

About ten seconds. OK.

OK, today is December 17, 1993. We're doing part 2 of the interview with Jon Steiner about his work interviewing Nazi perpetrators. I'm Sandra Bendayan, and with us too is Jon's colleague, Carol Hurwitz. This is for the Oral History Project, San Francisco. Well, last time we were talking specifically about what you learned when you were interviewing the Nazi perpetrators. And we had been talking about them reducing cognitive dissonance in the case of being able to admit they're doing atrocities, but doing it in the name of the ideology that is [INAUDIBLE] to them. .

That's right-- which is a very important point, very important point.

Well --

Well, the idea is that I don't think it has been sufficiently emphasized in literature and by those people who have supposedly studied the perpetrators. And very frequently, it is said that these people didn't have a morality. Of course, they had a morality. They had a private morality and they had a public morality.

And it's just like we understand the two major types of roles we play, which is the communal roles on one hand, which deal with family, and friendships, and relatives, which satisfy the emotional needs, the affection. And all that comes into play, because that's the major reason for this type of roles.

And then we have the societal roles, which satisfy the existential needs, in which it makes no difference whether I like my customer, for example, when I am a waiter. I just simply satisfy the needs in order to get a tip and whatever salary I may receive for my services. So that becomes more impersonal, and therefore, I serve anyone who is going to pay. So these are the major two distinctions which need to be made, and have different functions in the roles we play in everyday life.

So in their relationships to their families, they had one set of morals, which emphasized warmth-- whatever-- family spirit, mutual support, and affection-- including the dogs, animals-- house animals. And on the other hand, you had people who were defined as subhuman or non-human. They're not actually even recognized as human beings, but as vermin.

And those-- you applied total different moral set of values. And therefore, you didn't have any guilt feelings, or minimal guilt feelings when you killed them. And it was not viewed as murder. It was viewed as cleansing-- what we call to day cleansing-- but in essence, were the same thing.

Do you think it could have been equated with the notion of that it's OK to kill in war, that there were are categories in which --

Right, right. I think it's very similar, because if he's my enemy and he endangers the safety, the well-being of my society, the state I live in, then I feel free to kill that person whom I view as an enemy, who is out to destroy my country. And I think it's very similar, very similar.

And even we evoke God, and providence, and whatever-- which Hitler did-- and say, he's on our side. And the other ones, of course, do the same. And on whose side God is? Then that's a very important question. And yet, we are prepared to kill for the sake of being in the right, because obviously, we are right and the other ones are always wrong.

Clearly, during the camp period, that was the case. When you were interviewing the perpetrators sometime after the war, did they have any different point of view about committing the atrocities?

I think that's a very important thing. This is a very crucial question. And I was obviously very interested in their view after the fact. Now, you mustn't forget that, after the war, you didn't have a National Socialist state anymore. And what took place now was just a move away from totalitarianism into democracy. And so therefore, the values had shifted, and the emphasis of values has shifted.

So for that very reason, they felt ambivalent about it, because now the morals which were emphasized in the democracy after World War II was very different from National Socialist notions of how a state ought to be run and who their enemies are. And so therefore, they were now in some sort of a twilight zone and didn't know exactly where they belong.

But now reality had changed, and they had to live in the new reality, and therefore, they shifted. Some shifted and said, hey, under the reality of what exists today democracy of today, we did things which cannot be justified. And we are talking about former members of the SS. And some other ones said, the values which we emphasized during National Socialism transcend the values which we have today, and therefore, we don't-- we live in our reality today, but we don't acknowledge it as valid, and still adhere to those values which were advocated during National Socialism.

And that, I think, is a very important thing. So you had two different types of groups-- those people who accepted the new-- if you will, the new contemporary reality, in contrast to the previous one. And the other one still dwelled on the old ones, acknowledging that they lived the new reality, but said, we don't accept it as valid to us, and therefore, we will adhere to the other one. Then you have people-- mixture of both, people who were actually confused.

And in terms of racist anti-Semitic notions, they still adhered to the anti-Semitic racist notions after World War II, except they couldn't practice it, you see. They are not allowed to practice it because there was no outlet for it. Now, that's why, say, if things will change, and that's why I call these people actual sleepers-- that, in reality-- new realities, is they then would revert against-- revert again to the values they supported and adhered to during National Socialism.

Do you think that the other group, those who accepted contemporary values-- do you think they would revert?

Probably not, probably not-- and I've, in my dealings with them-- and it's something which I did not expect-- if one can call it that way, I converted quite a number of people to that type of thinking, which otherwise they would have not been perhaps exposed to the extent, by virtue of the interviews with them.

And they became very important catalysts to change some of their attitudes within a segment of former members of the SS. And so to begin with, in my early time of the interviews, all these sort of things we are discussing now-- the, so to speak, consequences of these interviews I did not foresee at all. But they simply evolved after the interviews, and were utterly unexpected.

But this was some sort of a bonus, as far as I'm concerned, because I've been able to influence people in a way which I think neutralized some of the viciousness and some of the dreadfulness in their thoughts which made it possible for the Third Reich to perpetrate all these crimes against humanity.

Did you feel that, among any of these groups, the-- during the interviews, that they were open to you? Obviously, they were open to some extent, but that they could open their hearts, or they would hold back some, or maybe vary from person to another?

I don't know whether I can generalize that, but I would say that, once you enter into a dialogue with people, even if you have different views on things to discuss, there's an exchange of ideas which will affect all those who interact. And I think that certainly happened. And the fact that I got them involved in a dialogue by virtue of the interviews, I think, somehow opened avenues in any case to some sort of exchange of ideas, which indeed affected all parties.

There's no question. And I was affected also by that, because not all these people are sadists. Not all these people are destructive. And especially when I looked at them after the fact, after National Socialism came to its end after World War II, these people didn't come to the attention of the public for having committed crimes in the new society.

And that, to me, was very interesting. You will say, hey, if these people are sadistic people, who are, so to speak, bent on criminal activities, crimes against humanity, and all that, you would continue-- that they will continue on their path and be criminal in the future. And that was simply not the case. And that somehow stopped me in my tracks and said, hey, I have to be very careful in distinguishing how these things come about and to what extent people who, under

certain circumstances, will behave within the norms and relatively humanely under a different set of circumstances will become vicious killers. And that was what I consider to be a very important insight, which then I reflected on in some of my writings.

Did you feel that, in general, they expressed true remorse, internal remorse?

Well, as I mentioned before, when we've had this roundtable broadcast with three former members of the Waffen-SS, that we've had a very clear-cut case where they said, if we had known the consequences of our activities and what happened by virtue of our membership-- an organization which was tainted with mischief, we would have not joined the SS.

And they said that in public, and then incurred the wrath of those people certainly had a different idea, and were ostracized by their fellow SS comrades. And that is very important to me, because they said that in public to people it was virtually their business based on their public declaration of the insight they reflected on.

