform and taught them to say heil Hitler, a child that couldn't even talk yet.

They would teach a little baby to say a few words, the first words they use to teach them, the uniform, with hat, the baby maybe six months old, one year old and they dress them in the uniform. A child says a clever word, look, my child knows how to say heil Hitler.

Actually in 1933 there were not -- They were all party members. Every single one.

Q. When did you first see a brown shirt parade?

A. 1933. All the time. They were always marching through the streets with those standards and hundreds of flags and their jackboots; all the time there were parades. Every little occasion they made parades to show presence.

It was pretty frightening, you know, the way they walked. All young men, all vicious, all found their position in life. So many.

Q. When did the SS start joining the Brown Shirts?

A. No, they didn't join. SS were called the schutzstaffel. They were the lifeguard of Hitler. That was Hitler's personal lifeguard. They also came into being in 1933. They were the elite.

Only specific person, specific background maybe, specific height. They had to look very Germanic way. In those days to get in was privileged.

Q. Did any of your friends or neighbors participate in the Brown Shirts?

A. Oh, yes all of them.

Q. And the Gestapo?

A. Gestapo?

Q. SS.

A. Oh, SS. I can't say, except this one man whom I talked about. I don't recall. The SI, 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.

Q. Did anybody ever exhibit embarrassment?

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

Q. Did your parents change as they noticed the

Brown Shirts and the SS become more prevalent?

Did your parents become quieter or change in any way?

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

All in all, I think people were very -- They were expecting things to get really bad in Germany. When the Nurenberg laws, I think they were published in 1933 if I remember correctly, when they came out everybody knew things were going to go really bad.

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

A. In 1936?

Q. Yeah. Did you notice a big change then?

A. I can't say. I only remember a few -- an incident when Jessie -- What was his name? Jessie --

MR. GRANT: Owens?

A. Owens. He won so many medals. Hitler

couldn't take the fact that a black person won so many against a black person.

Then we heard desparaging remarks about blacks. Of course, there was an American boxer that named Max Bear. He was a very good boxer. I think he defeated Schmaeling. I am not sure. Schmaeling was a master boxer in Germany. He fought against Joe Louis, the America black boxer. Joe Louis finished him off in the first round. He knocked it out. It was a terrible blow to the Nazi party. A black man, America, was able to defeat the world champion Max Schmaeling. You heard of Max Schmaeling? He is still alive. He lives in Hamburg. Joe Louis died some years ago. He also defeated him. That was a terrible blow to the Nazi movement.

Oh, yes, there was a Jewish Helena Meyer. She was in the Olympics. She fought for Germany, what do you call it? Fencing. She won the gold metal for Germany. Of course, they didn't publish the fact she was Jewish, but she was Jewish.

Q. What do you recall about the day the Nazi placed the Brown Shirts in the doorway of all Jewish businesses?

A. 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. Whoever did go in was very courageous person but very few did go in.

Q. Did you know the man stationed at your shop?

A. Pardon?

Q. Did you know the man stationed at your shop?

A. No. He was a stranger.

Q. What was his attitude?

A. He was a terrible antisemite. He was totally idealistic Nazi. He had a job to do and he did it well. All Germans do their jobs well, whatever it is.

He stood in front of our shop. Whoever wanted to come in he said "Don't buy from Jews." If he did come in his name was taken and picture was taken and it was published in the newspapers. There were very few that courageous. You can't really blame them.

Q. Did anybody go into your shop to buy?

A. I think one or two. They didn't care for the Nazi so they did.

In those days even if you did the worse thing that could happen to you, as I mentioned, their name was published in the newspaper and photograph but no more than that. They weren't imprisoned, you know, incarcerated in concentration camps.



Q. Did you ever wish when you were a child you could join the Hitler youth, for the acceptance, like the hikes and fun things?

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

Q. Did you ever express it to your parents?

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

Q. When did you totally lose that?

A. Oh, I came to the Jewish school and I came amongst my Jewish compatriots. Then I really, because we had so few children in the town in Gustrow in the town that I came from. One couldn't really suppress myself.

When I came among Jewish teachers and Jewish children a new world was opened for me. I was taught Jewish subjects. I saw how wonderful the teachers were. How compassionate and kind and loveable. Such a contrast between those teachers I had before and the Jewish teachers, who were tremendous, wonderful people, quiet, nice educated people.

I felt even at that age the education and the culture they had. The Germans couldn't get near that,

despite all the tribulation, despite all the terrible things done to us. We never lost our faith. We never lost our belief.

Those teachers, every single one of them, the rabbi, the cantor and Jewish slaughter and teachers, male and female teachers, they were beautiful, wonderful people. They taught us with such love and compassion. They were wonderful educators.

Of course, all the children. They were wonderful children. There was no hatred. There was no spite. There was no running after me calling me schweinjuden. I know today children, a few from Gustrow, I know lawyers and doctors - one is greatest people in Israel National Bank. Very capable people.

Completely, most of them modest people. Despite all that we kept our image of God. It was a different world that was opened for me. I started to live. I start to breathe. The first time I could even think and learn without all this terrible apprehensions which I had. It was a bit late. I was only two years there. Whatever I gleemed, what I have today is probably from that period.

Q. How did your family get through the depression and all that inflation?

A. I don't know. That was before my time. I

know we had in our loft we had coffers, big coffers full of money, million dollar. Not dollar. Mark. Hundred million, you know. I was told about it.

When you got your wages and before you got home you couldn't buy a pair of shoes with it for the months wages. I heard about that.

The fact the money was in our loft. I said "What is this money?" It was for playing. He explained to me.

You see the trouble started right then. Jews were pretty smart. They bought property. Property didn't go. When all this over they bought the property, they had houses. They had whole streets. They had half of a city. They owned all that.

Of course, envy and jealousy of the gentile population was re-enacted through all this and Jews were blamed even for this depression for the inflation.

Maybe you weren't allowed to be too clever. Maybe one should keep a low profile. I don't know. But then why stop it?

MS. COSTER: Let's stop for now.