

Today is February 6, 2003, and we are here at the San Francisco Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project. And we're interviewing Mr. Ralph Dreike. The videographer is Dr. Anne Grenn Saldinger, and I am Hilde Gattmann, interviewer. Mr. Dreike, what was your birth name, when were you born, and the city and the country, please.

My birth name was Rolf August Sigmund Dreifuss, born in Augsburg, Germany, on June 16, 1922.

And what was your father's name and mother's name?

My father's name was Ludwig Dreifuss, and my mother was Amalie-- for short, she was called Mali-- Dreifuss. [? Nauen ?] was her maiden name.

And did you have siblings-- brothers, sisters?

I had no siblings.

OK. Were you married during or before the war?

I was married after World War II.

OK.

In 1952.

And your spouse's first name?

My father's first name?

Your spouse.

Oh, my wife's first name is Ruth.

Mm-hmm. And you had a family, then?

And we have six children.

Right. Well, we'll get back to that. And how did your family in Augsburg support themselves?

Well, my father was an attorney. I can assume he was fairly prominent in the city prior to the Nazi takeover. He was a member of the Social Democratic Party.

He did some legal work for members of the party when they were politically involved with the Nazis. This was not a very good thing for him after the Nazis took over. He had a general law practice for other things as well.

Do you know when he was involved in that kind of work, that he represented those people? Around what year?

No, I was--

You were young?

I was too little. I was just 10 years or 11 years old when the Nazis took over. And after that time, my father was eventually-- do you want to go into his career after that?

Yes. Actually, first I would like to hear about your father as a person-- who he was, where he came from.

Well, my father was in a Jewish family that lived in various places in Bavaria. And towards-- by the time he was born, they had settled in Munich. Prior to that, from what I have heard, my grandfather lived in-- was probably born in FÃ¼rth or Nuremberg or thereabouts and later on went to Munich.

He was a businessman in various things. [LAUGHS] One of the family stories goes that he at one point owned a castle outside of Munich called-- well, anyway, it had agriculture and a brewery attached to it. And he went bankrupt because at some point, they had too much beer, and the floor collapsed, and there was no insurance. [LAUGHS] Thereafter, he got involved in other businesses. So my grandfather and grandmother are buried in Munich. They died long before the Nazis came about, came around.

Did your parents or your father tell you at all how the family got through the Depression years?

No, the Depression didn't seem to bother us. My father seemed to have enough cases, and his practice was thriving prior to the Nazi time. Of course, I remember other-- some signs of the Depression, but our family wasn't affected. Except one of my uncles that was out of work, but anyway, my immediate family wasn't affected by it.

And your mother, can you tell us a little bit about her?

Well, my mother was Christian, born in Krefeld. She was one of eight children, and they were involved in the various wars. One brother got killed in World War I. Another brother was gassed in World War I and died a couple of years after that from the effects of the gas. And the third brother was shot in the head and had an eye shot out, and his jaw was paralyzed the rest of his life.

So this is how the families in the First World War were affected. One other brother came through, and she had three sisters. So it was a large, large family. And maybe later on, we can get into how this family was split during the Nazi time.

Coming back to your life, what schools did you attend in Augsburg?

In Augsburg, I went for four years in the Volksschule, the grammar school, essentially, equivalent. And then I went to the [? Oberrealgymnasium ?] in Augsburg.

And I don't know if you want to get into details, but first year, I did OK. And that was '32 and '33. I had a [GERMAN], or teacher, that was a rabid Nazi and gave me-- I never could do things right for him, got a lot of low grades, and I flunked the second year.

Do you remember his name?

Yeah, his name was Schlecht. "Schlecht" in English means "bad." He was bad for me.

My mother had conference with him, asked him whether I should-- take me out of school and send me somewhere else. And just my mother told me about this. She said, he told her, yeah, that would be OK. Goodbye.

So they put me into a Catholic boarding school in a small town not far from Augsburg, Mindelheim. And I had to repeat the second year, of course, and did quite well thereafter. I still have some of my report cards from that time.

So you felt that that teacher really treated you badly because of your mixed [INAUDIBLE]?

Because of my father's-- he also-- some of the other kids in my class were-- I was sort of the butt of their jokes in some ways, in many ways. And then, there were these incidents when my father was in the jail. The jail was right next door, where the Nazis had imprisoned him with-- the official title was "protective custody," no charges filed or anything of the sort. And so were numerous prominent people from Augsburg, were locally in the local prison. Naturally, they were either Jewish or they were Communists or were Social Democrats that had opposed the Nazis in prior years.

And they were slowly filtered off. Some were released. Luckily, my father was among them. Others were sent on to the first concentration camp in Germany, outside of Munich. And--

Which was? What was the name?

Dachau. It was Dachau. As I said before, I was pretty young, but then I heard some of the stories when some of these people disappeared. Others were released and told they'd have to be out of Germany within 24 or 48 hours. And my father, they came to my father's-- at first, he had-- he was still in the office with a Christian partner. But then they had to separate, so then the office was in our apartment. And these people would come, and my father managed to make a living from them, because they would empower him to take care of whatever properties had to be disposed and all this sort of things. And my father was doing this for these people as they were released from Dachau. And this went on for quite-- for a good number of years.

When did your father first have any troubles with the Nazis?

Oh, immediately in 1933, because he was carted off to the local jail under protective custody.

So in '33, he was right away arrested?

Oh, yes, right away. It happened-- I can't tell you exactly what day, but it happened within a couple of months of the takeover, of the Nazi takeover. They rounded up-- I guess all over Germany, they rounded up any of the-- I mean, former political opponents, prominent people, and so on, and consolidated their gains by eliminating all possible opposition.

As far as you know, did they give any reasons for arresting your father?

Oh, no, protective custody. The theory was that these people, or these opponents-- political opponents-- would be in danger. The excuse-- from the population, that the population would in some way harm them. And that was the excuse for the protective custody.

The funny thing is, when my father told me that when he was-- when they brought him into the jail, the prison guards, he knew most of them. Because as an attorney, he was on the-- prior to the Nazis, of course-- he was on a committee that supervised the prison to the extent of making sure that the prisoners are treated humanely and so on.

The local attorneys' association had this committee. My father was a member of that committee. And they periodically inspected the prison, made sure it was sanitary, and all this sort of thing, that the prisoners be protected. And from that, he was well known to the administration and the guards in the prison. When he was brought in they were all-- just shook their heads. They weren't necessarily Nazis. They were just civil service people. A lot of these things you're bringing back. They're coming back to me right now.

So they treated him with some respect?

So he was treated relatively well in the local prison. And then, after I don't know how many, several months, they released him. And I don't know if I mentioned, the prison was next to my school, in the next block. And that's where some of the kids would tease me about my father being next door, in the prison.

And then he was-- at least two more times he was brought back over the next 10 years or so, until he-- for interrogations and some other stuff. His clients, I'm sure they were always trying to get information about the clients, the Jewish clients that were leaving Augsburg, that he had his last-minute conferences. And whenever that happened, in some cases, I guess I was-- by that time, I was no longer in Germany. And my mother would indicate in sort of a code in a letter that my father is on a trip again. Later, of course, I found out he was on a trip to the local jail. So then, of course-- then, he was eventually deported to Theresienstadt, but that wasn't until 1943, until 9 months before the end of the war.

Tell us a little bit more about your mother. Now, what kind of education did she have?

