

Interview with MAX GARCIA (No. 4)
Holocaust Oral History Project
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MS. BENDAYAN: Today is the 20th of June, 1991, and I am here once again interviewing Max Garcia. This is interview number 4.

You said, Max, that you had reviewed some of the previous tapes and you would like to make some amendments on the dates.

A: Yeah. I have reviewed all three prior tapes. There are a few corrections that I'd like to make, and I can give you actually the minutes into the tape -- I don't know if that's important or not; I did take that down.

In my first tape, about 12 minutes into the tape I say that 1934, '35 -- actually it should be 1934 is the year that I talked about with my father forced me, or began to indoctrinate me into the social democratic theories.

The name of the person who was accused of setting fire to the Reichstag in Berlin, who was a Dutch communist, his name was Lubbers, L-u-b-b-e-r-s.

Twenty minutes into Tape No. 1 I said something that the Paketstelle is a camp -- or somebody used it -- that's not true. The Paketstelle is a work detail within the camp of Auschwitz.

One hour forty-five minutes into Tape No. 1 I couldn't remember the other Dutchman's name who was in the hospital with us in Auschwitz, with Lex and myself. Later on I do mention him. His name was Bill Minko.

A serious mistake I made in Tape No. 2, right at the beginning, is that I said that the head prison official was the Lager Fuhrer. That's incorrect. That should be Lager Altester. The Fuhrer was only used for the SS. The Altester was only a name given for a boss among prisoners.

Ten minutes into Tape No. 2 I say the name "Bill Minko".

I did mention, in the latter part of my second tape, or third tape, that the Europeans do not like to use the word "ex-prisoner," but they like to use the word "Deportees," as do the Germans and the Austrians. They call themselves "Deportierten". The distinction lies in the fact that a prisoner presumably had a crime that he had committed, whereas a Deportee or a Deportierten is a person who was deported by the oppressor, and therefore, to them -- and I agree with it -- it's a great distinction.

Forty-seven minutes into Tape No. 2, the day that we left, the last transport that left Auschwitz was on Sunday, January the 18th, not the 16th, as I had mentioned in my tape.

Fifty-one minutes into Tape No. 2, the railway marshalling yard to which we marched from Auschwitz was called Loslau, L-o-s-l-a-u.

And again, fifty-four minutes, Tape No. 2, it's not the 16th of January but the 18th of January, 1945.

In Tape No. 3, fifteen minutes into Tape No. 3, the reason that the F Company of the Third cavalry, the one that liberated the Camp Ebensee was so concerned about the redoubt and the SS that might be hidden there is that they liberated us on Sunday afternoon. On the Friday, which really, for all practical purposes was the end of the war because, you know, some SS troopers had attacked them and killed one of their tankmen and wounded several others. They were very angry and ticked off about that, so they were very much on their guard.

Okay. Now, about my personal -- my family. This has nothing to do with any of the tapes. My sister was, as I told you, was picked up shortly after her 16th birthday in Amsterdam, and she was gassed on the 15th of December in '42 in KZ Birkenau. She left Westerbork on the 12th of December of 1942.

My parents were gassed in Sobibor, KZ Sobibor. They left Westerbork on July 13, arrived and were gassed on July 16, 1943, which was the date on which my mother was born, the 16th of July.

I myself left Westerbork on the 24th of August,

1943, and I arrived in Auschwitz on the 26th of August, 1943. So, some of the time frame that we have been discussing is off by a number of weeks. These are the factual dates that we do have from the Red Cross in Holland, and these have been verified with the records that they had, both in Westerbork and in Auschwitz.

And so now I have brought this up to date for whomever wants to look at it in the future.

MS. BENDAIGAN: OKAY. GOOD.

SO TODAY WE ARE GOING TO START OFF WITH YOUR DECISION, WHEN YOU WERE IN WASHINGTON, TO REMAIN IN THE UNITED STATES. I KNOW YOU HAD HAD QUITE A LOT OF SOUL-SEARCHING ABOUT THAT.

YOU DECIDED TO REMAIN AND STUDY ARCHITECTURE. SO WHY DON'T YOU TAKE IT FROM THAT PERIOD?

A: Remember now that -- I think I've told you before, or told the tape before that I had wanted to become an architect when I was about 15 years old. Now, this idea I took with me to Auschwitz, where I said I was a carpenter.

When I came to the United States I was a gung-ho kid. I called myself even an Army brat because I was snotty, spoiled, and snooty, over-confident, you know, and the world-owes-me-a-living-type thing.

That first winter in Buffalo was absolutely the pits. I mean, it was -- even the Buffalonians told me that this was one of the worst winters they had lived

through, '46, '47, and I began to drift away. And because I had no family here, and I had kind of given up on the Clarks, the ones who had brought me over, and the United States wasn't giving me a living and I had to scrounge for myself, and I did wind up in the Army with an 18-month enlistment. And I did come out, and I had spent most of that time in Washington, D.C. at the Army Medical Library, had made friends there, had gone to George Washington University on functions, not as a student, and had by then obtained my -- and passed my high school equivalency exam, and whereas I had had doubts while I was in the Service about wanting to stay in the United States because I didn't think it was all that it had been cracked up to be, and had given thoughts about going back to Europe and writing it off as a bad experience; I think once I got to Washington, D.C. and back in the Service, and the kind of work that I was doing, I began to like it. And with the friends I had made, and the high school diploma now in my pocket, I felt that perhaps there was a future for me after all and I became rather serious of going to George Washington University to see if I could really matriculate and be a student because I had never done this in my life. I mean, my education completed itself at the age of 13, my official school education.

They asked me to stay and re-enlist, and they were going to make me automatically into a sergeant and I said,

"No, I have had it. Now I'm going to play civilian for a while." And I enrolled at G.W. at Washington, D.C.

Q: DID YOU HAVE G.I. BENEFITS THEN?

A: Yes, because now I had also G.I. bill. And I enrolled and I found it not such a chore as I had been -- as I had made myself believe. Nobody had ever said to me, "It's too hard, difficult," no. I had talked myself -- convinced me, you know: You can't do this.

Well, I found it to be easy. The only thing that I had to take differently than the other freshmen was I had to take an English grammar course, which was considered, what, perhaps today English as a Second Language. Except in my case I spoke English fluently, I could read it fluently, but my grammar was not too good and that's what I had to catch up on and make come alive.

And I spent a little bit over a year at G.W. By that time I -- the bug of architecture began to grow in me again. And in Washington, D.C. there was a night course in architectural drafting and architecture and I went there. I enrolled there as well. And I became good friends with the teacher, who was a licensed architect. And there were other people there, and all the ones -- others who were there were basically there to have a cheap house designed by the architect, and I was the only one there who was interested in learning about the profession.

And so we became acquainted and he invited me to

become babysitter for his children. And we began to talk, and -- my ambitions, and so he had a good friend who was the Dean of the Architectural School at North Carolina State, and in the meantime, now it was summer and he had gotten me a job on the firm, the architectural firm where he worked, and so they hired me on as a jack-of-all-trades type thing. Through these two connections, N.C. State wired me, wrote me back and said I can enroll in September, there will be a desk for me. So, you must remember we are now talking here 1947, '48 -- '49 we are now in because I have done my service -- yeah, and a year at school, so now this must be '49.

The veterans were still being discharged, and they were all standing in line getting into schools under the G.I. bill, and the schools were not ready for them and they had to wait and wait and wait, and all of a sudden here I get a desk ahead of everybody else in architecture.

So I went to N.C. State and enrolled and was able to live off my G.I. bill. I can't remember what we got in those days, something like ninety dollars a month, and tuition paid for and books paid for, but living and all there was, I think, ninety dollars a month.

Q: HOW DID YOU ADAPT SOCIALLY?

A: Oh, very well. Very well. After I had gotten out of this so-called, oh, almost like a depressive state, "I can't make it here," you know, "I have been too spoiled,

I've got to get back out," I kind of snapped out of this, just like I snapped out of this thing in Melk after this beating that I am sure I got in Mauthausen, and the brain concussion. All of a sudden I snapped out of it and I began to enjoy this life. This was great, you know, and I was even pledged as a fraternity brother in George Washington and -- because at that time I lived as a non-Jew. I did not confess to being a Jew. I mean, after I came out of the war I said, "Who needs this?" you know, "They did it to us in Spain and Portugal five hundred years ago or something and now this again. I'm not going to do this to my offspring," you know, "I'll just forget about being a Jew." And I lived as such.

Q: DID ANYBODY EVER ASK YOU ABOUT WHAT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN EUROPE WAS DURING THE WAR?

A: Yeah. I told them I was in the camps; I had been in the underground, they found me, and they had arrested me. And that seemed to get by.

And so I was pledged. In fact, it was a Southern fraternity called the Kappa Alphas, the K.A.'s, which is strictly a Southern organization. They glorified the Confederacy. I didn't know -- at that time I didn't know a damn thing what the Confederacy was. But at G.W. I began to learn rather quickly because I took some very strong history lessons there because I wanted to absorb as much history of the United States as I could at that time.

Q: IN FACT, AS I RECALL, MANY OF THE FRATERNITIES IN THOSE DAYS SPECIFICALLY WOULD HAVE BEEN BANNING JEWS FROM THEIR --

A: Oh, yeah, the Jews were still out of it in those days, and there were not that many Jewish fraternities yet around. And not all the fraternities were yet filled with ex-G.I.'s either because many of the young kids who had just gotten ready to go to school didn't have to go in the Service. The draft was over with so, you know, and most of the G.I.'s came back, they had no use for the fraternities. I mean, they had seen too much. They didn't want to go back to children's play.

Anyway, so I enrolled and spent my first year and my second year at N.C. State. In my second year my G.I. bill ran out because I had used one year in George Washington and one year at N.C. State, and in my third year it ran out and I had to go to work part time and my grades just went, zoom, and the Dean wasn't very happy with me because I went in for scholarship and he said, "The way your grades dropped, we don't need you." And we got into an argument, he and I, because: "You have no sympathy. I have no family. I have no one." Well, he doesn't want to hear any of this.

I had one teacher there who told me when -- we talked about this -- and he was Jewish, but I still had not let on that I was Jewish -- and he told me, "If you can get the

first two years, the first two and a half years of architecture under your belt, you don't need the last two and a half years because that becomes just repetitive on the first two years, and you can go into an office and learn the trade the hard way by just working for architects and learning."

So I took that and I drifted off to Chicago where I lived for a year. And I worked -- at the outset I worked for Rand McNally as a map draftsman, and then I got a job in an architect's office as a junior draftsman on Michigan Boulevard, right next door in the McGraw-Hill Tower, in fact, in the penthouse.

And I spent that summer and that winter in Chicago. And the winter in Chicago is almost as brutal as the one in Buffalo. And the summers are awful in Chicago. The humidity and the bugs, they drive you nuts. So after one year I had had it and I cleared out and I had established residency in Florida with a friend of mine whom I had become acquainted with at G.W., and whose mother had kind of halfway adopted me. So I had established residency, and my thought was I can continue my architectural school as a State student in Florida, not having to pay out-of-state tuition. Well, that was a great dream and it didn't work out, because even Florida in the summer is unbearable, especially around St. Petersburg. The humidity was, you know -- if it wasn't for air conditioning that state would

have never developed the way it has. I mean, air conditioning was their Godsend.

Q: WERE YOU HAVING ANY DIFFICULTY -- I MEAN, YOU'RE MOVING ONE PLACE TO THE OTHER -- DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS, THEN LEAVING?

A: No, no.

Q: THAT WASN'T A PROBLEM?

A: No. Establishing relationships, even with women, I had no problems with. I had very much adjusted by then. My language was good. My cursing was not as prevalent anymore, I mean my Army cursing. I mean my speech had cleaned up, so to speak, and I had good times. I enjoyed myself.

