

One second [INAUDIBLE]. If we want to stop, do I just give you a signal, or just stop, or just say stop?

Any time. Any time.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

In case I need drink of water.

No problem.

Well, you never know when.

water.

Sure. OK. That's good.

OK, we can start any time.

This is the Holocaust Oral History Project interview of George Leitmann, taking place in San Francisco, California, on May 1, 1993. My name is Sylvia Prozan and assisting in the interview is Richard Kirschman. George, when and where were you born?

I was born in Vienna, Austria, on May 24, 1925. You want to know about my parents?

Yes. Your father's name.

My father's name was Josef, and my mother's name is Stella. In fact, I just saw her this morning. She is 91 and lives in Berkeley, now in a nursing home. My grandparents on my mother's side came from Hungary-- that is my maternal grandfather came from Hungary and my maternal grandmother from Bohemia. And on my father's side, my grandfather and grandmother actually came from Austria. I'm not sure exactly where they were born-- not in Vienna I believe.

My father, after returning from the First World War, went to a commercial college and graduated as a certified public accountant. He worked first for a private firm in the '20s. Of course, I don't remember this. This is only just what I learned since then. Then for the Austrian government. in what, I guess, corresponds to their antitrust division, until about 1934-35, when one of the electrical trusts was broken up and he bought part of that and then had an electrical supply radio store in Vienna until 1938.

I went to school in Vienna through grammar school. And then the first three years of gymnasium-- actually, real gymnasium, which is the technical part-- till 19-- Oh, I guess, late '38 after the Anschluss. And then, Jews were not allowed to continue in this university preparatory school, and I transferred in my fourth year to what really was a terminal four-year program. But only for one semester, because we emigrated in the spring of '40 after the start of the war. So in '39 I went for one semester, and then I was thrown out of that too.

My father stayed with us until the spring of early April of '40, in 1940. In that interim period, I lived with my parents, of course, in the 2nd district, which is where most of the Jews lived-- Leopoldstadt-- with my maternal grandmother, who lived in the same apartment and in fact owned the apartment house. My paternal grandmother lived by herself-- she was a widow by then-- also in the second district. And in the spring of '39-- so about a year after the Anschluss-- we were expelled from our apartment and moved in with my maternal grandmother.

Then-- well, maybe I should preface this by saying why we stayed so long. I guess that's because most of our relatives-- those who made it at least-- had left by 1939. Some of them were very bright and left immediately, both on my father's and my mother's side. My grandfather-- my paternal grandfather-- had been a staff officer in the Austrian army and for some time attached to the military government of Poland before the First World War. Most of Poland, part of it

belonged to Russia, part of it to Austria.

It was essentially a military zone, and he was stationed in Kraków. As a consequence, the children were born in different places. My father had four sisters, one with died in infancy and then three surviving sisters, all of whom were born in Vienna. But my father was born during my grandfather's stint in the army in Poland, and so he was born in Poland. This had a very profound effect on his life, really his death, because he fell under the Polish quota.

It didn't matter whether you were an Austrian or a Pole, but what determined the United States immigration quota was the place of birth. And since he had been born in Poland, he fell under the Polish quota, which was much smaller, or maybe more crowded, than the Austrian quota. And so we had decided not to leave until we knew that he was safe.

He had served as a Lieutenant in the Austrian army during the First World War in the Balkans. As a consequence, he spoke all the local languages-- Croatian, Serbian. And in addition, my maternal grandmother-- in other words, on my mother's side-- had relatives in then Yugoslavia. So this is about 1939. And so we decided that the best thing would be for my father to try and get into Yugoslavia, illegally of course.

He managed to do that in early 1940, the beginning of April. And in fact he led a group of Jews across the Austrian border into Yugoslavia since he knew the countryside and spoke the local languages, and was, in fact, able to join that part of my mother's family in Yugoslavia. And we heard from him a number of times thereafter. He was able to write to us. Of course there were diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and Germany.

And so we knew he was safe, and so we decided to leave. And we left at the beginning of May-- or maybe it was actually late April, about a month after he was able to cross over. So we thought he was safe. And so I left with my mother and my two grandmothers. I was then 14. And we were able to get tickets-- my father had already arranged that on the SS Eternia which was an Italian line out of Trieste.

And so we went from Austria by train from Vienna to Trieste in Italy, Northern Italy, and then departed on the SS Eternia. The war, of course, had already been on for about six months. It started, what, in August '39, and this was late April-- so more than six months. In fact, we were stopped in the Mediterranean by a British submarine as we approached Gibraltar, and they checked the passenger list. Stopped on the way along the Yugoslav coast, Dubrovnik, and I remember in Spoleto or Split, down the Adriatic, and then out through the Mediterranean, out through Gibraltar, and arrived in New York in early May.

We had quite a few relatives in the United States. It's a very dispersed family, the Leitmanns. We had American relatives, two branches-- a California branch by marriage, who had come to California in the 1850s and established the first stagecoach stop in Bakersfield in 1852. In fact, the surviving member of that family, a first cousin of mine, just visited us last week. He's retired in Long Beach, Al Kinspel.

The Kinspels, who were cousins of my father's generation, I guess, of my father's and his sisters, had decided at the turn of the century-- they were older cousins-- to come to Europe and pick up brides. I guess I was habit in those days, and they married two first cousins. So two brothers of the Kinspel family came and married two Leitmann sisters-- sisters of my father's. And Adele, who survived until the late '60s, lived in San Francisco. And the other Aunt, whom I never met, who died before the First World War, in fact very young, married to Uncle Manny, who, when I met him and in the '50s, still carried her picture and showed it to me many times. And she had been dead for almost 50 years by then, over 40 years anyway.

So we arrived in New York. We also, on my father's side, had relatives, the Greenspans. I'm not quite sure how they were related. Those two sets of relatives had in fact vouched for us, signed affidavits, and that's how we got to the States. The Kinspels in California, the Greenspans in New York.

The Greenspans were extremely wealthy. In fact, I remember that when my mother and I decided we had better go and thank them after we'd been here a couple of months. They lived on Park Avenue in a place where each apartment was just one floor. The elevator goes right into the apartment, and their butler greeted us at the door. It's the only contact we had with them, in fact, that one visit. And Mrs. Greenspan offered us sherry, and my mother doesn't drink, and I was too

young, and so she asked the Butler report back into the bottle. That's my one remembrance of the Greenspans, but of course we were very thankful to them just the same.

So, in fact, the third sister of my father's, who had been married into California, had emigrated in '38 already with her husband and children. And so they greeted us, and we stayed with them for a few weeks. My mother had two siblings, a brother and sister. The sister-- well, both of them also had emigrated in '38 or maybe early '39. We were really the lone holdouts. And my mother's older sister had moved to California almost immediately. She had a daughter who was an actress in fact with the Max Reinhardt company and got a job in Hollywood almost immediately. She was maybe 20 years old and my first cousin, Maria.

And so the paupers-- she had married an Austrian cavalry officer in fact-- had moved to California with their daughters. And my father's sister, the third one who had not married in California, lived in New York with her family. And so we stayed with them, as I said, for a few weeks after arrival and then moved in with my mother's brother and family, who had also emigrated in late '38 or early '39 and who lived in New York, actually in Elmhurst. And we stayed with them for a few months.

I started high school in Elmhurst, New York. I went to Newtown High School, which was very close to where my uncle lived. And then very shortly thereafter my mother got her own apartment. She got all kinds of sundry jobs to put me through school, and I went to school and graduated from Newtown High in 1944. So I actually lived-- February '44, mid-semester. So we lived in Queens, New York, first in the Elmhurst, and then in Jackson Heights for all these years.

I am rambling, here but I should say that, of course, the safety that we had thought my father had gained by going to Yugoslavia was clearly illusory, because the Germans marched into Yugoslavia that very summer of 1940. And so he clearly didn't gain safety. In fact, we still heard from him for about another six months after we had come to the States through the Red Cross. Apparently, because of his knowledge of both the area and the language, he worked for the Red Cross as an interpreter, and I think I have a number of the postcards that we got till maybe late 1940-- so for about six months after we had come here. And then we never heard from him again.