Well, my mother had the usual eight-year Volksschule, and then she was apprenticed as a seamstress, and she made her master's exam. So she had papers as a master seamstress. And she was a department head, or she became a department head, at the largest department store in Augsburg, which at that time was owned by a family called Landauer, who also were Jewish and had to, eventually, give up the business.

But my mother only worked there for maybe a couple of years, and then she opened up her own shop. And about that time, she met my father. So we're talking about, possibly, 1912 or so.

And my father was just building up his practice. And you know how things were back in those days. You couldn't get married until you had the necessary means to support a family.

So they put it off, and the next thing you know, it's 1914. World War I started, and my father had to go in the army. He was in the front lines for some period of time, although I don't think-- he probably was in combat, though he wasn't-- he was a telephone operator, is what they made him. So he wasn't in the-- probably not in the trenches, but he was still considered a front line soldier. Which, in some small way, he benefited from that, because the Nazis always, when somebody had the decorations, he got some decorations, and he was a front line soldier. So the Nazis kind of thought-- some of them would respect that.

So getting back to my father, they didn't get married until after World War I, because first of all, my father's practice went down the tubes while he was in the army for three or four years, and then he had to start all over again in 1918. And in 1921, they got married. And I was born in '22.

How did the families on both sides accept marriage between a Jew and non-Jew?

As far as I know, my Jewish side, they had no problems. The Christians had no problems until Nazi time came along. And my father and his brothers and sisters, they were all friendly, and there was no there was no problems at all.

The only problem was with Uncle Julius. He was the black sheep of the family. I don't know what he did. But he was being shunned, even though he would come and visit my father every once in a while. And I was told he just visited to see if he could get some money for a pair of new shoes or something.

So my Aunt [? Adelle, ?] she never married. She had a Christian boyfriend who, of course, turned his back when the Nazis took over, when the pressure came on. And my Uncle Beno, a wife and two sons. And do you want to go into their career, their fate, what they happened?

Aunt [? Adelle ?] was deported to Theresienstadt and from there to Auschwitz. That was the end. Uncle Julius was in the early ones deported to Riga area. And the first transport from Munich that went to Riga-- I can't remember how many, but several hundred, I suppose-- as soon as they got off the train, they killed them.

And my other Uncle Beno was-- he had a publishing business that went broke in-- within six months after the Nazi turn. The business was perhaps a bit shaky financially, but when the Nazis took over, that was the end of that. And he actually left debts behind and so on that my father had to clear up out of his pocket, and he and his family went off to France. And then, eventually, the Nazis caught him in France.

He had two sons, Richard and Edgar, my only Jewish cousins. And I discovered about four or five years ago all this in the archives in Munich, where I had a German archivist that helped me do some little research. So we found in these archives, and the two names, their names. And they were picked up in France and deported. That was in the Munich archives.

And two sons, Richard and Edgar, had received [GERMAN], compensation for the loss of their parents. So that indicated that they survived. They got this compensation in the early '50s from the Nazis.

Now, the way this was written, the way the entry was hand-written, and the way I had interpreted it is that Edgar was a survivor in that-- because they gave the address, I presume. And I perhaps mistakenly figured, OK, Richard probably didn't make it.

So when I got home-- this is all only five years ago-- when I got home, I started to see if I can find Edgar. And at that time, there was no-- we tried the computer. We got several people around here that had the name Dreifuss, and there was a lady in Los Altos that was very helpful. That was her maiden name.

But we couldn't get anywhere. Kept trying. So anyways, two years ago, my daughter finally discovered-- she's good at computers-- that the French had computerized all their telephone books. So she looked for the name of Dreifuss anywhere in France. We found nine of them spelled this way. The French normally spell it with a Y, see, but spelled German way, she found nine of them.

We wrote-- we had a French neighbor, who set up a letter. We sent the nine letters out, and a couple of weeks later, about 6:00 o'clock in the morning, the phone rings. Remember, we sent the letters out asking if anybody knew Edgar Dreifuss, if anybody have heard of Edgar Dreifuss.

Well, as I discovered later, he was not the survivor. Richard was the survivor. So a couple of weeks after these letters were written, the phone rings at 6:00 o'clock in the morning, and a German accent or a French accent voice said, here is Richard. I said, Richard who? 6:00, you know, I just wake up. He said, [GERMAN], your cousin, Richard.

So this was two years ago, 2 and 1/2 years ago, maybe. So he told me-- Richard tells me that Edgar died in the war in Israel-- and this, of course, must have been in the '50s-- and he was the survivor. But for several years, we were searching for Edgar, and that's the whole thing.

So I took a trip to France and Germany, and we met. And he unfortunately, he's rather ill, and he's a lifelong smoker. He still smokes. He's had lung cancer surgery, and he can barely get around.

But at least we met again. Now we write each other. And he has a granddaughter that lives in Cincinnati. We've gotten in touch with her. So yeah, we finally have one family survivor besides me, and we have a connection. And we finally connected like 50 years after that.

My mother's family-- you want to go into that now? My mother's family, there were the Nazis there were the anti-Nazis, and there were the ones in the middle. Oldest brother was a rabid Nazi.

His son was in the SS, was an SS officer, who did something that I don't know what it was, but it was not political, it was criminal. And ended up deposed from his officership and ended up in a German prison for I don't know how long as a regular sentence.

That's all I know about that part, because that family-- I heard that from the other relatives. That family, I wouldn't get in touch with after the war. I don't want anything, didn't want anything to do with them.

Another brother of my mother, he was what's known as a [NON-ENGLISH]. He did his-- kept his mouth shut, and played along the game, and managed to keep his job that way and get promoted a few times. Let's see now. Another brother-- well, the other two brothers. One, as I mentioned before, they died long before the Nazi time.

One of my mother's sisters was married to a Social Democratic functionary. He was some kind of an administrative job in the railroads. And he was, at the same time, a strong Social Democrat. He was forced out of his job in 1933, but I guess he kept quiet, and they paid his pension for the rest of his life. He was mentioned.

He had one son-in-law who was a minor Nazi, married to his daughter. And he had another daughter who was married to a Jewish man. And he was a businessman in Krefeld, and he had connections in Holland. And they were able to flee to Holland. They had no children.

I met them both after the war. My cousin, his wife, hid him. Actually, they built a double wall in their apartment, and they had just wide enough for a cot, fairly long for two cots. He and-- his best friend and he would go and hide in that double wall whenever there were searches or whenever something was happening that the Nazis were coming around.

Of course, my cousin and her father, and even though the Jewish son-in-law sort of didn't want to know anything about it, but they all helped by providing food for these two people. My cousin had three people that had to be fed, and all she got was one ration. So they all pitched in to have these two Jewish men survive.

What were their names?

At my age, it's hard to come by.

It may come to you.

I may come up with it. Well, OK, this is another portion of that family. After World War II, when I first came back to Germany for visits, there was one aunt. She had a business. She had a sign in her store, "Deutsches Geschäft." That's the sort of thing that they all had to do if they wanted to be sure, because their name was [? Leithausen, ?] and for some reason she thought [? Leithausen ?] sounded like a Jewish name.

But nevertheless, she-- so anyway, she was sort of the middleman. When I first came back in 1952, she would have two parties or two invitations-- one for the Nazi branch and one for the anti-Nazi branch. And I, of course, here comes the American. Got to go, was being feted in 1952, you know? We were on top of the world when we came to Germany.

And, of course, the Nazis didn't want to let it be known, but as when I first went back and I walked down the street, I used to look at people my age and a little older, and at the back of my mind, it always went, gee, what were they doing five years ago? When I go back to Germany now, I've pretty well lost that, because there are not that many old people around. And so anyway, that was the situation in Krefeld.

