

Interview with ERNEST GLASER

Holocaust Oral History Project

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SPEAKER 1: I'M SANDRA BENDAYEN AND I'M HERE INTERVIEWING ERNIE GLASER FOR INTERVIEW NUMBER SIX, WE BELIEVE. IT IS THE SIXTH OF MARCH, 1991, AND WE HAVE TWO SECONDS WHERE YOU COULD INTRODUCE YOURSELVES, PLEASE.

SPEAKER 2: I'M SHARI LANDAU.

SPEAKER 3: AND I'M ROLANDO COHEN.

BY SPEAKER 1:

Q: SO, WE LEFT OFF LAST TIME WHERE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY WERE RETURNING FROM CHICAGO TO CALIFORNIA.

A: Right.

Q: AND THE ONE LARGE AREA THAT WE REALLY HAVEN'T GOT INTO YET IS YOUR PHILANTHROPIC INTERESTS. I REMEMBER YOU SAYING HOW IMPRESSED YOU WERE WITH THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ALONG THE WAY IN YOUR TRAVELS.

A: Right. Well, just to come back to that for just -- repeat for a minute. The thing that struck me as a child was up to the time of leaving Germany, being Jewish was liability, not an asset, and it became very clear to me early on that being Jewish was much more than a religion. It was a, in many ways, a way of life; a belonging to a peoplehood; people reaching out to each other as they did when we went through the various ports on the way to Shanghai. As I saw in Shanghai, the actual survival of people all throughout the war was brought about strictly by the intervention and support of world Jewry, primarily American Jewry. Then again, after the war as we left Shanghai, the support that people were given in finding a place overseas, primarily the United States, the

starts that they were helped with, financially and otherwise, the organizations who really that were behind all of that, so I was well aware of the things that were taking place and subsequently it stuck with me.

But I never really became very interested in Judaism except for a while when I was in -- as a religion -- when I was in college as, I think I told you, the only Jewish student in my class and one of the very few at the University of California, Davis at the time when it was still an agricultural school and finding myself having to explain, not defend, to non-Jewish friends of mine as to what being Jewish was really all about. And I felt that I wasn't really well enough educated on the subject to hold up my end of the conversation because they were very well educated in their own religion. So I always had an interest in learning more about it, but I really never had the time even if I would have had the inclination and depth. And as I left school and went into the business world, I certainly didn't have the time and it didn't really become a factor for us until we came back to California, and all of a sudden, our kids were old enough to learn, to go to Sunday school, and to find out what being Jewish is all about.

So the first thing we did, and I don't know whether I talked about it, was shul shopping. We went around looking at the various temples in our area, which weren't that plentiful at the time, and we settled on a temple because we really liked the rabbi. But prior to that, in 1967, when war broke

out in the Middle East and we had not joined a temple as yet, I told my wife, "That's the time when Jews go to temple." And it was just a natural thing, and we did, and it kind of came to us then that that was a time we made up our mind to join a temple and we liked the rabbi very much. And to our luck as it was, he left two months after we signed up at the temple.

Q: DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A --

A: --practicing Jew?

Q: --BELIEVING JEW?

A: I have my own religion. I do not believe in a personal God, but I do believe in an order of some kind. I can see it all around me in small sciences and big sciences, meaning from bacteriology to astronomy. But I don't feel that there is some compassionate being out there that worries what happens to me personally. And I feel that when you go to temple, a prayer is a looking at yourself rather than communicating with somebody or something beyond. It's really something to come to grips with yourself, and in that regard, I probably would be considered a free thinker. But I have always been interested in Jewish history, and I find the trials and tribulations that we've gone through over the last 4000 years fascinating and so unique I don't think there's any equivalent anywhere with any kind of people, and that gives me a sense of pride and, at the same time, a sense of identification with a past, with the present, with a people, and with Israel.

I think I explained when I went to school it was a school

that was secular, a Jewish school. It was a secular Jewish school, but it was a Zionist school. And I got my Zionism early on with Jaffa oranges and oneg-shabut, and it stuck with me throughout my life. My wife is not -- she considers herself an agnostic, so she's one step removed from my approach to religion, has a very strong feeling for Jewishness and not that strong a feeling of Zionism, although since -- well, I think I brought her back to whatever Judaism we have picked and to Zionism as well, although she still is not as what we call fabisiner Zionist. In other words, a frebentizener, I think's a better word, meaning that really dyed-in-the-wool Zionist.