To jump back now, I guess, I graduated from high school in the beginning of 1944. In the meantime, I had volunteered for the United States Army for the V5 program, which was an officer's training program mostly in the sciences and engineering. I was inducted into the army in fact on my mother's birthday, February 5, 1944. And because of my interest in engineering, I was put in an engineer battalion. 286th Engineer Combat Battalion in fact.

I did my basic training in Colorado at what I guess was Camp Carson-- it is now Fort Carson-- outside of Colorado Springs in the Rockies. a very interesting place, because it was also a German prisoner of war camp for the Afrika Korps, whom we used to see marching along, singing their songs, going to the circus on Sunday afternoon when we went out on maneuvers. And it was one of the camps, in fact, where they hang their own people. While we were there, there were a number of incidents where Afrika Korps soldiers were found hanging in the barracks, apparently those who were thought to be collaborators.

Then I did my advanced basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri and went overseas in the fall of 1944, just after the invasion, but first to Great Britain. Spent 2 and 1/2 months in England and then crossed the channel during the Battle of the Bulge into France in early December of '44. And we were in combat then from that time until the end of the war. First attached after a quick trip across southern France to the first French army, General Lattre de Tassigny, and went up with the first French army to the German border, stopped at Sarreguemines-- now Sarreguemines, then Saargemund-- in January I guess, and then crossed into Germany through the Siegfried Line.

I was attached to a reconnaissance unit of that battalion, again, partly because I guess of my language skills. I'd been sent ahead and to Colmar, in Alsace, Lorraine, about three days before the United States troops enter to reconnoiter a route into Colmar. And then brought the first American convoy into Colmar. And that must have been January I guess or maybe early February-- I'm not quite sure-- of '45. And then we were transferred from the first French army to the US Seventh Army under General Patch. I stayed with them with the 286th Engineers till after VE Day.

We came through very much the same route as the Japanese regiment did. I looked at the map-- very much in that very

same area through Wurzburg and Munich and then down into southern Austria. We were in Innsbruck or very close to Innsbruck when the war ended. In fact, just as an aside, since I'm rambling, since I was in a reconnaissance, I was sent out-- rumor had been going around that Goering was hiding out near there. And so just two of us in a Jeep took off to look for Goering and found him, because we were suddenly surrounded by 100 German paratroopers who turned out to be his personal bodyguard. Of course he had, by that time, decided to surrender himself, although the war wasn't over.

It was probably May 5 or something like that, but he'd clearly been in touch with the United States authorities. And so when we said we would be very happy to take him in, why, we were told that that was quite unnecessary. In fact, he was having dinner that evening with General Patton. So we departed.

Then we were pulled back into Germany into one of the spas. And since we had enough combat units, we were going to be demobilized and sent back to the United States. So we were convoyed down to Marseilles for shipment back to the States in the summer of '45. And then they decided that they had made a mistake and sent another battalion home by mistake, and so they renamed us. I'm not quite sure what the other one was, but one more morning we were called in a typical Army snafu, and said, you are no longer the 286, you are the 114th or something. And so you're going to Japan-- you're not going home.

And while we were waiting to go aboard in Marseilles, the war ended in the Pacific. So it must have been in August of '45. And so we all thought we were going home. But it turned out our kernel was very eager-- volunteered to become Corps engineer for the occupying forces. And so we were shipped right back to Germany.

So we convoyed back up into Germany. By that time it was early September, and I had been requested by the CIC, the Counterintelligence Corps back even in April before the war ended because of area and language proficiency. And my commanding officer nixed that by saying they couldn't spare any engineers. And so now that we were really no longer needed that badly, they did allow me to transfer, and I transferred to a CIC unit in Wiesbaden. And that was probably early October '45 and then spent the next eight or nine months there till I was demobilized in May of '46.

Now, my only and really very minor experience in liberating a camp was with one of these peripheral camps. It was a camp called Landsberg. And I have some photographs in my album. It's the typical piles of bodies photograph. So it's something that I'm sure you've seen thousands of times.

Anyway, the remaining time during my army days in CIC I spent partly in Wiesbaden. In fact, I was in charge of a prisoner of war camp for a while, interrogating prisoners of war. We were involved in a number of actions against what was then considered to be an incipient Nazi movement, the Werewolves, and I have a number of documents on that. And then in February, I think, I was detached to the Nuremberg Trials as an interrogator and spent about six weeks there as an interrogator, between early February and March.

It was during that period that Goering committed suicide. So that sort of pins it down in time I guess. My main function, as I say, was to interrogate witnesses. I interrogated Field Marshal Guderian, who at first refused to talk to me because he couldn't ascertain my rank. First of all, he thought I was clearly too junior to have any rank. CIC agents didn't wear rank insignia-- officers uniforms with no rank insignia. Well, we could take on any rank we pleased up to Colonel.

So I showed up as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force the next morning. I figured he might believe that. And then he talked to me. The only other people of note that I interrogated were Mrs. Himmler and her daughter, sort of a pathetic pair as I remember it. Mrs. Himmler's main complaint was her husband's infidelities. That's really all she wanted to talk about.

And then I had a group of female concentration camp guards. All the other people were really minor people that I interrogated. It was an "interesting experience," in quotation marks I guess, because I worked very hard on keeping my cool. And I guess it's one of my few talents I was able to do that, because I figured I'd do a better job I guess, and not yell, and rant and rave, which I didn't do. And then was sent back to Wiesbaden and spent the rest of the time on the team there and then left the army in May as I said.

All that time, I had high hopes of finding my father. Talked to people. I knew the general area that he'd last written from

in Yugoslavia at the end of 1940. And, of course, there wasn't any news at all. The first news we had, as soon as I returned home in '46, wrote to the American Red Cross. I have those documents. And they put me in touch with the US embassy in Zagreb-- it was Belgrade, probably Belgrade-- who then wrote my mother and me, oh, probably late in '46, saying that they had investigated the situation.

And if my father had in fact been where we thought he had been, namely in a little town called Nis-- N-I-S with a little thing on top-- then he was executed along with all other Jews in the early spring of 1942. Because the Germans were beginning to withdraw from that area because of partisan pressure. And the bodies had all been cremated. But the only news we had and what we to this day assume in fact happened.

There is an ironic note, before I forget. When my mother moved a little over two years ago to a retirement home in Berkeley and I helped to clean out the apartment where she had lived until then, she still had an amazing number of documents with her, including my father's military records, or at least some of them. And it turns out that my father, who had been wounded twice during the First World War in then Serbia, was in a military hospital after his second wounding in the town of Nis. So he lay in a military hospital in the First World War defending the fatherland, and that's where he was killed in the Second World War. I guess there are lots of stories like that.

Anyway, perhaps this is a good time to stop and let you ask some questions. I've been rambling. I'll take a drink of water.

I'm going to go back to the beginning, starting with some name. Your father's father?

Alexander.

Leitmann?

Right.

And his wife?

Cecilia. And I don't remember her maiden name, although I could probably find out. I know that he was in the army, was that his career?

Yes. Yes, he was a career officer. Right. So he must-- I don't know how young he was when he went in, but he went right up. So that was--

Did you spend a lot of time with him?

Well, he died in 1929. So I only knew him for the first three years of my life or so-- three-four years of my life. I remember he was by then retired of course. And so he was the typical grandfather. A rather stern person, always dressed to the nines, a suit, and a vest, and a tie. And I never saw him outside of his formal attire.

My grandmother, his wife, survived and emigrated. As I said, she was one of the two grandmothers I brought along. First lived with the daughter in New York, and then, later on, sometime during the war when I wasn't around, moved out to her surviving daughter in San Francisco and died here in middle-late '40s. '46, something like that.

Can you remember anything about your visits to your father's father?

Well, yes, I do. Because, it was, in fact, the apartment that we had eventually moved into after we were kicked out of our own apartment. It was, I guess, the sort of typical bourgeois apartment, lots of overstuffed furniture and lots of paintings on the wall. As I say, he was, at least to my mind seemed, a very stern kind of grandfatherly figure-- not very relaxed. Probably a holdover from his military days.

On the other hand, I have photographs of his with his grandchildren. He clearly enjoyed his grandchildren and visited

with them. Excuse me. My aunt's husband had a candy store, I guess probably what you might call it-- general refreshment candy place-- where in the Prater, which was the amusement park in Vienna. That was my favorite place to visit of course. It was within walking distance of where we lived-- probably a mile away.