When you were growing up, did you did your family practice a certain religion at home?

Well, to a small extent. My mother practiced and took me to church, but the way this went, even in grammar school, they were segregated. There was a Protestant class and the Catholic class. And the Jewish people, the Jewish kids, could be in either class. When it came to religious instructions, they would leave and go to the synagogue.

So anyway, when we went to church, all the kids had to sit together. And the parents that had brought the kids would sit in the back. So my mother would bring me to church sometimes. Sometimes I went by myself.

My father at that time didn't know. I kind of vaguely remembered, maybe, he did go to synagogue on the high holidays. But they didn't take me, because I was supposed to be raised Catholic.

Tell us about your baptism.

The baptism? Well, I was baptized when I was an infant.

I thought-- yeah, OK, fine. And you did get a Catholic education, then? Or--

Oh, yeah. Well, partly. Even the public schools, you had that, because I was in the Catholic group, you see? It was a Catholic group. And like I said, the Jewish kids went to synagogue, but the Protestant class and the Catholic class, the clergymen would come in, I think, twice a week and give religious instructions. The Protestant clergyman, Lutheran, would go to their group, and our regular teacher would go do something else while they were in there.

So we were brought up-- like I say, even in the public schools in those days, you had religious training. It was part of the public school system, at least in Bavaria. I don't know about the other states in Germany.

So even though this was happening, and your schoolmates knew that you were going to the Catholic instructions, they still decided once the Nazis came in that you were Jewish.

Well, yeah, first, what I was thinking of was grammar, four years of grammar school. And the two years in Augsburg-- this was, of course, starting in sort of gradual. It was not very severe, I think. It was mostly just kids trying to use me as the butt of their jokes.

And when I went to the boarding school, it wasn't generally known, or at least it never was talked about, that I had a Jewish background. That was run by Catholic brothers, and I was treated quite well, but as-- I was treated like anybody else. As time went on, of course, when I first went there, I would say maybe 10%, 15% of my schoolmates were in a Nazi youth organization, the HJ. And, of course, little by little, more and more went in there. And by the time I left, they were 100% minus me all in the HJ. And--

Were you questioned why you're not joining?

Well, yes. That really didn't happen till the last year or two. And what happened then in the school-- I don't know what the legal things that the Nazis trumped up-- they threw out or essentially made the Catholic brothers leave and turned the school over to the city of Mindelheim.

The brothers ended up I don't know where. They all were gone, and new teachers came in. And they all seemed quite young I don't know if they were fully qualified, but anyway-- and most of them were-- politically, they were Nazis. And some-- as far as I'm concerned, they didn't really give me a bad time, but they didn't stop my classmates from giving me a bad time.

You want to go into any incidents that occurred there in the last year? Nothing happened as long as the brothers were there. But when these younger teachers took over, then the word came out. Then I was the Jew boy. And numerous incidents, and the teachers didn't-- never saw 'em. They just turned their back when something happened.

There were these things like we had to go march about a mile to the [GERMAN], the swimming pools. In front of that, there was a big sign, "Juden nicht erlaubt." And there were certain ones of my classmates, every time we passed that sign--

Jews not permitted, mm-hmm.

"You can't come in here." But we all marched in as a group, you know? This all started after the brothers left. And of course, in the dining room, we had incidents. They had, usually, the biggest guy was the one that was in charge of the table. There might have been six or eight tables. Each of them, we had 10 boys on each table.

And the food was brought in in platters and so forth, or big bowls. And the one in charge of the table, he would dish out, so that, supposedly, everybody got a fair deal. And most of the time, the one on my table, he'd find the smallest piece of meat, or-- and one time, he says, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Jews don't have to eat like the Germans.

And another thing is I love pickled herring. When we had pickled herring, they would put out 10 herring. And there was some other stuff to eat-- potatoes or whatnot. And then, one boy could run to the kitchen and get seconds if they had any, and then they gave you maybe three or four more. And the guy in charge would delegate certain guys to run and get the seconds.

So once in a while, it was my turn. So I'd be running and get seconds, and I'd bring back three or four herring, but I didn't get any. The runner usually got the first one, you know? So he wouldn't give me any. He says, you don't need it, you know? Let's see.

Oh, the biggest incident was when they beat me up. I'm trying to remember how many times that happened. It happened maybe months and months, I don't know. They just decided to have some fun. And they'd make a big circle, and I'd have to get in the middle.

And then, there was a bigger guy that they got from the next higher class who was supposed to be a good boxer. And we had to box. Now, the big guy, he was called Max Schmeling. And Schmeling was the world champion, heavyweight champion.

And so I was Max Baer. Max Baer was Jewish, and he was the heavyweight champion before Schmeling. And Schmeling had beat him to get the world.

So anyway, I'd get beat up, and kids would yell, and so forth. And this would go on for a while. I'd try to fight back, but like I said, I was a smaller guy. He was much bigger than I.

And nothing was ever done about it for-- well, nothing went on for a while. And then eventually, all the noise they were making, one of the teachers would show up and break up the thing. But they never went and punished anybody. They just broke it up.

And this was one of the things, perhaps, that led to my getting tossed out of school. And there were some other incidents. One time, I ran away to visit some people that I knew about 10 or 15 miles away. I didn't tell them I was going there. I was going to come back.

But you see, on Saturdays, I was totally left alone by that time. Saturdays is when they went off with their Nazi games. And nobody paid any attention to me, because I wasn't in there. They just let me sit around and do homework, whatever I wanted to do.

So anyway, on one of those Saturdays, I ran off on my bicycle. But anyway, soon after that, my mother came and got me out of school, brought me home, and I was no longer-- I was essentially thrown out of school. So what the motives were, I kind of suspect they were glad to get rid of me. They found an excuse.

And at the same time, to give them credit, they really probably didn't want to take responsibility for my well-being. I mean, they knew about the beatings. They knew all of that. And so they were just very happy to unload me.

When my father tried to get me into a school in Augsburg, they wouldn't admit me anywhere. Two different high schools in Augsburg that my father tried. Now we're talking 1938.

So another couple of months went by, and my father had been in contact with a cousin in San Francisco. And I suddenly got the news that I can come to the United States. He provided the affidavit. He had a good law practice-- another lawyer, a good law practice in San Francisco, and relatively well off. Lived in San Mateo, one of the larger homes, with a number of servants.

But his wife was on the board of directors at Homewood Terrace. And so the first thing I was taken care of at Homewood Terrace for a few weeks while they got in touch with the Catholic Charities and found Father Flanagan, who was in charge of that, and then found a foster home for me in a Catholic family in San Francisco.

Before we talk about, then, more about coming to America, a little bit more about your time in school. Do you remember what it was like for you, really, being raised Catholic, but being treated as a Jew? How did you understand that as a boy?

Well, [LAUGHS] it's hard to explain. Kids called you the Jew boy, you know? You were just a second-rate person, not quite human anymore. That's what-- you begin to feel like that. You were sort of in between that and-- well, I can't say between an animal, because it wasn't quite that way. You just were Untermensch, is what the German expression is. I don't know how to translate it.

Less than human.

Less than human.

Lower.

Lower. Lower than a human. So of course, that situation was what I had to live with.

During that time, did you have any idea of what you might want to do later on, what career-wise? Did you have any ideas?

In the way of a profession, do you mean?

Profession.