Q: WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT YOUR HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCES?

A: No, no, no. Most of the G.I.'s, they had come back; they didn't want to hear anything about the war. They just wanted to get on with their life, or with their lives. Whatever I could tell them, you know, they could tell me worse, from their point of view, in some instances. So that wasn't their thing to do. I mean: I gotta study. Hey, I got a lucky break, now, I survived this war. I got six years of G.I. bill, or seven years.

I mean, if a guy had been in for four years, he probably had six years of G.I. bill. He wanted to get an education. He wanted to find a wife. He wanted to get started, you know, Levittown. All of these things come

into play.

Q: SO YOU WANTED TO PUT THAT FAST BEHIND YOU?

A: They did. So -- you know, and I -- and I didn't want to bring this up, necessarily. You know, when they saw -- when they said:

"How did you get the number?"

"Auschwitz."

"Oh, how?"

"Underground," you know, "I was caught," blah.

Q: ALL IN A FEW SENTENCES?

A: It was over, yeah.

So Chicago, Florida, and Florida, all of the money that I had saved went by the wayside and I was poor again, so I called Jesse --

Q: HOW DID ALL THE MONEY GO BY THE WAYSIDE?

A Living expenses, you know, you had to eat. You know, there were no food stamps in those days. So I called Jesse and -- you remember, Jesse Miles, the captain from the infantry? And he lived in Indiana and he was still an R.O.T.C. teacher because he was regular Army, you know, West Pointer, and so he had to stay and put on his 30 years.

And I told Jesse my problem, and he said, "You got enough money for gas?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, come on up here." He said, "You come to Indiana, to Bloomington, and we'll talk about it."

So I drove up there, and that was the very week, when I drove up there, that Eisenhower made his famous speech about sharing atomic energy in the industrial military powers. You shake your heads as if you know. You weren't even born.

And this was in 1952, '53. And I remember it because I was listening on the radio driving up. And I spent about maybe two weeks with Jesse and his wife in Bloomington. They had a little boy, but -- and we came to the conclusion -- I came to the conclusion that I would re-enlist in the Army for three years and I was going to make the Army a career.

Q: WHY DID YOU DECIDE THAT?

A: I couldn't see how I was going to get the money to go back to school and do it all, and I --

Q: IT WOULD GIVE STRUCTURE TO YOUR LIFE, TOO.

A: Yeah. And I didn't -- I wasn't interested in anything else, really, as a living, okay, and I had always felt the Army was good to me, had been good to me, and I didn't mind it.

So I re-enlisted and -- but this time you had to re-enlist for three years. You could also go for two years, but I re-enlisted for three because if you re-enlisted for three years you automatically got one year of schooling out of this. And, also the Korean War was on, and the last thing I wanted to do was to go to Korea, so I figured three

years, the first year I'm in school; hopefully that war will be over. And you could make a choice as to where you wanted to go if you qualified, and I said I wanted to go to Army Language School to study Russian, and based on my other languages, the word came back, "He's accepted," and so I shipped out to Fort Ord.

And I had to take my basic training all over again. And after I completed that down the road I went to Monterey to the Army Language School, and I spent almost ten months there before I took sick. And my migraines -- I mean, first of all, the Army language schooling is a very intense course. I don't know how much you know about it, but you begin at 8:00 o'clock in the morning, and from the moment you enter the classroom, no English is allowed anymore. And you stay there until 11:30, and there is two hours for lunch; you come back and you go till 4:30, and then you have about three hours of homework every night. And this goes on five days a week. Saturdays and Sundays you have off, but they give you enough homework for the weekend, you know, to remind you that you are in school.

My migraines started coming back, and I went to the Mental Health Clinic, was interviewed by psychologists and then two psychiatrists, and I was given the piece of paper that I could stay in bed, put it on the blanket, and they would give me the very potent pills that would make me pass out so that my migraines could pass through.

Q: DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE PILLS WERE?

A: They were a morphinite-type pill. They were not shots in the arm. They were a morphinite-type pill.

Q: WERE YOU HAVING NIGHTMARES DURING THIS PERIOD, TOO?

A: I don't recall. Migraines are enough, you know. You don't --

And I was falling behind a little bit in my lessons, but I was quick enough that I could catch up, because I had known a little bit of Russian that I had learned in the concentration camps and I was well along enough in languages, you know, that I would have to be out for several weeks to really fall behind.

And one day, I think it was a Thursday -- it was a Friday inspection -- I came down with the damn thing; put on my piece of paper and took my pill and passed out, and then the guys came back from class in the afternoon and they began to tear the barracks apart to clean it, you know, for the inspection the next morning. And they made all kinds of racket and I blew my stack, and the doctors came and put me in the white coat and took me away.

Q: HAD YOU HURT ANYBODY DURING THAT --

A: I had not hurt anybody. I just started tearing down bunks, I mean, I had a fierce strength. And they put me into the psycho ward at Fort Ord until I woke up after the sedation.

And then the doctors began to talk to me and, you

know, I had been there to all the -- I had to go to like weekly sessions in the Mental Health Clinic.

Q: IS THIS THE FIRST TIME YOU EVER HAD THAT KIND OF AN OUTBURST?

A: Yeah. Well, I had these things at Fort Lee, if you remember -- I think I talked about that -- when I had these nightmares and I would scream and fall -- break out in great sweats, and then that psychiatrist had called the company commander and said, "Get this guy off the tower before he kills anybody," and so --

Q: BUT IT DIDN'T SOUND LIKE DURING THAT PERIOD YOU WERE HAVING -- I MEAN CONSCIOUSLY -- I MEAN, THIS WAS COMING OUT OF NIGHTMARES.

A: Yeah. Right, right.

Q: THIS TIME IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU WERE IN BED AND JUST ACTING UP.

A: Yeah. Mind you now, this is now '53; eight years have gone by. There is enough literature now on it that breakdowns are beginning to happen of the prisoners -- of the deported ones, and they are getting their delayed reactions.

The psychiatrist who had been interviewing me and counseling me, he was Jewish and had spotted me as a Jew right away, knew enough about the reading and had put on my card, "Watch out for him. He is going to be here."

In other words, he knew I was going to break down,

but he didn't know when. And he had put on the card: This guy's gonna come in; be ready for him. So when I came in they were ready for me.

Q: DO YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHY HE SAID THAT? I MEAN, WHAT ABOUT YOU --

A: I think he sensed that the migraines, you know -- he didn't know yet about the delayed syndrome, but he sensed that this kind of thing was happening to me, for some reason I was suppressing it myself and couldn't cope with it and I wasn't aware of it.

I really don't know, but these are guesses on my part that I make about that particular time.

Q: WELL, I THINK THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE, AS YOU SAY, THIS PROBABLY HAPPENED TO MANY PEOPLE.

A: But not in the Army yet. And he was an Army doctor. I don't know whether he volunteered or was enlisted or, you know, regular Army doctor or what. I don't know. I do know that I picked him out to be Jewish, and I had a feeling he had picked me out as being Jewish.

So after I had finally come out of my sedation, you know, they gave me intensive counseling and talks, and they told me, "Why don't you come clean and say that you are Jewish?"

"No, I'm not Jewish."

"C'mon, Max," you know, "don't give us this bullshit." you know, "We know that you are Jewish."

And then so I finally, you know, allowed it.

[brief pause]

So in the counseling they said, "Well, what do you want to do with your life?" and I said, "Well, I want to be an architect." They said, "You got to go back to school." I said, "I have no money to go back to school." So they said, "Look, we're not going to allow you to stay in the Army."

First of all, there was no G.I. bills in those days, either. They said, "We are not allowing you to stay because if you stay in the Army this is going to happen over to you again, and it just won't be any good, so we have got to get rid of you. So we are going to get you an honorable discharge for the good of the Service," which they did, and I got discharged. I got a new suit; I got some mustering out pay and some pay that was coming me, and the money -- my monthly pay that I had gotten that I had no way to spend at Fort Ord at the hospital.

And when I was at the Army Language School we used to go up -- one of the guys in my barracks, close to being a bunkmate, he had his car there, you know. Many of these guys came from very well-off families. They had all enlisted to get out of the Korean War and to get a year of schooling. Many of them were promising -- or had wanted to become academicians. I mean, they made no bones about that; they wanted to become professors. So they came from

well-off families. Many of them were Jewish.

One of them had a car, and so on Friday night after meals we would high tail it to San Francisco, sleep at the Y.M.C.A. on, I think on Golden Gate Avenue, or on Eddy Street where it was, and we would go on Saturday to the opera or to the symphony, whatever was playing at the opera house, and I would usher. And so I made friends there, and I enjoyed being at the opera house and things like that.

Q: WERE YOU OPENLY JEWISH NOW?

A: No, I was now -- after I had left the Army I had reverted back to being non-Jewish.

Q: BUT YOU WERE SOCIALLY GOING AROUND WITH THESE OTHER JEWISH PEOPLE, THESE OTHER JEWISH GUYS?

A: Only in the Service. The moment I got discharged I discarded them; I mean, I went back to being non-Jewish.

Q: WAS IT ANY RELIEF TO YOU TO TALK TO SOME OF THE PSYCHIATRIC PEOPLE AND ADMIT TO BEING JEWISH?

A: No, I don't think it was, that much. It's a few years later that I -- yeah, about a year and a half later after I got out of the Service that I finally --

I had a girl friend and I said, you know, "I'm Jewish," and she said, "We guessed this much." And so I came clean and I called the Rabbi. I went to see the Rabbi the next day, and he accepted me back into the fold-type thing, you know, like the long lost son, and so I began to eat lox again and all.

Q: YOU DIDN'T EVEN EAT LOX DURING THAT PERIOD?

A: No, I was strictly non-Jewish.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK MADE YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND TO ACCEPT BEING JEWISH AGAIN?

A: The real -- the fact of life that, you know, it's unavoidable. I mean, I would go by places and see lox and some of the other Jewish-type edible things that struck a bell with me, and, yeah, I looked at these things and I wanted to eat them and, you know -- then you finally wake up one day and say, "Screw it," you know, "What's the use of trying to deny it?"

And when you come clean it's a pretty clean situation.

Q: YEAH, ACCEPTING THAT PART OF YOURSELF.

A: Yeah, taking a douche, you know, taking a shower and wash it all off.

So San Francisco became, because of those weekend trips, became the focal point to go to, and, as I said, I had made friends here in the ushering -- among the ushers, and so when I got that discharge I high tailed it to San Francisco and said, "That's all the travelling I am ever going to do. That's going to be my home."

I looked for an apartment, got an apartment; started looking for work in an architect's office, and I did. And from there on -- and, yeah. This is the way it happened:

I came down in my little apartment with

mononucleosis, and my whole mouth was swelling up. I mean, I had blisters everywhere. And I went to see the doctor -- it was on Post Street -- a doctor from Mount Zion, Dr. -- I think his name was Friedman, but I'm not positive. He recognized me for what I was. He put me into Mount Zion, but before I got there some of the girls in the apartment house where I lived on Nob Hill, they would come by in the morning and fix me some food, because I was that sick. I could not really take care of myself. And so they finally said, "Max, we can't do this. You're gonna see a doctor. You're gonna go to a hospital." No insurance or anything. So I went.

Q: WHAT DO YOU MEAN, HE "RECOGNIZED YOU FOR WHAT YOU WERE"?

A: The doctor did.

Q: FOR WHAT?

A: Being Jewish. Okay. He put me in Mount Zion, and in those days, now I'm talking 1954, in those days Mount Zion was still a Jewish hospital. I mean, even the janitors were Jewish, you know. The whole thing was Jewish, and even the food was Jewish.

Q: DID YOU CHOOSE IT FOR THAT REASON?