So that, I think, is very important. And if we enter into dialogue with people, even if that was not intended-- that was not my intention at all, because I came into the whole thing as a sociologist, a social psychologist, to research what made them tick. But I certainly did not foresee that I would then get into some sort of a interaction with these people which was totally on a different level.

Did any of them know that you had Jewish family in your history?

Oh, yes.

They did?

Yeah, because some-- I told some of them, and some of them I didn't. And I waited for the right moment to tell them, when it would be productive, rather than destructive-- because some of the people I told in the right moment, and this furthered their acceptance of me, because I said, hey, instead of hating, he's listening to me and even supportive to me when I need to discuss some of the things which are a burden to me, or which need to-- I have to get off my chest.

And so as far as their view of me, their esteem-- my esteem in their eyes was thereby heightened. And it certainly helped me to find out more interesting things which I wanted to find out.

In your interviews, how did they react, and what was the process in their ideological changeover when Hitler fell?

When Hitler--

When the war ended, Hitler fell. That whole ideology seemed cracked, I presume.

Well, it just depends on the attitude. What was the reason why people joined, let's say, the SS? Well, they may have been attracted to the ideology, number one. Number two, they may have been opportunistic about it and said, hey, everyone, it's now a National Socialist state. I have to see that I'll make a career under those present circumstances and, so to speak, said, well, I don't care what, but as long as it's going to support my cause. And so I'll simply collaborate.

And some other people joined because they felt strongly about not only the ideology, but also because they admired Hitler because they really felt that Hitler was going to be-- the true ideologists who felt that Hitler had a good point, and would indeed do for Germany what he claimed he would be doing. So you had a number of reasons why people joined, and depending on their reasons, they would have a different view after the war and look back with different feelings and reach different conclusions.

And say for that group that were deep believers in the ideology, who felt that so-called God was on their side, how did they go through this transition?

Well, they applied what we call reduction of cognitive dissonance, and they said, well, Hitler was betrayed. Hitler meant well, and he would have won if not so many other people would have prevailed and not failed him. And so they said he was OK, National Socialism was OK, but the Germans simply didn't do what they should have done in order to see that National Socialism would prevail-- or, for example, said, well, technically, we are not as well-equipped.

The whole world was against us, and it was too much for us to defend ourselves against. And so there are a number of justifications which they apply, but Hitler and National Socialism were still right. And you've got a segment of particularly older generation, and now even younger generation, who claim that Hitler was right, National Socialism was right, but all the other ones who failed him and conditions simply made it possible for him to go to lose the war.

So that group came up with their ideology more or less still intact.

Right.

Was that group able to do then adopt more democratic attitudes later on?

Well, they adjust to normal conditions in order to survive existentially, but they wait for the moment when they really can activate what they really feel and put that into practice. So they are very unstable-- a very unstable element which actually undermines any sort of democratic process, because whenever they see some weakness in all that, they'll come up and will say, well, we've told you so, and now we-- it's our turn to take over, if we can.

And yes, you got people today in Germany who are very interested along these lines. And what we seen in the Soviet-- the former Soviet Union-- again, you see these sort of trends. So the question is, who is going to prevail? Which elements in a given society will prevail in time and space? And that, of course, is posited on the fact that-- what sort of leaders they are, and how they will conduct themselves, and who are the role models, and how they can structure the society and move it away from any sort of totalitarian situation.

Do you think that-- as a group, that they felt a nostalgia for their old days? They wanted --

Well, yes. One can hear that. And then they say things which we also hear here in the United States and-- law and order, law and order you know Turks. There are no foreigners who created unemployment, and everything was uniform, and there was peace in the streets, and less crime, and all these sort of things. And that's certainly one thing which is being advocated by these people. And they feel that these were the good old days, where everyone could walk the streets without being afraid.

What about the good old days aspect of their camaraderie, their power over people?

Well, that too-- yeah, the closeness, the closeness--

[INAUDIBLE].

That's a very frequent thing which came out in the interview. Invariably, regardless how they felt today about National Socialism, their closeness, camaraderie which they felt was so strong, very sustaining. And people supported each other in a way which does not take place today, and they miss that. There is no question about that. And that was one of the themes which was very strongly emphasized, regardless of their views-- ideological views. So they were missing that-- particularly within the SS, which was much more closely knit than other groups.

Do then is that sense of power over others as well? Do they speak of that?

Well, that is not something which they would emphasize, because somehow it doesn't sound good. But obviously, it came through in some cases loud and clear that some of these people played roles which had unbelievable power over other people. And that, of course, caused them to be elated, and they experienced some ecstatic joy playing these roles. And invariably, most of these people who were in these high positions, or even not that high positions, just consider Eichmann was only a lieutenant colonel, but look at the power he had, you see.

So they miss that. And I've been told that by a number of interviewees that-- who are well-off economically, and said-- and I argued with them and said, you're well-off, so what are you really missing? And these two things came up-- one, that the closeness-- they miss the closeness of these groups they were part of-- the SS, in this case. And then they missed the power, which was either direct or indirect by virtue of the fact that they wore the SS uniform.

They're respected, and feared, and whatever, and that was something which, . Regardless of their position after World War II, they couldn't obtain. And that is something which they missed, the type of respect they received from others-- and the respect not necessarily based on the respect of them as individuals, but the respect and fear of the role they played. And that is a very important distinction, very important distinction.

That brings me to, after the war, were there-- did they express any changes in their relationship, say, to their family, to their friends?

Well, that I haven't felt, because you see, it just so happens that I was frequently invited into their homes and stayed with them while conducting the interviews with people who were just really leading in this SS younger generation, but still had very, very high positions-- and so naturally observed how they interacted within their family.

And the interesting thing is that those people were more highly positive that married early in life, obtained divorces to marry younger wives, frequently with some sort of social standing, or were more attractive-- not only by virtue of the fact that they were younger, but also physically more appealing. And that was an interesting sort of tendency which I noticed, particularly in those people who married relatively early, and then became older, and their wives also became older, and they lost their attraction.

Or they married people who at that particular time were on their level of their social position, but once they had attained a higher social position, they left them behind. And then there you had people who were not that fully sophisticated. Some of the wives were socially not up to it to play that new role, so they just simply left them behind and took wives who were more in line with their new position in life so that they looked better, and of course, got also better satisfaction out of their marital relationship.

So did you feel they did this after the war more often or then during --

Well, that happened during the Third Reich already, because you see, with this type of power they've had, either they were not loyal to their wives and had side affairs, and when things didn't go that well, and they already were very high elevated-- and so they divorced and got someone who was more suited for the present situation, and left the other ones behind.

And they did it with very little feelings, just simply cold blood and I have a number of cases where I've observed that. But all these people were in higher positions. They're in higher positions. They're not just the run-of-the-mill type of SS.

Were there any women in the Third Reich that held any power at all?

Oh, well, yes, but you see, it was a very autocratic patriarchal society. And women were there to serve their men and do what the man told them. It was very clear-cut. But yes, you had women who were in charge of other women. And the National Socialist Women's Organization and the National Socialist Youth Organization-- they all had women in charge.