Yeah, I wanted to be an engineer of some kind. And that's what-- the high school I went to, of course, was teaching mostly science. The Oberrealschule is heavily in languages and science. So I had hoped to go on some day.

My father had ideas that I would become a lawyer, but the time hadn't arrived yet to make these kind of decisions. And of course, as time went on, my father realized-- and I got tossed out of school. And he knew by that time that I wouldn't be able to go to university. I mean, that was out of the question. And that was one of the reasons-- I mean, that was one thing why I could come to the United States, for my education.

Did you ever feel ashamed of your father?

Oh, yes, when the kids were after me. Absolutely, these experiences, I don't know how the Jewish kids coped with it, but you see, they had a group. I was all by myself. I had nothing. I had nobody to lean on-- I mean, no peer, same-age person to lean on.

And as it turns out, the Christians didn't want me. The Jews ignored me. I wasn't one of them. And I should have been one of the Christians, but they didn't want any part of me. So there I was.

And especially as a young person, that's so confusing. You identified as a Christian. That's what you believed in, right? And yet, you were treated otherwise.

But for some of us, that was a dilemma, that-- all these so-called "Mischlinge." And, of course, I've done a lot of reading lately. A lot of new books came out. Many of them tried to hide it because, after all, why wouldn't you? There are thousands and thousands of Mischlinge in Germany, especially in Austria, where there had been intermarriages.

And this latest book, of course, is-- and I just got about a year ago. And it was written, it was published about a year ago, which is Hitler's Jewish Soldiers. And this man did a tremendous amount of research and found all these Mischlinge that became generals who served in the German Army. And, of course, others like myself who came to the United States and served in the American Army.

It's really admirable that you, under all those circumstances, still had ideas of what you wanted to do and where you wanted to go. And so they-- although they hurt your spirit, they didn't attack--

Well, we all want to survive, adverse circumstances or not. And it's just a matter of survival. You have to roll with it.

What was it like to have to, then, part from your parents? Was there talk of all of you leaving? How was that decision made?

Well, the decision was made to get me out. My father was like so many Germans that served the Kaiser, and did their duty, and got decorated, Jewish people walking around with their Iron Cross on there-- and then the Nazis beat them up anyway.

So my father thought because of his wartime service, and, of course, the big thing was that he was married to a Gentile.

And that put him into a category where the Nazis kind of left the Jewish portion of the couple alone. I mean, Jewish women that were married to Christian men were not generally taken away at all. They never ended up in concentration camps at all.

Of course, the men, the Jewish men that were married to Christians, as you probably know, it varied a great deal. Some of them were taken away. If they got a divorce, that meant the man would end up in Auschwitz or a similar place. But if the women, the Christian women, stuck to their husbands, they were not taken away until the very end of the war. And that's the category my father was in.

Well, my mother, after he was taken away, my mother got-- went to a convent, and the sisters in the convent hid her until the war was over.

Was she in danger, do you think, at that time?

Well, the danger was that they were constantly after my mother to get a divorce. And, of course, I don't know what her reasoning was, but the point was, when my father was taken away under the pretense that he was sent for war essential work to the East-- that's what my mother was told-- she was afraid that something would happen to her, that they'd send her off too.

And besides-- well, of course, there was also-- I don't think that was much involved. There was a lot of bombing. Augsburg got bombed very severely because they had a lot of war industry there. But I don't think that had anything to do with my mother trying to hide out until the end of the war. By that time, they knew the war was going to end pretty soon.

And after the war, the first thing that happened is-- I don't go into that. I got a letter. I was in the Pacific, and I got a letter from the CIC that they had found my mother, and that she's made herself be known once the American army took over, and informed me about my father being sent to Theresienstadt, and that they were trying to get him-- trying to get him out to bring him back. And the next letter that came was from the military governor of Augsburg, on a personal letter, that they went to Theresienstadt, and they got him out, and that they appointed him mayor of Augsburg, Oberbürgermeister of Augsburg.

So the curious thing about this thing in my life was that somehow, the army kept track of me. I changed my name. They kept track of that. They knew what unit I was in. The Counterintelligence Corps knew my address. I mean, I didn't do anything to be known in Augsburg from a military unit.

So they-- somehow, they had me on ice and were watching me, even though I got sent to the Pacific. I've never found out what-- the mechanics of all that. All I know is the results.

[? Be ?] interesting to know if they did that with all the refugee military personnel.

No, I don't think so. I think they had something on me, because they knew-- they knew my parents were still in Germany.

So in '38, were you still there for Kristallnacht?

No, I left in April. The Kristallnacht wasn't until the fall sometime, six months or so later. My leaving was coincident with the takeover of Austria.

The German troops marched into Austria at the beginning of April, and as I recall, somewhere in the middle of April is when they had these fake elections. In between that time is when I left. But I think that wasn't planned. That it was just coincidence.

Was your father imprisoned at that time?

No. When I left, my father was not imprisoned, because-- my father was imprisoned several times in the years prior to that. And like I said, they'd let him go, then they'd take him in again. Well, how are they determined when he was going to be in jail and when he wasn't, I don't know, and I don't think he knew. They just wanted to put him in jail, and then, most of the time, he was being questioned about his clients-- the Jewish clients that he had.

So what happened at Kristallnacht at your family's home?

I have never found out. They just stayed in their apartment. And now, from what I understand-- I've never talked about this, but from what I understand, my father didn't have to wear the star because he was-- I mean, I've read this elsewhere, that the partners of mixed marriages, neither one of them had to wear the star. So if he went out, at least he wasn't seen on the street as a Jew. Kristallnacht, if you were found on the street, chances are you were going to be in trouble. But I'm sure he didn't go out in the street either.

So he was able-- then, for a time, when he was out, he was able to make those arrangements for you to leave the country?

Oh, yes, he made the arrangements. And they took me to Hamburg and put me on a ship.

Do you remember the name of the ship?

Yeah.

[INAUDIBLE]

It was the Manhattan. It was an American ship. He bought the ticket.

And my father told me, when he got me on the ship, he says, now you're going to be on an American ship. You're going to be on American soil. Nobody can touch you anymore.

How old were you at the time?

I was almost 16. 15 and eight or nine months. There were quite a few Jewish children that were doing-- coming to the United States on an individual basis. They were sponsored by an American relative like myself.

Was there any group leader with the--

No, I think it was just-- they all spoke German to each other. So we got to know--

Then you were part of the group?

We weren't, well--

Informally?

Informally, a group formed there of all these immigrants. And then, in New York, they had some old friends of my parents that had emigrated to New York. They had me there for a couple of weeks, and then they put me on a train to come to San Francisco.

Three days, right?

Yeah.

It took about three days?

I think it was three days, two or three nights. Anyway, we had to change in Chicago. And I really didn't know what was going on.

Like in Chicago, I was all worried what the hell was going to happen to me here, because he had to change trains and I didn't speak enough English to understand what was going on. So--

So when you came, you did not know English?

Well, the little bit that you learned at school. You know, school English, but no conversation really. Not the way they taught languages.

It was usually the King's English that we learned over there.

Pardon?

It was the King's English that we learned.

Well, yes, but--

Different pronunciation.

I couldn't hold a conversation. I could say a few words, and I had great difficulty understanding. On the train, nice people-- some of them must have been of German descent that knew some. They weren't German. They had broken German.