A: I didn't choose it, he chose -- the doctor said, he said "You are going because I am one of the doctors there." And I spent four or five days there and I got cleared up, and I didn't want to leave. It felt like home, you know,

this Jewish place. And that's when I went to my girl friend and said, "Look, I'm Jewish." I finally realized that I can't live with this lie any longer.

Q: WAS SHE JEWISH?

A: No, no, no, because I had gone with her to Unitarian church. You know, that's the next step for a Jew when he wants to get out of the religion is to go to the Unitarian church.

Q: RIGHT.

A: And that's exactly what I did, and that's how I met her there. That's -- this whole thing fell in place. We are still very good friends, so --

And so that was the beginning of my life in San Francisco. I worked for one architect, then my wife moved into the same apartment -- my wife-to-be moved into the same apartment house. And four weeks after I married her we were married.

Q: FOUR WEEKS AFTER YOU MET HER?

A: Four weeks after I met her we were married, yes. I seem to do everything in four weeks. I got from Europe to the United States in four weeks. I got married in four weeks.

Q: IT'S A LUCKY NUMBER FOR YOU.

A: Yeah. And --

Q: DID YOU TALK TO HER ABOUT YOUR HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCES AT THAT POINT?

A: Yeah, we began to talk about it. She wanted to know, and we began to talk about it. And by that time I was hanging loose about this whole thing; I couldn't care anymore.

Also, before I got to know her I had found out about that I had a cousin living in Milwaukee. And so I had called her after I traced her, got the phone number, and I called her up, and she had come after the war as an immigrant.

Q: HOW DID YOU FIND HER?

A: Through my cousin in Amsterdam. I had found -- I had written the community there, the Jewish community, for names, and they had given me the addresses, so I started writing them, and they told me that Floortje lived in Milwaukee, and gave me the addresses and I got her phone number and called her up and I said who I was. She said, "You are a liar. He's dead."

I said, "Floortje, believe me, I am your cousin." She said, "What was my mother's name?" you know, "What's your mother's name? What's your father's --" different things, and then she burst out, "Oh, you're alive! You're alive!" "I've been trying to tell you that." That sort of thing.

Q: DIDN'T DARE BELIEVE YOU?

A: No, because it was such a tremendously traumatic thing for her suddenly. Her husband had been picked up and

gassed. She went into hiding for most of the war. And then she had married a guy, Polish guy who had come to Holland after the war, and they came jointly over to the United States and had a daughter. And then he died of cancer in Milwaukee.

And so I went to see her. I borrowed some money from my boss, and I flew to Milwaukee by way of Chicago and, as you remember, in those days, '54, '55 they were all prop planes, you know, and you went from here to Phoenix, from Phoenix to Denver, from Denver to St. Louis. I mean, you know, everything -- you had to stop and refuel, and it was awful.

So we made it, and so I spent about a week with her and we reminisced and talked and cried a lot and I came home. And then after my wife and I married I took a trip to introduce her to the Clark's, who had brought me over, and they lived in Buffalo but they had a summer home on the other side of the lake in Canada. We went there and this was a whole train ride we took then. We flew into New York and then we trained.

Then we went to Milwaukee and I introduced her to Floortje.

Q: DID YOU GO TO FLORIDA, TOO?

A: No, that came later, much later.

And so then I kept being employed by architects, of course, because that's what I wanted to do. Then after Pat

and I got married and David had been born I began to become serious about taking my licensing exams, and so I took courses on weekends and at night and tutoring for engineering and -- structural engineering and civil engineering, and did a lot of self-studying and applied for taking the State Boards. And they allowed me, and two years later I was licensed in 1960. We got married in '56. David got born in '57; took the exams in '58 and '59, and was licensed in 1960 and opened my office shortly thereafter and -- which was Max Garcia, and then Max Garcia And Associates, and then Garcia Wagner And Associates. And the firm is still in existence now, thirty-one years later, and flourishing.

And then Tania was born three years after David, so that was 1960. Michelle was born in 1961. And so, that's the family.

Q: DID YOUR WIFE'S FAMILY ACCEPT YOU AND KNOW YOUR HISTORY?

A: My sisters-in-law accepted me rather quickly; Pat's mother, also rather quickly. Her father, no. He had some -- he had some undertones. I mean, well, for one thing my wife had been engaged to a guy whom he adored, and she finally brushed him to the side, and he kind of never forgave his daughter for having taken away his drinking pal, so to speak. But once I began -- the business began to flourish, which was about five years -- about 1965, '66

we could actually begin to see that we were established in San Francisco, he began to accept me. And, yeah -- so, I mean from there on it's been a very good life in the family. So that's where we are at and --

Q: AS YOUR CHILDREN WERE GROWING, DID YOU TALK TO THEM ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES?

A: Yes, we always talked to them about the experiences that I had undergone, that I had gone through, of course. And I also spoke at Temple Emanu-el to the classes, you know, because now it had become a little bit more fashionable to talk about these days.

Now -- we're now talking -- okay. Tania was born in '60, so we're talking now the late sixties. This is now fifteen years after the war is over, and I -- at social functions or at dinner parties, you know, I talked about it and people still were not comfortable with this thing. When you get older you begin to realize that this was a very normal reaction.

People -- it takes almost 30 years for people to get out of these traumas, to be able to rationalize and think logically about these things. We have seen the thing with the Korean situation. You have seen it with Viet Nam. I mean, finally now it's beginning to resolve. And the same thing was true, you know.

I didn't mind talking about it; nobody wanted to listen to me. Of course, that's why Pat said in the

opening in the book that: He was like the silent mariner, you know, nobody wanted to hear him and he just kept in his boat, port to port; nobody wanted to listen to him.

Q: IT WOULD SEEM THAT FEELS DOUBLY DEVASTATING. YOU HAD BEEN THROUGH THIS THING AND NOW YOU ARE LIKE AN ALIEN.

A: Now you want to regurgitate it out because, you know, you are not -- to clear up your guts, and nobody wants to listen to you, you know, and it becomes very frustrating.

But we had talked to the kids when they were younger. Not when they were six, seven years old, but, I mean, you know, when they became of junior high school age. And we talked about it.

Q: WHAT WAS THEIR REACTION?

A: They couldn't understand it. You know, for small kids that's incomprehensible. This is why it's unfair to load these kids down with it at a young age.

They barely, you know, are wet -- they are barely dry behind the ears and you load this on them and, you know --

They know that daddy speaks with a slight accent and daddy is always talking about the "Old Country," and they know these things, and that's enough for them at the time.

It's when they -- really when they get into high school that they should become perceptive and acceptable to begin to learn about this.

I find it wrong, myself, to start these kids in grammar school and junior high.

I don't think it's right. They are just in the age of puberty. They got enough problems.

Q: DID THEY ASK QUESTIONS ALONG THE WAY THOUGH, YOU KNOW, ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE A BOY, WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?

A: Yeah. I mean, you know, "What was it like in Amsterdam? Did you ever wear wooden shoes, daddy?" This sort of thing. "Did you ever know the guy who puts his finger in the dike?"

That's the kind of questions kids of this age ask because that's all they can comprehend.

Q: DID THEY WONDER WHY THERE WERE NO RELATIVES ON YOUR SIDE?

A: Yeah, that's the thing that allowed us to bridge, okay, "How come you have no daddy? How come you have no mommy? How come we have no grandparents?" you know, that sort of thing.

And I had the picture of my parents so I could show them, but they were not very good. They were snapshots. And I had a very formal picture of my sister, but it didn't link, you know, and so that's the difficulty that I see in this particular thing.

But the kids, when we got older we talked more about it to the point where they said, "Daddy, enough already." you know, "We have heard this story before. Forget it." I mean, you know, "Let's turn a new leaf."

And then my wife would pick up on it and they would

say, "Mom, stop it already," and, you know, that sort of thing, because you can go on too much in this thing. And so that's pretty well where we went.

Q: AND WHAT ABOUT YOUR CONNECTION TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY? DID YOU REMAIN RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED OR --

A: We became -- [brief pause]

I made no bones that I was Jewish. Okay. It was very difficult for the Jewish community in San Francisco to accept anyone with the name of "Garcia" as being Jewish. I mean, I was a Mexican to them. I mean, the word "Latino" had not been invented.

"This guy is putting one over on us. He is not Jewish. I mean 'Garcia'? Come on. And from Holland, yet?" And I had a client --

How long you been here?

Q: IN SAN FRANCISCO? ME, PERSONALLY?

A: Yeah.

Q: SINCE '69.

A: Okay. Have you ever heard of Krieger Oldsmobile?

Q: Yeah.

A: Okay. Well, Clarence Krieger was one of the sons of old man Krieger in the Oldsmobile. And we had met through another architectural thing after I had gone on my own, and he had liked what I had done and he began to hire me as an architect for his own work. And he was on the Board of Directors of Temple Emanu-el. In fact, he was the chairman

of the building committee, and they had -- all the classrooms were to be done over, and he pushed me and he got me the job. And that's how I began to break into the Jewish community.

The kids were not yet old enough to be in temple school. And I started doing that. And so then, after the kids became temple school age, my wife had decided to convert, unbeknownst to me. I just found out on the day that she was to become officially converted.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION?

A: Oh, I was angry.

Q: YOU WERE?

A: Oh, I was so angry for, first of all, for not having told me, and for doing it. I said, "You are crazy." I said, "What, do you want to go to a concentration camp? I mean, what's the matter with you?" you know.

So I went out and got her a mezzusa and rushed to temple and gave her that, you know, because I had my own business I could do this sort of thing, and she said, "How did you find out?" I said, "Well, you know, this is a small town, and so, here," I put this thing on her.

But, you know, when she wanted to join up with temple -- and I was at first not very much in favor of it. But she felt that it would be good for the kids and they needed a religious education and etcetera, etcetera. So we joined Temple Emanu-el.

After what I had been through I couldn't believe in anything. I mean, you know, I kept saying: If there is a God, you know, he was on vacation or something? I mean, you know, I couldn't buy this. I mean, this to me --

And I also, you know, by now I was in my thirties. I had shaken my experience clean and I was now a professional person accepted in his professional community as an up-and-coming young architect.

So I went to temple only on High Holidays, and really I went basically to say Kaddish for my folks and for my sister. Otherwise I had absolutely no need to go there. You know, on Yom Kolnidre night there was some good singing, especially when Jan Peerce was at the opera house and he would take the night off and sometimes he would sing at Emanu-el, and sometimes he would sing at one of the other shulls. That was about it.

We had no Passover at home. I didn't go for that. We didn't light Hanukkah lights, you know; not until way later. So I was very irreligious, or unreligious. I mean, I was a religious person as far as my own ethics were concerned, but I did not subscribe to any theological edicts from on high that -- "Hey, Rabbi, go kiss off-type thing," you know. That was my attitude.

Q: BUT DID YOU ACCEPT THE FACT OF YOUR CHILDREN WERE GOING TO RELIGIOUS SCHOOL?

A: It was Pat's idea and, you know, it's like any good

husband, you say, "Okay, if that's what you want." You know. The mother brings up the kids, and I wasn't too keen on it, but there was no point of arguing with me on this. I -- one way or the other, it didn't mean that much to me.

Q: HOW DID YOUR HEALTH HOLD UP THROUGH THOSE YEARS?

A: Oh, I had kidney stones; that's about all. I had kidney stones, migraines on occasion. But now there was better medicine on the market, and so I began to take those and I was able -- learned to live with it.

Q: WITH THE MIGRAINES?

A: Yeah. Still have them.

Q: YOU STILL HAVE THEM?

A: Oh, sure. I just had one two days ago.

Q: HOW OFTEN ARE YOU GETTING THEM?

A: About once every two weeks.

Q: AND HOW LONG DO THEY LAST?