But the people who were in charge in reality were usually males, and not females. And they accepted that. I accepted that, and did not rebel against that-- although some of them were academicians-- academics, and educated people and all that. But they willingly subordinated themselves to the males.

The feminists had already been deposed by that time.

Feminists of the Weimar Republic [INAUDIBLE]. They were the traditional [INAUDIBLE] for the most part.

Mm hm, Thank you. Were you ever able to interview any of the women who were in any positions during the --

Yes. But this was very sporadic, piecemeal. And there were not very-- not that they were not prepared to be interviewed or-- there are not very many people around who played an important role and would have insisted that they did. Some of them have written books or articles about the time, and those, in a number of instances, I received from them-- so that this took the place, if you will, of more in-depth interviews, because they already pretty much declared all the things I was interested in. So it was pretty limited.

And the man I think was perhaps the most impressive interview was with some of Hitler's secretaries-- two of them. And that, I think, was very interesting. And in one case, one of the senior secretaries, and perhaps the most intelligent and efficient of them all-- and he had about four-- she was very outspoken. And I developed a very ongoing and in-depth relationship, as far as our discussions were concerned, and also got her to write-- make contributions to the book which came out posthumously on her experiences.

And so many years, I just simply was pushing her to continue her writing, which she did until she became very ill and no longer could use the typewriter. But she was one who I considered to have made one of the most interesting contributions, in terms of the view of females. Christa Schroeder was her name.

And she was very intelligent and very vocal, and went through many changes, and I think assessed the situation relatively objectively after the fact. And I think she made a tremendous contribution. And she yet needs to be recognized, the book which she wrote-- in German, of course. And I tried to have it published here and translated, and I have not succeeded so far.

In the content of this book, are there other things that came out other than that she was trained as a patriarchal woman?

Well, you see, Hitler depended on his secretaries, because he did not do any writing on his own, other than very short writings-- letters, whatever, but nothing lengthy. So he was in the habit to dictate, and because of the dependency-- Hitler's dependency on them, he told them things he wouldn't have told other people.

And that came out, so that very many of her observations are invaluable, simply because of his dependency on his secretaries and his relationship. And it's just really amazing. One of the things, which I consider to be of significance in this relationship, in this regard, is that, whenever he started-- when he came to dictate to her or some other ones, he came and greeted them, and kissed their hand before he started to dictate.

Now, this in itself symbolically means something, because he certainly didn't kiss the hand of everyone. But simply, those people he considered to be important to him-- in a very selfish way, to be sure-- apart from the fact that it is an Austrian custom-- and he's an Austrian, of course, and-- to kiss hands. But not every male kisses the hand of a female who comes into contact.

But in this case-- and I've watched that in documentaries, and also what she said and what she wrote-- is that he was very selective in terms of whom he kissed, whose hand, you see. And he kissed the secretary's hand. So that means there was a relationship, a certain degree of gratitude and dependency which was reflected in that. Course, when he had no need for them-- so he was very cold-blooded-- just anyone, female or male, he discarded, and that was it, you see.

Are any other things that you think of-- would like to add from her book?

From her book, it's a wealth of information in terms of the relationships between the various Nazi leaders. And when we look at it from outside, as people who really are not insiders and understanding of the type of interaction which took place, we have frequently the notion that they're very unified and in harmony with each other, but that was not the case at all.

And the tremendous rivalries, tremendous feuds-- and also some of the responses, which were very private, come out in her writing, which I think is just absolute goldmine in finding out that some character of some of these people, which

did not come out in public, because it was very private and was kept private. So how they responded to a certain situation, or towards each other, or towards mass destruction, and what have you is something which was not publicized. But it comes out.

For example, Hitler's response when he occupied Czechoslovakia-- his elation and-- it's just like a little boy's, that it's the greatest day of my life, and just jumping around, and was beside himself with joy and elation-- whatever. And so some of these sort of things come out-- details which she had a very good memory for.

She discussed it with me and said, well, some of these things are trivial and all that, but I said, but it may look trivial, but it is a very important message. It really communicates something which otherwise would not be known. So she was very uncertain in terms of what was important and was not, and we had frequent discussions on what she should write about. And I said, just write what you remember-- and said, well, but that was insignificant, for example, the fact that she pleaded that the soldiers should be getting cigarette rations.

And Hitler was very much against smoking, and simply wanted to discontinue that. And they got into conflict with each other, and she fell for a time in disfavor, because she talked back to him in a way which was not expected to be done by someone who is his secretary-- in public, in a small circle of his confidants. And so these things came out in order to really find out how Hitler behaved in the inner circle or how some of the other high Nazi leaders behaved when they were among themselves and feuding with each other, or just backbiting and all that, and trying to be the first among the first, and what sort of means they employed.

In the post-war SS group that you interviewed, those that still had strong pro-Nazi leanings, were they openly so, or was it a sub rosa group, or did they organize?

Well, first of all, they have their rallies, and they still have them and they have their meetings. And the people who received their Iron Cross they have annual meetings and are proud of the fact that they've excelled and were recognized. And the question is, they're recognized for what? And that is not something which they would ask.

They said, well, we fought for our country and very frequently -- I said, for whom did you really fight? Did you fight for Germany or did you fight for Hitler's Germany? There's distinction between these two. And then they get into conflict and they don't want to hear that, you see, because they want to be viewed as heroes who did the right thing-- namely, to defend and fight for their country.

And so during these rallies, this is being reemphasized and said, hey, we have nothing to be ashamed of. We've done the right thing, and that is being justified-- justified whether it's the SS or other groups of people who had a vested interest and were certainly -- and that is something which some of them deny nowadays, who are certainly very sympathetic towards National Socialism and its cause.

And that, to me, was very obvious that, if you continue to celebrate what you did, even after the dire end, then you must have had some very strong affiliation in terms of an identification with the role you played during the Third Reich. And that comes out during these rallies and during their speeches. And I was privy to that, because I was a guest of honor-- one of those rallies, which we discussed, I think, in one of the things before, in one of our talks.

So the fact that they still harp on that, and they still meet and celebrate, and they are reminiscent and-- is a sign that they identified with what they did, and are proud of it, and were also highly decorated for it. And this is being reified by these annual meetings there.

Did any of these people post-war claim that they did not know the whole extent, that it was a policy on genocide?

Oh, yes-- number of them. But if you really probe more deeply, they just simply looked the other way, because people in high positions, and even in combat in, let's say, the Eastern Front-- very many people saw what was happening, and also were very much aware of the fact that you had the Einsatzgruppen and mass murder behind the lines.

And I remember, for example, when we were retreating when we were on the death march, and the retreating troops of

the Germans talking thousands of people-- military retreating and watching us. And so we saw each other. We encountered each other. And the interesting thing is that they called us names and all sorts of things. And if they would have permitted, they would have wiped us out.

And these were not SS people. This was just the retreating military. And so they could see us in striped pajamas under the conditions we were. And then, instead of having some compassion, very frequently-- there were some who did, but they didn't show it-- certainly not the military, I don't remember. But they simply were cussing us, and calling us names, and behaving in a way where they just, if they would ever let loose, would have done us in, instead of feeling some sort of compassion for us.

It was very different when we walked through some little villages and townships. Then we had a civilian population who rendered support not necessarily materially, because some of them couldn't do it-- although some did it also in some sort of piecemeal fashion. But they shouted encouragement to us, and to the annoyance of the SS guarding us. So that I remember also.

But in terms of the military, defeating the military was very clear-cut, because they-- as I said before, if they would have been able, they would have certainly attacked us and-- because they blamed us, because they identified us with the enemy from whom they retreated. And that also happened, then I no longer could walk in one of the last phase of the death march.

So there was a military police soldier-- actually, I shouldn't say soldier-- he was a major. And he drew a pistol and we crawled. We crawled. We couldn't walk anymore, so we were crawling into a horse and buggy type of situation. And so he drew the pistol and said, we'll show you, you swine what-- me show you, swine, pay you back that we have to retreat from the Soviets and all that. We show you what it means to retreat, or something of that nature.

So he just simply was ready to shoot us, but didn't, for whatever reason. And so we were then put into this horse and buggy and driven to the close concentration camps-- slave labor camp, what it was, actually. And so they blamed us because they felt that we were in cahoots with the enemy. And you can make this connection, of course, under the circumstances. So I still remember you swine, we'll show you what it means to retreat from the Russians. We'll show you. Anyway, so that was just one of the incidents.

It would be nice now if you talked about the process of making an SS person. The person joins-- are there some specific rituals over and above, say, combat training?

Well, again, what we said last time is that the SS was made out of very many functions and segments with different functions. And so the first thing which we need to remember is that it was a voluntary organization until 1943. So people who volunteered obviously could have not been opposed to the National Socialist cause.

But the SS was kind of viewed by the population as the representative, the strong arm representative of National Socialism and the protector of National Socialism-- so that if people say, we're not National Socialist, well, they may not have been National Socialists, but if they join that means that they had to, to some extent, identify with the cause of the SS, which was the protection of the National Socialist Party.

It meant that they were also at the disposal-- direct disposal of Hitler, that he could-- he was the one who could dispose of them and put them to whatever use he felt was best in his interest. And that's exactly what he did. And so this was known. And also, of course, they had some social status.

So very many people who were not well-prepared to assume other occupations, or were not that fully skilled in other things, or were without a job felt that, on that basis, joining the SS, they could embark upon a career which would be substantive and would give them security, prestige, esteem, and a role which they could identify with, they could be proud of.

And so that was one thing. So therefore, what you really had is the situation where you had a change-- well, change in society towards Hitlerism, where people could see that there was a chance for them to become something, and also, of



course, an ideological identification with National Socialism. So that was the basis.

Now, some of them, of course, were willing to do the things which was typically done by the Gestapo, by the death head guards in concentration camps who had very early functions, which were very, very brutal and violent. And some of them were aware of it and some of them were not, in terms of what they had to do, because that was not that-- some of these people were very unclear about it. They were very young, and they had no idea in terms of what was expected of them once they would become members, particularly in the early concentration camps in the Einsatzgruppen.

They had no idea specifically what would be asked of them. So very frequent, they're very ignorant in terms of the tasks they would be-- that would be assigned. And once they were in, it was very difficult to get out. And very many people who could see that they had to do something-- they couldn't identify, did not have the intelligence, or the foresight, or the ability to get out of it-- although I've met some people who, for example, were members of the Waffen-SS and said, well, I was getting an assignment-- and I remember one-- this person is-- I've talked to many times, and he was very clear-cut about it and really talked about it-- who married a very well-to-do lady and was very successful in what he did after the war.

Namely, he was an owner of two resort hotels in a very well-known resort place in the northern part of Germany-- southern part of Germany, actually. And he said that he wants to be assigned to be a commandant in a camp. And because he understood what it involved, he appealed to people who were his superiors and manipulated the situation so that, instead of being sent to be a commandant in a concentration camp, he was sent to the front and a combat situation.

And he survived it very well, and I talked to him, as I said, many times. And he was very glad and very happy and proud of the fact that he manipulated the situation, because he said, I couldn't have done it. I couldn't have lived with myself. So these situations were also -- but of course, he was an officer, as you see. The small peons, the people without any contacts with high posited members of the SS were, of course, in a much weaker position to manipulate the situation.

And even Auschwitz-Birkenau-- some people I've interviewed who were Auschwitz perpetrators tried to get out of it, and became very frequently drunk and all that, because they simply couldn't stomach what they had to do, and tried to be transferred. But that was exceedingly difficult. And one of them told me that he directly appealed to Himmler when he visited Auschwitz-Birkenau and said, reichsfuhrer, I'd like to be transferred-- and said, you will serve. We order you to serve. You stay. And he stayed.

Certainly, being transferred to the front was a much more dangerous situation--

Oh, absolutely-- no question--

--than to be in camp.

Yeah-- well, of course. And also, as far as their job was concerned, in terms of their own personal safety and hardship, it was a terrific job than to fight someplace in freezing winter in the Russian front. My God-- there was a tremendous difference. And they knew it, so some of them were glad to be where they were.

But later on, towards the end of the war, they replaced anyway, those able-bodied people they replaced and the old people who were wounded and all that took their place. I remember that particularly in one of the camps, in a slave labor camp of Blechhammer. So that was very obvious that older the people came all the time, and they didn't know exactly and they were quite sympathetic [? time, ?] certainly not very harsh and all that not just like the young people.

And the young people were sent into combat, you see. So there was quite a bit of rotation. And that's very important, because very frequently you hear that people who were members of the Waffen-SS say, well, we were purely combat. Well, it's not so, because very many people were just circulating, you see. And they don't want to hear that, because they don't want to be tainted with this dreadful thing-- for reasons which I can appreciate. And some were not, but many were because they were circulated.

Do you know of any instances where people requested transfer out of the camp and were sent other than to combat

situation?

Well, I don't know that many cases, number one. And those cases I know of that, yes some people were sent to the front and some people were simply told that they had to remain where they were period. had no recourse. Once you were in that situation, it was very difficult to get out. But yes, so many people said that they'd like to volunteer in combat, rather than do some of the things which they couldn't identify with.

So the difficulty of, once you volunteered, you couldn't get out-- is this the normal difficulty of getting out of an armed service, that you have to about go AWOL in order to--

I don't know AWOL, not very many AWOL, because that was very difficult. First of all, you couldn't get very far, and once they caught, you were finished. One incident comes to mind. One of my mentors-- very well-known sociology professor and one of his -- when we had, after our relationship which acquaintance kind of friendship, which lasted for very many years, he told me that he had something to confess to me.

He was a major in the German army. And he said, I really have to tell you something which has been on my mind. I signed a death warrant for one of those people who went AWOL. And I never could come to terms with it. I signed it. And so I said you know it's -- I can appreciate why you feel the way you do. And he talked about that.

So you had no chance. Unless you got out of Germany or went over to the Soviets or the Western Allies, you had no chance. Sooner or later [INAUDIBLE] and that was it. Then you were shot, finished.

Automatically-- no court martial?

Oh yeah, sure. Oh, yeah. But that was very fast. And he signed one of these.

[INAUDIBLE] SS training, were there any situations, as in certain other kinds of brotherhoods, like blood brotherhoods, or other kinds of rituals or knowledge that [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, no. What Himmler had in mind is to develop a Germanic creed-- one perhaps can say some sort of religion-- and I wrote about that-- I was actually the first to write about-- not much has been written about it since, anyway-- which would replace the Judeo Christian religions. And so that got stuck because of the war and other problems, and also that some people, in spite of the fact that they-- the National Socialists and joined the SS still remained active in their respective faiths, which was either Protestant or Catholic.

But then there was a third group, which was just about one third of all the SS people-- and became more and more popular-- who then assumed this to be new creed of the-- what they call-- just a literary translation-- God believers, of believers in God. And so they left their religion and declared themselves to be believers in God.

Now, the interesting thing is-- and that is something which relatively recently I found out, going through some books-- legal Nazi books during that period. And I found out that, if people were Jewish, they could become Christians-- not that it would help them any, but they could switch from the Jewish belief, religion to any of the Christian ones.

But one thing they're not permitted to do-- they could not become-- declare themselves to be believers in God, which is very interesting. That was only they open to Aryans. And that is something no one knows. Nothing has been written about that, and I just simply accidentally stumble across that. And that, to me, was very important, because that was to be the creed of the new Aryan Germanic people.

Yes. And they, for example, could-- an SS superior officer could, for example, marry people, or he could say whatever to be said when people had died and all that. So he more and more assumed the position of what was done by the ministers or, priests and that was to replace the Judeo Christian creed, which they, for practical purposes, rejected.

And all the Nazi leaders-- the high-ranking Nazi leaders, whether it was Himmler or whether it was if Bormann-- they all left their religion, except Hitler did not. He still paid his dues to the Catholic Church, which is very interesting. He

never left the church. But they did, and they became believers in God-- and practiced, supported that. And that is a very interesting thing. And virtually nothing has been done with that, very little has been written.

the occasional oblique references to ideas of going back to pre-Christian pagan religion--

Yep.

--that the solstice was to be the most--

Right.

--important holiday.

That's right.

Can you talk about that aspect [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, that aspect is rather interesting, because when I was interviewing, and then developed a very good relationship with my namesake, Steiner, he took me to this-- in Munich in this well-known, infamous [INAUDIBLE], where the early Nazi situations took place-- meetings and what have you, and all the various strategic things were discussed during the early period.

Former members of the SS had a celebration there, which was a combination of Christmas and solstice, and Germanic thing. And that was the first time I really heard about it, because one of the SS people present-- and we came in. Steiner and I came just about 10 minutes after all the other ones have assembled-- lots of people-- at least 150, no 250. I don't remember offhand how many there were-- lots of people.

So they all stood up with, some exception of some of the wives and children. But all the men stood up, and there we march, and I and Steiner. So it was just an unbelievable sort of feeling for me to just really-- very, very unusual and strange for me to just walk in with him. And then you got all the SS high-ranking some former high-ranking SS people there and all that congregated and standing up. And I'm marching with him.

So then they settled down, and then they celebrated the young ones, the kids. They had the tree and all that, and there were supposed to be a minister coming in to somehow-- celebrating the Christmas for these children, because they're split. The old ones were very much into this new creed, and-- but lived in a period where this no longer had any chance in a new society, post-war society.

And so he declined to come-- found an excuse not to come. So then all these people were there without a minister. There was to be a Protestant minister, not a Catholic. And so they simply continued, and instead of Christmas, it was very heavily emphasized-- the ritual which they had introduced already-- as the basis for their future creed. And to me, that was quite an experience.

And of course, I had no idea what it was all about, because I was not informed. I didn't have that understanding, because I had not written about-- I had not read about it very much at all, if anything. And so there was one person who was a non-commissioned officer in the SS-- saw me, so he came and explained to me the creed. And I was putting down things on paper so that I wouldn't forget it-- made notes.

And Steiner saw it and say, don't take any notes and don't listen to this fellow, this criminal who's just talking Himmler nonsense and all that. So they tried to discourage me, because they're very well aware of the fact what was going on. But they didn't want me to really catch on to it, you see. It was very obvious, because the man was very helpful, tried to explain to me, this is not really Christmas what are we doing here, and-- because that goes back into the German solstice and all this, and that's what we really celebrate this all these other things is nonsense Jewish stuff and all this, and Christian It's all this Jewish [? infested. ?]

Anyway, so that was an eye-opener, because I had absolutely no idea that this sort of thing existed. And that started my interest, and I pursued it, and with the help of some other people, inadvertently-- inadvertent help of some-- because now it's no longer very functional. They still adhere to it. They even have candle holders, and they have pieces of ritual which is being used in these sort of celebrations-- actual things. And I have one made out of ceramic so that-- these candle holders were distributed to every SS person and every friend of the SS supporter of the SS, so that they became a household-- part of the household which was being used.

And all these things I found out afterwards, and so that you really could see that many of these things were being introduced by primarily Hitler-- I'm sorry-- Himmler, because Hitler was not-- was very much in the background-- all that. Hitler's notion of these things was sympathetic, but he-- particularly towards the end of the war, he just was just letting them do what they wanted to. He didn't interfere. But most of all, that was done on Himmler's initiative.

So the impetus to consolidate this new religion was not Hitler's?

Well, it had his support, but he was very much standing back, I think, and didn't come, I think, for political reason-- not that he did not empathize, because it was very much in line with his thinking, and Himmler knew that. But I think, for political reasons, and because it is a Protestant nation with very large number of Catholic majority, he didn't want to rock the boat. I think it was just merely strategic thinking why he was not more actively involved, and let Himmler do all this, you see-- but not because he was not sympathetic.

Could you describe this holiday ritual, the non-Christian part of it?

Well, it's singing of specific songs and thinking of and talking about going through specific ritual verses of people who died in combat. And this candle is for the dead. This candle is for their mother-- for our mothers. This candle is for the children to come, and all that-- and singing of specific songs, which were non-Christian songs, not songs you sing during Christmas. So this was perhaps something.

And of course, you had no chance to attend these things after-- other than what I witnessed there. So you had a tree there, and they just put candles on it, saying certain things, as I've indicated, and singing particular songs which had absolutely nothing to do with Christianity. And there are no speeches, as far as I can remember. I put it all down. It's all part in my book, because I made notes when I was there, and then-- immediately after I went home so that I wouldn't forget.

And I described these things as accurately as I possibly could. But I was discouraged to make notes, as I said before. And it was very bewildering for me, because I didn't have any sort of background which would enable me to relate to what was going on. So I just simply relied on more the descriptive part of what I could see and witness.

Do you have any sense of how those candle holders were used in the household?

Oh, yeah. Sure. I've got one. So it's a candle holder which is made out of ceramic with particular symbols in it-- not a swastika, but the light wheel and some other symbols which connote, relate to solstice. And then, on top of it, it's just a little bit like a pyramid. And on top of it you've got indented part, and there you put the candle. And you also can put the candle inside, but the idea is to put it on top of it.

And when I bought this in some sort of antique shop-- for virtually nothing, because although the lady who sold it to me-- she knew exactly, because she happened to be a National Socialist and she was very familiar with that. But it was-- she didn't see any value in it. It's actually very valuable, because most of these things no longer exist, or have been destroyed, or whatever. So it was covered-- the candle, this pyramidal type of ceramic was absolutely covered with wax, which means that they put the candle on top of it, rather than beneath it.

And there are perforations so that it could be done, because there are these sort of things which are cut, and let out light if you put in the candle underneath. And I haven't seen it, of course, practiced, but when I show it or talk to them, all these SS people said, my God, you've got really something. Why don't you give it to me, or this and that?

And some of the things I had do-- I gave to some people, particularly some people -- and then I got it back after their death of the people said, can I keep it? And I'll see to it that you get it back.

And do you know in what the candle was used?

Yeah-- particularly when they celebrated these sort of things which were related to the creed-- this new creed.

Weekly, daily, monthly?

That I have no-- only certain, certain festivities which are not-- they probably could use it every day for what I know, but I think the purpose was to use them during specific festivities which had meaning in that particular to be creed.

Do you have any sense of how they were going to relate this creed to the religions of the German populace as a whole?

Well, they just simply tried to replace it, and that's. It was to be discontinued, because they're after the Catholic priests. In their speeches and in their writings, they talked about it and condemned them-- and whether it's Protestant and all that.

So step by step, they were going to discontinue that and replace it. And that's something which cannot be done overnight, because too many people were entrenched in their faith. So they had to do it step by step, and that was-- these were the first steps which they took.

So it never got to move on [INAUDIBLE]?

Established-- no, never got established. It was limited to very small--

And clearly, this notion of the military person having the power of the religionist, that's quite a powerful combination-- the SS person who can take over the functions of the minister, as in marrying, death rituals.

Well, the question is how it would have been developed, how it would have developed later on. Within the SS, that was already clear-cut. And it's not clear to what extent the SS-- they would have taken, but I don't think that the SS would have celebrated all these sort of things for other people who were not members of the SS. I doubt that.

But that's too early to-- we don't know what sort of-- we don't know. These are all speculations, and we have no idea in terms of what would have developed. But within-- primarily within the Nazi circles, high Nazi circles, National Socialist circles, that was accepted-- and especially also within the SS in particular.

I've heard tell that Hitler was vegetarian.

Yeah.

And do you think that practice had any religious connotation or a practical [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, see, that it's something which I discussed with the secretary and-- Hitler's secretary and all that but the idea was that he was-- in his early days, he was not at all against-- just so developed because he was putting on weight. And then he combined the fear of putting on weight-- because as a leader of this magnitude, this influence, I can't stand in front of the people with a heavy set stomach, whatever paunch or you know.

And so that was one of the major reasons why he stopped. He used to drink and he used to eat meat and all this sort of thing, but he discontinued it primarily because he didn't want to put on more weight. And then he combined it with-- somehow made an ideology out of it and say, well, I can't eat decaying flesh and murder all these animals, which is kind of inconsistent with all the other things he's done-- well, not necessarily inconsistent, because to him, Jews were not human beings, you see.

And they're even below animals, and that is an important thing too. So they all could rationalize, justify that. And so did he, of course. And he was the arch rationaliser. But he was very clear-cut and said, well, I can't eat animals, and decayed, and all that. I need to eat things which are not being killed.

Also, I was told that he had a personal astrologer, who I believe has written a book. Do you have any sense [INAUDIBLE]?

I don't think there's anything to it. I don't think there's anything to it. And I've looked into some of the things. Himmler yes, but not Hitler-- Himmler had the people whom he consulted and all that, and he was very much into the mythical aspects, and astrology, and all this sort of thing. But from what I could find out in all that, I don't think there's anything to it.

What was their notion in choosing the broken cross, the swastika?

Well, it's the sun wheel, and Hitler chose it because not only the symbolic-- because he liked the form of it, and also because it's a sign of the Nordic Aryan race-- which, by the way, is the Indo-German type of thing, which includes-- when I was in Bombay and in India, you see swastikas all over the place. You see it with American Indians. You see it all over the place.

So it is not really that unique, but he symbolically felt that the symbol was to connote Germanic Aryan types of people. And the swastika was his choice to use in the flags, colors, whatever, as the symbol of National Socialism.

Did it have some kind of connection with the notion of this ancient religion? Was it a symbol in that ancient religion?

I don't think that this connection was made to that extent at all, other than that it was his understanding of the Aryan purity. That's my understanding of the sun wheel, apart from the fact that it is used by those who are defined as Indo-Germanic. And that's why, for example, he did not view the Indians as an inferior race. There was even a battalion of Mohammedans, and Indians, and all that in the-- within the SS. And I talked to an Indian and his German wife, and he had a very important position during the Third Reich.

How is that compatible with the notion of a light-skinned, blond--

Well, that's precisely some of the inconsistency. Same thing with the Japanese-- Japanese were very close allies, and he had very high regard for the Japanese, but also talking at times about the fact that they are a different way and all that. But his interest, and his admiration, if you will, and his opportunistic interests transcended that. And the people whom he really-- the real target, where he never could have somehow accepted any justification for accepting them as a race, or interacting, or using them as allies were the Jews.

But all the other ones, whether they were Arabs, or Indian, or Japanese, he could deal with, and somehow could justify, but not the Jews-- or the Gypsies. And the chances are that, if you rank who was perhaps-- ranking order, the Jews probably below the Gypsies, the chances are, because Gypsies, during the war, even served until they took them out of circulation. They even served as soldiers in the Nazi army. And after they took them out relatively late, out of circulation.

It's interesting that neither of those peoples have a nation that could potentially [INAUDIBLE] assets.

That's right. Well, of course, the interesting thing is the inner circles of the SS to begin with, until before World War II, were very supportive of Zionism.

In the process of the making of the SS person, were all the SS tattooed, with-- I guess [INAUDIBLE]?

Yes.

[INAUDIBLE].

Yeah. So to speak, all of them had to do that, whether they were in combat or not. All members of the SS were tattooed. And there were some exceptions, but not because Himmler made them, but because they somehow weaseled out in one way or another. And that I have also seen in one of the SS generals, who was very much proud of his body, and his sexual prowess, and all that.

And he didn't want to be marked at all, so he tried to avoid it. And Himmler insisted and kept on asking, well, finally show me. Have you done it now finally? So then he found some sort of a method where he was tattooed with some sort of a material which would be absorbed and would disappear in time. And then he showed me. And then I asked him-- say, so what happened?

He said, well, I don't have it anymore. It just simply disappeared. Once I showed him and once I had it done, he no longer bugged me about it-- Himmler. And then it disappeared-- the tattoo disappeared, and he didn't have it renewed, and Himmler didn't ask him. So I said, show me. I'd ask some of these people, show me. I was interested. And he showed me. There was nothing.

Did this tattoo have any meaning beyond simply [INAUDIBLE] information?

No. No, no. That tattoo was just a very clever device, which is terrific-- that, if these people were wounded in combat or for whatever other reason, that immediately they would know what sort of blood group they would give it for transfusion purposes. And that was the major reason, none other.

I understood it was a tattoo in the armpit.

Yeah, left armpit-- the armpit-- yeah, yeah-- on the inside of there-- yeah-- so that actually, you wouldn't see it. Only if people just simply move their arms up and all that, then it was visible.

So it was in a relatively hidden spot.

Absolutely-- but people knew that. And after the war, for example, one of my interviewees wanted to somehow hide his SS membership for reasons which don't escape me. And so what he -- a sympathetic surgeon shortly after the war performed a minor surgery, and a surgery which simulated a shrapnel wound or something else so that it looked like he would have-- that he was injured, shot at by bullets or whatever. And so he performed that surgery, and he showed it to me, because I ask these people-- say, show me. And they are willing to do that. And so he's got scars here-- nothing there anymore.

This tattoo would also function in the opposite way, that it would be a brotherhood symbol too?

Well, yeah. It's a sign of recognition, but I don't know whether they used it that much, because at that particular point in time, it was of no use other than for the purposes I've indicated. And so I don't think-- only perhaps after the war and all that-- and say, I was in the SS or something Well, it used some sort of a purpose, let's say, in South America, whatever. So yeah, that was an identification mark. Of course, you can always fake it, if you know how they look like. And not that many people do.

How do they look?

Oh, it's just a very simple type of that data, not unlike that type of tattoo we got as inmates. And it is just a number that's just the blood group. That's it, and nothing else.

Did anyone ever speak of any kind of special process used to desensitize these people in order that they could do some of these terribly brutal things?

Well, the desensitization took place primarily by way of indoctrination, and to render the people, the targets, the victims, so to speak-- make victims-- not victims out of them, but make vermin out of them. So you've got-- remove them from

the ingroup into an outgroup. Create a social distance which would be so great that you would not feel any concern or compassion what you do to these people, because they are not people, period.

And that was done very systematically by way of propaganda, indoctrination, ideology. And again, this is something which we need to understand, because there was no other reason for it where they simply could distance themselves from their victims-- other than justify the fact of dealing with them the way they did by removing them from their midst and dissociating themselves from their kind.

And they've done it very successfully in very many cases-- not in all, but in very many cases. Now, the interesting thing is-- and to me, it's very interesting talking about interaction in concentration camps. The more people behave like "Germans," quote, unquote, the greater was their chance of survival.

The more they behave differently-- and that was very interesting in Shtricker's Sturmer paper which was a weekly-- anti-Semitic weekly. And there, all the Jews were depicted looking very different, very oriental, very Jewish-- whatever they symbolized this Jewish-- typical nose, eyes, bad figures, unathletic, and all that. And the interesting things-- the less they looked like that stereotype which was being propagated, the more they felt inhibited to mistreat these people.

And that is something which I personally experienced myself, because I didn't look like the stereotype. I didn't behave like the stereotype. I spoke the language perfectly. And therefore, the SS responded to me very differently than if they would have then they would have responded to a shtetler Jew who more looked like that stereotype, behaved like that stereotype.

That's a very important very important situation, because the chances are-- and I really can say that with some degree of accuracy-- that, if I had not look the way I do, or did-- of course, now I look different-- I'm older-- put it mildly-- and if I had not looked and behaved and spoke the way I did at that time, the chances are I wouldn't have survived, because I was in situations where SS would have not hesitated to kill someone else, but they somehow were deterred to kill me, because I reminded them too much of someone who could be their relative or someone they could be related to. That is my reflected assumption, because I got into situations where other people would have been shot on the spot, and I was not.

Do you think, say, someone who joined the SS in 1943-- would that person have been--

They wouldn't join. They were drafted.

OK. Well, before '43 then [INAUDIBLE].

OK. Yeah.

Would that person be sent to one of the concentration camps fairly quickly without some sort of [INAUDIBLE]?

No, no, no. It just depends well, no -- because when you talk about war, most of the concentration camps were already headed by people who had some connection to concentration camps before the war. So they were occupied by special outfits which were assigned that role in concentration camps before World War II-- prior to it.

So the chances that there would be assigned there after '43 are remote, other than that they were wounded, crippled so that they no longer somehow could serve in combat. Then yes, there was a chance, as I've indicated before, that they would be sent to concentration camps as guards-- as guards only, but not in any other function, because those people in other functions were members of the security service, were members of the death squads, and members of the Gestapo. And so these people were specialists.

Amongst the people that you interviewed, were there any people who served in the concentration camps?

Yeah.



And did they ever express any astounded reactions that they saw when they arrived there? Or were they prepared, do you think for what they would find?

I don't think they were prepared at all. No. I don't think they were prepared, and just grew into it, and somehow got adjusted, because they didn't see any chance to get out, and so they did what they were supposed to in order to be rewarded. So they did that, and were very eager to buy into the ideology, because that would enable them to sleep at night.

But very many people had problems, and therefore, drinking, being drunk in these places was very frequent-- and among all different ranks. But it was very frequent, simply because they needed to get out of the situation, which otherwise, they couldn't. And alcohol was one of the very few means, because other drugs were not available to begin with. So they drank very heavily.

So even with the whole process of dehumanization and everything that went with it, it was not enough to totally eradicate?

For quite a few, yeah-- for quite a few. And that is precisely the interesting thing, which-- we will not be able to establish how many people were really suffering or feeling about what they were doing, and how many people were not. And there is one book which we are using in our lecture series next time-- is where one of the historians has done very interesting and, I think, important research, in going back to the court documents when a battalion of people who were in the Einsatz-- part of the Einsatz group were brought to justice by the Germans after World War II in Hamburg.

And he looked at the court records and find out how these people responded to important leading questions of that nature, and came out with some sort of ideas that many-- probably the majority adjusted and did what they were supposed to do, and other people tried to find excuses to avoid the mass killings in which they were to participate-- found excuses or just were able to somehow avoid it in one way or another. But they were in the minority. And some of these people then also adjusted, and then did it.

See, once you've found yourself in this sort of situation, it was very difficult to get out of it. It was not impossible, but it was difficult. And I think that needs to be recognized, because just look at people in our time, when they would be placed in this situation. And we've got experiments-- Milgram, Zimbardo, and some number of other ones-- how people behaved under some degree of stress, and how they respond to authority telling them you do that because I tell you so, because I'm the authority. I know best-- and people who are educated, intelligent. So it's something which should not be underestimated.

Do you think that the SS hierarchy tended to choose people who might be more sadistic for in-camp jobs?

In some cases, they went-- had some psychological-- whatever they had at that particular time in terms of psychological tests, inventories. But I don't think they have much use one way or another. No, I think the-- if there was a negative selection, it was the appeal National Socialists that is -- National Socialism had for these people. That, I think, was already a negative selection, because if that appeals to you, the chances are that you probably will rank higher-- as I have tested, rank higher on the so-called fascist authoritarian scale.

And that, I think, is the case. So therefore, you're more susceptible to do things and listen to authority uncritically. That much I can say. But I don't think they've selected people who were a priori sadistic.

You talked before about the notion of potentially violence person--

Yeah.

--and having the violence-prone atmosphere meet up with it [INAUDIBLE].

Right.

And in the continuum say that, in a cultural ethos that might be in there too, how do you think-- what's the entry point? How does it start and keep going? Or where does it stop?

Well, and that is precisely where I respond with this notion of a sleeper. we all, to some degree or another, have violence potential, and this violence potential comes forth in certain situations-- for example, where you lose your temper, or where you just become physical, or you cuss someone out and behave in a way which is not socially, under "normal circumstances," quote, unquote, acceptable.

So when you get into situations which exert a great deal of pressure on the individual, then certain characteristics which heretofore have not come forth, were not overtly expressed, will be enacted upon. They'll come out. I think that is only possible if-- as a person in power structures situations which will stimulate that in people. And that's why it's so important that the social structure has to be structured in a way in which this sort of violent potential we all have-- whether it's the family, or the occupation, or whatever-- will not be furthered, will simply not be stimulated.

And most of the people who are in power are very ignorant of all the things which we are discussing here, and therefore, not mindful that what they structure is powerful individuals, because they want to structure society most. They are not the only ones to, be sure because, they also have to be supported by people who will go along with that, but still-- so once you produce a social structure which will be violent-prone or will permit outlets for violence, you'll have it. And the people who already are repressed and somehow wait for that moment to behave violently will jump to the occasion.

So do you think that, therefore, this violence-prone atmosphere serves the purpose of people in power?

Well, if they are interested in violence, yes-- particularly when they are interested in violence the way Saddam, or Hitler, or whoever the people in Cambodia, whatever-- in some other places are interested in. And then, of course, they will structure it so that they will have roles to play which will be officially acceptable, socially acceptable-- not only that, but will be rewarded so that people will do it and become mass killers, because this is rewarded, and it's desirable, and there are social outlets for that by way of creating roles these people can play, who are violence-prone.

In the question of the person who is a sleeper, is this person the same in that respect, or do you think different from every person who has some anger and violence-prone--

Well, no, we all are sleepers, except some are-- takes more for us to become aggressive before we become aggressive, and for some people of a very small provocation suffices to become aggressive and fly off the handle. And so we all are sleepers, more or less and I've seen, and that's why I developed this sort of idea, because what I could observe in concentration camps-- how much does it take until any one of us will kill in order to live?

And this cattle wagon situation, which I've described in some of my writings-- not published writings-- is precisely a situation where we all, with the exception of perhaps 1%, defended ourselves against people who might have killed us, in terms of what they did, in a way that we caused the death of them. And that is something which needs to be acknowledged. Now, for some people it takes longer and more, and for other people it takes less.

So for example, the inmate functionaries who assumed functions that were assigned by the SS in concentration camps. did it without any sort of hesitation, because it furthered their life and made their life more bearable in concentration camps. So that was the major reason-- not because they necessary were evil.

Some people were sadists, and they enjoyed what they were doing. Yes, they existed also. And we don't know the exact percentage, but in terms of inmate functionaries, I think it was exceedingly high. And that is one of the reasons why I never would have assumed a function myself, because the very moment I had a function, the chances are that I would be guilty or responsible for the loss of life of fellow inmates.

And to me, I couldn't have done it. Under those circumstances, I would have been pressed more, as I was pressed in this sort of cattle open boxcar situation, where I was suffocating and-- so I knew that the person was suffocating me so that I couldn't breathe-- that, if I pushed him away, if I had enough strength and I had enough strength to ask him, please move-- which I did-- and when he couldn't, I didn't move.

I said, I have to push you. I don't want to push you, because I, knew when I pushed him, that would be the end of him. I knew that. I knew that. But I did, because if I had not pushed him, I would have died myself. And that was the extreme of the situations. So yes, I'm also capable. See? So that was the sleeper was awakened. And there was only one person among about 110, 120 people in that open boxcar who chose to die.

And he was able-bodied, strong, relatively well-fed, and was a functionary before-- was an inmate functionary before. And I held his hand while he was dying and all that, and I could have helped him and done what I could, but he preferred to die rather than defend himself-- one person, one person in that group of people.

So I'm very much aware of it, because in one way or another, I'm guilty also, that the sleeper was-- that my drive for self-preservation was strong than my feeling, my concept of morality. And I knew that I didn't want to be the cause of anyone else's death, even if it was indirectly, because I didn't kill anyone. But I helped the situation, in as far as that I pushed that person, and other people killed him.

Were you able to forgive yourself for that?

I don't think forgive is the right word. I still question it. I still question it. It's not a question of forgiveness, but I still question to what extent this was acceptable behavior for me. And I still question it. It's very important to me.

And I'll probably question that until the end of my life, because I disagree with that but on the other hand, I don't have-- still, what would I do-- the question is, what would I do today? Because then I was young, and I'm older, so the chances are that I would consider that in this decision.

And today I have less to live for than I had then, I guess-- although I didn't believe that I had a prayer to survive. I didn't at that particular point. But that's the nature of the drive for self-preservation. Even if you intellectually and otherwise think that you don't have a chance, you still will act as if you would.

Your body takes over.

That's right. So I was attacked, and people wanted to kill me, and all this and that out of self-preservation, and I defended myself. I used my teeth. I used my feet. I used anything I've had. And obviously, I was successful.

Now, this is one important point where I think we all have to-- those who are survivors have to ask, at whose expense have I survived? What did I do which may have caused the death or injury to fellow inmates? And that is something which has not been done to my mind in any sort of systematic way, which is really very bad, because there is a great deal we can learn from it.

But because it's a very threatening situation and because many of the survivors-- and I would say many survived at the expense of someone else. And today the morals are very different. The situation is very different. It's a very frightening thing for many people to admit that they've done something which was, in terms of our values today, immoral or destructive. And therefore, they just will sweep it under the carpet or shove it into their subconscious and not talk about it-- and if they talk about these things, not admit it.

So there were the acts that one did that aided the death of someone else.

Well, yes. Let me just give you a very, so to speak, innocent example, when you queued up to get your daily soup, water soup, you'd make quite a difference if you queued up in a way so that you got something when the water was already removed-- the first people got their water, particularly when--