They'd speak to me and they tried to explain to me what was going on in Chicago. But I remember that I really didn't understand what they were saying. You had to get off the train, go into a taxicab, and it'd take you off to another train, because those two railroads didn't connect in the same station in Chicago. And so here I was all concerned, what's going on with me? They're putting me in the cab, in the taxi cab, and I was supposed to be on the train to San Francisco. So anyway, that was an experience that I don't forget so easy.

Yeah.

I would say--

When you left, were you concerned about your parents' safety?

Well, of course. But what can you do about it, you know? And with my father still doing a reasonable amount of work, that part, I knew he wasn't going to starve to death. And we had every three months, we could write about 25 words, letters when I was here. It took about three months for a round trip. But all we could say is, we're still OK, you know? But my mother couldn't mention when my father was off to jail, I mean, if there was any problems. So that--

She couldn't mention it. It would be censored.

No, even though it was done by the Red Cross, with all the bureaucracy, they went from the German Red Cross to the Swiss Red Cross, from the Swiss Red Cross to the American Red Cross, but the German Red Cross had access to whatever you said. So she couldn't say anything much other than, hey, we're still eating and we're still alive. That's really all those 25 words would let you do.

So you got to San Francisco?

So I got to San Francisco, and [? within ?] [? the ?] first two weeks, Warren [? Hirsch took-- ?] he'd gotten here, San Francisco, six months before me on a Kindertransport. He took me under his wing and helped me learn English more and introduced me around school. And so he was my initial mentor.

Warren Hirsch and I, his family and our family, we see each other frequently. We go to one-- we go to the Hanukkah party at Warren Hirsch, or celebration at Warren Hirsch, and he comes to Christmas for us every year. We've been doing that ever since we started family in the mid-'50s. And now, the second, the younger generation has taken over the parties, because we're too old to handle all those people. Between all my family and his, we have 20, 30 people there-- kids and grandchildren.

And who was the family that you came to?

The family I came to, that was the one through-- that fostered-- very good Catholics, the name of Povey. I'm still in contact with their grandchildren. And they had another foster. They have a son of their own and-- a foster son, another boy and myself, and lived in the Richmond district. And that's how come I went to Washington High School there. So I kept in touch with them to this day. Also, see--

And how was--

Both foster brothers are dead at this time. But the widow of one is still around, and we see her once in a while.

How was life for you at that time, adapting to another country, the language?

Well, language, that took a few months. It got better and better, and eventually, we had no problem language-wise in the schools. I mean, it was a day-and-night difference. We learned how to-- once we got the hang of the American schools, we were like any of the other kids, I guess, because of how the refugees, we stuck together. We had a common bond there. But we didn't live together.

All the German Jewish refugees, I don't think any of them stayed at Homewood Terrace. Warren Hirsch stayed for a little while, but eventually, he was sent off to a foster home. And I don't know the reason, but all the immigrants, the German refugees, ended up outside of Homewood. To my knowledge, Homewood didn't keep any of them except as a short-term way station to go on to a foster home.

Does the group-- has that particular group been getting together, the ones that were at Homewood Terrace, other than your close friends?

Well--

Have they kept--

Oh, the other thing, Homewood did send us, yeah, for a while, maybe on Saturdays, maybe for a year at least. It must have been close to that. On Saturdays, Homewood was going to send us off to a German lady that gave us English lessons. That was something that Homewood helped out so that we could get-- integrate much faster that way. And the people that I mentioned before that were in the German class in Augsburg, we went to English lessons on Saturday.

And now, one of your father's brothers was here? That's who you came to originally?

No.

No, it was a more distant relative?

It was a much more distant relative. It was, I would say-- well, actually, it was a first cousin. It was the mother of this attorney Altman in San Francisco that provided the affidavit for me. So the first cousin of my father's.

She had-- she lived in Portland, but she made-- prior to then, obviously, prior to the Nazi time, she made trips to Germany probably every couple of years. And they were together in Germany whenever she came. She would stay in Augsburg.

I don't recall. I was a little boy. But she stayed maybe a week or two, I don't know, in Augsburg. And then, she'd stay in Munich for a while with the rest of the family. In other words, his first cousin's mother was a Dreifuss.

Prior to the war, I imagine, but did your parents ever consider that they would leave Germany?

I don't think they considered it until the Kristallnacht.

Oh, even that late?

Well, my father was in the position where he was hoping things would turn around, in spite of his problems that he was having. And by the time that he really decided-- come to the United States, you're an attorney. What did these lawyers do that came to the United States? I mean, nothing. All you could do is find some kind of a job sweeping, or elevator operators. I've heard of many of them. And a few were lucky and got to be accountants, maybe. But I don't know, I've never heard of a German lawyer coming here and becoming an American lawyer, like going to law school.

So anyway, that was one of the things-- that he had, professionally, no prospects. And when the Kristallnacht came, he realized it. He got off, and the cousin in San Francisco provided another affidavit. But by that time, he was number 50,000 on the list, and the war came along before he could be interviewed or get a visa to come.

When your mother went to move in with the sisters, was she able to sell your furniture or belongings, or what happened?

I think, no, the furniture-- well, for one thing, the apartment house where they live got bombed, and a lot of it was destroyed. But a few things did survive, and they just stayed there until after my mother's-- until my father came back.

And then, they-- of course, he came back. He was the mayor of the city. They provided a house for him to live, and whatever pieces of furniture and whatnot that had been salvaged was moved into this new house.

All right.

This house, incidentally, was also-- this is how things go-- this house had belonged to a Jewish family then had been confiscated by the city. And now the city owned it. And now, the new Jewish mayor got to live in it. [LAUGHS] Isn't that something?

When you left, what were you allowed to take? Were you allowed to take some--

Oh, I got \$10. And there was no limit on, I guess, the baggage, if you could pay it, if you could [INAUDIBLE]. So my mother bought all kinds of new clothes, and some of them were totally useless once I got here. She got right down to giving me a set of knives and forks, and a plate. And they gave me a complete what they called an [GERMAN].

Yeah.

Now, like I say, a lot of it was useless, but I had a great big steamer truck full of stuff. And there's another interesting sidelight. I never forget, when the steamer, when the trunk arrived at Homewood Terrace, they told me that it cost \$35 for that trunk to be shipped from New York to-- or from the dock, or from the train, whatever. \$35 was a lot of money in those days. But the interesting part is many, many years later, when the Germans compensated me from my father who spent the money to send me here, they come up with \$35-- coincidentally, the same amount of money-- which I got in the mid 50s, or late 50s.

And they-- typically German-- they had it all written down. Of course, we couldn't provide receipts for it. My father didn't keep receipts from my trip. So they estimated it. We took an estimate.

My father's former law partner was doing this in Germany. They estimated how much it cost my train from Oxford to

Hamburg, how much it cost them to ship to New York, and how much it cost my train to San Francisco. And that came to what was then 350 Reichsmarks. But when the [INAUDIBLE] reform, or the correction of the money market in Germany occurred, Reichsmarks were exchanged for 10 Deutsche Marks, 10 to 1, so the 350 ended up to be \$35.

But they did give me 5,000 marks for my loss of education, or whatever the technicality was. And that was also a legal problem, because the first thing, the Germans found out that I went to school here on the GI Bill. So they said they didn't owe me anything, because the American government paid for my education. But then my father's law partner got in the act and worked this out somehow, so they got the 5,000 marks.

At the time when I got to 5,000 marks, plus the \$35 for the trunk-- for the trip, rather.

For the whole trip, actually.