And I spent a lot of time there, because my father also was a fairly stern person and my mother was, and still is, very much a housekeeper. So I was always kept very clean. I was an only child. And in fact my cousins used to call me Little Lord Fauntleroy. And so when I wanted to escape that, my father would take me down to the Prater, which, A, was an amusement park, but, B, of course also, my cousins lived in a much more relaxed atmosphere, and we were able to wander around the amusement park, and also eat candy, and hot dogs, and what have you.

So that's really all I remember about my paternal grandfather. Because, as I say, I probably have a year or two of memory. Now, my grandmother I remember for much longer, because my father used to visit her every day, and he used to take me along quite often. He had a routine. On his way to either the office or later on the company he owned, he would stop off in the morning, and have a cup of coffee with her, and then go to the office. And it's a habit that I took up when my mother moved to California in 1970.

That was when she retired. And she had her own apartment till two years ago in Berkeley, and almost every day I would stop off for coffee in the morning before going to the office at the University. And it's one of the things I feel sort of ties me to my father, whom I really only knew for a very small portion of my life, since I saw him last when I was 14. And that's well over 50 years ago-- it seems hard to believe.

On my mother's side, I never knew my grandfather. He had died before I was born.

What was his name?

His name-- that's terrible, because I don't-- oh, I'm going to have to look on the records or ask my mother. My grandmother's name was Fannie, which is probably short for something, but that's what we called her. And she lived with us, because she had been a widow for all these years from before I was born. And she also came. She was the other grandmother whom I brought along to the States.

She lived with us then again in New York, with my mother and me, until she died in 1947. She was-- I guess the whole family was stern Or maybe I just recall it that way. They took very good care of me.

She had her own part of the apartment. It was very large apartments. I think I said before, she owned the apartment house we lived in, so we had sort of a double apartment.

I took piano lessons in the dining room, which was never used for a dining room, I guess except for parties. But it had the grand piano in it, and her room was off of the grand dining room, which was one of these Victorian places with a chandelier with God knows how many lights, and a grand piano, and a couch, and a fireplace, and two side boards, and sort of the formal part of the apartment. And then we had a little house in the country, right outside of Vienna, called the old Danube Lake, subsidiary arm of the Danube, where we spend our Summers. It was a place that was eventually taken over by the mayor of Vienna when we were kicked out.

And both grandmothers spent the Summers with us there. So they were both really a very close part of the family always. Although my paternal grandmother lived by herself but not too far away, they did spend the Summers with us out at the lake. And my father commuted, because it was within commuting distance of the city.

Now, I do remember, my grandmother's maiden name was Hauser. And as I say, her father came from Hungary, and her mother came from Bohemia. I have family portraits of my maternal grandmother's parents, which I found in my mother's closet about 15 years ago rolled up. She had cut them out of the frames and brought them with her. And I had them restored. And I did then find in the files, in fact, the daguerreotype photographs of that family, and they hang in my place in Berkeley.

What did they do for a living? As I say, my paternal grandfather was an officer in the Austrian army. My-- I'm going to

sneeze. My maternal grandfather owned a dry goods store, I guess, in the apartment house that my grandmother then owned in the second district in Vienna. I had an uncle who was an opera singer.

What was his name? His name was Fischer. My grandmother's married name was Fischer. So her family, her maiden name was Hauser, then she married into the Fischer. Family. And I will have to remember my--

What did he sing? He sang in the opera in Vienna, La Scala. In fact, at La Scala he very often appeared on the program as Ernesto Piscator, because his name was Ernst Fischer. And he converted to Roman Catholicism in the early '30s. And it was not a scandal in the family-- that wasn't the problem. It was a scandal only because he wanted the archbishop cardinal of Vienna, whose name was Innitzer, to officiate at the wedding, and Cardinal Innitzer declined for obvious reasons. So that was really a cousin of my mother's.

Her brother-- as I said, she had a sister and a brother, an older sister and an older brother, she was she was the youngest one-- uncle Paul, was really my favorite uncle. Although I didn't know him for very long, because he had been an artillery officer in the First World War, and was captured by the Russians during the first year of the war on the Eastern Front, and didn't come back at the end of the war, and was given up for dead. And then one day in 1920 walked in the door, two years after the end of the First World War. It turned out that he had been eventually sent off to Siberia, and then fought his way back during the revolution with a Czech brigade, and then in 1920 showed up. Of course spoke fluent Russian by then.

And the economic situation, I guess, was very bad in Austria during the '20s. And in the late '20s-- he had a degree in chemical engineering-- he decided to take a job in the Soviet Union. They were looking for foreign engineers in the late '20s to build up their industry, particularly their chemical industry. And so he left his family-- had a wife and a daughter-- in Vienna and went off, got a job. First in Sverdlovsk, now, again, Ekaterinburg, I guess, in the Urals. And then when he was transferred in the middle '30s, 36 or thereabouts, to Moscow-- earlier, maybe '34-- he brought his family, his wife and daughter, to Moscow.

They stayed till 1937, when he was given the choice-- become a Soviet citizen or leave. And decided to leave. Came back to Vienna, which was really the first time I met him in 1937, just a year before the Anschluss. It was a bad choice I guess, or maybe it wasn't-- I don't know. But he did become my favorite uncle, and partly because his interests were akin to mine. I was always interested in science, and, of course, he was an engineer. And partly because, of course, once I was in the States, he really became a father figure, because I never saw my father again.

He survived. He died in 1954 I think in New York. So he was in his early 60s. I was very glad to remember him. In 1988 the Technical University of Vienna-- it was the 50th anniversary of the Anschluss-- gave me an honorary doctorate, and I dedicated it to him in my acceptance speech. Which, I guess, the only two notable things about that event were, A, that in Austria the president of the Republic usually is present at the bestowal of honorary degrees, because they don't give very many-- it's a small country. And I accepted on the condition that Mr. Waldheim would not be present, and they were very pleased to use that as an excuse not to have him present.

So I really was able to do two things. And the dean of the faculty, who is a very nice man by the name of Hans Troger, gave a wonderful speech, a very political speech in fact, pointing out the sins of the prior generations and the history of antisemitism in Austria. And I have a copy of that. It's in German of course, but we can probably make a copy of that for the files.

In fact, his speech was so strong that the rector, in his speech, said, well, no, this is a very important political occasion of course, being the 50th of the Anschluss, but this is really an academic occasion, and so I think it's better not to say any more about it. So I think he was a little embarrassed by Troger's-- I guess honesty is what you have to call it. And it really points up that I don't visit the sins of the fathers on to the next generation. I have some very good and close friends of that generation of Germans and Austrians. I still find it very difficult to communicate with my own generation, but people who were either small children when the war ended or were born after the war I have no problem with. And Hans Troger is one of these people.

In fact, it's sort of ironic. His own father served in the Austrian army, of course, during the Second World War on the

Eastern Front, fleeing before the oncoming Russians in, I guess April or early May of just before the end of the war, crossed the Danube on a small boat with a number of other Austrian soldiers fleeing from the advancing Russian. And an artillery shell hit the boat just a day before the war ended and killed him. So that just shows that there's tragedy everywhere.

Again, it's a good time to let you stop me.

OK. Your mother's brother was Paul, and her sis sister was who?

Elizabeth. Elizabeth. And they actually changed their name after they emigrated to the States from Popper, P-O-P-P-E-R, to Palmer. So my cousin's stage name was Maria Palmer in the States. And she was sort of a starlet I guess is what the phrase is, a minor movie actress, until she retired from the stage. She was also on Broadway in a number of plays and then in leading roles. And then wrote for TV and the movies, but was a very heavy smoker and died in her early 60s of lung cancer. Her mother survived until two and a half years ago and died at the age of 94, buried in Forest Lawn.

What was the first school you went to like, and how far away from your home?

It was within walking distance. In fact, when I went back-- well, I went back right after the war ended in January of '46, which was the first time that Americans could get into Vienna. Until that time it was occupied by Soviet troops, and then it became a jointly occupied city. So I flew into Vienna at the beginning of '46 and walked those distances and realized that they were much shorter than I had to remember. I guess to a child these distances seem much longer.

And then, since then, I've gone-- well, I didn't go back there until actually the early '60s. So for almost 20 years, I didn't go back. Just as an aside, my mother has never gone back and never expressed a desire or even a yearning to go back. I've offered it to her quite a few times, and she said, what for?

So I lived within walking distance of my school, which was called-- well, first of all, grammar school was really within walking distance, probably four or five blocks. Once I went to gymnasium, it was Archduke Rainer, real gymnasium-- I guess R-A-I-N-E-R. It was an all boys' school. And it turns out that, again, as an aside, one of my colleagues at Berkeley was about five years older, four years older, than I am. When I went for my PhD at Berkeley, gave me one of the two required language exams and he gave me my German exam, and he was very surprised that I finished it in 15 minutes without any mistakes. But I didn't really enlighten him until a year later.

And he had gone to the same school-- that's what brought it up-- about three or four years before me. So we didn't know each other. But we very often have lunch together now.

What's his name?

His name is Joe Frisch, and he retired, oh, five-six years ago. But I went for three years to gymnasium, and, as I say, then had to leave. Jews weren't allowed to go to gymnasium, since that's a preparatory school for university.

I have no recollection one semester at the other school that I went to. Maybe it wasn't even the full semester. You know, for my fourth year, in the first part of my fourth year I went to there. There were gymnasium and then there were the four-year schools for people who went into a trade, and then had to go to one of those, but I think only for a few months.

Was your grammar school coed?

Grammar school was coed, yes. But the gymnasium was not. But there was a girls' school across the courtyard, and that got us into a lot of trouble, because always trying to peer over into their part of the territory, standing on ledges trying to look over.

Were you successful?

Yes. In fact, my whole form was kicked out for a whole semester for doing that. We were all allowed back, but we had

private tutors for a semester I remember.

That must have been a scandal.

Yes. In fact, one of my few recollections is being called to the principal's office and seeing my father sitting there. And I knew I had done something bad, but I didn't know what. I think it must have been the second year I was in school. So I was probably 11 or 12-- a very curious age.

How did your father react?

Well, actually, he was quite understanding. Parents got me a tutor, and actually I think my grades were better after that semester off than they had been before that. But, you know, I got a good talking too. But I think they understood what hormonal drives were at that time. Anyway, I wasn't the only one. The whole form got kicked out.

How many would that be?

Oh, there must have been about 20 of us.

Did you have to wear a uniform to school.

No. No, there were no uniforms. No, we did have sort of paramilitary training however. I remember we were throwing things. There were mock grenades and stuff like that. We had an obstacle course and what have you.

Was that a usual course of training?

No, it was a regular-- now, the real gymnasium is the technical. There are two kinds of gymnasium. One is a humanistic one where you take Greek, and Latin, and a lot of literature, and stuff to prepare you more for the humanities. And then the real gymnasium, which prepares you for science and engineering. So I went to that one, and Latin was required. In fact, eight years of Latin. I only had three.

And then you could choose a modern foreign language. I never got to that, because that was done in the fourth year. So the English that I learned, my parents, again, hired an English teacher once, of course, we know we had to emigrate. So in '38 and '39 I took private English lessons. In fact, it was on my way home from an English lesson on the afternoon of Kristallnacht, that I was walking back from my English teachers, that I arrived in at our apartment. And I knew something was going on, but I didn't know what.

I got to our apartment, and there were stormtroopers and other people carrying things out, sort of helping themselves to the things. Fortunately, my father had been warned and stayed in the office. This, of course, was, what, late '38. He was still involved with his business that had been placed in charge of commissar, and he had to train the persons who were aryanizing the establishment.

So he was in the office, and I guess somebody had called and said there was trouble-- stay in the office. So he didn't come home. But my mother and grandmother, of course, were home. And the main thing that happened was that people just came in and broke in and just stole stuff as I remember.

Were you there when they broke in?

Well, when I came home they were still doing it. Yeah, right. So, you know.

What did they take?

Well, they took paintings off the wall. They took my father's stamp collection. He was an avid stamp collector. They took things like radios, and phonographs, and sort of the normal kind of thing. But you know.

How were your mother and grandmother reacting?

They, by that time, had learned to stay out of the way. So they just withdrew to a room back and let people do what they wanted to do. There was really nothing that could be done. We had learned our lesson. Because right after the Anschluss-- in fact, starting on the day of the Anschluss-- people were taken out, scrubbed streets, and of course beaten up and that kind of thing. So this was, what, five, six months after the Anschluss, and by that time people had learned not to resist or make a fuss.

And so they just-- I guess they were happy enough that my father wasn't there. Because people were being taken away. Now, there was still no real inkling of the magnitude of, of course, the disaster. People were taken away. Some came back, some didn't come back.

I think it wasn't really until about a year later that there was some realization that things were very serious in terms of being taken away and not coming back. I mean, we knew about Dachau. Dachau was about the only concentration camp that was known almost from the outset, but it was really more considered to be where political prisoners were taken-- socialists, communists, Jews, but really not in terms of being exterminated, but as a detention camp. That's really what-- there was every indication that the virulence of the reaction towards Jews and other people that got it in the neck really didn't become serious in terms of magnitude until probably '39-40, probably '40.

Everyone knew that people were being maltreated, put into concentration camps in Germany. But I suspect, even talking to some of my German colleagues, that the amount of ill treatment was much smaller in Germany. And I think, to some extent, the Austrians were worse than the Germans.

Why?

Well, you know, it's very interesting. The Austrians, to this day, at least the right-wing Austrians and that generation of those who survived, want you to believe that Beethoven was an Austrian but Hitler was a German. It's that kind of thing. It's a typical, I think, one way of absolving yourself of guilt I suppose, also making the best of a bad situation. But it's very interesting, because the Austrians, or many of them, wanted you to believe that they were one of the first victims.

And one of the things I do remember, because of the great excitement of the period, was that I went out-- first of all, just before the Anschluss, when there were lots of demonstrations on the street, both by Nazis, and anti-Nazis, and so on-- I roamed the streets. For a 13-year-old, a 12-year-old really, it was very exciting. And I'm still surprised that my parents let me do it, but I think they had no inkling what was really going on.

And then, on the day of the Anschluss, I actually was in the crowd that saw Hitler March into Vienna. And so I know that there were over a million people out there, because you couldn't see the end of them. And so they weren't bussed out there to greet him. I mean, they went out there because they wanted to greet him.

Please describe that day.

Well, as I say, I was 12 years old or a little over 12 years old, so it's a long time ago. But all I remember is this terrible excitement. And it's really, as I have thought about it many times since then, something that brings home the fact that that kind of demagoguery and I guess you'd have to call it theater is terribly appealing to most of us. I think one of my true regrets for a 12-year-old was that I couldn't participate once I realized that I was excluded.

I would have been a Hitler Youth for sure until I became old enough to think about it. But as a 12-year-old, that whole hysteria, and the excitement, and the marching around, and beating the drums, and all that kind of stuff, it's a tremendously appealing. We always think of human beings being rational. First of all, kids are not rational, and they're very easy to catch. So I think very hard when I condemn people, until they can think.

That particular day did you know Hitler was coming?

Oh, yes. Of course. Because there have been a plebiscite, and the Nazis lost that plebiscite. Now, the predecessor, the

Austrian Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, who later on became a professor at Toledo, University of Toledo or something, in history, wasn't any great shakes either. Because Austria, since early 1934, really had a fascist government. The chancellor in '34-- this is another one of the reminiscences that are reasonably clear in my mind-- in 1934, I guess in the early spring, is when there was a Nazi uprising. Well, no, it was later. It was the summer of '34.

In the spring of '34 there was a socialist uprising, because the fascists had taken over the government. Vienna was always traditionally red, and the countryside was black as a political party. The countryside was essentially conservative and very much dominated by the Catholic Church, so the peasants in the countryside were the conservative element. and Vienna was sort of a citadel of socialism, and social Democrats were very strong in Vienna. Of course, the Jews had played a very large role in the Social Democratic movement early on-- Adler and people of that type in the early 1900s.

So there was that enmity between countryside and the city and between what were considered the intellectuals and the peasants. And the Jews were always strong of course in Vienna, both in terms of numbers and influence, and fairly negligible in the countryside. And so they were very largely involved in the Social Democratic Party and the movement. And even though my grandfather had been a general officer and all my relatives have been in the army-- I know that my parents voted socialist. Now, I don't know about my grandparents, but my father my mother certainly voted for the Social Democratic Party.

They, of course, were socialists in the mildest way. They're sort of Swedish-Scandinavian model. And it was the second international as opposed to the third and the fourth. Well, to come back to this day we're talking about, the Anschluss day, I think that the first reaction really was one of strict excitement. Of course, we knew from before, and we had listened to Hitler's speeches on the radio, before they had taken over Austria, we could get, of course, German radio, we knew exactly how he felt about the Jews. But it was still very much in the abstract, and it was really only the people who maybe were more sophisticated and maybe less trusting and felt less assimilated, I guess, maybe than we did, who took the hint and took off right away.

I mean, we could have gone through Yugoslavia right then and there. It didn't take a visa as it took to come to the United States. There was a certain feeling I know on the part of my father that his father had been a staff officer. He had served as an officer and been wounded. My uncle had been an officer. His brother-in-law-- on both sides, in fact, the cavalry officer who married my mother's sister and my mother's brother had been officers. And so he felt that there really nothing that could happen to him-- nothing serious.

It'd be another one of these antisemitic episodes of which there'd been so many that he knew about. He had never, of course, really experienced one personally. He was a reserve officer in the Austrian army. He had his pistol at home, until they came very early after the Anschluss and collected it. And I think that I rather have a feeling that it was until almost the very end that he didn't believe in this outcome.

And I try to reconstruct myself-- I wake up at night sometimes trying to put myself-- of course, impossible to do that-- in his shoes in his last moments, when the people were taken out to be shot, just what he must have thought. And it's very hard to imagine that. But it haunts me after all these years, you know? It's 52 years since I saw him last, so it's ancient history, but--

It haunts you that he didn't leave or?

Well, it haunts me that he was in a sense naive, yes. Then, of course, the whole thing haunts, the mere fact that I try to imagine the kind of terror that he must have felt, that all these people must have felt at the very end. Because by that time, of course, he must have known exactly what was going on. But I think he fooled himself until almost the very end.

Because even when he left, I still remember, he left very early in the morning on early April of 1940. and we said goodbye to him, with every hope and understanding that we would see each other very soon, as soon as his US quota came and his visa came through. In the meantime he would be with our relatives in Yugoslavia. So there was really no problem. And then once we knew he was safely across the border, then we really had no qualms about leaving.

And yet in historical terms you see that all this was a pure delusion. You know, the Germans marched into Yugoslavia

that summer. They also attacked France that summer. It really-- well, it was naive, you know? Of course, it's very difficult to leave a place where you've grown up, where you've felt at home. I understand that too.

I think it's much easier for us now, knowing all these things in retrospect, to say, when it gets bad, we better leave. And people have learned their lesson and people leave much more readily now and become refugees. But in those days, that was really a very difficult thing to do psychologically. And we had explored a number of ways of emigrating. We thought of going to Australia, I remember, to Israel, Palestine.

I even learned Hebrew. I remember that I went into a-- for a very short period of time, I was bar-mitzvahed, and I became very religious for about six months. Then I became a Zionist, and I went to a Zionist camp and learned Hebrew. I went to a course and learned to become a locksmith at 13, because we could no longer go to gymnasium. And so that was one avenue. We thought maybe we go to Palestine or Australia.

People are talking about Madagascar. I remember, at the time, there was some notion that the Germans-- in fact, the Nazis were touting that as an idea, settling the Jews in Madagascar. So there was still that illusion that what they really wanted-- they wanted you out of their hair, but they wanted to somehow help you do that. And so they actually fostered this notion of going to a Zionist camp. They were not interfering with that kind of thing, certainly not in '38-39. I think by '40 things had changed completely.

So I do remember that the winter of 1939 was very bad. We had, by that time, been kicked out of our apartment and lived with my grandmother. It was a very cold winter. The winter of '39 I'm sure must have been a record cold. Because I remember the Jews were allowed gleanings of coal. Coal was sold in basements and sort of places where they sold fuel of all kinds, wood, and coal, and stuff like that. And they had a special section where the little pieces of coal that dropped off and things, slate and stuff, were kept, and the Jews were allowed to go in there and get a bag of the stuff and drag it home.

And I remember dragging one of these bags of little gleanings of coal for 12 or 13 blocks, because my grandmother lived near the Danube canal near the first district, and that was a fair distance from where we had lived. But I guess they made you go back to where you had actually been registered to live to get this stuff. And I remember dragging this over the frozen streets.

And I think by that time the lesson was beginning to sink in, but it took that kind of really physical abuse to realize. And I was never-- I was physically abused in a sort of more pragish way. Other kids, non Jewish kids, would yell things at us once in a while. They'd pinch us-- you know, that kind of stuff. But it really was it was more humiliation than being threatened by something that you thought would deprive you of your life.

It was a terrible humiliation, of course. Because here were these kids who had gone to school, and suddenly you were an outsider. Kids don't want to be outsiders. I mean, that's the worst thing that can happen to you.

Then there was, of course, this whole business of just trying to survive. Then the war started. Jewish people got smaller rations than other people. They got special ration booklets that were different from other people's, had a J stamped in them. Then of course we all got middle names suddenly that distinguished us. So my middle name became Israel. My mother's middle name became Sarah.

I still have the passports, because we had German passports of course. They're stamped with a J and then also the middle names. All our documents from then on had the middle name. But I did leave before the yellow star was mandated. That must have been maybe late in '40 or even later.

So you could still in a way pass, which was really, to a pre-teenager, well, beginning teenager, a very important thing to do-- not to be picked out. And I remember-- it's not something I can be terribly proud of, but it's a fact-- that I think that not only I, but a lot of the other Jewish kids that I knew, tried very hard not to be Jewish kids on the street.

How would you accomplish that?

Well, by simply not making waves, by not-- there was no physical way of identifying Jews until they made you wear the star. We were very careful not to sit down on benches that said no Jews allowed, because almost all the park benches by that time had been stenciled saying no Jews were allowed to sit there and have that kind of thing. We knew enough not to be challenged. So not being challenged allowed you to pass in a way.

But then, when you had to go to a store and get your ration of whatever bread or something, then, of course, it was not avoidable, because your ration tickets were different or stamped or whatever. But it was really during that period that I had this-- and as I say, I was bar-mitzvahed just right after the Anschluss in fact in the synagogue that my maternal grandfather, whom I had never known-- in fact, I had been an elder, a church elder, I guess, is what they call it here-- that was a synagogue that was burned down with the rabbi in it on Kristallnacht.

So I think that was the first really traumatic experience. But it was, in a sense, a singular one and very cleverly done. Because you remember that at least ostensibly the reason for it was the assassination of this German diplomat in Paris by a Jew. And so it was all portrayed as popular outrage. And at least, even if you were the victim, it gave you some kind of rational explanation why this happened. This co religionist of yours did this terrible thing, and so a lot of people just went wild, and you have to understand how this happens.

So it was portrayed that way. And so there were a lot of Jews who, although they were clearly hurt by this, in a way felt, well, this is I guess what happens when you get involved. It time and time again brings home to me that there are very few heroes. And people who resist or somehow make themselves conspicuous are really true heroes, that the majority of people on all sides try to just do the minimal thing just to survive. And the only people that you can really condemn heartily are the people who actively cooperate with evil on both sides.

I mean, there were Jews who cooperated. There were the active Nazis. But then there were the people who tried to help their Jewish friends but up to a point. The ones who at their own risk went out of the way to do that were not many, but they to me were true heroes. And that's something that really stands out. But the majority of people, I think, cannot expect it to be heroes. It would be nice if it were different, but it isn't.

What about the Jews who cooperated? Did you know any?

No. No. I think all that knowledge came later through reading, both in concentration camps where they were, I guess, trustees and other places. No, I never knew anybody who cooperated or even heard of anybody in the circle of people that we knew.

Let's go back to that 12-year-old boy on the day he was going to see Hitler coming in. Your parents knew where you were going?

Well, they knew I was out wandering around, yeah.

You went with the specific intention--

Well, I went there just to see where everybody was going. There were people marching around and going off into the inner city, which was within walking distance. And it was just this general air of tremendous excitement, which I think you can feel in the air. I mean, it isn't something that-- and I think kids are very prone to be drawn by that kind of thing. I saw it later on in many other ways. And I was just curious.

I was curious to see a crowd like that. I've never seen anything like it before, you know? I've been to military parades and things like that, but I've never seen any crowd like that. And then, of course, the army came in, which was terribly exciting to a kid to see all these tanks and stuff. So all that was-- it really brings home the-- later, of course, when I had a chance to see film of the Nuremberg rallies, they were really masters at that kind of thing, absolutely masters. They involved people to get them excited, to get them involved.

In a sense, when I became rational, it began to instill in me a great fear of the mob. Because I saw it in a very minor way later on during the '60s when people were yelling in unison. It always bothers me, even at conventions, even a

Democratic or Republican convention, I get very upset when people start yelling slogans. Because I say to myself, you give up your individuality and you become part of a mob. And it's really when people no longer feel responsible, because they're not an individual, they're part of a group, that they do terrible things that they wouldn't think of doing as individuals.

And I saw it later on in the army. Again, it's a matter of degree, but just to digress, I was with the first troops that crossed the Rhine at Worms, because we were ferrying infantry across in pontoon boats. And when we got to the other side, the place was littered with German dead of course had been lying in the sun for a couple of days and were bloated and stuff. People would be driving by, Americans in trucks, and Jeeps, and taking potshots at these bodies and see the gas escape-- you know, that kind of thing. Well, it's the kind of thing that you wouldn't think of doing as an individual, but this was all part of this mob hysteria, and you just get it everywhere. Nazis were particularly good at exploiting that kind of thing.

When you went to this parade or this welcome for Hitler, were you sort of in front section where you had a good view.

Well, I did see him drive by. Kids, of course, can snake themselves in.

What did you see?

Just saw a guy standing there going like this. And I saw him once more later on during a much smaller occasion in the sense of the number of people involved. It must have been in '39 when Mussolini came to Vienna to meet Hitler. I went out to look at him both too. So I saw Hitler and Mussolini.

Together? Together, yeah.

What did they look like.

Just like their pictures in the newsreels.

Same height? Same--

Oh, well, Mussolini was, as I remember it, a little heavier. But they were in limousines, and it was a little bit difficult to see. They were a fair distance away, because people weren't allowed that close. It was on the Ringstrasse, which is sort of the main parade ground for things. And that's a wide Boulevard, and people usually get back on the sidewalk to see that. But it's something that somehow drew me and a lot of other kids. I just wanted to see what all the excitement was.

And was everybody didn't heil Hitler?

Oh, yeah. Sure.

What about you?

Oh, no. No. I mean, I knew enough about that. No, that I knew not to do. Because by that time, of course, it was very clear that I was different-- not part of that group. But I'm not at all sure, other than my parental influence, I suppose, would have kept me from it, just how far I would have gone.

You know, it's frightening when you think about it. If you get drawn into this kind of thing early enough until you have the ability to think for yourself, you're liable to do almost anything. And it's just a very cleverly done thing, marching kids around with drums, and singing, and campfires, and all that kind of stuff. It's a glorified Boy Scouts.

And it's a problem of exploiting human psychology, and they were masters at that. They weren't the only ones, but they certainly were.

At the end of that first day, when we Hitler, did you tell your parents?

I don't remember. I really don't.

Do you have a feeling of elation?

No, no. A feeling of excitement only, because it was all the excitement going on. And there was a certain amount of fear mingled with that I'm sure, because I knew I really wasn't supposed to be there, which was another reason for doing it. I remember, just before the Anschluss, when there were all these demonstrations and counter demonstrations going on, that I remember being in one near the opera. It's one of the few specific instances that I remember people yelling at each other, and carrying flags and banners, and that kind of thing. It was-- and, of course, at that time, I felt as a very patriotic Austrian against the Nazis, because the Austrian government did of course oppose the taking over.

Remember that Hitler called Schuschnigg to Berchtesgaden and scared the hell out of him, but he did stand up to him surprisingly enough. And, of course, he was disposed of very quickly and did go to Dachau, but survived, and then become, as I say, a professor. But no, I think that I could have easily been part of that crowd that yelled heil Hitler at that time, yeah, in retrospect.

What do you remember about the Anschluss?

Well, I remember the planes flying overhead and the paratroopers coming down. I remember that. I think the first real exposure to or an inkling of what it was going to be like for Jews came almost the same day, when people were hauled out to start scrubbing the streets. Because slogans had been painted on the streets. And I don't remember, frankly, whether any of my immediate relatives, my mother or my father, were pulled out to do that. But I do remember walking on the street and seeing people that I knew, older people, on their hands and knees scrubbing the street.

And so that, I think, made it very clear to me that we were not part of the crowd. And then, of course, when we were kicked out of school. First of all, suddenly, a lot of the kids didn't know me. I guess their parents told them. I really don't remember any kids that defied that.

There were people that stayed friendly, people that tried to help in minor ways by either sneaking us food, or, later on, particularly after the rations became very strict and we got less than other people. I remember my father coming home with a piece of smoked meat-- this was already after we had moved in with his mother-- very proud of himself that he'd been able to buy that somewhere on the black market. And it later on turned out to be a cat.

Was it good?

I don't remember. I don't remember. But my mother became very adept at non-meat dishes. She made wonderful hamburgers out of cauliflower I remember. But that really wasn't such a terrible problem. I think that the situation really didn't become desperate until much later. Probably we didn't have as much to eat as we did before, and certainly not the things we liked, but there certainly wasn't any starvation. And the war has only been on 6, 7, 8 months, something like that, when we left. So it really wasn't that bad yet for anybody.

How were you told that you had to leave school?

Oh, I think the teachers--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No, no the teachers just told us.

Through a general announcement?

Yeah, it was a general announcement. Everybody knew who who, because there was religious instruction in school.

What was your religious instruction?

Well, Jews could go to Hebrew school, and I think that was once a week. Of course, everybody knew everybody's religion, so there wasn't any-- it was very clear who had to leave and who didn't. The other thing is that many of my friends who had gone to school with me were emigrating. So I was really one of the few leftovers. Most of the kids that I'd gone to school with emigrated in '38 and certainly by early '39. So by mid-'39, I don't remember really having any Jewish friends anymore.

But you weren't the only one who had to leave that school?

Oh, no, no. But I mean, as I say, most of the other kids, by that time, left all together. And so it wasn't as if-- for a while there, in late '38 and early '39-- I don't remember the exact span-- I get involved in the Zionist group, and we studied Hebrew together, and agriculture, and planted potatoes I remember, and stuff like that in the backyard. There was a certain enthusiasm for emigrating to Palestine and that kind of thing among the young people. I think the older people didn't view it with such fervor, because they wanted to go to a more pleasant place I guess.

Did any of your friends emigrate to Palestine?

I think I had one school friend, but we never stayed in touch, who went to Palestine. I never kept up with him. In fact, you know, it's a very interesting thing. There may be a psychological reason for that. Except for little individual pieces of memory, that period is almost wiped out in my mind. For example, I don't remember, except for one or two kids that emigrated to the States, that I was then in touch with, including my really oldest friend, because we parambulated around together, who lives now-- well, who's a retired postal inspector that lives in Florida. So those are the people I met again when I came to the United States. I don't remember anybody's names.

You remember any teacher's names.

I remember my Latin teacher in the gymnasium. His name was Epstein. And he did emigrate-- came to the States. He was a Bachelor. And in fact he tutored me Latin during that expulsion period. Beyond that, not really. I remember a grammar school teacher, and I remember his name. His name was Immervoll, "always full." Beyond that, really, no.

So whether I've done it consciously, wiped it out, or whatever. But there are these singular events that I remember. But beyond that, sort of as a period, it's really gone.

A favorite subject of yours in school?

Favorite subject in school? Well, I liked history, and I still do, and I was pretty good at mathematics. Beyond that, school, particularly gymnasium, was a warfare between the students and the teachers. The more pranks you could play on the teacher, the better off. It was truly an adversarial kind of thing between the students and the teachers. I mean, there were a few teachers that we didn't hate with a passion, but generally they were a well-hated bunch.

The school system was very strict. Besides, they worked your fanny off. It was six days a week, including Saturday, probably till 4 o'clock every afternoon, an 8:30 to 4:00 kind of thing with a lot of homework. And it wasn't all pleasure, but I was interested-- for example, I was in the theater group. I remember, my first roles was the second citizen in Faust, Goethe's Faust, when I was maybe 10, 11 years old, just after I started. You start gymnasium at 10, and you are dressed as Mister from that day on. So you really are considered essentially a grown-up when you get to be 10 years old in that system.

And beyond that, as I say, the singular events, like being kicked out for one semester and things like that. I really have very little recollection. It's surprising. It always surprises me when I think about it. And I try to reconstruct it, and I can't.

What did you think you were going to do when you became older before--

A fireman

Fireman.

For a long time I wanted to be a fireman. Really. I was really, in a sense, not very advanced. I wasn't going to be a Nobel Prize winner, or scientist, or anything like that. That started very soon after I came to the States. I became interested in science almost immediately. But as long as I remember back in Vienna, which was really only through the age of 13, I didn't have any high ambitions.

Where did you get the training for your bar mitzvah?

From the local rabbi in the temple that was burned down-- with him. And I worked very hard at that. And then, as I say, just following my bar mitzvah, which was in May of '38-- so just a couple of months after the Anschluss-- I did have a short period of religious fervor. I put on tefillin and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, every morning I prayed, and then came the Zionist phase for a few months. Stopped doing that, which was more politicized I guess.

And all that stopped. Once almost all the Jewish kids were gone, there was really no longer any contact with other Jewish kids. So then it became an adult world. It became really a world of just sort of trying to survive, and gathering coal, and trying to stand in line for food-- that kind of thing. So it really wasn't, as I say-- and I took that course to learn how to become a locksmith, and I learned welding. I still have, I think, a picture somewhere of me in that locksmith shop. It was a Jewish locksmith who had a little class and taught kids how to become a locksmith.

And he did have a little course in welding. So I learned how to weld. But all that was sort of in a vague way in preparation of maybe having to earn a living pretty soon in a foreign country-- that kind of thing.

What do you remember about your bar mitzvah itself, that day?

What do I remember? I think they're always in a haze. Because I've talked to other people who've had bar mitzvahs under normal circumstances, and it's very hazy. But it was still close enough to normal times-- it was only a couple of months after the Anschluss-- so there was a party. We of course were allowed to do it, and it was in the temple.

I worked really hard, because I started already before the Anschluss studying for that. It takes almost a year. And I went through the whole thing, learned all by rote, I think. I didn't really learn Hebrew enough to consider it as a spoken language, and I've all forgotten it by now, until that little Zionist period, where I felt I had to learn it. And it was modern Hebrew, Ivrit.

But it's very interesting. I have my watch. I got a gold watch. My father gave me a watch, which I still have. I have his watch.

It's one of the things he collected was watches. My father was an inveterate collector of antiquities. He was a frustrated archaeologist I think. I do remember that, first of all, we used to go to the movies together, just he and I sometimes. We had-- see, things do come back. In Vienna there was a place called Urania, which was a little bit like a cultural center. Primarily it showed sort of National Geographic type of movies, and they had lectures, and that kind of thing.

We used to go to that a lot, because he was fascinated by expeditions of all kinds. One of his heroes was Sven Hedin, who was a Norwegian Explorer in the late 19th century who used to go on expeditions in Afghanistan and places like that. And he had people that he corresponded with in other countries quite a bit, and he had sort of outrageous friends. There was an Austrian count that he used to pal around. With they went to lectures and things.

So I know that he was very interested in that kind of thing, and I found that interesting too of course. Maybe only because he did. He did go one year, maybe even before he was married, on a dig somewhere in Greece with somebody. But he did collect. He had a fair collection of Etruscan artifacts in fact that my mother sold for a song in the early '50s, because she needed money and didn't know what she was doing.

And I think that that's certainly one of my distinct memories of my father's, his interest in esoteric places. He collected books or read books on foreign lands. I remember that-- I even brought some with me-- South America fascinated him. His favorite foreign song-- he had quite a large record collection-- was "Get Along Little Doggy." He had a record of cowboy songs that he used to play for us and things like that.

He was certainly fascinated by travel. He was also a soccer fan, and he and my uncle, his brother-in-law, went to London in early 1933 or '34 to the World Cup. I remember it was a big deal, and he brought me back one of these airplanes with a rubber band that you wind up and it flew around the place, from London. I remember that. So I must have been maybe seven, eight years old.

He was an avid fisherman. And it's one of the reasons why I've never gone into fishing, because he used to wake me up at 4 o'clock in the morning, and I had to row his boat partly on the lake where we had our house. But before that, we used to go on vacation in upper Austria to a place in the country that had a trout stream. Used to go out and fish, and I could never see removing the hooks. It still turns me off.

But really that was his number one sport. He really loved fishing. And I still have some of his tackle. I brought it with me. I have it in my storeroom.

And he loved to eat fish, and my mother won't eat fish. So she was very, very good about that. He used to bring live fish home and put them in the bathtub. Keep them alive until they could be cooked.

[LAUGHTER]

Let's see, trying to remember where we were exactly. You did ask me a question.

You were going to the movies with your father.

So we used to go to these National Geographic-type of lectures and movies. And the other type used to take me to were cowboy movies. You know, American movies. So he was certainly fascinated by foreign places, by faraway countries. I'm sure he would have loved to come to the States. I know that's a terrible thing that he never was able to do.

And then, of course, he had relatives here. So I guess they wrote to him what it was like. As far away as California-- California was pretty far out in those days, you know? I remember my aunt used to send me birthday presents from San Francisco. Every year I'd get a five \$5 gold piece. I don't know what happened to those gold pieces, but every year, at least for a number of years in the early '30s, she used to send a \$5 gold piece and also made me a member of the American Red Cross I remember. She sent me a little membership card. She had contributed in my name to the Red Cross and I was a member of the American Red Cross when I was six, seven years old.

After the family had moved from Bakersfield to Fresno, the California branch of the family since we're off on them, they lived in Fresno until the early '30s. They had vineyards there and then later on leased the land out to an oil company. Then they moved to San Francisco. The brother, my Uncle Manny, had already moved-- badly planned-- before the earthquake in San Francisco. But then his brother and my surviving aunt didn't move until the '30s I think.

And my aunt died in the late '60s. And in fact my two cousins, Charlie, her youngest son, who was a Bachelor, never married, and my cousin Al, the one who just visited us last week, they lived first somewhere downtown, Bush and Pine I think, and then out on 36th Avenue right off the park, right on the first block. And that house actually wasn't given away, in fact, until this year. My cousin Al gave it to a friend of Charlie's who sort of took care of him.

And we were fairly close to that part of the family after I moved to California, which was in 1950. They were very good to me, as was my mother's sister, and my cousin, and her father in Hollywood. So when I moved in 1950, I was footloose bachelor, and I had a very good time for those first few years, because they took such good care of me.

Then I worked for the United States government at a rocket test station in the Mojave Desert for seven years nominally, from '50 to '57 and met my wife to be there. She was visiting people there. She's not Jewish. She's of Welsh descent, one

of the ubiquitous Lloyd's born in Pennsylvania. And was in fact-- she was going to convert, probably more to please my mother than anything else. She wasn't religious. But interesting-- and we were married by a rabbi. It was the temple on California Street. I don't remember the name of the temple anymore.

[INAUDIBLE].

Anyway, it's right up on California. In a private ceremony, because it was just my relatives here. And my mother who lived then in New York came out for it. The rabbi at Hillel-- I was a graduate student out at Berkeley-- talked my wife out of it. He said to her, you're just doing it to please your mother-in-law, and that's no reason to convert.

So she said, OK. You're a rabbi. You know best. And that's fine It's never been a problem.

It's interesting, because we have a daughter and a son. The son was born in '57 first. It's interesting, because, again, I think the breaking up I guess of what might be a Jewish family, you can see when that happens. Because both of our children married non-Jews. Our daughter married first, married a fellow student Davis whose father was a Marine Colonel. Well, he's retired.

And our son just got married last year, late in life, to a Japanese girl. They met as graduate students at Berkeley. And a lovely girl, Reiko. So now we're partly Japanese. And I think maybe that's the only hope mankind has any way, to do that kind of thing.

On the other hand, if you ask our son, if somebody says, what are you? He'll say he's Jewish, which is interesting, although he's not at all religious. So I think it's probably a culture that hangs on longer than many others. And I think it's also partly because he feels that maybe to say something else would be denying something that he doesn't want to deny, in the sense that he knows the history of course. And so I think it's also partly that. He's a very rational person.

I think that's interesting too. I'll let you ask a question again.

Do you recall any specific conversations that your father had when you were present, he was talking to you or talking to your mother about, shall we go to the United States? Shall we go to Australia? Did he ever talk about it with you?

Well, no. There were certainly discussions, and there was a certain amount of training for that. For example, my getting English lessons almost from the outset I think were indicative of the fact that there was certainly, first of all, every intention to emigrate. I think what was not present was this terrible imminence that they should have felt but didn't. In other words, it was a process that one could plan and not have to rush about, at least not for the first year or so. And there were a number of alternatives considered.

I think the United States was probably always the number one goal, partly because we had lots of relatives here, and that's where most of them had gone. Now, the family that he fled to in Yugoslavia, all of them were wiped out too. Not one of those survived.

We had other parts of the family that even left earlier. My mother had a cousin who emigrated from Austria to South Africa in the early '30s. She was a nurse, and she married a doctor in South Africa in Johannesburg. We had relatives who went to Palestine in the early '30s, before it was even necessary to do so, at least in Austria. Indeed, the brother of my mother's sister-in-law-- complicated, anyway-- the brother of the wife of my favorite uncle Paul, had a brother who had emigrated to Palestine in the '20s, who was an architect in Tel Aviv. And I have a number of his drawings. He was very, very good at sketching things from that period-- I think he lived in Haifa first, and I have a number of his drawings of Haifa from the 1920s, pastels.

So there was a certain amount of dispersal going on quite early. We also had, by the way, a British branch of my family. And I'm not quite sure when they left. It was in the 19th century. Because in my grandfather's memorial album, which I can bring along some time-- after he died the family put together a Memorial album, the army person-- at the end of the album, there are photographs of both people and family graves in London of Leitmanns who had changed their name from Leit to Light. But some of the gravestones have both names. They'll have Leitmann-- L-E-I-T-M-A-N-N-- in

parentheses under the anglicized name.

And so there was even a British branch. And I'm not really sure just how all this dispersal came about even in the 19th century. And there were never any Leitmanns in Vienna, except for us. I mean, you could look in a telephone book-- there were no others. The only time we ever ran into other Leitmanns, I remember, was in the middle '30s, before, of course, the Anschluss, when the circus came through town, and the trapeze artists were Leitmanns.

And I've since then learned that in fact it's not very common, but it's at least a more common name in Munich. In fact, when I went back in the middle '60s for the first time, first of all, I spent the first day at the central cemetery looking for graves. I did find my grandfather's grave. I looked in the telephone book and there was a Leitmann in the telephone book. He turned out to have been a butcher from Munich who had moved to Vienna during the war. So he was not one of us I guess.

So it's a somewhat singular name. And there are a few Leitmanns in the States. There is still a well known Leitmann-- I've tried not to bother him-- whether in fact he's a member of the family, I suppose so, in London with the unchanged name, but with one N only, who is a very famous art dealer. And there is a Leitman at Brown University with one N. But other than that, there's certainly none in the San Francisco telephone book. And I have looked into the New York telephone book, and I haven't been able to find one. So it's not a very common name.

When was the decision made that you would go the United States and your father would go to Yugoslavia?

Well, I think there was talk about that probably from mid-'39 onwards. So probably almost a year before he did it. There was a fair amount of preparation involved in planning his escape, in the sense that he of course crossed the border from Austria into Yugoslavia illegally-- I think from both sides illegally-- and that he led a number of other people-- took a number of other people with him. And so I really wasn't privy to the preparations. So I couldn't give you any details, but I know there was a lot of preparation involved.

There were a lot of sort of coded messages going to our relatives on my mother's side in Yugoslavia, sort of alerting them to the fact that my father would be showing up. They used to send us food on occasion I remember.

What food?

Oh, they sent-- some kind of smoked meat came through the mail once in a while from Yugoslavia, particularly in '39, maybe even early '40 when rationing began. So I think they certainly knew my father was coming. And all that was very short-lived of course, because he went there in April '40, and I think the Germans marched in June or July of '40. So the whole thing was only a few months.

One day your parents came to you and said, pack up, we're leaving soon?

Oh, no. There was a fair amount of preparation. Because we were able to do a reasonably organized move, in the sense that we were able to get a moving company who packed things for us in vans. My father, who as I mentioned before was a collector of all kinds of things, antiques, he had a very large collection of coins, watches, antique watches, all kinds of other things, I remember tried to get some of that stuff out of the country so that we would have something to start with. So the notion that we would emigrate certainly was a settled thing. The question was how to do it in the most rational way, which turned out to be very irrational, and how to prepare for it.

And so, I remember that in fact the man who became the commissar of the company that my father owned, who was in charge of aryanizing it, became a captain in the SS, and said to my father, of course, I'll help you, and volunteered to take some of the antiques and stuff to Switzerland and put them in a safe deposit box, including our silver. We had lots of menorahs, and candelabra, and all kinds of things. I remember one thing, after this went on for a while, once my father followed him after he had gone off with a large load of silver and found out that he had a whole basement. He'd gone and followed him down into this basement, and this man had a basement full of silver. I guess he did this for lots of Jewish acquaintances, but, of course, without any intention of doing anything about it.

But he did get some stuff out. Because after the war, I guess he had given my father the number of a bank and the safe deposit box in Zurich. And we had friends of ours who were in Zurich at the time-- this must have been in the late '40s, after the war-- go to the bank. And there were some of the watches from my father's watch collection there, which I still have. My father had maybe 150 watches and maybe 30 survived, including some pretty good ones.

And so it's very interesting. When you think about it, he could have stolen it all. My father couldn't-- so these people really were sort of two minds on. The one hand, it's OK to rob these people. On the other hand, you want to help them a little bit so it isn't quite so bad. You know, it's hard to tell just exactly how people think when they're on the other side and suddenly are sort of the conquerors.

And so, I guess what it proves is that these people weren't entirely evil. Because they could have, A, not volunteered to help. Of course they volunteered to help to enrich themselves. But on the other hand, they did help to some extent. So it's the kinds of situations where everything's completely black or completely white are really the exceptions. There were these gray areas where either people helped a little bit or at least they didn't hurt you.

It's very interesting in retrospect to think about these things. And the really terrible things, the extermination, even there, when you read about it, you see that the number of people who were actively involved were really not very large in number. And I remember that from the Nuremberg trials, the number of concentration camp guards or the number of execution squads, those were really a small percentage of the army or the paramilitary or whatever.

I think what to me is really a much more of an indictment of humanity is the fact that I remember reading about the meeting on the final solution and of the 30-odd people who participated in that meeting, with Eichmann and all these people-- 30 of them had doctorates in philosophy, in law, in medicine. So you suddenly say to yourself, is that really proof against inhumanity? And it really isn't. It's got nothing to do with it.

And then the real heroes were, I don't know, the people in that Huguenot village in France. Or maybe some nuns in Belgium. The most disappointing thing to me as an educator is the fact that you always try to fool yourself and say, if people were only educated, they wouldn't do terrible things. That's got nothing to do with it. Absolutely nothing. So I guess that's a very disillusioning thing, but I--

What makes the difference then?

What makes the difference? I'm sure that much of it has to do with early training, the way a family approaches things. What your parents teach you I'm sure has a lot more to do with it than anything else, by example primarily. I'll always come back to that small Huguenot village in France, where they saved as many Jews as there were people in the village. I think everybody in the village was hiding one or two Jews, clearly knowing what the consequences would be. And obviously, French peasants, people who surely didn't have an education in any sense of what we consider to be an education. But I think, who, maybe because of their own history of persecution, had things handed down to them-- I don't know what it is. But it certainly doesn't have anything to do with being educated in the normal way.

I don't think that's proof against anything. It's a lesson that I guess I learned the hard way. It's very interesting. Because nowadays there's all this stuff going on all over the world. And you say to yourself, can you do anything about these things, or is it time to just throw up your hands? And then you have to say to yourself, you do the best you can.

But on the other hand, it's very difficult to do that, because we're so involved in everyday things in our own lives. And then you say to yourself, well, that's probably what's true for those people too, that sort of just try to get along and not make waves.