A: Well, as long as I want them to last. I mean, you know, if I don't take a pill they will last a couple of, three days. But if I take a pill, the blindness is over with and then I have to work off the pill, and that's the worst part because it's a very big depressant, and to work off the pill can take anywhere from 12 to 24 hours and, you know, but you can continue living normally. But it's a pretty potent piece of chemical.

Q: DID YOU EVER HAVE ANY MORE OF THOSE ANGRY OUTBURSTS

LIKE YOU HAD HAD?

A: Me having angry outbursts? Where did you get that idea?

Q: FROM YOU.

A: Oh. No. In terms of, you mean, with people?

Q: NO. THE TIME WHEN, YOU KNOW, YOU WERE IN SCHOOL AND YOU --

A: Oh, you mean breakups?

Q: YEAH.

A: You mean mental breakdowns?

Q: YES.

A: No, never. That was the only one.

The doctor had recommended -- my psychiatrist at Fort Ord had recommended that I see a doctor at San Francisco, a psychiatrist, and I followed up with that. And when we got in one of the sessions he began to talk about my sex life, and I said: What's he need that for?

That's when I quit. I mean, my sex life was okay, so I figured, you know, he didn't need to know about it. I mean, he wanted to know -- I mean, all the other stuff was already done, as far as he was concerned. He was going into territory that I wasn't interested in, so I left it alone and I walked away.

Q: AND YOU HAVE NEVER HAD AN EPISODE LIKE THAT; NEVER HAD ANOTHER MENTAL BREAKDOWN?

A: And I must say that the writing of the book was the

great catharsis. My wife, as I think I've told you before, she wanted to do the book for the kids, basically as a story so that they would know what their father went through, when they were ready to read it. And that became, then, into a book because it just got too big.

Well, during those sessions that she would tape me and interview me on the couch at home, I would have some screaming sessions with her when I felt she was digging, digging. And she brought things out I had forgotten. And in retrospect I thanked her for it because this was really what I needed, I mean, but I needed it from somebody who trusted and loved me and, you know, was not doing it for, oh, extracurricular-type purposes, for lack of a better word that I can think of.

And that catharsis, that helped me to cleanse myself. Once this was out, many of the things that she had delved into, my life was a Hell of a lot better.

Q: LET'S TALK ABOUT THE WHOLE PROCESS OF DOING THIS BOOK. WAS IT YOUR WIFE'S IDEA?

A: Yeah, oh, yeah, all of it. She wanted to do it because she felt that all the things I had discussed with her, that she had asked me about, that she -- for the kids, because they had never known their grandparents, my parents and my sister, or any of the other relatives -- that we should do something for them so that they, later on when they were mature enough to read this, they could get a good

understanding why all this, and why they were without grandparents on my side. So we began this interviewing. Pat would tape it and then start typing it, and then, you know, asking questions, everything. We would only do it on Saturdays and Sundays sometimes, but I told her never after work because the next day I had to go back to work, and this was our livelihood.

Q: AND YOU WOULDN'T SLEEP WELL?

A: Yeah. Sometimes I would not sleep well. I would have these screaming sessions. She would have to wake me up; and at that time I still had all my teeth, and I would grind the Hell out of them at night, she tells me, and would have to wake me up in fear that I would unscrew my jaw. I mean, it was so bad.

When the material got to be so big she said, you know, "This has got to become a book because this is getting beyond the realm where I thought we would be." So at that time I decided, okay, we got to go to Auschwitz.

I had already taken her, now, to Ebensee, remember, in 1971 when I took the family across. So I said, "Pat, we have got to go to Auschwitz. You have got to see Auschwitz to get a better understanding what that camp looked like." And she agreed. She was loathe at first, but she agreed that this made sense. And we flew and then drove to Berlin, and then we drove through East Germany into Poland, and that was some trip. I tell you, that was insane. And

we finally got to Krakow.

Q: WHY WAS IT INSANE?

A: Well, many of these had been four-lane autobahns. Well, these crazy communists had made them all into two lanes. They had closed off one side, and then every so often they'd put gravel on the road, like tank traps. So everything was slow, and there were all these horse carts that you sat behind, and then you travelled from village to village, and every village was two kilometers away. So you never made any progress, and you couldn't go any place, and what should have taken no more than four hours turned out to be something like a 14-, 16-hour trip.

We got into Krakow, I think it was 2:00 o'clock in the morning, and I, you know, I was bedraggled, and it was awful. And so -- and we spent the night in a hotel. The next day we went to Auschwitz. It was a rainy day, and we got there, parked the car and went in. And I took her through the main gate and showed her where I had lived, and all these barracks had now become little museums, and there were a lot of children there and military personnel who the Poles had brought there for their indoctrinational, educational purposes.

And we spent a number of hours there and went to the book store and I bought some books that I brought back, and it was a little guy, like a Boy Scout out there selling banners, you know, "Auschwitz" with the stripes, and --

that was part of the parking lot. And I bought one of those things.

Pat said, "You're crazy. What do you buy this thing for?" and I said, "Well, you know, it's like a soccer team."

And so then we drove off, and you have to go through Czechoslovakia to get to Vienna; didn't talk. And it rained all the time we were in Auschwitz; and didn't talk. And finally Pat spoke up and said, "Well, what do you think?" And I said, "That's not the place I was." She said, "Well, that's Auschwitz." I said, "Yes, I know where I have been," I said, "but that's not the place I remember." I said, "That's a museum."

She said, "Well, what do you want them to do, I mean, to satisfy -- " I said, "Well, what they should do is put people on towers, you know, and hire thirty thousand or eighteen thousand emaciated actors and shave their hair and walk around, and then you watch outside from the fence in and see what's going on. Then you can get an idea, maybe, what took place in there." I said, you know, "Yeah, I have been here, but I haven't been here."

Q: WERE YOU BRINGING UP THAT VERY BIG PROBLEM OF HOW TO EVER HAVE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WENT THROUGH, EVEN FOR A MINUTE?

A: It -- look, even when we get together, us deported ones, "Did this actually happen to us?" You know, I mean

it's unreal now, forty-odd years later. "Did this really take place with us?" We are doubters at times ourselves, and we know damn well that we went through it, you know, we got the marks of it, we have all the things that happened to us; but the wounds heal, and life is good to you in the intervening years, and it becomes very difficult for you to accept that this actually did take place.

You know, there are people who glory in this whole Holocaust experience, and it has been my belief that these unfortunate people, for them this probably was the zenith of their life, and they can't let go of it.

Q: IN WHAT SENSE DO YOU THINK --

A: This was the greatest thing that's ever happened to them, I mean, the most horrible thing, but it was also the greatest thing, and it just has overtaken them and they can't shake it.

And I have always said to people, "You want to shake this? Write a book. Have somebody interrogate the Hell out of you, get rid of it, and you'll feel better." And I'm convinced of that myself.

Q: YET YOU --

A: It's done wonders for me.

Q: YOU DO STILL HAVE THOSE SCARS YOU TALK ABOUT,
NIGHTMARES --

A: Oh, I have occasional nightmares, I have still my migraines. I have my scars on the belly that I can show

you. I have the number on the arm; so it's all there, what took place.

Q: WHAT ARE HE SCARS ON THE BELLY FROM?

A: That's the one -- that's the appendicitis, and the other one is the abscess in the abdomen. And I got scars on my lungs that the x-rays will show you that I had TB, so, you know --

Q: WHAT ABOUT AILMENTS? LIKE DO YOU THINK IT'S BEEN MORE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO TRUST PEOPLE THAN MAYBE SOMEBODY ELSE OR -- IT'S HARD TO TELL, BUT THOSE KINDS OF THINGS?

A: No. Basically I'm a very trustworthy person, but I had one client once -- and I will not mention his name -- he was Jewish. And it was a rather big project that he had hired me for. And I -- in the interplay I had given a copy of the book, but he never read it. Okay. But he knew that I had been in Auschwitz and all that. He had not hired me because of that but -- there was no pity involved. I had been hired because I had been recommended to him, and he accepted my expertise in what he needed.

Well, it came along that we were 60 percent or more into the project and he stopped paying me. And I said, "Hey," you know, "no more drawings." And he said, "Well, I need the drawings because I can't get any loans without them," and I said, "Well, tough shit," you know, "I got to eat, and I cannot eat without money, so we have a standoff here." We had a big argument and I said, you know, "You

are doing something wrong, and I'll tell you what," I said, "if you had done this to me in Auschwitz you'd be dead by now."

He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "You are stealing my bread, and stealing of bread in Auschwitz was not tolerated." I said, "That's what you've done right now," I says, "so I'm putting you on notice, an ex-prisoner of Auschwitz doesn't allow his bread to be stolen, so watch out for me because I'm going to take you to court and I'm going to get every penny from you that you owe me and some."

"You wouldn't do this." I said, "Don't dare me, because I have survived worse things than you."

We took him to court. We won. He is out of the business totally. He lost everything, and it's a good come-uppance. I hope he remembers my words, because that is the thing; basically I'm a very trustworthy person. I'm also a very loyal person to people who do good for me, and I return it. You do something to me and I'll find ways to get back to you, and you are going to remember for the rest of your life that you've done something wrong, because I can be very mean in that sense because you don't take my bread. That's a very clarion lesson.

Q: SO THIS IS -- YOU FEEL YOU DEFINITELY GOT THAT FROM YOUR CAMP EXPERIENCE? I MEAN, THIS WASN'T A PART OF YOU YOU REMEMBER FROM BEFORE?

A: Well, I can't say that, Sandra, because I had never been in business before before I went to camp. I mean, I was a youngster for all practical purposes.

Q: I MEAN, EVEN IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS?

A: No, I mean, I wasn't vengeful. I became vengeful to people who done me wrong afterwards, and I do think that that probably comes out of my Auschwitz experience. You just don't do me wrong and get away with it.

Q: IT CERTAINLY WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT SURVIVAL TOOL TO BE THAT WAY.

A: Auschwitz, for all those who have survived, and I hate to say it, for all those who didn't survive, yes, has been a very good school in how to get along in life later on.

Q: BUT, I ALSO MEAN IN TRUSTING PEOPLE RIGHT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

A: You have to make decisions just like that. I mean, I've told you that before.

Q: RIGHT.

A: When you are coming into that camp, you have no time to write papers on the pros and cons. You want to survive, you have to be able to snap a decision in a tenth of a second or faster. I mean, you are really a computer with a real fast moving mechanism.

Q: DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE THAT WAY NOW?

A: Oh, yeah. I would sit at meetings with clients and would tell them what they had said weeks ago without having

to look at my notes, and they said, "Max, how the Hell do you do this?" and I said, "Well, it's just something I have learned to do."

My staff would say, "Max, how do you keep ten projects in your head at the same time?" I said, "Well, once you get to be in my slot you will find out you have to learn if you want to succeed." It's these kinds of things. I think Auschwitz helped in the sharpening of one's mind because of all the things you had to be alert to, had to do in order to survive.

Q: DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU TEND TO THINK PEOPLE ARE GENERALLY GOING TO BE KIND, OR GENERALLY GOING TO BE SELF-SERVING OR --

A: Most of the time I believe people are good by nature, yes. They don't try to screw you intently [sic]. There are the ones that I just mentioned; that's their nature, I mean. Basically I think people are very good, because I have some very good experiences of very good people.

Q: SO, I'M THINKING BACK NOW. YOU --

A: I'm thinking of Clark; I'm thinking of Jesse Miles; I'm thinking of Morry Kiel. I'm thinking of a lot of people who passed through my life who have been instantly good to me, and, you know, I have not forgotten. And we have remained good friends through the years.

Q: YOU ARE STILL IN TOUCH WITH THESE PEOPLE?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. When we are in their neck of the

woods we see each other; we write cards, we send Christmas cards and we call on occasion, you know.

It's -- in essence it's been a good life in that sense, basically, yes. I think people are good. It's the rare bastard that you got to watch out for, and luckily they don't show up every week, otherwise life would be miserable.

Q: SO, I WANT TO GO BACK AND FINISH ABOUT THE BOOK EPISODE, TOO. IT SOUNDS LIKE -- I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S TRUE -- THAT GOING TO AUSCHWITZ WAS NOT MAYBE THE TERRIBLE TRAUMA YOU THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE FOR YOU.

A: It was no trauma at all because, as I said, I could not accept that I had been there because it didn't look as I remembered it. Ebensee didn't look as I remembered it, although the location and the severity, you know, could be identifiable.

By that time we had not been to Mauthausen; we had not been to Dachau or any of the other camps. We had just been to Ebensee and Auschwitz, Pat and I had visited. We did not take the kids to Auschwitz with us. They went with us to Ebensee back in 1971.

So the return to Auschwitz was no trauma to me. It was an eye-opener to Pat, because now she could relate to some of the things I had talked about in terms of the barracks, where the band was, where the orchestra had been sitting, where the bordello was, where the kitchen was,

where the Paketstelle was, you know, where the clinic was, where the sick bay was. I could tell her these things, and in that sense it helped her a great deal. And also the books we brought back, because some of these books were already in English by then, and they helped her to read some and understand some.

Q: DID YOU GO TO GERMANY AT ALL ON THAT TRIP?

A: Oh, yeah. We -- every trip that we have been to Europe we have always been to Germany because I -- on the '71 trip took the kids where the CIC offices were in Nuremberg, and I'd taken them to Scheinfeld Castle on the mountain top that I have described to you. I took them to all the places that I had been. I had taken them to Marienbad in Czechoslovakia, and Francisbad; all the places that I had been to as a person in the Service. So I had given them that whole tour.

The trip to Auschwitz helped Pat in the book. It got completed in, I think '57, thereabouts. And now the job, you know, looking for a publisher was the next thing.

Q: DID SHE DO ALL THE WRITING?

A: Yeah, Pat did all the writing, went to an editing class at U.C. Berkeley, met a professor there who had been part of the Berkeley Press, the University Press, Max Knight, his name. And she asked him to become the editor of the book. And he read the manuscript and couldn't believe it. And so before --

Q: HAD SHE WRITTEN ANYTHING BEFORE THAT?

A: No, no, but she had gone to Middlebury College in Vermont and had taken English as her major. She had also worked for Newsweek as an editor, okay, and also for the Boy Scouts, or something, of America as an editor or something, I'm not sure.

And he read it and he said he couldn't believe some of these things, and he said before he hired on -- he would take on the editorship he wanted to interview me in person. So we went up there and he accepted. And I told Pat on the way back, because I had never met the guy, I said, "He's Jewish." and she said, "How can you tell?" and I said, "Pat, take my word for it." And he was married to a non-Jewish lady. I said, "He's Jewish." She said, "I had my own doubts about it that he might be, but the name 'Knight' -- " He said, no, that's not his real name. That's a name he took up after he came to the States.

He spoke with a very thick German -- I almost detected an Austrian accent. It later proved right. He was a Viennese and he was Jewish, and he has written his own book with his own buddy after our experience.

All of a sudden Pat said, "See what we've started? All of a sudden these people are writing books suddenly that we've been in touch with and in contact with, and they are all beginning to write down their experiences."

So Max edited the book, and the search was on for a

publishing house, and the Alabama Press, University Press was interested in it because we had a friend who was a professor. But in the University Press, as you probably already know, they have to go through committees before a book is accepted for publishing, and we had been told that could take a year or two and we didn't want to wait. We had waited long enough. So the guy who was the publisher working at the University of Alabama Press said, "Look, I have my own publishing house. Can I publish it?" We wrote a contract and he published it.

Q: ANYWAY, I WANTED TO ASK YOU, TOO, WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE BOOK?

A: "As Long as I Remain Alive," and it refers to a song we sang in Auschwitz, which was: "Auschwitz, Auschwitz, I cannot forget you as long as I remain alive." Okay. Because the essence of the song is that: You have so ingrained yourselves in our lives that after we leave here we can never die because we have died here so many times. So we are going to have a very long life, and you are going to be with me as long as I live. And that was the title that we chose. It -- I liked it. In retrospect it's a lousy title to sell books with. You know, it would have been much nicer, or probably much salabler book if it had the title "Auschwitz" in there or something like that, but we all agreed. Pat's older sister got into it and her husband, both of whom are academicians, and they felt it

was more sophisticated to call it, "As long as I Remain Alive," and who am I to quibble at that time with academicians? Now I argue with them because I found out they are not so smart anyway.

So that's the story of this, why this came about.

Q: WELL, I HAVE READ THE BOOK, AND I THOUGHT IT WAS VERY WELL WRITTEN. AND IT CERTAINLY WAS --

A: Can you say this a little bit louder so my wife can hear it?

Q: I CERTAINLY WILL. I THINK IT WAS VERY WELL WRITTEN, AND I WOULD SAY IT WAS AN ENORMOUS LABOR OF LOVE ON HER PART.

A: Yes, it has been, and, I mean, as I say, it pushed us apart during the sessions because I just felt that -- I saw no reason for it. But I didn't understand what she was getting at, and she knew the reason for it. She was right.

Q: BUT YOU ALLOWED YOURSELF TO BE SWEEPED ALONG WITH IT, IT SOUNDS LIKE?

A: Yeah, you know, there is this odd situation. The questions are so penetrating, and you haven't thought about these things for years, and she shakes something loose and it begins to flow, and you say to yourself, "Shit, what else do I remember that I have forgotten?" Then you become curiously interested in this whole thing yourself. "What have I pushed aside that I ought to be remembering?" you know, things like that.

So again, this was this revelation that took place. And after the book, you know, it was an episode in my life, and I have always been very quick, as I have told you before, to be able to accept things, hence, my survival, I think, and also to push things to the side. And I have told you before that I can put people out of my mind very quickly who have done me dirt.

And, you know, Pat and I have had a very good relationship through all these years, been a very successful marriage, I'd like to say. And I think she would agree. And, yes, she has done a remarkable job. She has gotten a lot of accolades on the book from people who have read it, knowledgeable people, in terms of writing style. They have told her, said, "Boy, reading this we can hear Max talking. I mean, you got his rhythm, you got his -- the way he would talk. You got it right down." And she has a very good ear for that sort of thing. The book hasn't sold well because we have a schnook for a publisher, I mean, a regular schmuck who had no sense. Also, I tend to believe that the Jewish community, the professional hierarchy Holocaust that I discussed with you before, the Davidowitzes and the others of their ilk, when I made my statement in the book that Palestine wasn't for me, and thinking of building an Israeli state, or Jewish state in order we get all wiped out together, you know, in one fell swoop, that hierarchy felt that book should not be

pushed by them because it was antitheses what they were pushing, which was the Holocaust was the reason for Israel, and somebody like me coming along saying: Hey, I wasn't going to go for that. "You're crazy," I mean, two years of this is enough. I can see why they put that aside, because it's not helping their cause any, okay. It's my truth, but it's not helping their cause. Mind you, I said this in 1945. Israel became free in 1948, and they were nearly wiped out. I don't say that I am a prophet or, you know, a seer, but, I mean, it came very close to them, you know, being pushed out of there. So I wasn't too far off that I said, "This is a crazy idea."

I am delighted for Israel that it exists, okay. I send them the money when I -- I don't send it through regular sources, I do it my own way. I have never been there; I have no need to go there. I don't feel any compelling urge to go there, nothing because I'm anti-Jewish. Just to me it isn't meaningful, okay.

Q: NOT EVEN CURIOUS?

A: Not even curious, because I have seen enough KQED, and others have shown me enough, and pictures, and I know people over there, one who is a survivor, and I have had some other letters from survivors over there.

I feel there are too many other things in the world that I'd like to see that I feel are more important. Part of that is, I guess, from my architectural background as

well. So that's kind of the background there.

Q: DID YOU EVER FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE IN GOING TO GERMANY
OR --

A: No, no. See, this is the great thing that I --

My wife couldn't understand at first why I wanted to go to Germany or to Austria. And I wanted to go. And I wanted to go for one reason: That some jerk is going to ask me, "Gee, you speak a good German. Where did you learn it?" and I can say, "Auschwitz." And at that time I was the victor. The moment I uttered those words I had beaten them, and I was there to remind them that I had beaten them. And that's why I wanted to go.

Q: DID YOU GET THAT OPPORTUNITY?

A: Yes, in Berlin once, and several other times, as it was absolutely -- it, you know, it's like the egg scene again, you know. It was marvelous to look at those faces, and I hit them between the eyes, and you could tell in their faces, "Oh, shit, what did I get myself into?" you know.

Q: DID THE CONVERSATION EVER GO ANY FURTHER?

A: In some cases it did. In others it was halt, schluss, it was the end. I mean, "Whoa, I don't want to get into that quicksand-type thing."

We have had some good experiences with some young Germans when we got to talking, who wanted to know more and more about it. They said, "They never told us any of those

things," and, "Keep coming back to Germany, keep showing your number and remind people, you know, because we need to be reminded.

It really has happened to me, and in Nuremberg, 1989 in October we were having lunch and this was happening. And we have met some very -- made some very good friends with young Austrians, professional people. And then we've talked about -- and, well, these are -- the one guy especially, he's a doctor in history in Vienna, and he wrote the definitive book on Ebensee, and he and I have been very good friends. He ends his book with my quote that he uses at the end of the book where I scold the Austrians in Ebensee when they said, "We never knew about that," and I said, "You are a bunch of liars." You know, I mean, how can you say?

Anyway -- and we became good friends with his brother and his wife and three or four others in Vienna. We have a constant correspondence.

I -- a fellow deported one lives in Prague whom I have mentioned to you before, Drahomir Barta, who just went through a tremendous ordeal himself.

We just got a letter from him a few weeks ago. He's been in the hospital for six months with Lyme disease. So that's been coming home.

The guy with -- the doctor in history, Florian Freund, he wrote in his letter he has back pain. I

just found out this week that there is an 80 percent chance that he will never walk again because he has a growth in his spine that they have to go after, which is very difficult to do, so --

Q: SO THEY ARE ALL GETTING OLDER?

A: No. This guy is in his late thirties, early forties. I mean, we're talking about young people, not our kind of alte kackers. I mean, these are young people. And the one with Lyme disease, he's my age and he is a doctor of -- I think I mentioned once before, literature at Czech University, Prague University.

So, yes, it has paid for me, and when my wife sits and sees this victorious grin come over my face when I do this to these people when they trap themselves into it, she knows the exhilaration I go through at that particular point.

So the other thing my father has always taught me was to forgive but don't forget, and I have taken that lesson to heart. You know, there is more Germans in Germany now who were born after the war than were there before the war, and you can't blame these kids, these youngsters. You know, they may have done the same God-damned thing, I don't know, but you can't blame them what happened in those years prior to that.

So if you were to make your itineraries of travel not to visit countries in which there has been very overt anti-

semitism, there are not very many places you can go to in this world, you know.

Q: THIS IS TRUE.

A: And especially in Europe. I mean, the French were anti-semites before the Germans even knew the word existed. So, I mean, that's kind of meshugass. I used to have people here tell me, "How can you go to Germany; how can you do that, especially with your experience," and I would look at them and say, "How can you tell me that you're driving a Mercedes?" you know, I said, "These things don't make sense to me."

So forgive, but don't forget, that's my motto that my father taught me, and that I think is very worthwhile.

I think I've told you before in my career I became the architect for Lufthansa on the West Coast.

Q: FOR WHAT?

A: Lufthansa are the German airlines. I did all their facilities in San Francisco and Los Angeles and in between, so, you know --

Q: WHAT OTHER KINDS OF ARCHITECTURAL WORK HAVE YOU DONE IN THE AREA HERE?

A: We did a lot of work for the Pacific Telephone Company. We did work for AT&T. We're doing work for Citibank; Lufthansa. We did all the restaurants at the San Francisco airport. We did all the restaurants at the San Jose airport, at the Reno airport. We did a lot of the

facilities at the Los Angeles International airport.

Q: SO THIS IS OBVIOUSLY PRIMARILY INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE?

A: Commercial Industrial architecture, yes, that's where the money is. That's the kind of work I like to do.

Q: AND YOU MENTIONED DOING PART OF THIS BUILDING THAT WE'RE IN?

A: Yeah, I did the Friedman Center downstairs, which -- and I don't know how many years that goes back. I have done very little Jewish work because, again, "Garcia? Are you crazy," I mean, you know. But most of my work has been commercial and industrial.

I started my career doing houses in Diamond Heights. It's been a very successful career from a guy who started with nothing in this town as an immigrant. The high point of my career was we had something like 25 employees once. Now my successor, he is up to 13 people still, so that's a pretty good size for San Francisco. And we are now in our 32nd year since we opened our practice.

Q: ARE YOU STILL WORKING?

A: No, I retired five years ago. We are almost starting our sixth year of retirement. And we built it and -- from -- my wife was very much involved in this. I would do the drawings at daytime, and client, and then I would bring my draft letters home at night and she would type them at night after dinner, and she would type the specifications

and I would take it the next day to the office. So she was very much the secretary because that's how we started, just a one-man office and my wife very much at home helping out and doing the hard work. And then little by little it began to grow, very slowly, but it began to grow. So it's been -- very proud of it, you know.

Q: YES, WELL YOU SHOULD BE.

A: Yeah, I have been very pleased about it. It's a nice feeling if you are able to provide jobs for other people. It's a lot of responsibility goes with it, but it's a great satisfaction. It's very much misunderstood by people, you know, this private enterprise thing.

Q: WELL, YOU CAN SEE THE CONCRETE EVIDENCE OF YOUR WORK.

A: Well, that's not the importance. I mean, I thought this when I was a young person, I thought you go into the history books with a building, you know. One architect in a thousand gets into the history books, you know. But it's a satisfaction that you're building something from nothing and then you provide jobs and they -- when you think back that: Gee, you know, these guys, their wives don't have to work because you are making a good living for these guys and they can stay home with their children and raise them, and this is one of the great satisfactions that I have had in my life, to see that come about. I wish that younger people could understand this better.

I think there would be a greater drive to wanting to

do things, you know, and not be reliant on going to work for somebody because they give you good medical care and they provide this for you and that for you. I think it is much greater satisfaction if you provide those things for yourself. That's my personal feeling on that score.

Q: WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR PROJECTS NOW THAT YOU ARE RETIRED?

A: I have a worldwide correspondence with survivors, mostly in Europe. I translate books from both English into -- I mean from Dutch into English, and I am about -- this fall I am starting a book, the book about Ebensee, translating it from German into English.

Q: AND THESE WILL GET PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH FROM THEIR TRANSLATIONS?

A: Yeah, hopefully they will be published in Europe and then try to find a marketing area in English-speaking countries, because this is pretty well the definitive book on that particular camp.

And then I have a stamp collection I work on and things like that, and I am an amateur pastry baker, and I do all that.

Q: I KNOW YOU HAVE ALSO HAD A REAL CONNECTION WITH THE HOLOCAUST CENTER; AND WHAT'S THE HISTORY OF THAT?

A: Well, the history of the Holocaust Center, Research Center -- Library and Research Center of San Francisco -- that's what the original title was, the Holocaust Library

and Research Center of San Francisco -- that came on because of the local Nazi party opening up a book store on Taraval around Easter of 1978 or '79, Passover. And Mr. Weiss, who is dead now but his wife is still alive, he and his son tore down the window of that store and, you know, tore all the literature out of it. He was arrested, taken by the police, and that galvanized the Jewish community. You know, this -- I mean, the guy had done something wrong in tearing down this window, but the whole Jewish community was saying, "You can't do this to this guy. He is a survivor of concentration camps." I mean, you know, it's like waving a flag in front of a bull in an open street. I mean, he is going to come after you.

They got him out of jail, and the Jewish Community Relations Counsel, at that time -- what's his name now, Earl Raab, that was in charge before Rita Semmel -- he writes in the schmooz gazette every week now. Why can't I think of his name? It will probably come to me. He called a meeting of all survivors: What do we do? And everybody went around the table talking and, you know, we talked about a monument. We talked about a library, about some other things, and it appeared that the library was the most likely thing that could get going fastest. And so this guy asked me to pick up on this, and so Lonnie Darwin and I and one of the Rabbis got together, Rabbi Dalin, on this and we decided to go ahead with the library and so we

began -- Lonnie began to collect books, talked to her very rich friends and got money, and they would all come to our house and go in the library, and Pat would then begin to index them. And before you know it, our library was filled with books and they had to be catalogued, and it became a real chore. I mean, all of a sudden, "What the Hell did we get ourselves into, here?"

So now we had to get a space, and we went to the Bureau of Jewish Education, and after much haggling we got the little room that was the children's library, and we started there. And not too many people liked that because when you came in the library the Holocaust -- they hit you with the Holocaust, you know, and the word was out, "Let's get this off this floor because we don't want to see this --" you know, " -- when we walk in." I mean, you know, "Who needs this type thing?" So we got some space in the basement, and I stayed on as head of it for four years. Lonnie is still, I think the first vice-president, I'm not sure, but I told them that I needed out. I mean, I needed my own life to live. I had given enough years of my life to the Holocaust. I mean, I wanted to be on my own for a while, and so -- so it's doing very well, I hear. It's doing very well, and they continue to increase the number of books and things like that. I think they are ready for more space, and they are looking forward to this thing on Bush Street when it gets going.

And I know that it probably is the largest on the West Coast. I don't know if it's the largest west of the Mississippi, but certainly it's the largest on the West Coast that we have built, because the one that the Wiesenthal Center -- when I saw it -- because I used to go down, I went down there when I was doing work in L.A. at the airport, I would hop by Pico and go in there and scout their library, and I was horrified with the few pieces of books they had, and they were all enmeshed in the Yeshiveh books. There was no separate section. But they had this fantastic room, this money-making machine they had in the back with all these exhibits and telephones you could push buttons and hear the messages, you know. I mean, typical Hollywood-type thing, very effective. And they made a lot of money that way for their deal.

So we had made it among ourselves -- when I came back and I described it to people what I saw, and then I think Lonnie went down to make sure on her own, you know -- and we came back and said: We want this to be something for scholars where really research can be done. And Pat and I went one time to New York and we got into a secondhand book store and we had a great time. You know, we're talking '79, '80 now. I mean, we bought something like, six, seven hundred dollars worth of books. I mean, those days, six, seven hundred, that was a lot of money. But we found a whole set of the Nuremberg trials, the complete set, and I

bought that and other books. And then we went to Holland. I would go buy books there in the stores and ship them because I wanted to make damn sure that they had a good Dutch collection here because of my background. And we have one of the strongest Dutch books on that particular time frame.

So that's how it came about, and it has grown very well, so I'm rather proud of that.

Q: AND YOU MADE REFERENCE TO GOING TO SOME OF THE OTHER CAMPS IN OUR DISCUSSIONS. YOU TALKED ABOUT THAT.

A: Yeah, Pat and I have visited Dachau. We visited Mauthausen. We went to Melk. There is no camp there anymore, a little monument. And that's all the ones we have been to. We were driving once in -- we passed by Landsberg and I knew what Landsberg was and I said, "Pat, that's Landsberg." Of course, that's where Hitler also sat in his cell where he wrote "Mein Kampf". And then became later on a very infamous jail for anti-Nazis.

We were driving once along and I saw the sign which in German means "cemetery" -- and I'm trying to think what it is, it's something, "Friedhof", and we drove in there, and it evidently was a cemetery of a camp of some sort that had been nearby. And there was nothing left of that particular place.

But Pat had never been to Mauthausen until she went with me last year on the tour. She also went -- and I

don't know if she went with me to Dachau in 1989. I think we did, but I'm not positive. Both Dachau and Mauthausen are very well preserved. Dachau has a far better museum and exhibits than Mauthausen. Mauthausen is not very well done.

Have you been there?

Q: NO.

A: You shake your head as if you'd been there.

Q: NO, I WAS LISTENING.

A: Those about the camps that we all been to.

Q: DO YOU THINK YOU'LL GO AGAIN?

A: To the camps?

Q: YEAH, OR --

A: If we are in Europe in May, the first week in May in Austria, I definitely will go pay homage, yes. If we are anywhere near when it is not May and when there is no one there, inevitably I head up to the plateau, walk around, spend an hour there, think, you know, that sort of thing. You know, when you get close to the magnet, it draws you in, and it's a good feeling in many ways, not that you enjoyed what happened there, but that you can come back and pay homage to the guys who didn't make it out, and that you can reflect on your own life, and in that sense it's good.

Q: AND, AS I RECALL, YOU HAD ANOTHER PROJECT GOING ON HONORING SOMEBODY OR RETURNING FOR AN ANNIVERSARY.

A: Oh, that was a tour last year.

Q: WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?

A: Well, when I was --

You are just pushing your luck, aren't you?

Q: [Brief laughter] GO AHEAD.

A: In 1985 Pat and I and my son went to Europe because there was a fortieth anniversary of our liberation, and I didn't know what would take place there, and I told Pat and I told my staff, "I got to go." I just felt in me I need to go. If nobody is there, I just want to be there that day."

It turned out there were a lot of people there. But a few days before we had met someone and become acquainted and he was Italian and our mutual language was French. That was the only way we could converse. We became friends that weekend, and he invited me up to his house, which was in Northern Italy near the Swiss border, north of Turin, and we went up there and he put the bug in my ear that in 1990 on the forty-fifth, wouldn't it be nice if I could find the guys who liberated us and then bring them there so that they can be honored. That's five years later, you know, and I kept thinking about this after we got back. And there had been another guy there who was a researcher at the Library of Congress, also a survivor, from Czechoslovakia, quite a few years younger, and we got to talking about it, and he says, "Well, when you get back, write or call," so

-- and so -- in New York -- "he might be able to help you." So I started on this track and I made contact with this guy, and then I was invited to come to their reunion in Chicago and I couldn't go because we had other plans, and so I was invited for the next year in El Paso, Texas, and I went.

And I met the sergeant who had given me that cigarette, and I met the lieutenant who had been in charge of that unit, Lieutenant George Garbowit that I mentioned, one of the Jewish officers in that Company -- the only Jewish officer in that Company. And so --

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE BLACK -- WASN'T THERE A BLACK OFFICER WHO --

A: No. Look, in the Second World War there were black units that had white officers, contrary --

Q: NO BLACK OFFICERS?

A: Yeah, there were black units with black officers, but there were never blacks interspersed with white units. That didn't exist in those days. Take my word for it. I mean, I had to give a guy in Vienna, a doctor -- a lawyer who had become a Ph.D, and I was at a meeting -- as an aside -- I was at a meeting in Vienna in 1989 in May, at which time the definitive book on Ebensee was published, and this guy was asked to say a few words. And he was saying that a black guy had liberated him. So after he had spoken I went up to him and said, you know, "You are

telling a falsehood, and one of these days somebody's gonna catch you at this and is going to say you can't be trusted; you are full of crap." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "There were no black guys who liberated us." He said -- he said, "There was a black guy." I said, "No." He said, "Well, when I woke up in the hospital there was a black guy looking at me." I said, "Ah, wait a minute, now, that's a different thing. You were in the hospital. You must have been passed out." He said, "I was. I was out for several days, and I woke up in the hospital and there was a black guy looking at me." I said, "Yeah, that was an orderly in a field hospital. That existed, but the actual guys who liberated us were all white. They were the troopers". And he was so done in by this because he had always been saying in his little speeches he was liberated by a black, you know, because --

Why do Jews have to believe that they have to be so far out to believe that always minorities liberate them, you know, never the majority. I mean, to me, these are the foolish things that they do themselves in with.