For the whole trip. And the marks was about \$1,200 or so, because it was still a 4:1 exchange rate at that, and I don't see-- yeah. Anyway, that was pretty close to what I made for a week's work in-- no, for a month's work. That's about how much I made for a month working in the pharmacy. So this whole education compensation amounted to a month's salary.

But the Germans do all this. I mean, that's in them. It may not mean a thing, but whatever they do, it's going to be done according to the numbers.

Right. When your mom was with the sisters and your father in Theresienstadt, I guess they didn't communicate.

Oh, no, of course not.

Of course not.

No.

So they met again after he was released, then?

Yeah, I've been-- when my father-- when the Army got my father out of Theresienstadt, then they put him on-- They found out through my mother that my father was taken away. I don't know the details. I wasn't there.

But the first contact was between the American military and my mother. That was that phase of it. But then, whatever was going on, as far as finding me, how much the military, the Counterintelligence Corps knew what they were doing, I don't know. Maybe they just found out about my father when they went in there. But they knew that they had me, they knew about me.

And then they stayed together in Germany?

Oh, yes.

And they came-- did they visit you here?

No. My father was physically in bad shape after the imprisonment. He came back, he weighed about 80 pounds-- half his normal weight, roughly. They had him, the first couple of months, he was in the hospital or extended care facility until they got back to reasonable health.

Then he took over as mayor, and then he did that for four years. And then, he went into retirement. And he was sickly all that time. And he died in 1957. And my mother lived until she was 93 years old. And she stayed in Germany, of course-- old age home and all that. And I made regular trips, about every couple of years, took some of my kids over there so they would see their grandmother. So I made a lot of trips back and forth during those years, as long as my mother was alive. And she came to the United States twice on her own.

[INAUDIBLE]

So we had as good a life as you would hope after the war.

So you finished high school in San Francisco?

Yes, I finished high school in San Francisco. Then I started to go to Berkeley. That's an interesting situation, too. I started working in the shipyards, on the swing shift, and go to Berkeley in the morning. And on my day off, I did all my lab work.

And then, the war started, and us all enemy aliens no longer could be on the street. At 6:00 or 7:00 o'clock, we had to be indoors. And here, I was working the swing shift. Bureaucracies everywhere.

I went to my boss to see if he could get me off the curfew. Nothing he could do. He says, but I can put you on the day shift. Yeah, but I was going to school in the daytime. Well, so I had to give up school to keep on making a living.

And so now here, I was the enemy alien, working in Marinship making T2 tankers. That was fine. But I had to be home and indoors by 7:00 o'clock at night.

So they allowed you to work on the Army ships as an enemy alien?

Oh, yeah. Of course, one hand not knowing what the other one was doing. But my bosses knew I was an enemy alien. And they needed help so bad, they turned their back to anything. They weren't going to do anything about it.

And then you went into the Army?

Well, then, as an alien, you weren't eligible. But then, eventually, you could be drafted, and you had a choice of either going in or not. If you didn't go, then they barred you from citizenship. That was the situation then.

At least, that's what we were told. If you don't go in, you will not be able to become an American citizen for life. That was the story.

Well, as far as we were concerned, or I was concerned, or any of the refugees concerned, this was ridiculous. I mean, we wouldn't even think of not going in. We tried to volunteer, but they didn't want to let us volunteer because we were enemy aliens. We had to wait for the draft. Again, that's how the bureaucracy works.

And then you became a citizen before going overseas?

Yeah, according to Army regulation, all of a sudden-- I heard of a number of people that fell between the cracks-- you were supposed to become a citizen before they shipped you out overseas. But I had one friend, also half-Jewish, who got shipped overseas. He was a medic in the infantry, went through combat and everything as an alien. In other words, they just didn't get to him soon enough before they shipped him out, or they forgot, or whatever.

So they made him a citizen. When he re-entered the United States after World War II, when he came back on a troop ship, before they let him out of the Army, they made him-- made him a citizen at that point. So it's interesting things. It's always, somehow, paperwork, bureaucracy.

And is that when you changed your name?

Well, yeah. The name change, you had the opportunity. They told us that the morning before you were sworn in. In the morning, you went to the courthouse and made out the paperwork, and then you had to come back in the afternoon to be sworn in by the judge. And at that point, they told us, if you want, this is your opportunity. It'll be legal to change your name, and we'll just give you a new name. You can pick it.

And I have maybe a half hour to think about it and make up a new name. A lot of people who were refugees did that, simply because you didn't-- at that point, you didn't know if you were going to be sent to Germany. And if you had a name like Cohen, Kahn, Dreifuss, whatever, you didn't want to carry that around with you in case you got close to some prisoner of war situation.

But that's unfortunate, because the American guys didn't know that. Only the refugees did that. The American guys didn't know what they were getting into, and I'm sure there was a lot of Jews taken prisoner. Nevertheless, I think they were treated OK. I've never heard of them being mistreated for that reason.

But of course, at the time, you couldn't know that. We were different than American Jews, too, because basically, we were German-born. And we could have been considered traitors or whatever, if the Nazis had decided to use that kind of an excuse.

So you changed your name?

So I changed my name.

How did you come up with your new name?

How did I come up with it? Like I said, I had a half hour to think about it. I didn't want to lose the thing entirely, so I kept parts of it.

And you changed your first name from O to A?

Well, yeah, that's a simple thing.

How do you feel your experiences have influenced your life?

Everybody asks me this question. I've been asked this question before. It's influenced my life-- I'm a very happy guy. I had all the good luck that I needed to survive these things. And you make the best of it.

I appreciate it. I'm over 80 years old now. I appreciate having a long life and having a good life. And all I can say is, looking back, it wouldn't have happened if I hadn't come to the United States.

So you were happy to be able to serve in the Army?

Oh, yeah.

[INAUDIBLE]

I think some of the other boys, too. We went down to the recruiting station after December 7, wanted to enlist. They wouldn't have us. As I said, there was still the bureaucracy. You were an enemy alien. Nobody recognized the fact that maybe you didn't have any allegiance to Germany anymore.

And that this was your--

And that now, we wanted to be-- we wanted to serve our country.

So you felt already, at that time, very American?

Oh, absolutely. Because we went to high school here, which, at a young age, that was a lot of influence there. Pledge of Allegiance every day, national anthem.

"God Bless America?"

I even took ROTC in high school. Took it in college again, and I spent 33 years with the American military.

You were in the reserves?

Yeah.

And were you called upon again while you were in the reserves?

Well, there, again, maybe it was luck. I was in a unit that was not called up in Vietnam and that was not called up in Korea. Well, Korea, I served a few months at Letterman Hospital, more or less on a voluntary basis, on active duty. I'd been in contact with them through the reserves, and they had lost their pharmacy officer. He was shipped off to Japan to back up. So I was given temporary active duty to replace him. But it was no big deal, because I lived in San Francisco, and I just went to work every morning at Letterman Hospital.

So I mean, that was-- just as a young lieutenant, it wasn't a bad experience, and I was glad to help out for the time being. But my regular reserve hospital would-- they wanted to keep these hospitals and the reserve hospitals together. They didn't break them up. And as long as you were assigned to those units-- of that type, not only hospitals, but other units too-- we weren't called up in Korea. The only people that were called up were people that had no reserve assignment of that kind.

So again, a couple of my classmates that took ROTC, we had about 15 people in the ROTC. Among those were only myself, one fellow who had a real hardship situation with his family that didn't go to Korea or Germany, didn't go going full-time duty, and two of them got killed in Korea. They were medical officers in the front lines, and when the Chinese came down, they'd overrun all these aid stations. And usually, the pharmacist was the second one. The doctors would go off and run away, and the pharmacists would stay with the wounded. And that's how the North Koreans and the Chinese would kill everybody when these aid stations were overrun.