My involvement with charitable things really took a long time to get to take hold because when you're in business and you're trying to make a career, you really have your mind in many other places but that. I felt that I was doing my duty in giving to the charitable organizations and, looking back, it was really minimal the amount of support that I gave. It wasn't until many, many years later when my mother-in-law had a stroke, and she had lived back East, and we brought her out to live with us, at least not physically in our place, but because she had paralysis and needed constant care, but she went into the Home for Jewish Parents first for quite a number of years. And here again was a Jewish institution and going there constantly and seeing her and seeing the shortcomings of the place, because there was just not enough money to go around, I became -- both of us, my wife and I, became very

interested in trying to do something about it.

And when one year we had a good year, I decided that that was a time to really go beyond what I had done, way beyond what I had done before for a specific purpose, and we bought a new elevator for the place because the old one was really totally shot as far as we were concerned. And we ran right smack into the problem of Jewish organizations, that here was an old facility and they're struggling with themselves as to whether or not to take all that money and put it into an elevator; new elevator in an old building that sooner or later they felt they would like to, at least, vacate and move someplace else, or whether or not they shouldn't do it, and meanwhile nothing was being done and I was getting conniption fits. And so my first really personal involvement with charitable giving beyond the five-and-dime kind of stuff was not a good experience.

Q WHAT WAS THE UPSHOT OF IT?

A I yutzed them enough to finally put the money in and now they're moving out of the place, but this is, of course many, many years later.

Q CAN THEY TAKE THEIR ELEVATOR?

A No, they can't, but it's done its duty and it's fine. My mother-in-law moved out of there really shortly after that but it wasn't built for my mother-in-law. I mean, it was a place, but she used it obviously.

The real involvement, I think, my kind of second career really started in a very innocuous way. It happened with the

war in Viet Nam or really the aftermath of the war in Viet Nam, when the boat people arrived here. Both my wife and I became concerned about what was happening to those people that were coming here at loose ends and didn't know what to expect. It was a culture shock, if anything. And our temple had a social action committee. I think I was chairman of the social action committee. It was a gradual thing. I was on the board of the temple of, of all things, religious school chairman. They wanted somebody to manage it rather than to set policy from a religious standpoint, and, from that standpoint, it probably fit me pretty good. I'm not sure whether I was chairman of the social action committee or whether or not I was just on the committee, but anyway, we became involved and we formed the subcommittee.

The temple made the decision that we would like to settle a Vietnamese family, and my wife and I, became the chairpersons of that committee. And we got together a relatively large number of people, like about 10, 15 couples, who took this on to obtain the necessary furniture. We were able to get a kind of a guest house which one of our members in the congregation did not use, and it was really run down quite a bit, and so it needed cleaning and -- I mean, more than cleaning. It needed redoing really. And then we, as I recall, we were given, through the family service in the East Bay, description of the family that we were to expect. But we didn't know when they would be coming, and we didn't know the details. As things worked out, when they finally came, Ellie

and I were on a trip and weren't even there to receive them.

And thank God, we had a very good committee, and these people really worked hard and settled this family, where the husband was an acupuncturist and the wife was a very smart businesswoman and three children. And they couldn't speak a word of English. And the husband had been detained because of health in a camp in Thailand, so the wife arrived with the three children all by herself. And the experience was really a very, very interesting experience for us because I remember my wife and I taking this lady shopping to show her what it was all about, and she couldn't speak English, and it took her all of two visits to Safeway to know that there was such a thing as private labels much cheaper than the branded merchandise. I mean this woman was savvy. She knew her way around very quickly and learned English fast, and she was way more intelligent than her husband. And we got her a job; we got him a job; and their children were being tutored by members of the committee, one lady being a teacher by profession.

And that kind of whet our appetite and intrigued us, and it was very satisfying because the rapport you can establish with people who don't even speak your language, and you can see that these people are the kind of material that America really is built of. And, I don't know, word must have gotten around, and we were approached by the Jewish Family Service that the gates were opening in Russia and that they were --

whether or not our temple would be willing to settle a Russian family. And so we went through this thing for the second time; set up a different committee, some of the same people, and this time we were there when they arrived, and this was really a very, very gratifying experience. We went to the Oakland airport at about eight o'clock at night, and we had brought along, since we didn't know whether these people spoke English or not, we knew the descriptions. They came through HIAS, which is the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and we knew that it would be a young couple and their child, a boy of about ten -- no -- six, six. And so we went to the airport with the son of another Russian family that we didn't know but who had been settled in Oakland, and we thought that we might need an interpreter.

