

Where you were born and when?

Well, I was born in a little town called Darmstadt, about 15 miles south of Frankfurt in 1922 in September. And I lived there until we left Germany.

What was life like?

Well, of course, I'm a product of after the First World War, was born in '22, and things were not too rosy for everybody in Germany. But as far as the Jewish life was concerned, it was very active. And we were members of the Orthodox congregation there. And we had Sunday school. We had regular school. And life was-- we were never rich people there. We were, let's say, lower middle class. And everything was fairly normal, except as a child, I used to notice as many times they used to have hunger marches going through the town, because there were a lot of unemployed people.

And later on, we saw the first Nazi uniforms. And I do remember as a small boy that my mother saw them pass by our window one day, and she told me then and there. She says, if they ever get the power, they're going to kill us all. I remember that very distinctly. And then later on, when the Nazis came to power, of course, most of the Jewish people, including my father who was a veteran of the First World War, decorated. He thought, well, this won't last very long. The governments have come and gone there over the years, and this will be another passing phase.

And so we had never even thought in the beginning of leaving Germany. My dad was working yet for his cousins as an office manager. And however, I noticed in school, tremendous antisemitism. And during the day, if I went home from school, I either had to run or pull out my belt and defend myself from gangs of youth who wanted to fight me. And the parents, our parents, noticed that. And so they decided that they would form their own schools, since we had a lot of Jewish teachers.

Because the Jewish teachers were all let go by the Nazis. They couldn't work for the government any longer. So we had our own Jewish school. And it was, of course, heaven it was. We didn't have the antisemitism anymore. And we had our Jewish teachers, and we had a very normal school life. But then gradually we noticed that things got worse and worse for us. And of course, many, many people already were leaving. Those who were able to leave who had visas to go other countries. And that wasn't easy to come by anymore after, let's say, 1936.

Most of the countries closed their borders to us. But we were lucky that I don't know if you want to know the story, that how we got very lucky that we got a waiting number through a shipping company that solicited us, a waiting number to come to the United States. And my dad took the number. And so when the time came that we wanted to leave, we wrote a relative in the United States. And he wrote us back that he was a very sick man. He couldn't be responsible for all of us.

So he sent an affidavit for me. But he gave us another name of a man who had the same name as we did in Virginia. We wrote them, and they sent us affidavits. And so we were able in 1900 and late '38, to get an appointment to come to the American consulate in Stuttgart, to leave Germany.

But of course, the main thing was in 1938, I think you're all familiar with the Kristallnacht. And during that day, I was in Frankfurt as an apprentice. And I was home that day. And that was on a Thursday, November the 9th. And I went home. And I saw the temples were burning, or one temple was burning. So we rushed to my temple, I did. And when I walked inside the temple, I went through the schoolhouse which was connected to the temple. And I saw inside the temple a big lot of mattresses soaked with some kind of a liquid. It wasn't burning yet.

So we ran in there. Two of my friends, we wanted to save some Torahs. But when I was in there, we were arrested by the Gestapo. And they noticed our age, and they sent me home. So when I came home, the Gestapo came to our house and looked for my father who had just left to check on his cousins. And so they arrested me instead.

And they took me into the Gestapo headquarters, where we met a lot of my fellow Jewish people from my town. Most of them, of course, were much, much older than I was. I was only 16 at the time. And we sat there all day. And at night,

they picked us up by trucks and by private cars, and that drove us to Buchenwald.

Now, the funny thing was that in the car that I was riding in, the chauffeur who had an SA uniform on, he was our baker around the corner from us. And in the back was sitting an SS man who was a butcher's son that we knew. And so they drove us for hours and hours it seemed, to Buchenwald. We got there at midnight. And there the fun began, so to speak.

I was, as a 16-year-old, very, very scared. And I don't know how to describe it really. But we were all chased into the camp. And in front of the camp, I've never forgotten. I could never figure out at that time what that sign means in English. It means work makes free. Arbeit macht frei. And I didn't know what they were talking about. But in any event, the first night there was very, very horrible.