It's very interesting that you had originally thought about going into engineering, then you worked in the shipyards, and then you became a pharmacist-- which is really a different kind of engineering, also.

Well, no, I thought I was going to be a chemical engineer. So I had some chemistry background when I was-- before the war, when I was still going to school, college. The reason for becoming a pharmacist, I think Warren Hirsch influenced me. And also, he was a pharmacist.

Also, if I had gone, continued on with chemistry or chemical engineering, there really wasn't much in the way of employment on the West Coast at that time. And the prospects of that, plus the fact that in order to be a good-- or get along in that profession, you would have to get the master's degree, and I'd just run out of time. I wanted to get to the point where I could make a living. And the pharmacy thing was the compromise that could be done in three years or so, and then go out and--

What did you do initially in the Army during the Second World War?

During the Second World War, I was in the Signal Corps, and I was a radio repairman. They sent me to school. And the only thing was, I had a certain amount of physics and mathematics-- took two years. So I went to a six-month course for radio repair, and I was assigned to a unit that actually didn't repair, but we were building up radio stations throughout the Pacific Islands.

Whenever an island was taken away from the Japanese, re-established the military on the island, they had to have a radio station. So I was on a team that went out there and set up these radio stations. And I wasn't in real combat, although there were a couple of incidents where some Japanese stragglers would shoot at us in the morning. But that wasn't anything serious, although a couple of my buddies did get wounded.

But I never got close to it. I mean, I never got wounded. They just never managed to hit me.

So and you mentioned before, while you were in the Pacific, then, in the Army is when you got information through the Army that your mother was-- that they had spoken to your mother, or found where your mother was?

That they found her, yeah.

And then your father.

And then, of course, the communication between them while I was still in the Army was really all unofficial through military that was stationed in Augsburg. In other words, we were writing each other private letters. It was generally the military governor of the city that did this for a number of-- maybe. I can't tell you how long, but well over a year, that they would forward letters from my mother, and forward my letters to them. In other words, I'd write to the military governor. He would give the letters to my mother and my father.

But you were able to communicate in that way?

Yeah, we were still in a state of war, and there was no direct mail service for the first year or two, I guess. And the communication was strictly on a QT basis between myself and-- as long as I was still in the Army, you see, we were still-- Germany had been occupied not that long before the war was over in the Pacific, see? So it was really communication that was taking place with two military people-- myself, even though I was only a corporal at the time, and the major or lieutenant colonel that was the military government. We were writing only through military channels with each other.

So when did you meet your wife?

My wife? Well, this was the [PERSONAL NAME] family. This is another story that-- Jewish wife and a German husband. She came after the husband, from what I heard, stayed with her, and they had three children. And she survived, but after the war was over, they got a divorce. And she came over here with her children, but the oldest son had come before the war with the other two children, and he came.

So anyway, the oldest son Hans and I, we were-- well, we were all friendly together and had been buddying up quite a bit. And we had a New Year's party. And the New Year's party, they invited a friend of his sister's whom I met there, and then she became my wife. I was there with another girl.

And Ruth-- actually, the way the story went, Ruth, the way it really went, Ruth needed-- she was in training, nurse's training at Mount Zion. And she was on a graveyard shift. There was a New Year's party. She came for the party, but she had to be back in the hospital by midnight. And I volunteered to drive her there, to drive her back to the hospital.

So I did miss the champagne at midnight, but I managed to find a nice girl that way. And after a week or two, I called her up for a date. And that led to the rest of it. She finished her nurse's training, but after that, she did most of her nursing at home, with raising the kids.

And you had already finished your schooling for--

Yeah.

Pharmacist?

Yeah, I was-- I had finished school. And that year-- well, before we got married, while she finished nurse's training, I was with Letterman. And after that, after we got married, I got out of that.

And I had a couple of jobs before I-- that weren't very satisfactory before I ever [? met ?] [? her. ?] But then I had worked for [INAUDIBLE] Pharmacy, which was one of the better places in San Francisco, for 10 years. And after that,

we decided to move out of the city, and I got to work at Stanford.

And stayed at Stanford for 25 years, retired from Stanford. And for a year or so-- a couple of years, maybe-- I got called back to Stanford whenever they got into a shortage of personnel. But that went on for, maybe, five or six years, and I did a little volunteering for the Air Force in their pharmacy at Moffett Field.

And then, through a coincidence, I was at Kaiser Hospital, and I brought my wife there for some medical care. And I was walking around the hall. One of my former colleagues from Stanford was a supervisor in the pharmacy there. He happened to run into me, and he says, come to work. We need you. So now I'm working for Kaiser Hospital three days a week.

That's terrific.

I don't usually tell people I'm 80 years old, but some of them do know.

You don't have to tell. So no retirement for you.

Well, like I said, I'm semi-retired. [LAUGHS]

And tell us a little bit about your family. I know you have several children. Just their names, and what they do now.

Yeah, let's see, the oldest is Philip. He's married. They don't have any children. He's a physicist for Sandia Labs in Albuquerque. He's not an administrator. He's a technical person. He's the highest rank that they have, whatever it is.

The next one is Christopher. He has his own thing going. He has always been a tinkerer, and he makes small robotic devices that he either-- some of it, he works out of his home doing that. And things are still going in spite of the downturn. People are always-- whatever's going on, the devices he makes save people money, or labor. So he's still got business going there.

So next one is [? Marianne. ?] She works for Lockheed. She has a degree in construction management, but what she does is run their training programs for Lockheed. Married to an Iranian immigrant who has lost his job with Sun Micro and can't find anything else to do, so he's been out of work for a year or more. That's the only part of the downturn that seems to hurt in our family.

And the next one is married to a Chinese, American-Chinese, and lives in Walnut Creek. He's a construction engineer that deals with water treatment plants, and sewage plants, and that sort of thing. And with the increase in population, things are still moving in that field. And she's a food consultant. She does recipes consulting for a number of firms on a contract basis. That's the daughter, Rosemary.

And then we have Anita. She's married to a CEO of a small movie company in Los Angeles, lives in a great big house. And the youngest one is Elizabeth. And she's an assistant professor of accounting at Oregon State [INAUDIBLE]. The oldest and the youngest have PhDs. And I managed to-- I joke about this. I put them through college by bringing my bag lunch every day to work. [LAUGHS]

[INAUDIBLE] Sounds like a wonderful family. And you have a lot of grandchildren.

They all have children, a total of 12 grandchildren there. [? All ?] except the oldest.

How much of your life story do your children and grandchildren, if they're old enough--

Well, I made them take German in high school, but none of them remembers anything. So unfortunately, a lot of material is in German, and whatever I can explain to them. But they're pretty much involved in daily life, making a living, taking care of their kids.

They know my story, of course. They've seen my videos. But we don't talk about it anymore.

One thing, going back, that's very unusual is about how your father then went back and became the mayor of Augsburg, of your town. Can you talk a little bit more about how that came to be and how he felt about it?

Really, there's little I can say about it. It's-- way about life. When I visited there while he was mayor-- actually, early on, kids were little, I only went there in 1948 while he was in office. The next time I went was 1952. He was already retired.

And, well, there were all kinds of incidents. But I only, in two weeks that I was there, didn't have that much contact. But of course, everybody wanted to meet the mayor's son and wanted to meet the mayor and all this sort of thing, because all of a sudden, nobody was Nazis. They all told us the wonderful stories they did for Jews that maybe they did and maybe they didn't.