We had a nice apartment for them, actually in the same building that the boat people were living by that time, also furnished with hand-me-downs. We had refrigerator stuffed full with stuff, including a bottle of champagne, and we had telephone. And when they came off the plane, this lady looked like she came out of the movies, all dressed up to kill, with high boots, and a very good-looking mother. And the father with a goatee, and the son didn't know what to do with himself. They spoke a very good English. And we drove them. From Oakland airport to where their apartment was is about 45 minute, maybe 40-minute drive, and we talked to them. Now, mind you, we found out in the car that they had been on the plane, I think, a total of something like 36 hours, because

they came from Leningrad. I don't remember the route, but they were routed the cheapest way possible so that they had about four stopovers from New York to Oakland, and you would have expected them to be totally zonked out. Well, they were not zonked out. They wanted to know where San Francisco is because they wanted to go there tomorrow.

And when they saw the apartment it was just mind-boggling for them. The first thing they did was to phone Leningrad because a phone was something that was a luxury that was almost impossible to achieve in Russia. It also happened to be the day of arrival their anniversary, their wedding anniversary, so it was a real celebration, and it was a very gratifying experience. They're still friends of ours. They're doing extremely well. They have a house in Foster City today with two cars. The son is now a student in aeronautical engineering at UCLA, and they've been to Israel; they've been to Europe; they've been everywhere, a success story. So you really had two totally different experiences; the boat people who came, who had much greater culture shock, but who managed and they too -- the children today are in college. They have moved to Saint Louis, and one of the members of the committee just told us a few days ago that they had opened a Chinese restaurant there and they're doing very well in Saint Louis, so it's a success story of its kind.

So through this Russian couple I was approached as to whether I would serve on a new American's committee of the Federation and because this was a real problem for the

Federation, here all of a sudden were a relatively large number of immigrants from Russia that came what is now about ten years ago, and we as a community in Oakland were not prepared to really deal with them. And so there was a great deal of friction, there was a great deal of problems. There was a murder of one of the girls that lived -- I mean, one of the daughters of a family, a Russian family that lived in Oakland, and it was a very traumatic experience. And so I was asked to serve on the committee because of the -- probably the experience I had with the family, and I don't know how long it took, but after a while I was chairman of this committee and deeply involved in it and settling and all of a sudden, they were all mein tsaurus.

And one thing led to another, and you see now you're part of the Federation, and I was unhappy with the way Family Service was running this whole show, and I convinced the Federation board that the new American program was something that was important enough so that it shouldn't be delegated to an understaffed and overworked agency that was really not geared up for it, but that it should be a separate operation reporting directly to the president of the Federation. And so that meant that I was then chairing a committee, and that meant that I was automatically put on the board of the Federation, and so I've been on the board ever since, I think, and this is back, yes, ten years, maybe eleven years. And so the wave subsided because the gates, you know -- it's always a window period. Although this couple that we've helped was

able miraculously to get her parents out; to get husband's parents out, to get her brother out -- no -- her brother out, and his sister out. And they're all settled. They're all doing fine, and they've all been traveling like mad all over the world. So it's something that makes you feel good.

Then, I guess I may be the kind of guy that can't say no, because when you see what's going on and people ask you to help out here or to pitch in here or to take on another responsibility you kind of feel well, why not? And the more you get involved in activities, the more you feel that you have to support it also, and it's a constant -- feeds on itself, this kind of involvement, so that the next thing I knew, I was -- well, I was still on the temple board also. I had various responsibilities at the temple. I was personnel chair as I told you, religious school chairman. I forgot all the different assignments I had, but gradually drifted away from that and got more and more involved with Federation and was asked to serve on the board of American Jewish Committee, and I did that and now -- and then AIPAK because -- I don't know how I became involved with it but I was asked to get on the board on that and now I'm on the National Executive Committee of the AIPAK.

Q WHAT IS AIPAK?

A AIPAK is American Israel Public Affairs Committee. It's not a charitable organization. It's strictly a lobby group on behalf of Israel, and American Jewish Committee, I think is well known. Federation, though, has been the most

time consuming and the most involved -- that I've been most involved with and I am now the first vice president. I'm going to be president in June, and then that may be the end of my career with the Federation.

Q WHAT SORTS OF DUTIES DO YOU DO?

A Well, working backward from what I have been doing now, I've just completed my assignment as Operation Exodus chairman, Operation Exodus being the emergency fund that where we tried to raise in the United States \$420 million to aid in the settling of new Russian immigrants in Israel, which now amount to well over 200,000 people within a year, maybe year and a half. That was an interesting and little different assignment because it was something that people could relate to, not only I could relate to it, and, obviously, I can relate to it as a former immigrant myself, but the American Jewish public got swept up with this euphoria of people being able to get out of Russia where there were initially a goodly number of doubters that thought that the people wanted to look -- that were leaving primarily to improve their economic situation, but it became pretty evident that that wasn't the case. It may have been, in the very first instances, the case but it isn't the case now.

It is a very dangerous situation and I became involved in fund-raising and something I don't really enjoy doing, but I feel that somebody's got to do it. It's got to be done, and as it turned out, this particular assignment of raising funds for Operation Exodus I enjoyed, and I enjoyed it because I was

dealing with people who identified -- we set up interviews with large givers and these were interviews one-on-one or two-on-one. These are people who have supported the Federation historically with good amounts of money, and we set up these interviews and I explained to them the situation and it was very, very gratifying to see that these people identified with the problem and some of them were doubling and tripling their annual gift to Federation in one fell swoop which blew me away. And you really regain your faith in humanity if you've ever lost it, if you have these kind of experiences; people thanking you for asking them for money and making it possible for them to be part of this. Very unusual, but it was very focused. It was a single purpose that we were raising the money for. It was easy to do.

I've been involved in Federation fund-raising as the ongoing operation, and that's much more difficult because Federation is an organization that many people don't understand what it does. That money goes overseas. That money stays here. Who's getting it, and how much gets stuck on the wheels? Where does it go, and what do I get back for it? And people can't identify with it as they can when you have a single purpose kind of a fund-raiser. Those are about the -- well, it's not only fund-raising. I've been involved - - I'm now on a committee -- they're all kind of dovetail.

I'm now on a committee that's been set up by the agency for Jewish education in the East Bay where we're trying to write a program for acculturating the Russian immigrants that

come into this country; trying to make it easier for them to adjust to the new life here; at the same time to not give up their old culture; to retain their old culture; to fuse the old culture with the new; a very difficult task and a task that's really ongoing for all immigrants. There's never an end to it, but we're trying to set up a program that accelerates it, that makes it easier for the kids to get funding for it. The usual kind of thing that organizations have to -- hoops that they have to jump through in order to get the money that they need to operate. That's again an assignment that's a little different.

Q WITH YOUR STRONG ZIONIST FEELING, HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT TO EMIGRATE YOURSELF TO ISRAEL?

A No. Well, not emigrate, but one of the thoughts that I had since I retired was to maybe spend a year or two in Israel to offer my expertise that I have developed in business, and from a technical standpoint, I've never made the right connections in Israel. I would still be interested in doing that some time. My wife and I spent a couple of months in Israel one summer on an archeological dig which I found very interesting, but that's not very Zionist.

I have been to Israel many, many times, and I'm going again on the Megamission in April. But to really pack up and go would be out of the question from my standpoint because my family is here; my kids are here. The adjustment, I think, would be horrendous, especially as you get older. I don't know Hebrew. I mean beyond bokatov, I don't know very much,

and I think that I can be of more value to Israel on this end than I can be over there, other than being there perhaps as a consultant of some kind, the kind of work that I'm doing now in this country. But I don't believe that Israel would be a permanent place for us to live because, (a) it's for the reasons that I gave, and, (b) my wife isn't that Zionist oriented, and obviously it takes two to tango if we wanted to go over there. So I enjoy going but I don't think it's for long.

Q I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU IF YOU WOULD SPEAK ABOUT HOW YOU INTERPRET ZIONISM.

A How I interpret Zionism and why Israel is necessary?

Q YEAH. YOUR POINT OF VIEW OF WHAT ZIONISM IS.

A Well, Zionism to me is the ingathering really of the exiles that need to have a place to go. That's number one. And number two, that as a people it gives us kind of an anchor to have a place to call your own. That would perhaps in the mind of some people bring up the subject of dual loyalty. It doesn't in mine because I think you can have a great number of loyalties, and that's what I think made this country what it is. That you can be a good citizen of this country without having to give up your history, your past, and your upbringing; something that you can't do in many places in the world. America's, I think, very, very unique in this respect, and it made America what it is. In Israel, I think, would be another place where I think you would have to, if you lived in Israel, you would have to be totally immersed. I don't think

it would make any sense to have an allegiance someplace else.

My feeling of Zionism is of a nonreligious nature, but at the same time, I feel that without the Jewish tradition and a Jewish culture and a Jewish history that is in back of the state of Israel it would be a meaningless enterprise. So whether or not there's a God watching over Israel or whether it's a miracle that it was created is immaterial from my standpoint. It is a miracle no matter how you look at it, and it's an ongoing miracle. What happened within the last few months was a miracle too. So, I have a close kinship to the people, the land, the experiences that we've had when we went to Israel.

I went to Israel with my kids the first time in 1971. I wanted them to be able to have some roots like I had. They were at the time deeply involved in religious school and I wanted them to see that what they were learning in Hebrew school was something that had related directly to places and events over there. They enjoyed it greatly. They had a fantastic time. They became ardent Zionists at the time to the point where both of them went to Israel after they came out of high school for a year, lived on a kibbutz. But religion didn't take with them, but very strong affiliation from a peoplehood standpoint. And I have little doubt, although I may be wrong, that when they will have children perhaps they will go through the same reappraisal that my wife and I went through irrespective of the Zionist aspect.

Q AND I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU HOW ARE YOU FEELING

TODAY? YOU MADE REFERENCE OF BEING A JEWISH PERSON IN GERMANY WAS CERTAINLY NOT AN ASSET, AND HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW ABOUT --

A About Germany?

Q NO, ABOUT YOURSELF AS A JEWISH PERSON.

A Very comfortable. Very comfortable. I have brought with me the old tradition, I think -- tradition's not the right word for it -- the attitude of when you read newspapers and you see a crime story and you see a Jewish name you cringe. No reason to, but you do. So from that standpoint perhaps that's a sign of identification with the group. But I don't feel that I had any negatives that lasted -- brought about the experiences that I had. If anything, it really reinforced my interest in being part of the Jewish community. Now the more interesting question in a way is my attitude toward Germany. That's a very complex story. Because deep down you were raised a German. Jewish or not, you were raised a German. I was back in Germany on business in early 1970s, maybe the late '60s, and I had occasion at that time to travel to Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, and Germany. I spoke German in each of the countries except Germany. I could not get myself to speak German in Germany.

Q WHAT DID YOU SPEAK?

A English. I just couldn't do it. I've been back many times since then on business and also privately. It was easier every time that I'm going for a variety of reasons. One reason is obvious. You can't hold a grudge against people who weren't even born at the time, and better than half the

(people in Germany weren't born then. Also, I think you mellow with age and you forget what's happened, the bad things that have happened and remember the good. And by and large, I had a good youth. I had a good time as a kid. And even though the Hitler period from '33 to '39 that I experienced, the six years, were almost half of my life in Germany, the personal exposure to Naziism and anti-Semitism was really small. It was only when I lost my relatives and a number of other people that I had a personal loss brought about through what happened. And I am still an avid reader, now, of German literature, both in German and English, to learn as to what really the history was from 1900 to now.

(My wife and I were on a mission by the American Jewish Committee. We were sponsored by the German government and we had occasion to meet a number of Germans in leadership positions and had long discussions both in the East and West, by the way, and saw people our age talking about their own search for morality in all of this, people who were in their early, maybe the late teens, early twenties during the war; and I could identify with some of their trials and tribulations that they went through. Another time and I one time took my kids with me to show them where I was from and so on, and my wife accuses me of being more German than the Germans over there, which may not be far from wrong for a couple of reasons. One, I wanted to show them what it was about and expected them to lap it all up, and I'm sure after a while it became kind of boring to them, but also because I

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think the Germans have become Americanized whereas I was in Germany harking back to the way I was brought up as a kid. The time that it really came home to me that I'm really German was when I was alone in Berlin one time and I took a bus and somehow talked to the conductor on the bus and he started telling me things as if I live in the city, and I recognize he didn't know I'm not from here because he recognized my accent, which is a Berlin accent or dialect, and that kind of blew my mind that somebody wouldn't recognize that this fellow's been away for 50 years and picked it right up there. So long way around about to explain I still haven't come to grips with the situation. I still feel very ambivalent about Germany. I should add the reason the American Jewish Committee was involved with the trip to Germany was that the Germans reached out, wanted to have a better understanding with American Jewish leadership but also we felt the quid pro quo was that Germany is one of the major support, financial and otherwise, of Israel, and so, like it or not, without the support that Israel would receive from Germany it would be in a totally different position today, and that's something that I think is not well known in America and it's also not well known that the second largest contingent of tourists in Israel are Germans, after the Americans. So kind of interesting, and, by the way, I should say that just to keep the record straight, the Germans kept on coming during this period of trial and tribulation for Israel when the American Jewish stayed home, which is very interesting.

Q WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT? WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THAT?

A Well, I'm sure that for the younger generation, and we've run into a lot of Germans in Israel, there's a guilt feeling as to what happened and they feel that their parents were at fault and they're trying to for religious reasons or just moral reasons to make up the debt that they feel this country owes the Jews. I'm sure there's a very large part of, you know, this it responsible for many people going there and that's to the good, but there has established over the years very close relationship between Israel and Germany, where we were standing in line in Israel exchanging some money and an Israeli lady was standing in front of us -- a young lady -- and we got to talking to her and she changed her money into Deutschmark and turns out she was a police officer in Israel who was on her way to Germany to be trained by the German police. I mean, that kind of blows your mind. For I think a three month stint, so the world has changed.

Q WHICH BRINGS ME TO: DO YOU THINK THE HOLOCAUST WOULD HAPPEN AGAIN?

A Yes. The Holocaust can happen again and it has happened again, only not with Jews. I think it needs to be spelled out exactly what holocaust is. It's not dropping an atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima unless the motivation was racially motivated. If it was and I take at faith value that Truman felt it was more he was saving American lives, then it was not a holocaust. A holocaust in my book, and I

think by definition is a systematic murder of people solely for reasons of race, religion, or nationality. I think what happened in Biafra was a holocaust to the extent that it may not have been that large a holocaust in numbers but that's immaterial. I think what happened in Cambodia was a holocaust under the Khmer-Rouge where they were, in this particular instance, going after a certain class, and really rooting out everybody systematically.

It is the systematic aspect of it, I think, that makes it a holocaust, and unfortunately, the word has been overused in American vocabulary to suit any mass murder of any kind which it isn't. But it, unfortunately, is the kind of thing that is within the human psyche and it's not related to any particular race within the human family. It can happen in Africa; it can happen in Asia; and it can happen in Europe, as it has. I also think that a holocaust against the Jews can happen again. We are people with a 4000-year history. As Americans we have a history of 200 years, and don't think the world existed before that time. But if you look at Jewish history this isn't the first holocaust. It's the largest; it's not the first. We've been systematically done away with many times in history by the Romans, by the Germans, I believe, by the Syrians at one time, not by the Arabs, interestingly enough. Historically, I think we've had better relations over a number of years in the Arab world than we had in the Christian world.

So, looking back, if history is prologue to the future there's very little question in my mind that history will

repeat itself, not the same way, not in the same place. I don't think there will be another holocaust in Germany, but could it happen in this country? That's an interesting question. I think it can. I don't think Americans are at the moment with the kind of background in education that we have in -- that disease would not flourish here; but given the right kind of circumstances and going in the direction in which many things are going today, I can see 20, 50 years down the road or a hundred years down the road a totally different society evolving, a society which could support a holocaust; and we Jews have always been on the cutting edge and we're very victim.

Q HAVE YOU OR AS THEY WERE GROWING UP WERE YOU TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

A With difficulty. On that subject I have a communication problem with my kids. They know what it's about. And it isn't that they're not interested, but I think that they are uncomfortable with it to the point they don't know how to cope with it, how to deal with it; and I think this is something that they have to come to grips with themselves. I hope, frankly, that the tapes will play a role in giving them some food for thought and come to grips with it.

Q I KNOW YOU SAID YOU WERE THINKING TO WRITE A BOOK OR YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN TO WRITE A BOOK.

A I have. Well, it's memoirs for my kids really in which I go into greater personal detail, which perhaps makes

it more interesting. There is an immediacy to television that glues you to the set. There is no such thing in the written word, however, the story when it's presented more on a personal basis is something that perhaps grips you that way, I hope. I don't know.

Q OKAY. WELL, IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU CAN THINK OF THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

A What I would like to add. I enjoyed this series. It's brought back a number of things that I had forgotten, and I changed my memoirs after they came back. I think that I would like to see as much exposure of this material, not only mine but everybody's, because I feel that it's more than a question of just the issue of the Holocaust that we are transmitting with these, I think, in part, it is the immigrant story in America. In my case, I think it was even the immigrant story in a strange world like China and how people that have a certain value system are able to all of a sudden plug that in and develop that into a subculture almost in that location. That we as Jews have really a unique ability to -- when we talk about a light unto a nation is perhaps a little pompous, but at the same time I feel that because of the 4000-year history that we have been able to distill much of what works and we can plug it into many strange situations, bend it around in some fashion, and make it work; and when you look at where in the world Jews have settled successfully arriving with zilch, and it hasn't been necessarily a question of money. It hasn't been a question of education. It has been

almost something that they picked up with mother's milk which is a way to deal with unusual situations.

I've run into people in the strangest places, and maybe I should leave with that one because it really kind of in a way crystallized a number of things in my mind. My wife and I were on a pleasure tour in South America and we were at the very tip of South America in Argentina, in the mountains, on the Andes, in Bariloche going from Argentina over to Chile and you cross the Andes and you're going -- it's a beautiful area and the transportation is a boat crossing a lake, and then a bus takes you to the next lake, and then you get another boat, and then you go, and it's about three or four lakes, and there's many buses in between.

And when we got on the boat is on the Argentinean side in Bariloche. There were about 30, 40 people on that boat, and my wife and I were sitting on one end of the boat, and I was looking down about 20 feet and I saw an older couple sitting there and I said to my wife, "They're Launslite. I can see it." They were speaking Spanish, but somehow a sixth sense told me they were German Jews. Nothing, you know, South America clothing, no way to tell. Maybe it's the body language. I don't know what it was. But we didn't talk to them, and the second or third bus that we had to take, it broke down and they had an intercom -- I mean, a portable telephone that they called for another bus, and we had to wait for about a half hour and we were walking around, and this man came over to me and asked me where I was from and I said,

"From Germany, -- from the states." And I said, "Where are you from?" and he said, "I'm from Buenos Aires." And I said, "Where are you really from?" And he said, "From Germany." Then he said something that was really unique. He said, "Isn't it strange that two Jews as we are from Germany, where else would we meet but in no-man's land right between two borders?" And there was a bond there. Strange, but that's really what peoplehood is all about. It's something nebulous, impossible to tell. People on the one hand -- and the no-man's land as really the symbol of the 4000 years or 2000 years at least of wandering around and it stuck with me.

Q WELL, DO EITHER OF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

SPEAKER 2: IT WOULD BE BACKTRACKING.

A Go ahead. Let me just take a quick look. Yeah, we've got time.

SPEAKER 2: ONE OF THE QUESTIONS IS IF YOU NOTICED ANY CHANGES IN AMERICAN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS FROM WHEN YOU HAD COME HERE AND EXPERIENCED SOME TO WORK ON THEM NOW?

A Oh, my goodness, yes. The kind of change I saw in our Federation in the East Bay was probably related -- I'm sure it was related to the growth of the area. We had an old institution that was not really doing that well. It wasn't able to communicate with the people in the community. It wasn't able to serve the community very well either. And over the last, oh, five years or so, maybe more, we have really come a long way in being able to make the community, at least

those that want to participate in the organized Jewish community primarily as to who we are and what we do and why we're doing it and where they would fit in. And to that extent, I think it's changed a great deal. It was an organization almost exclusively directed by fund-raising. Today, it is really an organization in which fund-raising is a necessary evil, but it's really a service delivery agency -- organization. And that is a major shift. By the way, I should mention that one of the tasks -- you asked me what tasks I had was chairman of the long-range planning committee, so that's one of the things, but that's really, I think, the major shift that has taken place.

BY SPEAKER 3:

Q I HAVE TWO QUESTIONS. I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TIME WE HAVE.

A Sure.

Q AND I'LL POSE THEM BOTH AND THEN YOU CAN CHOOSE WHICH ONE YOU PREFER TO START WITH. THINK THE FIRST ONE IS: IN YOUR VIEW I'D LIKE TO HEAR WHY YOU THINK THERE'S ANTI-SEMITISM IN ALL ITS DIFFERENT FORMS TODAY THROUGHOUT SO MANY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. THAT'S THE FIRST QUESTION. THE SECOND QUESTION IS: IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT YOU'RE SAYING THAT EVEN WITH YOUR OWN CHILDREN IT'S BEEN SO DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST, CORRESPONDINGLY, DID YOU FIND IN YOUR TRAVELING IN GERMANY THAT THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF IGNORANCE IN TERMS OF THE YOUTH ABOUT --

A Germany?

Q WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

A Yeah, well, what brings about anti-Semitism? You know, volumes have been written about that subject, and I haven't read very much about it. My gut reaction is that we as Jews have consciously and subconsciously played a unique role in history. We have kind of set ourselves up, as I mentioned it earlier, the light unto the nation as we have the inside track, and that comes perhaps from -- well, it comes through the religion obviously. But it gave us, I think, a great deal of self-confidence which made it possible for us to survive as a people, but the self-confidence also made it possible for us to succeed individually. And perhaps we are showing a mirror too often to society that society doesn't want to see. And perhaps that is something that people resent.

We are a convenient scapegoat that has been used very often and it's true we are a convenient scapegoat because we are really a powerless people. Until Israel was created, we had absolutely no power and now that Israel is there, we have some power but not very much really in the scheme of things. And so the power that we have developed over the years has been one of brainpower and economic power, and that has been resented by a great number of people. And so it's easy, I think, to lash out against us because we're an easy target.

I think there are parallels in other cultures. Again, what I've talked about earlier. You were probably too young to remember, but in Biafra there was a very similar situation

were, I think, and I forget as to who they were but one class of people in the country who were the merchant class and better educated and they were really in many ways the Jews of that area, were picked on as the scapegoat and there was a holocaust. It happened in Indonesia too, where overseas Chinese where small merchants successfully sent their kids to school. I mean, the special schools, succeeding where others couldn't succeed, and the majority population resented it, and they were what we call pogroms against the Chinese in Indonesia -- many places like that -- it isn't only between the Germans and the Jews, or the Europeans and the Jews or the Russians and the Jews. We're Europeans too. But I think it takes a certain level of frustration on the part of a majority and a lack of power on the part of a minority to bring this kind of a mix together, and if the ingredients are there, it happens. It happens in India too.

What was the second question? I forgot. Oh, how the Germans -- yeah, that's an interesting question. There was a concerted effort on the part of the Germans not to teach Holocaust to the children in the early years after the war, and it went into the '70s and probably the mid-1970s. Gradually the kids asked too many questions -- the kids that grew up, and then their children asked too many questions and the picture has totally changed.

I was at Dachau near Munich with the American Jewish Committee group and there were buses and buses and buses of German high school kids. Apparently it is a part of their

curriculum that they have to visit a concentration camp. The movie Shower was at first fought by the state of Bavaria. I think the rest of Germany showed it on television. Bavaria didn't want to show it. It was then finally shown, and it was a real eye opener for them, and it had a tremendous impact. What is lacking, I think, and that is unfortunate, is that the people that went through it as Jews, as victims, like myself, and I didn't go through it in Germany, be invited back to speak to high schools, to universities. That is something that has taken place on a haphazard basis. Yes, some have done it. Some localities have invited people to come back and talk about it to high schools. But, I think more needs to be done by the people who experienced it firsthand because they're the most believable. When somebody gets it on a hearsay basis because my parents told me about it, it doesn't have the same impact. The second best thing, obviously, is this kind of programming, and I wish that some of it would be done in German.

I saw something that I felt was extremely well done. One of the West German radio -- no -- television networks produced a one-hour documentary on Shanghai. I have a copy of it. It's in German. An interviewer like yourself came with a group of ex-Shanghaiers, accompanied them with a video on a trip to Shanghai and then interviewed them about their experiences before and after. It is extremely well done, and I think it's extremely effective. How often it's been shown, I have no idea. I wish it's something that could be

translated into English and shown in America or at least with subtitles. Terrific. That's the kind of thing I think is more meaningful than -- really it reaches the masses whereas one person going over only reaches a few, but that's all right. That should be done also.

I think that there is one other aspect that should be documented more and that is the role that America played or didn't play in the Holocaust picture. Roosevelt had been the hero of the American Jews for years and years and years, and yet when you look at the record, Roosevelt was no friend. America had the opportunity to play a major role in the prevention of the Holocaust and didn't. And America wasn't the only country. Many other western countries who were involved in the war as well and knew what was going on as well sat on their hands and did nothing. And to that extent, I think something that the American public ought to know more about and doesn't know, and perhaps a lesson could be learned from that as well.

BY SPEAKER 1:

Q WELL, I REALLY WANT TO THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL THESE SESSIONS.

A This is number six or number seven, I think.

Q RIGHT, RIGHT.

A Well, that's a good number to stop on.

Q REALLY. THANK YOU SO MUCH.

A Thank you. Enjoyed it.