So, anyway, I met these guys and I gave a little talk in El Paso, and I told them about the 1990 tour that -- and so the guys said, "Look, that's still three years away. Why don't you talk to us next year when we have our session in Milwaukee?" and I said, "I'll be there." So we went to Milwaukee and we talked to them and

I said -- so after I gave my speech --

Now I had also met the second sergeant, okay, of the two tanks, and they are still very close buddies. I mean, they are like this [gesturing].

Q: IT MUST HAVE BEEN VERY EXCITING FOR YOU TO MEET WITH THEM AGAIN.

A: Oh, it was exciting for me, and Pat, when she finally went to Milwaukee -- she had, you know, kind of feelings, I shouldn't be there-type thing -- and she was swept up by it all, and now she is just like me, nothing but friends, and can't wait to go in August when we go to Chicago again.

At any rate, I talked to them, and after I had sat down the two sergeants came by, Bob and Dick and about four other guys and said, "Max, you can put this together, you can count on us." So all of a sudden, you know, here was six couples, there was twelve people that wanted to go and I had said, you know, if we can get twenty-five people to go we're going to do awfully well.

Well, to make a long story nauseating, we wound up going with two buses; ninety people went on this tour. Now, when the guys in Europe found out what I was doing they went crazy. They couldn't believe that I was going to bring ninety people over, among whom were the two sergeants who had actually liberated us, the commanding officer of the unit that had liberated us, and all these other fellow troopers and their wives, and some of them had brought

their children along. So we had a fantastic get-together. I had written the guys in Paris that I was bringing -- so they had a surprise reception for them at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Paris. And then I had -- we had made other arrangements with some of the people in Luxemburg, because one of the units, the people on the tour, one of their units had liberated several towns in Luxemburg during the Battle of the Bulge, and so these people wanted to honor them. And so we had dinners there and luncheons. All these were surprises. They all wanted to know why they should bring jackets and neck ties. I said, "I'm not telling you." And the wives -- I said, "There are two functions where the wives are not allowed to wear pant suits, they must wear dresses. I mean, we are going to be strictly formal," and they said, "What is this all about?" I said, "You'll find out when you get there. There have to be some surprises in life."

And we got them over there and it turned out -- into an incredible tour, incredible. The evening of the -- in Ebensee -- the dinner was just unbelievable and the Mayor --

Pat and I had gone back in October, '89 to make the final arrangements, and then the mayor of that town had become so imbued with this whole concept that he had gone to one of the high school music teachers and says, "I want you to write a Cantata for that event when all these guys

are here." And he didn't tell me anything about that. That was a surprise to me. And so all these youngsters from all these different high schools in that town -- now that village had grown into a small town -- they all stood there singing this Cantata with all these different musical groups they had brought together and rehearsed. Very, very moving. And plaques were handed out, and I had commissioned Florian Freund to write a short history of Ebensee, and then in the back I had put in all the names of all the people who were on the tour so that they had this as a permanent memento to this whole thing.

It turned into an exemplary type thing, so much so that people have started talking to me last year, when we were in Louisville, "Max, should we go in '92?" and "Whatever you want to do, wherever you want to go in Europe, count us in, we'll go." And about six couples have said this to me, and I don't want to take two buses again next year if we do go, and -- I feel one bus is enough, and that's forty people. And when I make my announcement in Chicago in late August: Anybody here wants to go next year, you know -- I think we're going to go next year and probably go visit different countries, may not go, per se, to Ebensee, and then again we may, I don't know yet. But it was extremely successful. We are still writing with people. People are still putting pictures together.

Then I made a videotape of the whole tour. We had

four people with us who had video cams, and so at the end of the tour in Vienna I called them all together and I said, "Look, once you get home, I want you to make copies of all of your tapes, send them to me, and I'm going to make a videotape and edit it and put it into one tape." And they said, "How much is that going to cost?" And I said, "I set money aside on the tour to pay for the videos, and each of you is going to get one for free." Well, you know -- and so we have a 90-minute tape of these amalgamated video cam tapes, and I made them into a single one, and people say, "Oh, we have friends over and we watch it and we have so much fun watching. That was such a good thing, Max, best thing that ever happened in our lives."

It was very successful, very successful.

Q: IT SOUNDS FABULOUS.

A: It was. It was very good. It was a lot of work for me.

And they honored me in Vienna. They gave me plaques and they had a special evening for me. And they were so pleased with the whole thing, and we've become such good friends, spending time at their houses when we're over there. They come to visit us. We have just become family. It's just an incredible experience it has been.

Q: IT'S BROUGHT A WHOLE NEW WORLD.

A: Well, you know, people are essentially good, very much so, and it's been just great. And they know we are

Jewish, and some of these people are very religious, you know, strong Baptists, strong Catholic. No, this -- you know, we -- it's just an amazing experience.

Q: WELL, I SEE WHAT YOU'RE DOING WITH YOUR RETIREMENT, IN PART.

A: Yeah, it's been great fun. You know, you have this to look back on. You have your children; now you have your grandchildren, and so you can see your next generations grow and you feel that, you know, I wish it didn't happen, but it's been worth it in many ways, okay. I mean, I could have forgone the experience, but then, on the other hand I often ask myself: If this hadn't happened and I had stayed in Holland, would I ever become an architect? Would I have ever been happy? Nobody ever knows, so you got to ride with what life deals you and make the most of it. And I feel that, in essence, life has dealt me well.

I don't believe in an afterlife. I don't believe in a heaven, so I know my father and mother are not looking down on me-type thing. But I think were they to know what I have achieved, they can look at each other and say, "Pretty proud of that little guy," so -- and that's the way I feel.

Q: IN REVIEWING ALL THESE THINGS, WHAT DO YOU THINK -- I THINK WE'VE TOUCHED ON THIS A LITTLE BIT -- BUT DO YOU THINK SUCH A THING COULD HAPPEN AGAIN?

A: Funny, somebody asked me that question the day

before, and I'm of the strong belief that it will not.

Q: IT WILL NOT?

A: No.

Q: WHY DO YOU THINK SO?

A: Boy, that takes another hour.

Because this is 1991. When this whole meshugass began, that's almost sixty years ago. And if you wish to think back in those sixty years, if your parents or grandparents wanted to go to Guatemala, they had to go by ship. There were no airplanes who could fly that distance.

If you had radio, it was for SOS signals. People had to use the Morse Code. There were no satellites flying overhead. You had no instant television; didn't exist.

These are the things have changed. These are the things that forbid people to get away with certain things that otherwise they were able to get away with when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, Abyssinia -- that was then known as Abyssinia.

You know, it's these kinds of things that can never happen again. I mean, look at Saddam Hussein, I mean finally somebody said, "Enough is enough," and they pounced on him.

Q: BUT WHAT ABOUT THE HUMAN ELEMENTS? THERE IS GENOCIDE GOING ON IN MANY COUNTRIES RIGHT NOW.

A: No, that's a different thing. Please, please, please. Genocide is not something that is dictated by

government and honored and executed by a government. When you are talking about a genocide that takes place in Africa or in Asia, okay, these are either political acts or tribal acts. They are not condoned, per se, by legitimate governments. These are not official edicts of a Nazi government who has said in their Nuremberg Laws, "Jews can't do this, Jews can't do that." Make that distinction, please, that the Holocaust was a formal act of government to do away with certain groupings of people, not exclusively Jews, mind you -- gypsies were included in this as well as other quote, "subhumans," unquote. So make that distinction.

It's my belief there will be no government ever again who will formally decree to do away with a certain group of people, both within and without their borders. The world would no longer tolerate this.

Q: SO YOU THINK THAT OTHER GOVERNMENTS WOULD INTERVENE?

A: Yeah, they would slap them down.

Q: THERE WERE, OF COURSE, OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHER GOVERNMENTS TO INTERVENE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR AT POINTS WHERE THEY DIDN'T REALLY, BUT YOU FEEL LIKE THAT THE TECHNOLOGY IS DIFFERENT ENOUGH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

A: The capabilities of delivery are better today. The technology of surveillance is far better today than was ever before.

There can be arguments made that yes, the allies

could have done something in order to get rid of the camps. On the other hand, good arguments have been made that the strategy of winning the war was more important than doing some of those things because it would divert the, their (things) from their strategy.

Some people have said that Hitler lost out against the Soviet Union because he diverted trains to get the Jews to camps. Had he not done so, he would have actually beaten the Soviet Union.

These are very difficult things -- these are hindsight things and nobody ever is going to get to a close answer on this with a -- pardon the expression -- with a final solution.

Q: RIGHT.

A: Okay. That's a joke.

Q: I GOT IT.

A: Yeah. No, I think man is far better today than he was sixty years ago, both as a human being and as a perceptive human person, I mean personality.

For one thing, wars don't pay. There is no money to be made in war. It's too costly. Even the merchants who make money at it finally pay it all back in taxes because it's too damn costly. So man is becoming aware that war is an undone thing. I mean, one of these days the Arabs are going to realize this, too. They are getting close to that. You know, fighting with Israel just doesn't make

sense for them. It's not a cash flow item, let's face it. It's these things that I'm very hopeful about, and that's why. I believe it can never happen again. I am by nature an optimist. Eli Wiesel by nature is a pessimist. He looks at a glass of water that's half full and he says it's half empty, and I look at that same glass, it's half full. That's the difference between him and me. He's been through the same things. He writes better than I do, but his experiences are not any worse than mine, and probably mine are worse. But, you know, he has made a good living out of it.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE QUESTION OF SURVIVAL --

A: But he's still a doom sayer today.

Q: WELL, I APPRECIATE YOUR OPTIMISM.

A: Hey, what else is there, you know. It's the greatest thing to be. As long as you breathe, enjoy it.

Q: GOOD POINT.

A: And that's being an optimist. If you breathe and don't enjoy it, be a pessimist, but don't make other people suffer because of your attitude.

Q: I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU WHAT WAS YOUR THOUGHT ON THAT IDEA OF SURVIVAL GUILT? IT COMES UP A LOT.

A: By whom?

Q: BY ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE. PEOPLE, OF COURSE, FROM THE OUTSIDE, BUT SOME PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALSO BEEN SURVIVORS AND --

A: Okay. Should I be guilty that I survived? Should I have guilt feelings about me surviving?

Q: NO, NOT THAT YOU SHOULD.

A: Okay, then, what's the question?

Q: THE QUESTION IS -- WELL, YOU CAN SAY ONE PART IS: DO YOU, WHETHER YOU SHOULD OR NOT, AND 2, WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE IDEA? I MEAN, OTHER PEOPLE HAVE MENTIONED THAT THEY DO.

A: Okay. There are times for everyone, whether survivor or not survivor, that you ask the question, "Why me?" or "Why not me?"

Q: YES.

A: The guy in an accident in an automobile, you are sitting right behind him, "It could have been me." All right. You can't go through life like that, "Why me?"

You ought to be able to sit back, look at the perspective --

[End of tape. Begin Tape No. 2]

Q: OKAY. YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE IDEA OF --

A: No, you were talking about it, not me.

Q: WE BOTH WERE. I ASKED YOU. YOU WERE HOPEFULLY ANSWERING.

YOU KNOW, YOU SAY WELL GENERICALLY PEOPLE OFTEN SAY, "WHY ME?" WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS. JUST -- IF YOU HAVE ANY MORE THOUGHTS ON THIS QUESTION OF SURVIVAL GUILT.

A: The -- when people who have not been survivors ask

that question, they have no right to ask it, because by the mere fact, in my opinion, by asking that question they have already stamped you being guilty; they just want to get it verified in their own minds.

Q: WELL, NOT NECESSARILY.

A: I feel that way, okay?

Q: OKAY.

A: Because by having to pose that question they do not understand what that time was like. They cannot then transpose themselves into a camp under the conditions that you had to live, okay, and how to survive.

So wanting to know that, my answer would be, "What have you read?" and, "Start reading before you ask that question."

Among survivors ourselves, when we get together there is this question, you know, "Why me?" you know, "Why was I lucky enough in many of the instances that the moment happened to me whereby I could stay alive?" even though I had to do it all myself, like healing my own cuts.

It was very easy to lie down and go. So don't ask me how, or, "Don't you have any feelings about sur --" Look, if I didn't have any questioning feelings I wouldn't be human. But I will not tolerate it from an outsider who isn't knowledgeable enough to pose that question to me or to any survivor, you know.

Q: WELL, I APPRECIATE THAT YOU ARE ANSWERING, ANYWAY --

I MEAN, THAT YOU ARE DISCUSSING THE QUESTION, IN ANY CASE, AND NOT THAT THERE IS EVEN AN ANSWER.

A: There is no answer. You cannot go visit Dachau, Mauthausen, any of the camps and walk away and say, "Now I understand." Bull!

We who survived it, there are times when we don't even understand it. You tell me, you are smarter than we who went through it? C'mon. So -- but, you know, we asked ourselves the question and then we looked back and said, "Well, that's the way the cards were dealt us." We took the hand and we played it out as best as we could, and here we are. Other people perhaps were dealt worse hands. Other people were perhaps handed out better hands, and still that didn't make it. So there is no answer to this question unless you are going to say, "Who did you kill in order to survive? Who did you do in?"

And this is what I feel is the underlying rationale for that question, and that's why I resent it.

Q: WELL I CAN SEE NOW THAT YOU EXPLAINED THIS OUT WHY YOU MIGHT FEEL THAT WAY, AND I'M GLAD YOU DID THAT, ALTHOUGH THAT WASN'T IN MY THINKING. BUT I CAN SEE WHY YOU WOULD THINK THAT.

A: Yeah, and I think you'll find it out from probably many survivors feel similarly as I do. I know that my friends in Holland feel the same way, you know. They will say, "You have no right to ask that question." You have a

right if you have been in the camps with me and you know something that I might have done that allows you to pose that question. Perhaps I've stashed it away back in my mind; I want to know about what I did, you know, I'm not too proud of it. I don't know. From them I can accept it; from an outsider, no.

This is what Hannah Aaron did. She said, as you remember, that those who have survived must have done something in order to survive that might not be too honorable. And I -- in one of my tapes I mentioned it -- I said to you, "She is the last one to point fingers when she was lucky enough to get out in 1936 because some university of the United States asked her to come out, and gave her a grant or something," then she becomes prominent among her people as the historian or whatever she is, and then has the chutzpah to come around and say, "They must have done something wrong."

Well, my answer to her would have been, if she were alive and I could sit here and talk to her, say, "Hannah, survive with us, then ask the question if you still feel like asking it." My feeling myself is, "Hannah, you wouldn't have survived four weeks there, no matter how good your hand was."

Q: WELL, I THINK THIS IS ANOTHER GOOD POINT, AND I THINK ALSO WE TOUCHED ON IT BEFORE, THAT YOU CAN'T APPLY THE SAME MORALITY --

A: Of course not. I've said that before. You cannot set standards in 1991 or in 1985 or in 1980 or 1975 that pertain to the conditions that prevailed between 1942 and 1945. They're way out of line.

Q: EXACTLY.

A: They cannot even come close. No academician, no matter how well read, every book, is able to stand up, "Now I understand." No, sir, No, ma'am. That's not true.

You will never, because we don't even quite understand what happened to us. Because when we get together we talk about it, and God knows we have more knowledge among us than you have with all the books you've read, so this is the thing. This is what has made me so angry. That's what I said before, you know, they are only looking for the next grant, next book, and they are lining up a publisher and, you know, some of these books have insight; some of these books are just written because, "Hey, there is a new market for this and I happen to be in this market."

Q: STILL, THANK YOU, BECAUSE EVEN THE EXPLORATION OF IT, I THINK, IS SOMETHING TO LEARN FROM IN THE HUMAN CONDITION.

A: Always be glad to be of help, just don't kill me while you're doing it.

Q: OKAY. WE DON'T WANT TO DO THAT.

A: All right.

Q: WELL, CAN YOU THINK OF ANY THINGS YOURSELF THAT YOU

WOULD LIKE TO ADD, OR ANY MESSAGE YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE,
OR THOUGHTS OR --

A: The only thought I have is that I hope that all this work that you all do in interviewing us and through the effort of putting this all on tape and stashing it away and indexing it, that there will be people looking at these things and will actually take the time and look at me and others who you have, to have made it worth your while.

But regardless of having made it worth your while, that perhaps we can leave something for posterity with these interviews of some of the agonies that we had to experience. "Agonies" is a soft word for what we went through, but we belabor it pretty much now.

But the point is that if young people can read this, can see this, can hear it, that they can get a feeling that among all these interviewees, they have seen sincere people who have been willing to sit down and allow their emotions to be played with for the good of mankind, and allowed themselves the pains of having to agonize over this once more, not because they want to hear what their story is, the ones who are telling it, but because they want to do good in their own way for others.

You know, we can sit and close our eyes and see the camp marching in front of us and all the things that took place. All we have to do is set out own inner reel in motion and we can see the marching taking place. We are

going to convey this on what we are doing here the best as we know how. That's what I hoped when I told you you could interview me. That's why we wrote the book which began for our children, but then we felt it had a larger message for other people.

And I hope that you run out pretty soon, out of material. Not that I hope they will die off anytime soon, but that you don't have to go through this with some other subjects. In other words, the Holocaust survivors are in their twilight years or getting near their twilight years, and so at a certain point in time there is nobody to interview except their children, and their children can only tell you what they learned at home, so they cannot relate the visual that I have been able to, and others like me have been able to tell you, and the viewer of what we actually experienced.

And that's the only thing I can leave you with, and that I have been pleased to be part of this.

Q: WELL, I'M GLAD YOU HAVE BEEN PLEASED.

A: Yeah, you have done a good job.

Q: THANK YOU.

A: I don't know about John back there, but you have done a good job.

[laughter]

Q: HE DOES A GOOD JOB. YOU HAVE SEEN THE TAPES.

A: Right.

Where's my third tape, John?

[laughter]

JOHN: At the duplicating house as we speak. They were taken in two days ago. They should be ready in about a week.

A: Okay.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

JOHN: I think my questions were covered during the course of the interview.

A: No, I have my third tape, I guess. I'm waiting for my fourth.

JOHN: Your fourth? You mean the one in the camera?

A: Right.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING YOU WANT TO SAY?

MS. BACKOVER: A couple of comments.

A: Get closer to the mike because it's very weak.

JOHN: Yeah, Judith. Could we ask you to sit here for your comments?

[Brief pause]

Q: And why don't you introduce yourself?

MS. BACKOVER: I'm Judith Backover. Couple of comments.

First of all, I'm very glad you set the record straight on this notion of the black liberator. This notion has been incorporated into at least two movies that I know of dealing with the Holocaust, and I've always known

it was false because my father told me how the Service was run in World War II, and it just bothers me when you see one falsehood like that. There are just too many people who are willing to start looking for what else, much more pernicious, could be false.

The second thing is, I want to thank you for making the distinction between the question I asked you much earlier this afternoon about what your coping mechanisms were, how you got from day to day, and you said it wasn't even day to day, it was meal to meal. And you discussed humor mostly.

And the question, "Why you?", because I think -- I do think it's an important distinction. And I have been mistaken by others who have thought that perhaps I was pointing the finger.

A: Well, listen, I think that's a very serious question by an interviewer of a survivor, that last question. And I don't know how others have reacted to it, that very same question. I don't know whether they reacted like I did, or whether they, you know, slumbered into thought before answering. To me it's a potentially very dangerous questions to ask because it has undertones of "j'accuse," and you almost have to preamble it before you ask the question.

Once you have seen, as I have, the stacks of corpses with the indelible ink with their numbers in large numbers

written on them, and they were stacked like wood on the carts and then pushed by other human beings, other prisoners, that becomes unreal, okay. Nobody's asking that question, "Why ain't I out there?" The question is, "Thank God I'm not on there." You know, that's the thing. I mean, this staying alive becomes overwhelming.

I have said this so many times before: Dying is so easy. There is nothing to it. Living is difficult. Living is a 24-hour-a-day job. You know, once you make up your mind that you kill yourself, it is so easy. But living from day to day, and especially under the conditions that we had there, now that is effort.

You know, to run into the electric wires, there is nothing to it. Once you run fast enough you go in there by momentum alone. But staying alive, scrounging, organizing, piece of bread here, shining a shoe there, doing this, doing that; that takes effort. That takes constant thinking, and staying alive is very, very hard work.

So once you've seen all these things, when you've seen stacks of corpses lying here and stacks over here, you become indifferent to it. I hate to say this, but you do, because at that particular time there is nothing you can do for these people anymore, but there is still something you can do for yourself so you don't become one of them. That's the difference.

I don't know if that's the answer you want, but to

me, living is great effort, very hard work. So what else can I tell you?

Q: I WAS JUST CURIOUS, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF WE TALKED ABOUT IT BEFORE. ONE MORE QUESTION.

DID YOU EVER GET REPARATIONS OF ANY SORT?

A: No.

Q: NOTHING?

A: Every time that I found out that I could, it was too late for me to apply. And then when I found out later what people got, it was such an insult that I said, "I'm glad I never --"

I got, I think, once the equivalent maybe of a hundred dollars from the Dutch government for the furniture that had been taken by [sic] my parents and, you know -- and I thought this was an insult. I mean, we were --

Early in our marriage I got a notification from Holland that I had inherited money. I couldn't believe it, you know. I mean, we were so poor, we didn't have anybody that had any money. It turned out that an aunt of my father or something had a postal account in which she had her savings, and she had been wiped out and they had traced me as one of the survivors and I got 30 guilders -- I mean dollars.

Q: THIRTY DOLLARS?

A: So my wife's parents lived in Denver, so we called them up and I said to my mother-in-law, I said, "Mom, I

just got an inheritance from Amsterdam." And she said, "Oh, that's fantastic," because we were struggling, we were just starting our business and we were struggling, "Oh, that's fantastic," you know, "Great, hey, that sounds wonderful. How much did you get?" I said, "Three thousand."

"Oh, Max, that's great." We are talking now 1957, you know, three thousand bucks. She said, "Three thousand dollars." I said, "No, mom, I didn't say that." She said, "You said three thousand."

"Yeah, three thousand pennies."

"You mean you got thirty dollars?" I said, "That's it," and we all burst out laughing. And that's the only time, that was what I got, and as I said, it was about a hundred dollars from the Dutch government. And I could have gotten money from Buna, I could have gotten money here and there, and each time because I wasn't involved by following it --

In Europe everybody, you know, that was in the camps, they followed all the papers and every time there was an opening they wrote off a letter and got money. And we are so glad in retrospect, my wife and I have looked upon this and said, "Boy, are we glad we never applied, never got a penny. We did it all on our own."

I have friends in town who are originally Germans who still get a check every month from the German government,

every month.

Q: SO THERE WAS A TIME LIMIT ON APPLYING. I DIDN'T
REALIZE THAT.

A: Sure.

Q: WELL, I GUESS I --

A: CAN I GO NOW [smiling]?

Q: YEAH. AND THANK YOU VERY, VERY MUCH.

A: Oh, it's been a delight.

Q: YOUR PATIENCE IS ADMIRABLE.

A: Thank you. It's been a delight.

[End of Interview]