And, of course, my father could identify the anti-Nazis that had been underground and that he had known from the past, some of which had done time and at least didn't go to the death camps. But these were Gentiles that were anti-Nazis that my father managed to find and generally placed, in positions where they'd be useful in the city. There was a couple of them that were half-Jewish.

And the big push, initially, was to get the Nazis out, and there was nobody there to take over, other than what managed-- too few anti-Nazis could be found. But whatever was found, my father could place into things like various departments of the city. And that was his primary function. And initially-- that is, glad to say-- is that the Americans were very much anti-Nazis.

I got letters from the military governor. She says, we will throw every Nazi out. We won't have a Nazi. And that went fine, until we started getting-- the Iron Curtain started coming up. And then, all of a sudden, the tide had turned, and Nazis started getting some of their jobs back-- at least the lower-level ones, not the biggies.

By that time, my father was out of office. But the administration was really in shambles, because every key administrator was a Nazi, you know? And the Americans wouldn't let them work.

[INAUDIBLE] the city was, I don't know, 60% of the living quarters in the city had been destroyed in the heavy bombings. Augsburg was an important target for us because the Messerschmitt works were in Augsburg, and the MAN, Maschinenfabrik Augsburg-Nürnberg. You see those buses running around here? They come from there, same place I come from, those articulated buses.

They're made there. I mean, elsewhere, too, but at least they're the ones that started that. And so they were making vehicles and diesel motors where the submarines were being made in Augsburg. So that was a heavy target, heavy target for us.

And that's why all the civilian destruction, because we did blanket bombing. Or the British did that. We did it, supposedly, only in the daytime. The British did the night bombing with firebombs, mostly, and just blanketed whole cities. So that's how the house my parents lived in was destroyed.

Do you know what happened to the Jewish community in Augsburg?

Well, I have a book at home with complete records of who-- of all the people that died, every one of them. Because a young-- a person about-- he was just a young boy during the Nazi time, but he became the chief editor of the paper, newspaper in Augsburg, and he sort of made this as a sideline, is to get the history of all the Jews of the city and what happened to them.

He has files. You want to know what happen to any resident of Augsburg, whether they immigrated to Brazil or Israel or died in the concentration camps, he has been able to make a complete record of that. And he published some of that. They have these books.

So we became-- because of that, we were quite friendly. I emailed with him every few, every couple of months. And when I go back, I was-- he's retired now. When I go back, we always spend a few days together.

So as far as the Jews of Augsburg, I'm sure that similar things happened in a lot of other cities in Germany, because the newest generation that's grown up, many, many of them have an interest, a historical interest in this. And they write, and have written books and unearthed a lot of the Nazi records, too.

And your father, do you know-- did he talk to you about how it was for him to then be in this position, after the things that he had experienced?

After what he experienced? Yeah, it's still back to the fact that these people were Germans, and they never considered themselves anything different. After the war, he felt it was his duty to do his part in rebuilding the country.

How was he received by the [INAUDIBLE]?

How he was received-- well, like I say, I only spent very little time there. But he brought to surface anybody that had somehow, some reason, for some reason resisted the Nazis and put them in position. And, of course, everybody like that was on his side.

And other people, well, the known Nazis he just ignored. And there are all the others that never were Nazis-- so they said. And they all-- to them, he was-- well, they all were on his side or on the anti-Nazi side after the war. They all voted Social Democrat and CSU, and these survivors of what used to be the groups that were Nazi, they were such a minority at that time that you could ignore them.

But, of course, I never heard anybody say, hey, things are bad because we have a Jew for a mayor. [LAUGHS]

Well, the thing is they wouldn't have dared.

Oh, there was still a lot of antisemitism. But of course, I-- nobody would-- how would I know? They wouldn't show it to me if they were antisemitic.

Were you disturbed about the reunification of Germany? I mean, how did you feel about that?

Well, no. This was something that-- the only thing that could have happened if you had two separate Germanies. But with the political situation then with the Russians and all that, reunification was really the only thing that should have happened.

When the Russians got collapsed, what would you do with East Germany? It might have been better for them to stay separate. I don't know. But I think it's-- to make two countries out of Germany wouldn't have done anybody any good either.

You said that you received these reparations. You didn't get any other reparations? Just your education and the \$35?

The 5,000 marks and the \$35. Well, actually, what I got went to charity anyway. I didn't want to keep it. I kept the \$35. The 5,000 marks I gave away. I didn't feel comfortable with it, and I didn't need it at the time. It wasn't that much money. As I say, it was a month's pay.

Do you feel that another Holocaust could occur?

That's a good question, and-- I kind of doubt it. But with the Muslims' and Muhammadans' anti-Jewish feelings, there could be something local. But on the scale that the Nazis were able to perpetrate, I can't see that happening again.

But the Muslims aren't going to give up. And that's not just-- those radicals, it isn't just a matter of Jewish. That's a matter of everybody else besides them. I mean, they're as anti-Christian or anti-Buddhist as they are antisemitic. But

that's a rather small, small number of people, and I don't think they'll be able to really do much of anything, as long as the rest of the Arabs don't go with them.

Did you say you had some family that went to Israel?

Pardon?

Did you have some family that went to Israel?

Well, rather distant. You know, it's my cousin and my wife went to Israel. She married a-- married a fellow who was one of the Jews in the British Army. Came over here, went to-- got an agricultural degree and Davis and went back to Israel, with the reason he went to Davis is, because of the climatic conditions and so on, he could learn that.

And then, right early on, as soon as he was-- must have been in the mid-'50s-- he went back to Israel then, and used his knowledge what he learned to Davis, and became some sort of an agricultural official in Israel. And at one point, he was the agricultural attache in London for Israel. And somebody threw a letter bomb, and he got injured badly in the Jewish-- in the Israeli embassy in London.

But he died. And my wife's cousin who still survived, but she's also close to 80. And she has children and grandchildren that all served in the army in Israel. There's some grandchildren that are still in it. But we have, oh, twice-a-year letter contact with her.

Are there lessons that you would want to pass on to future generations from things you've learned from the experiences you've had?

Yeah, what can you say? It's the Judeo-Christian doctrine to pass on, do unto others what you would like to have done to yourself. That sort of puts that in a nutshell, if that answer your question. And if that's what everybody did, we wouldn't have all these problems in the world.

Mm-hmm. Had you recorded your history in as full a way as we're doing today? How did you feel about doing this today?

Well, there's today it's-- I've done it before for the Germans. You know, this editor from Augsburg came over and made videos of myself and a number of other former Augsburgers that live in the United States. Most of them-- virtually all of them-- live on the East Coast. But he came out here to California to make a video for me that he gives to the schools around the area of Augsburg, [? Bavaria ?] for schoolchildren to look at. I've got a copy of that, but it's all in German, so if you saw it-- So that's what I can pass on, what I'm doing now and what I've done in the past in the way of recording the history of myself, I guess, or my family.

We want to thank you very much for that. Each story is so unique in its twists and turns and certainly--

Well, my interest is to have some of this preserved for future generations.

Yeah, that's exactly what we plan to do.

And what your organization does is a great thing. And I'm very glad and happy that I am being included in this, when, in most other cases, I'm an outsider.

Well, we feel it's an important story to be preserved and recorded. And you have lived it.

That, I'm very glad that you're doing that.

Thank you.

<https://collections.ushmm.org>
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection