

I didn't bring any photographs. Forgot to bring them.

OK, we're rolling. You can start any time.

OK. I'm here with John Steiner. We're doing interview number four for the San Francisco Holocaust Oral History Project. Today is November the 19th, 1991. And also here as a second is Brian Paris and Carol Horwitz is here along with John also. So where we left off last time was were about to leave for Australia.

Yeah, so my decision which is quite interesting to go to Australia was primarily based on the fact that my affidavit to the United States, my quota number, was not-- there was such a long waiting list that I simply couldn't wait until I would get permission to come to the United States. Instead, I had Australian relatives and a great, great uncle who was the black sheep of the family, who started a family there and was very successful, and had married a Scottish woman. And then relatives, that is to say my aunt and my two cousins followed, came to Australia via England. And they actually sent there because they were viewed as aliens because they came from Austria and they didn't care whether or not they are Jews and what have you. So they were interned in Australia, and then stayed there and became citizens.

And that was actually the main reason, because it was a very closely knit family. And my relationship to my aunt especially and to my considerably older cousin was close, because we used to see each other every year in one way or another. And so they were in Australia, and so I decided to go to Australia.

Now prior to my decision to go to Australia, I talked to some people with whom I had been at Dachau, and these people are very important Czech people who were very important role models to me because of their conduct, their bravery, and their profile in courage. One of them was the Archbishop of Prague, a man called Beran and became later cardinal. Died in the Vatican, is actually buried in St. Peter's Cathedral back in Rome.

So I went to see him and said I know that I cannot accept communism. It's another totalitarian system, and I've had enough of Nazis. And he was with me in Dachau, so we were kind of brothers, so to speak. And so either I can be here and be continuing the underground, but chances are because I already had been arrested before and my father got me out with the help of influential friends, out of jail.

It was not prison then yet. And couldn't recognize me because they had beaten me up to such an extent that I was totally deformed. And it was actually worse than any beatings I got from the Nazis, as a matter of fact, if I come to think of it.

And so I was on the blacklist because when they arrested me I was taken to one police precinct and then they looked at the list and there was my name. So I was not prepared to go through another sort of slave labor camps and all that, which of course existed already during that time, of course, for a number of years, as a matter of fact. So I decided to skip the country because I knew that I couldn't continue my studies by virtue of the fact that I was not a communist, by virtue of the fact that I was opposing communism with all means at my disposal.

So then I had very wealthy relatives who left prior to World War Two in time with lots of riches. They were the richest Jewish people in Czechoslovakia. Their name was Petschek Otto Petschek And that was a family with my mother was the first cousin of Otto Petschek wife.

And so they arranged for me to go to England, but they closed their borders. I think I've mentioned that. And I had a ticket, everything, but they closed the borders just about the day I was supposed to leave. And so that's how I got into concentration camps. Now, I didn't want to go through all these things again, because I felt I've had my fill. So then I got papers and then just smuggled my way through the borders and they paid for the trip.

What form did the smuggling through the border take?

Well, it just meant false papers and all these sort of things. And just a number of difficulties, so I guess since I had some training and all this back in the camp so it was not that difficult for me. But it was not easy either.

How old were you at this time?

How old was I at this time? At this time, I was 22. No, 23, 23. And I decided that I didn't care what I had with me because I didn't have virtually anything with me at all, couldn't take anything with me, or minimal.

So this very wealthy relative came to the United States via England. But my whatever, my mother's cousin, her name was Martha Petschek She arranged all the things for me in London. And then her children arranged-- she was no longer alive-- arranged for me to go first class to Australia. Which was kind of an irony, because I didn't have a handkerchief to my name. So I went first class without having a handkerchief.

And that took about 28 days, and I was shipped in and Genoa, and was picked up by my relatives in Sydney. And that, of course, was a tremendous reunion and all that. Then they took me to Canberra. And within about two or three weeks I had a job with the Department of Immigration of all the things, based on the fact that I spoke English and that I had some education and what have you.

And within that particular time, also I started to think about the university and I enrolled as I think the first immigrant displaced person type at the so-called Canberra University College, which was associated with the University of Melbourne, kind of a branch. And so that was a big thing and was put into the papers that John Steiner of whatever John Steiner or whatever they called me then enrolled at the Canberra University College, which was a big thing, and worked for the Department of Immigration.

Now, the important thing working for the Department of Immigration was that I could help countless other people to come into Australia, and primarily, Czechs. Not that many Jews, as a matter of fact. There were some Jews among them, but primarily Czech people who also had skipped the country and needed to go someplace, and they didn't know where to.

So I assisted them to get landing permits, simply because I knew the ropes. And because of some of my activity, which I then initiated, we started an organization which was called The Czechoslovakian Australian Alliance Organization. And that was exceedingly active in supporting Czech immigrants and also bringing Czech immigrants into the country.

So was one of my major activities, from which I derived a great deal of satisfaction. And then I also worked for the Australian Intelligence to work against the communists, because there some communist infiltrators coming in and all that. So that, to me, was also important, because my experience with the communists and I was very glad to be connecting with this sort of thing. It didn't amount to very much to be sure, but it gave me a psychological, emotional outlet.

Were other survivors, you say not many Jews were coming to Australia, but I thought other survivors--

There were some Jews, of course, who came. But they didn't come as displaced persons, most of the people. Because displaced persons had a two year contract. They paid the Australian government because they needed the manpower or human power, they paid their passage. But for that, they were under contract for two years, which means that they had to accept assigned work given to them by the various departments of immigration in different regions of Australia. And there was just ruthless exploitation because they were given jobs Australians didn't want, the worst possible jobs.

And so I working then later I moved from Canberra to Melbourne because my father worked and lived in Melbourne and I wanted to be with him and also his second wife, who also was a survivor from Theresienstadt, but was half Jewish. And because of a fluke was sent to the concentration camp, Theresienstadt by virtue of the fact that although she was a half Jew first degree, not second degree, but first degree. That means these people were exempt because she was baptized. She was a Catholic and therefore, would have been exempt from being sent to a camp.

But by virtue of the fact that she had married a Jew she lost all these privileges. Although, she was a widow because that person had died, so that didn't help her. And her mother was not because she was the non-Jewish link, and she of course stayed there. And so she was sent there but stayed in the Theresienstadt. Was not sent to any other destruction camp, so that saved her life.

And anyway, so my father married her and they both worked in Melbourne, and I just wanted to be with them. Also, I wanted to continue my studies. I was not getting all the various courses I needed back at the Canberra University College, so I wanted to be at the University of Melbourne proper. So that's when I moved there and continued to work with that Department of Immigration in Melbourne, where I was able to help lots of immigrants and cut all the various red tape and got people out of difficulties. And saw to it that some people who were not divorced could marry married people, and did all sorts of things in order to aid people who had been affected by war conditions and sought refuge in Australia and got into some sort of bureaucratic morass.

So that gave me some degree of satisfaction. But because I had also a number of interesting encounters and met a young woman, an Australian woman, I wanted very badly to marry, but it didn't work out because I left for the United States. Because I couldn't continue my studies at the University of Melbourne because I had a full time job. It was virtually impossible to get any sort of fellowship or scholarship. And I wanted to continue, but I simply it was just too much.

And at that particular time, I still had an active tuberculosis, lung tuberculosis. And so it was getting too much. And I decided that it would be better for me to come to the United States and to take advantage of an offer I'd received from the so-called Masaryk Foundation, which supported and obtained fellowships for people who were political. I mean, real political refugees because they had to escape from Czechoslovakia because of political reasons, namely that they are anti-communist and were working against the communists. And I certainly fit that description.