They put us into a half-finished, huge barrack, which had no floor yet. And they told us to lie down on the floor. And anybody who got up, they shot bullets over their heads. So the next day, we were put into a barracks, which I think that most people saw the pictures what they looked like. In the inside, there were three tiers of boards we slept on. And usually there were so many people in there that every night some other part of the barracks boards would collapse, and they fall on top of each other.

And anyway I stayed there for four weeks. And about three or four days after we were there, we got our first meal, which was, I must say, I didn't even miss the food. The only thing we missed there was water. There was no water. And so the only time we got water is when it rained. And we fetched water in any kind of container we could lay our hands on.

And I remember this fourth or fifth day. They took me and all those under 35, and put us into work battalions, where they gave us a typical uniform. And of course, I don't know if you're familiar with the signs that were worn there. Each one knew exactly what he was in for. If he had a green triangle and you were not Jewish, it was a criminal.

If it was a red triangle you were a communist, a political prisoner. If it was a-- a purple triangle, you were a Jehovah witness. And if you had a yellow triangle, you were Jewish with a star, made a star out of. And this, I was put in one of those barracks. And the man in charge was a prisoner himself. He was a brutal person who would just as well knock you down and sort of look at you.

So I stayed there at night, one night only. And I remember the only good thing about it was they had all the water you wanted. And I drank a lot of water. And the next day, we had to report for work, about 5 o'clock in the morning. And the Kommandant of the camp was walking around. And he went to his loudspeaker, whatever he had there. And he screamed out that he saw-- he found out that there was a young punk in here, 16 years of age, and he wants that punk to step forward. So I had to step forward.

And they told me to go back where I came from. So I took my uniform off again, and I went back to the other camp where all the people from my town were. And we stayed there. I personally was never physically attacked. I saw a lot of it. And the brutality was usually meted out at night. They had these long-- I guess what do you call them? Tails of-- cat tails.

And they would pick out people who may have done something wrong during the day, and beat them 25 lashes, or whatever lashes they decided on, or until they became unconscious. And, of course, the food there was unspeakable, not inedible. But there was one incident that you may be interested in.

On a Sunday, the reason we were in the camp was because at that time the German attache in Paris was shot and killed by a Jewish man by the name of Grynszpan. I don't know if you knew this. That's why they rounded up all the Jews in Germany.

But on that Sunday when the funeral was held, from this von Rath was his name. We had to sit down on the camp grounds there all day. And in the afternoon, somebody came and brought us food. And sitting next to me was a very close friend of my father, and who looked up and saw this young man serving the food. And he said, my God. He said, what are you doing here? It was his nephew who had emigrated to Israel. And he was in a concentration camp. And we

found out that his nephew had stolen the car in Israel, in Palestine at that time, and the English sent him first to Czechoslovakia, and the Czechs sent him to Germany. And that's how he wound up in a concentration camp.

And so after a few more weeks, I was notified the night before that I would be released the next day. And with 250 others, I was released. And of course, we looked terrible. We hadn't taken a bath or a shower in four weeks. We were filthy. So they told us not to go in the Depot, in the railroad station, to the regular passengers. We should go to third class.

So as soon as we walked into the railroad station in Weimar, there were many Jewish ladies. Excuse me--

Take your time.

They were volunteer Jewish ladies who noticed us right away, and they brought us food, and gave us comfort, bought our railroad tickets, so that we could go home.

And then when I finally got home, it was early in the morning. And my dad had disconnected all the bells to our apartment, because the Nazis would play tricks on you, and they put matchsticks into the bell. So they would keep on ringing so we had disconnected them. And I had no way to get in there.

And so I picked up some pebbles on the street, and I threw them against the window where my parents were sleeping. And after about three or four pebbles, they heard something was going on, and I called to my dad that I was home.

And I never heard my dad scream like he screamed that day. So I went in. And then I made every effort, you know, to get out of Germany. I had to report to the Gestapo headquarters in Frankfurt. And they told me that I must leave Germany by December 31, or they would put me back.

And I did report there. And I told them that I was no longer working in Frankfurt, that I wanted to report to my hometown. And they told me I could do that. But that the deadline would stand. So when I went to my home town and reported to Gestapo headquarters there, I told them what they told me. And they said, well, he said, you know, we cannot make you go on a certain day. But we advise you to go as soon as you can.

And so it-- I waited and waited. I couldn't go get a visa to anywhere. Our papers for the United States had not come through yet. And so we waited until about a couple of months later, I got a call to come up to the Gestapo headquarters. And of course when you were called to the Gestapo headquarters, as a Jew, that was like the death penalty, so to speak.

So I went up there and reported. And they came out with just with the stuff they had taken away from me when they arrested me. They want to give it back to me. And they told me to check it. I said, no everything is all right. No, I had to check it out. And so after, my dad was relieved. He waited for me downstairs, when I came back. And so we waited around until September of '39.

The war had already broken out in Europe. And we got a call to come to Stuttgart where the American consulate was. And we got our visa there. Unfortunately, I had a little sister who was only five years old at the time. She was born prematurely. So she was not completely-- her vocal cords were never fully developed. So she wasn't able to talk very well yet. So the American consulate refused to give her a visa, only the rest of us-- my sister, my father, my mother, and myself.

And so my dad didn't know what to do. So he consulted with rabbis. And they told him, you have two other children. You have to go. So we left my sister in an orphanage. And she died in Bergen-Belsen in November of '41. She was one of the first ones to get killed in the same place where Anne Frank died. I found that out after the war through the Red Cross. I was in the service. And they got the information to me. And this month, she would have been 55.

And well, we came to the United States, like many, many other people. And our guarantor wanted us to come to San Francisco, because they thought the weather was better here for us. And so we did. And we settled here in January 1940. And I don't know what you want to know about our life here. We were always able to support ourselves.

We all worked. And until 1955, when I met my wife, and we got married. And we have a daughter who just got married. And so since I came here, I cannot complain anymore. Sometimes, I wonder, of course, why we were saved and others had to die. I don't know.

Harry?

Yes?

Going back to the years between 1936 and 1939, when you came over, what was life like?

Well, we lived. Of course, under constant fear. Because first of all, they could arrest you. We had no civil rights at all. And naturally when you want to go to a store to purchase your-- whatever you needed to buy, every store had a sign on in Germany, Jews not wanted. But if they put on the Jews not wanted, you would go in there and do your shopping. But some stores put on Jews entrance forbidden, then you couldn't go in there.

Or like for me as a young boy, '36, I was 13, 14 years old. The biggest punishment was I couldn't go to a movie house. There was no entertainment. We made our own entertainment in the Jewish community. They had their own concerts. They had their own little theater plays, and so on, and so forth. But we were talking about it not too long ago, on the swimming pool, the civic swimming pool was a sign on there. Dogs and Jews not allowed.

And you, of course, they knew-- all the non-Jewish friends that used to be your friends, they avoided you. If they saw you coming one way down the street, they would go on the other side. And it was only if they knew nobody was watching them, they would talk to you.

I know my dad had many friends. He was very active in politics for a while. And they even avoided him, only would talk to him if it was safe. As a matter of fact, when the war broke out in 1939, we all had got ration cards. Every German got ration cards within one hour after the war was declared. Every German at his ration card. And in our ration card was a J in there, Jew, you know?

But it happens too that in the city that we came from, we could purchase everything what the Germans got to. I know in Frankfurt, for instance, when there was a J in there, you couldn't buy meat products. You couldn't buy butter and things of that sort. But in our town, the merchants gave us merchandise, whatever we had coming to us know. But we didn't socialize at all with non-Jews anymore. You couldn't. Because if a non-Jew was caught talking to a Jew, that was a concentration camp, perhaps, for them.