And they wrote to me in Australia that if I come to the United States they would guarantee me to get a fellowship to one of the larger universities in the United States. And so I decided to take advantage of it and in March, 1953 I went tourist class, not first class, because obviously I couldn't afford via England, where I also stayed for a while, toured Europe.

And in England I was able to get some sort of inheritance from my uncle who had money all over the world, which included England and other parts. I only got a fraction of it, but that really put me into a very good shape so that I could indeed come to the United States from England cabin class, and that was something I never regretted. Because you just came to the United States not only the poor immigrant, but in style, which is very unusual. And I remember that I bought all these sort of things back in London at expensive shops so that I could have all the outfits to wear for the gala, dances. I even won some sort of things back during that time.

And there was a intelligence officer on board and I got to know him and he found out about my background and my anti-communist activities, which of course put me immediately into favor with him. So that when I checked out with all my luggage I didn't have to go through any of the passport and things, and red tape. And that was kind of, I was very proud of that. That was very nice.

I was going to ask you, in leaving Australia, how had your relation with your father been when you reunited?

Well, the interesting thing is that I knew, of course, I knew her very well because they had lived together in Prague already without being married, which was OK, but not necessarily accepted socially. But I mean, they didn't have any problems because of it. Besides, he had some other ladies, and saw other ladies too, which was kind of interesting. But for him, not for me.

So she was a very excellent cook, and so I used to come there for meals and she never forgot to tell me about all the things they did for me and what I would do in return. So she was a very, very calculating lady, and pretty cold. But she was very good looking and that was very important for my father because he responded to good looks and sex appeal. I don't blame him for that, I hasten to add.

But I never developed any very close ties to her because she was a cold fish in so many ways. Very intelligent and all that. And so I got to know them already in Prague and I had hoped that he would marry someone else with whom he was engaged after the war. But just she persuaded him to marry her instead of the other woman, whom I liked very much because she was exactly opposite.

She was very appealing and all that, very nice, and very warm person, and we became very close. And so that was a

disappointment that he married her instead of the person I really liked and thought would have been probably the better wife. They would have gotten along much better. The only problem was that she was German and had considerable problems, but because she was not a Nazi, but merely a German, she could have stayed. But she chose not to stay in Czechoslovakia because she went with the rest of her family to Germany.

All right, so we got along quite well, except she always asked me what am I going to do and what presence and this and that. And at that time, I was not as flexible as I would be today. So I neglected her appeals in a way, and in retrospect, I feel that I should have given her more recognition for whatever she did. Because she was an excellent cook and really looked after both of us in this respect. Not in terms of affection or so, but she put all the things into the cooking and hospitality and all that. She was very excellent in doing that.

So it was not a very close relationship, but it was not a strained relationship either. The only thing I missed in her she didn't share the sense of humor my father had, who had a tremendous sense of humor and we had a lot of laughs together. So that we all were in tears very frequently because of some of the jokes he made.

They were just really uncanny. It was just really out of this world. And I still miss that because I haven't met anyone who would have been that funny, could have been that funny in some sort of level of sophistication, but kind of intellectual sense of humor which I appreciate very much. And I miss that, yeah. So she didn't share that.

All right, then I met this young lady there and of course, I brought them all to that place. And they of course, assessed and immediately took measurements, what have you in so many ways and assessed their manners and all. And they're all Australian women and lovely women, all very good looking and all that. But they always found something which just didn't fit that.

So the one I was really very attached to I think they liked also, except she was not attached to the United States and certainly didn't think in terms of leaving Australia because of me. And she was very open about that, and if I had stayed there the chances are I would have married her. And so then I came to the United States for reasons which I've explained.

Also, I was notified that the affidavit, which was the quota number was a Czech, I had to wait and all this. Now I was due, so I was able to come to the United States. And I came to New York and I was picked up by these very rich relatives, director of one of the enterprises who also had been a colleague and a friend of my father's. And they're very nice, but I've never met this these relatives because somehow they delegated these sort of care to this director.

And so I found some friends, people who permitted me to share an apartment with them from Connecticut, Darien, Connecticut, to Englewood, New Jersey, and from Englewood, New Jersey to New York for just about half a year until the fall. And then for reasons which still escape me they said, well, you can go to Harvard, you can go to this and that. but I was so unbelievably ignorant about the reputation of American institutions that for reasons which still escape me I selected the University of Missouri, which at that particular time was number 10 on the list of state universities-- state universities, not large universities.

And that was on one hand, very good because I learned a great deal and I met professors who were like a family to me, and I'll never forget the chances. I don't know whether this would have been the same case at Harvard. But of course, Missouri didn't have all the-- I made very good contacts. But that cannot be compared with contacts which were made by old Henry Kissinger and other people who were immigrants who knew exactly what they were doing, simply because they knew the ropes. I didn't.

And so I got my master's there and started my doctorate. And then I had a chance and worked in a state mental institution just to apply some of the theoretical concepts which I had picked up and see how that would work. And that was a very beneficial experience apart from the money. Because I had a fellowship and this fellowship was consisted of pocket money, tuition, and all the textbooks, and whatever I needed for my studies, they paid for that, and meals, which I had to take at various fraternities. And that proved to be exceedingly interesting, although at times was a bit cumbersome.

And that way I became I think the notion was to become acquainted with the different American sectors, walks of life. And I think that did a very good job. I thought it was extremely interesting for me to be introduced this way, and I made quite a few friends.

Were you at all apprehensive about starting over in a new country and having to leave your family?

Yeah, I was very apprehensive, simply because the university system was very different. And so for example, at the University of Melbourne or Canberra you only had examinations at the end of the academic year, which took hours. In every subject there was at least three hours and you had to write countless papers and things like that throughout the semester. But then, on taking that seriously, the important thing is that you had to, under very strict supervision, you had to respond to printed questions for about three hours in just one subject.

And so here all the weekly quizzes and objective tests were something totally new to me and took a great deal to adjust. And by virtue of the fact that I had a scholarship I needed to excel. And during the first part of the semester I had two Ds because of that.

And the dean called me in and said, and addressed me as sir, you are a disappointment to us because we gave you a scholarship expecting you to excel, and the report you have on these two subjects, I remember one was in anthropology and one was in psychology. And these were graded courses, and you have two Ds there. And that was a very bad things, so what then? I mean, a very embarrassing situation.

And so there was not very much I could say other than just I'm adjusting or what have you. And that was a bit traumatic to be sure. And I worked hard, it's not that I was lazy, that I didn't try.

But then I've learned the ropes and the quizzes in time. And so the D one day turned into a B, and the other D turned into a C. That's the only blemish I had on my graduate record, the one C. But because all the other things during the next two semesters, three semesters, I was at the University of Missouri for four semesters. I got my masters in 3 semesters, which included the writing of the thesis, so that means one and 1/2 years. Which is not bad for someone who comes from another start, mostly the Jewish start.

But so that was not too bad. And when I made Honors Society simply because all the other things were As, you see. So therefore, I just caught up and got quite a bit of recognition, as a matter of fact.

How did you adjust to social life?

Social life was not very difficult because for some reasons, which at that particular time escaped me, I had lots of friends, very good friends. Also by virtue of the fact that I was in fraternities I had bit of problems with women, young coeds at the number of two private junior colleges at the same place Columbia, Missouri. Not that many women at the University of Missouri proper, and so I dated quite a bit.

But I was very insecure by virtue of the fact that I didn't have a car, I didn't have any money, and couldn't invite them to big things. And most of these kids came from very well-to-do homes. So I was very self-conscious about my limitations.

But apparently, these limitations were not that dreadful, because I had no problem. They still liked me and for reasons which, as I say, escape me then today. Perhaps it's a bit more easy to understand. I was not starved for company, for sure. And except my choices, I just simply didn't understand them too well because you had a date and they kissed you good night at the dorms, and then you went with someone else and the same thing happened. You see the girl you dated yesterday was kissing someone else.

And that was very confusing to me because the dating system was not exactly something I was used to. So I had to adjust to that. And in a way, I didn't because I said hey, either you like someone and you just are steady with them and do the things from all the way, or you just sort of this halfway thing and all that was very frustrating.

Because of the puritan ethic, which still prevailed at that time and people of course pretended to be this and that. But

you know everyone claimed to be a virgin until she had a ring on her finger. If nothing else, at least the engagement, but usually there had to be the wedding.

So I wasn't used to that. I had problems with that. So then I found some people who didn't have problems with that occasionally, and then I didn't have a problem too. That was supposed to be funny.

But I was very overwhelmed with the hospitality of all the people, they were exceedingly hospitable. And I had a very functional support system there, and some of us who excelled were even invited to the governor's mansion, which was in Jefferson City and hosted by the governor in a very unusual way. I wish to god that something like that would happen here in California. But so that was very, and we had lots of important activities.

And I was invited with another person who had excelled grade wise and all that, academically. We were invited as unusually gifted people to Dallas by the United Churches of Dallas for Christmas. And that, I never had heard of Dallas totally. And said who wants to go to Dallas? And my friend who was the secretary general of the University YMCA to which I belonged said Dallas is a very important place. And he started to explain to me, and I was not very impressed because I never heard of Dallas.

So we went there and we were hosted red carpet treatment and all the oil millionaires with all their beautiful daughters. But I was a very naive person and didn't take advantage of all the contacts, which I should have at that time. But I just had my nose into the academic stuff. And so during that particular visit, which was when in-- I came to '54, that was '54, Christmas '54.

And so they asked me, well, what do you want to do when you finish your studies? I said, well I guess maybe teaching. And I said, well, how much will you make as a teacher? And I said well, I don't know, not that much.

They said well, if you make that little money, these millionaires said, you can't be very intelligent. So that gave me some sort of a taste of the value system in the United States while I was in Dallas, and it was exceedingly interesting. And also, what happens to you and then you are treated as a VIP, which somehow I couldn't relate to. I just couldn't quite assume that role which they assigned to me. Because if I had, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you, the chances are.

How was your health?

My health?

Yes.

Was terrific.

You said you had still the TB?

No, the TB had healed. It had healed apparently at some time or another, either prior to leaving or after leaving. And I haven't had any problems with it since.

So physically, you were all in pretty good shape then?

I was in pretty good shape, yeah.

Were you suffering any other kinds of things, like nightmares?

Nightmares stopped pretty much back in the first few years in when I had returned back to Prague. And because I got it out of my system, to some extent, so that I wouldn't be bothered by nightmares. I had indeed nightmares and frequent ones the first few years.

And I've had particular problems with the loss of my mother, because at that particular time emotionally I had not cut

the umbilical cord at all. I was not ready for that loss and that is something which lingered on for very, very many years. And for all practical purposes, I still haven't come to terms with that, because that is something which both of us, that is my mother and I, were totally unprepared to cope with, including also many other my relatives because it was a very closely knit family. It's a very important point, which I think I've repeated on several occasions.

It was probably the worst thing which has happened to me, the worst consequence of the Holocaust. So that all the physical injuries and the mental anguish and the trauma which was experienced, which I experienced in the camps, was something I could come to terms with in time. But I have not come to terms with the loss of my family.

That's a lifelong grief.

Absolutely, absolutely, yeah. And that's still my problem, and it's still something which comes back every new year, every Christmas, every holiday and Pesach for what I know. Because that was something which was celebrated by my uncle's relatives to which we were always invited. Because in contrast to my father, my mother and her relatives, which included my aunt who was married to that particular uncle, were very well to do people and very cultured and highly sophisticated individuals, role models in so many other ways. Not just people who were relatives, but people I looked up to and had good reasons to look up to because they just were fantastic people.

My uncle's family were not religious Jews, but were very cultured Jews. And part of that included Jewish holidays, and Pesach happened to be a very important one for them. So that is something which was very important and we all participated in that.

So just closing that circle is that because of these experiences and because of the age in which I lost my family, it is something which I am not able to come to terms with. And also primarily because I have not been able to find a substitute. I've had my relationships. I had a very unsatisfactory marriage, and I have a son. And that is the only link I still have in terms of really feeling of family.

But other than that, also the death of my father and all that, to whom I after the war was not that close because then it reverted back to the sort of pre-war situation, which was very conflicting, I just simply haven't had a chance to find a substitute. And that is something which made things even worse. Because if you fall into and marry into a family by virtue of the appropriate person, then I think it would have been eased, I'm sure. But under the circumstances, that was not the case.

So your vision is that if you would have had a good mate, and not only that, but someone with a family, the whole sense of family?

Well, you see, that's the irony of my life in a way and the dreadful disappointment, because I always hoped for that. And that was also something which was more or less implanted into me by my mother. And my mother always dreamt about that and we talked about it even in Theresienstadt.

As a matter of fact, I specifically said, well, when we get out and there was no if or but, yes we would get out. And we both were convinced that we would. Therefore, for reasons which were kind of strange, but psychologically understandable I'm sure, and so she said, well, I really hope that you will have a nice family. And I would not want to live with you in one place.

And it was all these sort of pre-war notions which would supposedly continue after the war, after the liberation, whatever. And that's what she envisioned. And you will have the family and she saw herself as a grandmother and then just as a person who continued to be the very close thing which yes, I certainly would have wished more than anything else. And said but I'm not going to impose on you.

And the way she talked, it was just something which really stirs my emotions when I just think of that. And I wouldn't want to impose on you, but I would like to have a small apartment near where you live. And all these sort of things come back, and I said my god, in terms of my private personal life what actually happened and all this would have been a dreadful disappointment to her.

And she would be turning whatever her ashes at Auschwitz or whatever it is would stir in responding to my situation. And that is something which is a very heavy weight on me. And say my god, in a way, it's a terrible disappointment. Not just to myself, but certainly if my mother had lived it would have been a tragedy for her.

Now, on the other hand, if she would have been around, the chances are she would have given me counsel so that some of the mistakes I've made I may not have because of her counseling. That she would have been at my side, and I'm sure she would have counseled me. Whether I would have listened to her or not is another thing, because at times these sort of things are not always heeded.

That is to me, one of my-- that's the crucial thing in my life that this has not happened. That my personal life, my family life was destroyed and I was not able to replace it in any shape, or form. And I think probably, I may be wrong there, I think that it was made more difficult by virtue of the fact that I came to the United States.

In what way?

Well, I think in Australia it would have been easier in terms of human relationships. And the chances are that this particular girlfriend I had back in Australia, I think she probably would have filled the bill more readily than what I had found here or elsewhere, for that matter, because I married the person from the wrong country, our wrong culture I should say more than country, both.

Would you have had a closer relationship you think with your father had you stayed in Australia?

Well, he wanted to stay. He was very successful in Australia. He really built for himself a very secure existence and was well recognized in his field as an accountant. He was very able, very successful. And he wanted to stay, but because of his wife who had relatives in Germany, who then came who were Sudeten Germans and went to Germany, her brother, her mother I think, and then she had a sister in England. So she wanted to go back and she just persevered in this, that he then gave up his job there and decided to come with her to Munich.

And that also affected my personal life, because the chances are I may have returned back to Australia under different circumstances. But because he went to Munich I was more than Europe oriented, by virtue of the fact that he was there and I wanted to visit and keep in touch, yes. And that was not the worst thing because I got also a doctorate back at the German University, which I do not regret. On the contrary, I think I've learned more there than anywhere else.

Were you and he in Germany at the same time?

Yeah. Well actually, the same time, I came to Germany because of him. Because he had come there, not that I had not visited Germany before, yes, but that was for different reasons. But he had come there and because he had come to Germany I also frequently came to Germany.

And that was one of the major reasons apart from some of my research, which I conducted in with the archives there in Munich, the Institute of Contemporary History. And later then did all the research with former perpetrators. And so that was something which I never would have done if I had been in Australia, the chances of.

So you continued your graduate studies in Germany, is that what you're saying?

Well, I was a doctoral candidate at Berkeley, but they didn't want me to do the type of research I was interested in.

So after you left Missouri, where did you then go?

Oh, I see. So we didn't talk about that.

No, I'm sorry, maybe I'm confusing it.



No, that's sequentially I think we've gone a little bit astray. But no, I was back in Missouri until '55. And then one of my mentors got me a fellowship because I already started my doctorate at the University of Missouri after I completed my master's in '55.

So he felt very strongly about the fact that he was a very eminent sociologist actually, a ? monologist ? man called Noel Gist. He felt that they taught me all they could at the University of Missouri that I should continue, and he didn't want me to get a PhD from the University of Missouri. Which I think was a mistake, because it prolonged the whole thing and complicated things, but made as it be.

Then he helped me to get a fellowship to a place I was not particularly interested in going, which was in Louisiana, University, well known university.

Tulane?

Tulane, yeah. And I was scared of the climate because I developed an allergy and I couldn't take humidity, climatic kind of climatic allergy. And humidity is something which really exacerbated that state of sneezing and all this other. And so although I've had it and I was accepted, I was very reluctant.

And in '56 I got a fellowship to a university in San Diego to spend about, I think it was about a month or six weeks, something like that, at a sort of international corporation. An international kind of interesting experiment which brought 23 different nations together, represented 23 nations together to live together, international kind of experiment in international living and interacting. And I got a fellowship. There was something which was done by the Quakers and the Friends service. And I got a fellowship to that and that way I came to California, which I had not intended before.

And while I was in California I had a number of friends who were at the University of California Berkeley, who had studied with me and received doctorates from the University of Missouri. Who were in other words, more advanced than I because they had come earlier. So they said, why don't you [INAUDIBLE], why don't you come and you may get something here?

And so I had one of my Indian friends who I was very close to. I was particularly very close to people from India, students at the University of Missouri. It was a very closely knit communal sort of relationship in which I was totally accepted for interesting reasons. And all these people were in their doctoral studies.

And one of them was a man called [? Shanty ?] [? Tongre. ?] And he graduated from the University of Missouri and got a job at Berkeley. And he said, why don't you come and I'd like to introduce you, me be possibilities and all that. And he did a lot of foot work for me prior to my coming.

And I came and he said, well, they are hiring some instructors, lecturers in the department of speech, and you really should go and try and introduce yourself. And I thought it's just absolutely ridiculous. I didn't have any teaching experience. I was not an assistant. And just absolute 100% greenhorn, and I felt I wouldn't have a chance, particularly at Berkeley and all that.

So I came, I had an interview. And they were enthusiastic, for reasons which still escape me. It just doesn't make any sense to me, it just doesn't make whatsoever. And they hired me on the spot, and I became a lecturer at the University of California Berkeley.

And then I wrote to my professor, my mentor and say, hey, I'm here Berkeley and Tulane. He was very mad. He was very angry with me and say we've done so much work. And now next time around we don't have a chance with Tulane because you have somehow given up that sort of fellowship. And that I was very sorry for, because he was behaved like a father to me. I didn't want to be a disappointment.

But I still stayed there. But then before I actually I got that job and they said OK, you start now in the fall. It was just summer. And I had butterflies in my stomach. And I had sleepless nights, and I said I can't possibly do it. I can't face a class of students without having ever taught before and not really knowing what the hell I was doing.

And so I couldn't eat and lost a lot of weight and sleepless nights and butterflies in my stomach. And I said, I'm going to skip Berkeley. I'm going to run away. I'm just going, I'm going. And then I talked to my friend and he said don't do it, try it, and all this. And he was very supportive and all that. And then I mustered the courage to face up to the whole thing and I thought it just absolutely impossible.

And for reasons, whatever, I adjusted and then I was in the doctoral program also. So I was a lecturer, but also a doctoral student back at Berkeley. And within a half year I was a very popular lecturer. Again, for reasons which I don't understand, but it just happened.

The chair came, said John, he was a blind person and [Personal name] was his name, very famous attorney and a jurisprudent, wrote a lot of interesting, very important books. And so I sat down with you I mean all these students of course some female students they just all rave about you and say how well you dress and all that. What's with you? So I had to describe to him, because he never saw me by virtue of being blind. ? What about ? the success and so on. And so he said, well, when I left he said John, I like to finish your doctorate and you will send us a dissertation, and then we want to consider for full time track, tenure track.

All right well, and that was, of course, very nice, but the fact is that while I was finishing my doctorate back at the University of Freiburg in Germany where I went there because they were very supportive of my theme. Of course, there are people there who themselves were interested in national socialism. And one of the professors, a very well known person called Arnold [Personal name] who was a professor in Chicago during the war because he had to flee from Germany, not being non-Jewish, but very active politically. So he had to flee and got a job at the University of Chicago, and then after returned to the University of Freiburg.

How did you get this connection with Freiburg again?

Well, that goes again back into a sort of interesting situation. I went to Germany. No, I went from Berkeley, I went because I wanted to have some sort of a change to continue my doctorate, but have some change. And I was hired by the United States Air Force as a social psychologist, as a researcher. And I went to Dayton, Ohio, which is the Wright Patterson Air Force Base to research there.

And for reasons which I can't understand, which are partially political and my interest in applying some of the theoretical stuff, which I picked up back at Missouri, as well as at Berkeley. And it was exceedingly well paid, I just thought I'll try and see what it will do. And yes, I've tried it, and I know what it did, and I was pretty much disappointed because of some of the things which were going on there, which I absolutely disapproved of. The squandering of money and the nepotism, which I disliked, and some other things which were just really bad. And so I resigned and came back to Berkeley and applied for a job with the State Department, which I received as a vice counsel to go to Laos.

And so they gave me all sorts of shots and all that, and I was ready to go. And prior to my going I wanted to be sure that I will see my father and visit there. And while there I got a cable from the State Department said unfortunately, we regret that we cannot give you the job because you have not been a United States citizen for five years. And I was a United citizen for four years and eight months or something like that.

And I don't know, I think it was a trumped up thing. I think the CIA had something to do with that, because all the people would have been sent to Laos would have had also to work for the CIA. And I may not have been to their liking because of my past. And I think that was the reason because I said OK, before you go to Laos you just can go through all the various training, and in four months you can go when you've been a citizen for five years.

All right, and that happened while I was in Germany, because I got that cable came to my father's address, which I gave to the State Department. After I had been screened, after I had all the shots, plague, cholera, you name it, I just had all these. I felt sick for quite a few days.

Did you know you were going to have to work with the CIA too?

Well, I had some inkling, but I felt that I could stay out of it because it was not-- well, the State Department was particularly too in aiding people. So I would have had to work with aids, third nations, in that case Laos. But I talked to people who were there and said, hey, the CIA connected everything. You will be ruined. And I think that broke the camel's back. And I didn't go.

Well, these sort of things happened while I was in Germany. And what now? What then? I had a girlfriend who won't you come with me to Germany and all that, and I want to get married. And I said, I can't get married at this point and all that.

And she was very disappointed and bitter and a very lovely woman. And so I had sacrificed a great deal because of that, what I wanted to do. And then it just fell through.

So then I was saying now I'm here, I might as well see what I can do here. And I was interviewed for a research job at the University of Freiburg. Well, it was not actually the University of Freiburg, but it was some sort of supervised by this particular [Personal name] person. And I got to know him because I got the job as a researcher in this sort of research institute, kind of a trumped up situation. But nevertheless, I learned quite a few things about particularly German perspectives and research and all, which was helpful.

What was the subject of the research?

My subject was primarily race, international race, and minority problems.

You really should talk a bit about why you were studying social psychology and sociology, really, why you chose those fields.

Well, but that was prior to that simply because I studied my medical studies in Prague, and couldn't continue back in Australia. When I came to the United States I felt I was too old for that. And then I decided to switch to something which would be related to the camp experience and somehow find answers to questions which I've had, find meaning in all this trauma.

And so I decided to study sociology because I felt that that was a field which might provide me with the tools necessary for understanding what is going on, and social psychology specifically. So that's what I did. Well, anyway, so when I was-- so that's the answer to that question. But and also because I felt I was getting too old to study medicine, which was not correct at all, but I mean, I felt for reasons I was too old to start from scratch.

And so when I was in Freiburg doing this sort of research and meeting this Professor Arnold [Personal name] with whom I had a very in-depth, very personal and in depth talks and who could relate to my background, he suggested you should get a doctorate here, forget Berkeley. Because we are interested in your dissertation, and we'll give you credit for things you've done and all that.

And so that I could finish the doctorate in a minimum of time and had not lost any, in spite of the loss of semesters and all that, I could catch up and finish the doctorate within the shortest possible time, which I did.

What was the subject of it?

The subject was very simple. The subject was national socialism, the sociology of national socialism. And the title of my dissertation was Power Politics and Social Change in National Socialist Germany.

This you have published into a book?

Yeah. Yeah, it was very important because I had a friend back at Berkeley who happened to be in the process of getting his doctorate from the University of Oslo. And that was in '58, and that is to say the same year I was actually hired. Well, actually no, I was hired '56, so he got it in '58. And he asked me to come with him to meet his parents in Oslo, at the University of Oslo. And I helped him to put together his index on the boat.

We took a boat, beautiful trip. It was just luxury and fun and just El Dorado on that ship from Stavanger Fjord. It was Stavanger Fjord it was called, a ship from New York to Oslo. It was just a terrific thing, two weeks.

And so that was relatively inexpensive. I could well afford it, although it was everything was first class. It was first class, and I shared a cabin with him.

And while we were on the trip he finished his last touches of his dissertation and then had to defend his dissertation at the University of Oslo. And he also said that the conditions for getting a doctorate at the University of Oslo was that you had to publish, that university had to be a publishable dissertation. And it had to be published or they had to have your contract to have it published in a reputable publishing firm. And I was very impressed with that, and I felt that it was very proper. So I just simply emulated that and wanted to write a dissertation which indeed was publishable, and that's exactly what I did.

And so at that point, you had already decided to make your life's work studying the perpetrators?

- Well, yeah, I mean, at that particular point I was not sure to what extent it would be possible. But while I was doing my preliminary research at the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, looking at all the archives and the documents and getting stuff together, looking at the German publications, the newspapers and Der Sturmer, and all these sorts of things, I had a person who was very supportive of me. A very well-known person, one of the leading people who died quite a few years ago now, a man called [? Brochet, ?] who was one of the leading German historians of Nazi national socialism. And he was very supportive and was very impressed with what I was doing and very supportive indeed. He was older than I, but very, very friendly and supportive.

And so we talked about personal things and also my ambitions, and looking into not being satisfied with just simply archival material, and that I actually wanted to interview SS perpetrators. And that had not been done at the time, certainly not by a survivor. And so he was very helpful and said that's interesting because in Munich you are people, and I think it's crucial that you start with a man called general Steiner, Felix Steiner. And he was one of the senior SS generals, actually, and a person, interestingly enough, another national socialist, but he didn't know that.

But he said that this general Steiner is very open and he's accessible. And so I called him and I said, hey, my name is so-and-so, and I think we have namesakes and may even be remotely related. And I'm from Berkeley, and originally from Berkeley and this and that, and just would be interested in coming to talking to you.

And he was immediately very enthusiastic, very open. And we hit it off. Of course, I was full of trepidation with an SS general. I mean, here you are with all the notions which experiences I had. And I said my god, what are you getting into? And so I was kind of jittery to be sure.

But the funny thing is so he came very elegant and very well dressed, kind of stocky fellow just about my size, stocky, big fellow, with the hands of a butcher. And so we opened the door and I came to the apartment back in Munich, which a very nice apartment, which he shared with a relative of Cardinal Faulhauber, a Munich cardinal who made an interesting law during the Nazis opposing Nazis.

And so there was the table all spread with cake and coffee, and he had put all the things together. And I just said, what's going on here? I mean, you were SS and a coffee table with cake and all this. And so I had to adjust to my role as an interviewer, and not as a victim.

Did he know you were a survivor?

Well, I didn't tell him look, I just come from Dachau. I just come to visit and give you hell. Well, I couldn't, I couldn't do that of course. So I said yeah, I'm a researcher and I'm a former faculty member for Berkeley, and I'm interested in interviewing perpetrators. Perpetrators-- I said members of the SS, I didn't say perpetrators, I said members of the SS. And you have been suggested to me by this and that Dr. [? Brochet ?] and here I am, and I'm very interested.

And so we hit it off, for reasons which because I said my god, he was a monster, monster. And it turned out not to be a monster. He was a very amicable sort of dreadfully interesting person who was very generous and very hospitable in a way which was exemplary. I mean, his hospitality because he had put his paper napkins in some sort of special way so that they had decoration because he just folded. So he went into real minute sort of things to prepare this.

And I was totally unprepared for that, because I saw the SS types from the camp. That's my projection. I expected some brutal type of sadist barking at me. Well, the contrary was the truth.

And so then he wouldn't let me go and then I came back and back and he just said, I want to call you Dr. Steiner or whatever. And can I call you John and you call me Felix, and all this? And I thought, what the hell is going on? This man is becoming my friend, an SS general. I mean, it's absolute irony. And I just had the problem to adjust to it.

But I said, well, I have to be open minded, and I have to go through that because that may develop into life's work, and I just simply. And then I came back and back and he kept on writing to me and we telephoned. And then I came out with my first full blown project that was prior to the completion of the dissertation, but was certainly connected also. And in a questionnaire, which authoritarian personality and all that. What do you do?

So I mean, what he has done is precisely handed me two other SS generals. And one of them was an SS General Karl Wolff. And he was really, he was a different type altogether because he was a political general, not a Waffen SS general as Felix Steiner.

So he introduced me more and more so that a circle of people whom I was handed to simply was and this fellow is on the level. He's going to do objective research and he's got my support. And because of his position, senior position in the SS of that particular time, he opened all the doors for me.

And so I was not a person non grata, but I became a persona non grata, and that made it all possible. And including this sort of Karl Wolff, who was, again, a very influential person who was Himmler's right hand up to a point. And taken with mischief because he interceded in the transport ministry to get the box cars, which made it possible to ship Jews to Treblinka, for which he got 15 years in prison and was released after five.

So this fellow then viewed me as a friend and said now we know each other, and of course got to know my wife too. And said well, when you visiting in Freiburg and I stayed with him, and all the other places overnight, and was included in all the personal stuff. And Felix Steiner, I was the guest of honor during a so-called yule festivity, where all the SS congregated in the beer hall where Hitler used to meet and all that. So it was just real unbelievable stuff, and I went through this sort of thing like a dream.

So I come with this SS general. Everyone was sitting there, hundreds of people congregated there to celebrate not Christmas, but what this Germanic Yule Fest, which was to be the new religion. And that's how I got this sort of interest into what was really brewing and what was being in preparation to really replace the traditional religions with the new Nazi religion. And that's what I was introduced to, and I was the first to really describe that also in publication.

When was that?

That was in, it must have been in '64. I don't know the exact thing, because it's published.

More or less?

'64, '64. And there you come and see all these people, and there comes the Yid with an SS general.

With your arm covered, I presume?

As I had long sleeves and it was winter.

Fortunately.

They never-- none of them had--

Oh, no.

Never knew what your history was?

Well, I mean, some did. Some did, because I told them, but he didn't. I would have told him too, except he would have probably died of a heart attack. And so there all these people were sitting with their families, all the former SS people in all different things, but primarily or Waffen SS. But then of course, many people came from different walks of life, SD and the concentration camps, what have you.

So all the Munich SS people are congregated there, let's put it that way. And there I come [INAUDIBLE]. He was a senior general at that particular time, surviving general.

So there I come into this beer hall thing where all these people are with him just as the guest of honor. I still can't quite fathom the whole thing. And all these people get up, the SS people, and stand in attention.

Little do they know.

Sounds surreal.

Yeah.

Absolutely and totally.

So this was a new religion you're saying that was brewing?

Yeah. And so then I was seated, of course, the guest of honor next to Felix. And then the people came and talked to me, because I was the American, you see. I was not a Yid, I was not from Prague. I was an American.

And so they talked to me. And then the one came and explained this and that, that's the Yule and Christian is nothing. It was a Jew and all this and that, and comes and tells me about these sort of religious rights. And I, in my naivete, had a piece of paper and a pencil and I took notes. And they said, hey, what are you doing?

So I said, well, I'm very interested. I'm taking notes. And then this fellow came, and it was a staff sergeant, a real bad, badnik I mean, if I've seen a badnik he was a badnik. And telling me about all the SS religion, which I, of course, never heard because there was nothing in the literature at that time published after the war. Documentation during the war I had not seen much of it, just some, minimal.

And so he comes and then starts, don't listen to this person, he's just a criminal. Don't listen to him. And it's all published. I keep the whole episode, which is published. And but of course, I listened to him and I didn't see a criminal, because he wanted to disparage him because this was a very threatening thing.

When you say he's a badnik was that from your sense that you had learned--

Oh, yeah. I mean, he was a bad--

That you could recognize?

Oh god, he was bad. He was a real badnik no question about that.

Well, could you elaborate on this religion and what he was telling you?

Oh, yeah he said, well, it's all the things. It's all the Germanic paganism and all this Jewish stuff and Christianity, it's all bad news. And this is what it really stands for, and the Christians have stolen that all this from the Germanic festivities and turned it into Christianity. And we were there, and that's something which is important.

And he explained to me the meaning of the solstice and yule and all these sort of things. And what the ritual were when they were singing songs and lighting candles for the people who died for Germany, these people for the children and for the mothers who suffered, and all this sort of thing. And I just don't remember all the things. I put it down. It's all published.

And so I went through all that. And then he got wind of it while he was and said, don't listen to him. He doesn't know, what a criminal. He doesn't know what the hell he's talking about. And of course, he knew exactly, except he didn't want me to know what really what the game was, because that's what they celebrated.

And then they said, well, we are still into this, and some other people are still into it, but our children we raised them in Christian thing because this doesn't-- we will be the last ones probably. But in order for them to survive in this new society, it's important for these children to be brought up in a acceptable Christian religion denomination. And so--

It sounds like--

He devalued all the things which some of the people did and tried to keep apart, but they came and started talking and I listened because that's why I was there, except they thought I was there because I wanted to be a guest of honor. I didn't do anything. He said I want to invite you to this Yule Fest, Felix did, and I want you to be here. And then instead of then, so I was his guest and I was because I was his personal guest, I was the guest of honor. And it really shook me up. It really shook me up.

So it sounds like this is another big element of many of the hints of the occult going on?

Yeah. And that's what I was after. And then this led to my sensitivity towards this sort of thing. And then when this Karl Wolff, General Karl Wolff was sentenced to 15 years, and I went to the trial because I was there at that particular time in Germany doing my research and starting to work on my doctorate at the University of Freiburg, so I went there. I was already working quite a bit, as a matter of fact, on the doctorate.

And so I went there to be on the trial because I knew him. So I come to Munich. The trial of [INAUDIBLE] said hi, hi, hi, and I talked to him. He was sentenced and then I visited him in prison, and visited other SS people whom he introduced me, oh by the way, there is this and this and that, and so we talked.

And then one day, when I visited him, he said, well John, I've got a big favor to ask. And I've got this chain here with this amulet, and I'd like you to have that repaired because it tore. And tore, I say tore, it's interesting because it [INAUDIBLE]. And I took it and there was a hammer, a silver hammer on a silver-- or was it platinum? I don't know, platinum or silver chain.

I said what the hell? Why would he have a hammer here? Why would an SS general have a hammer on a silver chain?

And so I went to this [? Brochet ?] fellow, and said look, I've got that, I told him about my encounters because I went to visit him. And he told me many things about CIA connections and all these sort of things, the SS and CIA connections, that's what also he told me. And said, well, if they don't release me within a certain time I'm going to talk. And I said what do you mean talk? I'm going to spill the beans in terms of the CIA and their role in the SS and in all of this.

Really? This is Wolff speaking?

That was Wolff. And I said by all means, spill it now. And said well, I'll wait until I'll find out what's-- and sure enough, he got out because CIA intervention.

Really? Did you ever find out whatever?

Oh, yeah, I know the whole thing.

What the CIA connections?

Oh, yes, I know the whole thing.

And so anyway, so coming back to the chain, and I went to [? Brochet ?] and said, hey, John, I have no idea. I can't place it. So but this sort of thing reminded me. I said I've had it repaired, I paid for it, of course. I always smuggled cigarettes to him which he could use and all that, and then he opened up and told me things, all sorts sort of things which otherwise he may not have because he felt obligated and also felt that I kind of was supportive of him.

So it was a very complex game. And so I brought back the chain relatively shortly after that, brought it in the prison and said here you are. But you know, I'm bringing it to you. Now, tell me what it's all about. What the hell is this?

And he was very reluctant to talk about it. And then piece by piece it came out that it was a hammer of the Thor. And I said what the hell is this? And then I got into this sort of religious sort of thing, and that gave me the end which I then continued to research and came out with a really important publication relating to this sort of thing.

What was the name of the publication?

"The God Believers in the SS." And that was published in German, in English, and in Swiss history journal.

Is this in a book form?

No, it was just an article, but and also part of my book, yes. It was a chapter, subject in the book. Except in the modified form it was in some other journals and see in a chapter in a book, in a German book, a very reputable history book, too books talks god, for just about four or five different publications in modified forms.

And one, which appeared in Switzerland, with lots of pictures, photographs. And so that was a very popular thing and most of the SS people read it. They were all over me later on said, hey, how can you do that, this and that?

So were you referring by saying god to the ancient mythical gods that were pre-Christian? In this yule celebration, along with this mythology, were they still upholding the principles of fascism?

Well, the interesting thing is they simply looked back more than forward. And somehow, I think most of these people understood that this was the end of the line, that this would not be perpetuated or would not be easy. Because they themselves said that we are bringing up our children in Christianity, in some sort of whatever Protestant or Catholic faith.

But they still brought them to these yule things while they were around, and they continued to do that now, the old ones. Because they are their last who will continue with what they had adopted, accepted during that particular time while they were SS, in the SS during Nazi time. But they also know that it is coming to an end, and that chances are that no one else will pick it up and perpetuate it again, although we don't know.

No, because the children are being inculcated with this to some degree?

Well, yes, but I think they are exceeding those-- many I've met, I don't think they-- I think they have been so much influenced by the media about national socialism and all that that I don't think they are building or think it would be prudent to continue this sort of thing. I think there would be a very small minority, because I think the influence of the media and the teaching and the Democratic sort of perspective at this time is stronger than the influence of their parents.

Should we assume that all these people who were celebrating the yule were brought up as Christians also?



Oh, yeah, you can because you see because at that time this sort of thing was just beginning to be popular. And that was before, I'd like to make sure, that it was also existing starting at the turn of the century, something of that nature. And even before the beginning, the seed of it if you will, the beginning of that particular development, but no one took it that fully seriously. And very few people adhered to it or were interested in it. It only then became popular and furthered officially by the top Nazis. Now they all belong, for example, Bormann and Himmler and Goebbels and all these people came to this sort of thing and renounced the Christian faith to become what they called god glory, namely believers in god, which was the name of the new faith.

And now with a friend of mine I'm doing research which has not been done before, because I found in legal texts that according to the Nazi definition, racial Jews called be Catholics or practice the Catholic or Protestant or any sort of Christian faith. But they are not permitted to become believers in god. That is something we were not permitted to do.

You had to be Aryan to do that?

That's right. And no one has ever written about it. It's just something which is totally new. And I just simply, because I browsed through some legal texts which I do see what sort of laws, particularly racial laws, and among those things precisely that. Including the fact that Hitler himself was the only one who could make an exception to the Nuremberg laws. That's also a legal permission.

And right now, we are interested in both things, to find out if there indeed were cases of full blooded Jews, "full blooded" quote unquote, because there's no such thing as Jewish blood. That's the fiction of the Nazi imagination. And so I'm particularly interested in finding out if indeed an exception was made by Hitler, because yes there was a provision in that. Which kind of boggles my mind that even there was a legal provision and that's in the legal books, and I have it in several legal books.

So you haven't yet run into an instance that he used this?

No. I know that some people who were half Jews, or were just married to Jews. For example, a very well-known Austrian actor, his Jewish wife was exempted from her Jewish status, and that was referred to in documentation which I have lots of documentation on that.

So would that be an instance?

Because last year I went to Koblenz through the archives to search just to do a search like that. And now, because of east German all that, there are very many more archives open and access to documentation which hasn't been even tapped before. So and Prague also has very important documentation, particularly on the SS. So all these things, if I have a chance, if I ever should get into a financial position that I can do that, then I certainly would like to do that with Ms. Horowitz or someone else do that. But I mean, just it's something that we'll be able to get the funds, because it takes time to get away from.

You had said that some of these SS people were aware that you were a survivor?

Well, yeah, because you see, when I, for example, interviewed some of the Auschwitz perpetrators who by now have all-- and I taped all the interviews, which is important, or most of the interviews, I told them. And after the interviews say I am a survivor, and they said-- they burst into tears, many of them, and said how is it that you treat us the way you do? And where-- couldn't quite come to terms.

And I came back and talked to them again. Because of you, we haven't eaten and I have not eaten and I have not slept and all that, because of the encounter I've had with you. And you treated me as a human being, and all this and that.

And these were the Auschwitz perpetrators. These were the gassers. These were the people who were doing it. And that was a very fortunate thing, because I had access to them by virtue of the fact that I was befriended with the Jewish attorney general of Hessen in whose jurisdiction the Auschwitz process and he initiated the Auschwitz process.

And then these people who-- I did not attend the Auschwitz process, unfortunately, but I talked to them later on after they were sentenced to multiple life sentences. And then I had access because of his permission and because of friends I've had. One friend who actually was the director of that prison at that time, was a personal friend of mine. So I stayed with him at the premises of the prison where all these Auschwitz people were. So I virtually 24 access to them, and took advantage of that. Except these people I taped, most of these interviews.

So it sounds like in this group there was quite what you might call a human reaction?

Oh, yeah, very, very much so. And most of these people were exceedingly eager to talk to me. And that is something which came to me a surprise because I thought that most people, once I start probing in depth, that they would clam up on me. But none of them had.

Not only they did not clam up, but they couldn't get enough of it, so I had to come back and come back. And then one of them who was another, was not the Auschwitz but he was known as the Hangman or Buchenwald, man called Sommer, he wrote to me twice a month. And I have the correspondence over the years, which is just a mountain of letters.

Somehow, I became the father confessor and also some person whom they could talk to in order to get all this dreadfulness out of their system, and that was to my advantage. And so they wrote to me, and they expected me to respond to their needs, which I did. And relations developed so that when still a person with whom I worked very closely, was one of my major research assistants, if you will, back in Germany.

So whenever I come there I stay with them. They treat me like a family, and he knows that I am a survivor. And whenever I leave he bursts into tears and tells me I'm so thankful to you and all that. It's a dreadfully embarrassing situation for me. And he embraces me and cries and weeps, a man who was a guard at Dachau. And witnessed and participated in one way or another the destruction of Warsaw Ghetto.

How is it for you--

And he wrote me his whole description of the destruction of which he as an eyewitness, SS eyewitness, wrote and he's a journalist. He knows how to write.

How was it for you to be in the role of forgiving and assuaging the feelings of--

I don't know. I don't know. You see, the sort of forgiving to begin with, I was terribly confused because hey, I mean, project my experience of numerous death camps. Most people didn't survive one. I survived four, five, a death march and all this.

And project into this, particularly with Felix Steiner and say he is an SS general, my god. Swine like that terrible stuff, how am I going to stand up and not do something or say something or whatever, be there as a sociologist, an interviewer. And I thought I couldn't do it. And also the feelings came back. There was all this sort of replay of what had happened.

And he turned out to be exceedingly human. A person who can be a very loyal and fully supportive friend, who is very caring. And I said hey, how is it possible that under those circumstances you can be humane, and before that they fought for the Nazi cause?

How can you-- or you're glad to see me and talk to me as a human being, and you were the Hangman of Buchenwald. Or all you burst into tears and you gassed a hundred thousands of Jews. Just how do you put that into proper context?

Well, yes, and that's precisely how people respond to different situations. And the interesting thing is and the upshot of it that most of these people who participated in it were not people who initiated, but were sucked into it by the system. Because they themselves never would have been initiators, most of them.

Some of them are sadists, no question about it. And I discussed it with Erich Fromm and we agreed that among all these SS people in concentration camps, there was a pitiful 17 just about 16, 17, 18% of sadists. I've met them.

And that's why I think that they feel a Zimbardo's experiment was very important. They simulated the prison. And that's why I participated in that as a consultant, because that was a replay of a situation which was not totally unsimilar to the whole thing. Except of course it was by far not as traumatic obviously, but traumatic enough to see what sort of-- Eichmanns are all in us, which under certain circumstances will come out and we will behave out of character.

So like the pressure of the hierarchy, the pressure of the peers to force you into this?

Well, yes, the system. The system which creates situations, because the structure, which is manned by individuals, will compel, persuade and compel people with the help of an ideology, Nazi ideology, absolutist ideology, persuade people to lend a hand in mass destruction.

It has like a life of its own, the system?

That's right. That's right. Which is being created with the help of Hitlerism and people who will benefit from it because of power and satisfaction of their needs at the expense of countless millions. And where other people also will participate because they feel they are doing the right thing ideologically, indoctrinated, brainwashed to believe that they are doing the right thing.

And when this sort of ceases to exist then they revert back into some sort of normal, quote unquote, "normal" selves and behave in a way which is not going to break any law. And you would meet them and say what a nice person, totally innocuous, nice kind of harmless individual.

These Auschwitz perpetrators, the ones who were immediately involved, it sounds like they were suffering obvious guilt.

Oh, yeah.

But was this also true of the--

Well, and some other people, for example, very few people, I just spoke to one of them, a man called Boger. And he was a well-known sadist. And I had one encounter with him and then he didn't want to continue any interviews. And this man just thrived on sadistic acts. I mean, he was thriving on it and he invented torture for that. A fellow called Boger, B-O-G-E-R.

But then I also met someone else who was another general SS, also involved with-- no, that was not there anymore. But I went back because I wanted to see some other SS people in a prison in Bavaria. And then I tried to have an interview with a man called Bach-Zelewski who was actually the admin of all that region, Von dem Bach-Zelewski

And I met him at this prison, and the director of that prison was very cooperative and with whom I had a tremendous relationship and also was a very fair minded and sophisticated individual, a humanist in a way. He cooperated with me and said, OK, we'll bring him out, Von dem Bach-Zelewski and Erik von dem Bach-Zelewski. And you can eyeball each other and see how we will respond.

And so I came there and he was sitting there, because they brought him out. And I said my name is Steiner, and he introduced me and was kind of very courteous, very nice. And said Professor Steiner would like to interview. Would you mind doing that? And said if I have a choice, I'd rather not. And then this fair minded director said OK, if you don't want to, we won't force you.

And that was one of the major interviews, which is about 98% of people never refused an interview. It was a matter of fact cooperated and it's just about 2% roughly speaking. And he's one of the 2% who refused to be interviewed, which is a tremendous loss because he was responsible for most. He was the senior man in all the destruction policies in the East

So that's lost then?

That's lost, because the man is dead. He died of cancer and was released prior to this, before his because he had a life sentence. He was the real.

The other SS generals and people at that level of the hierarchy, did you feel that they were justifying themselves, or did they too suffer guilt in their decisions?

I think that's a very important question. And I had a feeling that some of them to some extent maybe, but to a minimal extent. I would say primarily they bathed in their glory, in their past glory. They continue to look back and focus on their glory and their power. And that to them was more important than the consequences of their power, namely what they had done.

And that I could see in Steiner. That I could see in Wolff. In all the generals, and I met a few, god I'd met a few, and none of them really came to say, hey, look this time is terrible.

I mean, and now in the first time I got an apology, and that is an important thing, which I think it made history, although it's not recognized, so it maybe after my death that may come out. Because now when I was in Germany last summer, I had the first table talk, which was with SS people, which was a public broadcast in which two of them said, and we talked about it, any one of you apologize?

Havel, Vaclav Havel, the Czech president, apologized to the Sudeten Germans what they've done, the Czechs to them. And I've been there, and I know what they've done. I've seen it. And I've helped many of the Sudeten Germans to save their lives, particularly those who were friends and I knew they're just as narcissistic as I am. And so he has done that, and that's what I use to say, hey, what have you done? Have you ever thought of apology?

And yes well, yeah, I mean, it's really terrible. And so we discussed that, and that became a very interesting sort of thing. But of course, I left Germany before it was broadcast, so I don't know what sort of response it stimulated. But it was broadcast in a major broadcast stations all over Germany, including Cologne and all that, which caters to Berlin and what have you.

And so there they said yeah, well, if we come to think of it, two out of the three said if we had understood what the consequences would be at that particular time we would have not become members of the SS. That was the first public statement anyone has made since World War Two. And I got them to do it.

They said they would not have joined the SS?

That's right. And they had regrets. And one fellow was just as old as I, same year, born same year, and the other one was born 1920. That's right, just turned 17. And the other one who was the senior there, he didn't join the club.

No.

He didn't join the club, he didn't say it.

It seems that then, in general, they didn't have that same outpouring as those--

Well, but you see, this is something with my questionnaire, I've tapped that all because these are questions I've asked. And that was published in 1970. And said how do you look back with regret or whatever? And categories there, and only a very small minority had regrets.

It was too soon.

Huh?

It was too soon.

Oh, no. I don't think so. I think it was just the timing was I think very appropriate, '70. I think I mean, you're talking 25 years.

So you're saying the response would not have been any different?

No.

Surely, they would have by then--

And that was of course in person, because they filled in a questionnaire without anyone being present and it was anonymous. So I mean, they had no reason to-- and so I think that two or three times of their real true sentiments, I think that came out. That kind of came out loud and clear.

So now at this point that you have spent a good deal of your adult lifetime studying the perpetrators, kind of generically, what conclusions have you drawn?

Well, the conclusion, the terrible thing that most of us are capable of dreadfulness, regardless of how we were brought up. Well, maybe not, I think there is still some difference in terms of how we were brought up and what sort of insights we have gained by virtue of the way we were socialized. And so I think there is a significant difference.

There's a significant difference between people who are authoritarian and not, because the authoritarians will be more susceptible to ideologies and also more willing to participate in crimes against humanity. But for all practical purposes that we see in everyday life that all of us are capable of things which would be defined as out of character and would be destructive. So human destructiveness is something which is not merely done by people of who won't say this, but by relatively, as Hannah Arendt said, individuals like Eichmann who himself would have not initiated, I'm sure, that the chances are in terms of what we know. The destruction he participated because he identified with the ideology and he was given orders, and wanted to advance in rank and power.

And so that is, I think, that's the danger. That's the danger. And politicians and just general individuals who are not that fully well read or have not looked into it don't know that, and we all are more or less capable of these sort of things.

And that's, I think, the dreadful outcome of this investigation. That these people, and that's something which I found out without any question, that the majority of the SS people who were perpetrators, who were doing all these ghastly, monumental crimes, under different situations revert into kind of behavior which is not going to break any laws. And that's exactly what I found out. They have not broken any laws. They are law abiding citizens who have not harmed anyone. That's the frightening thing.

Do you think there's--

Because I too went into this beginning of the research, I went into this sort of thing believing that I'm going to interview an SS and he's going to eat me up alive. Because I projected my experience into this sort of situation and that was my conviction. Say, hey, my god, am I going to blah, blah, blah, what am I doing exposing myself to all this? Who needs it? Only to be seen that these people are just absolutely charming, concerned, hospitable.