So we just lived a very isolated life. And of course you would never-- my dad always wanted to know where I was with my sister. And so we were, of course, in fear on all times. But we were-- we never, never would have thought that in the 20th century a mad man like Hitler could want to kill, eliminate all the Jews. I mean, nobody thought of that. The times would be brutal and bad, yes. But that he would-- that he would exterminate us, I don't think any civilized person, at least, that I ever heard of, would have thought at that time.

And as we know now, that wasn't decided I believe until sometime in 1941 for the final solution. So even Hitler wanted to get us out of there. But nobody wanted us. We all know that today. That all the countries closed their borders. And so we were just hoping that we could get to some country. We tried Palestine. We tried every place. But finally, we were able to come here.

And do you remember any examples of incidences that happened when you were in Germany that were anti-Semitic, or

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Well, I'll give you one example. I had a very close friend, a school friend of mine, and I used to go to his house. He used to come to my house. But of course, after that, we didn't socialize that much anymore. But when the temples were burning this mother of this best friend of mine, a good friend of mine I should say, said right out loud on the street. They should have thrown the Jews in there too. This is how they-- this was the reaction.

The German people were anti-Semitic, a great many of them. That was before Hitler too. But my dad used to call that-- I don't know how-- he used to call it healthy antisemitism. I don't know why he called it that, but that's what he called it. But the people there lived in fear themselves, the Germans themselves. I mean if you did not pretend to be a Nazi, and if you had any kind of official position, you had to be a Nazi. Otherwise, you would lose your job and you lose your income. There's no question about that.

But naturally, we were chased on the street, from Nazis, from young men, when we went on the street and they recognized as Jews. And so like we lived a very isolated life. We had our own sports club, where Jewish boys and girls would go to. And so of course, we were isolated from the rest of the Germans. We had to be just among ourselves.

What about your dad? What was his business, and how was that affected?

My dad after the First World War, before the First World War, he was a salesman. But he wasn't married yet, after the war was over. And his mother didn't want to travel anymore. So he went to work for his cousins who were in the scrap metal business. They had quite a nice business. And he became the office manager there. He was not in his own business.

And that business was running until 1938. In the early part, I think in the middle of '38, they had a sell-out. They were forced to sell. And so my dad didn't work anymore after '38, except he did a little bookkeeping help for somebody who needed it. And that's all he did, after that-- until we were ready to go.

And I tell you, we didn't have much savings either. So, it was quite tight for us till we got out of there.

Now between '38 when he lost his business or had to sell out, in '39 when you left, what was everyday life like at home? What could you do? Was it a ghetto? Was it could you go out on the street? What was it like?

Well, yes, you could. He would go out in the street, but just to go maybe from one person's house to another person's house, to visit each other, or whatever. He would read, or he would write, or things like that. I mean it wasn't so that they would come every day and look for you. That was not the case. What got worse and worse was in 1938, it was, I believe. It could have been maybe early '39. They came to every Jewish house, and picked up all the radios. So we had no radios.

And that was a big punishment too. So we mostly sat at home, alone, and we amused ourselves while we were waiting. And then we would go to shul. And as a matter of fact, when we used to go to shul, there was usually a Gestapo agent sitting in the temple. He wanted to know what the rabbi was going to say, if anything. And everybody knew who he was. That he was Gestapo agent in temple, you know?

But it became gradually weaker and weaker, the Jewish life because people were leaving. I remember in 1939, we were still in Germany, on high holidays. And which used to be a congregation with, I just found out of 5,000 people before Hitler, there was two congregations. And there was, well, actually three. There was a little town nearby, which was part of it.

And they had 5,000 members. And we went to the high holiday services in '39, and I believe there must have been about 30, 40 people in attendance. And most of them were ready to leave. So it just got gradually less and less. There was no more Jewish life either anymore. There was no more congregations.

And it was just naturally when the war came, there was a completely different attitude. First of all, there was blackouts every night. And we really got scared, because we were afraid that some incident that we could be just picked up and taken away. So we really stayed home, and it was a very terrible punishment for a young person like me that had to be home all the time, but nothing we could do about it.

What else changed once the war came?

Well, in the beginning, there was not that much change, except like I say, for blackouts and strict rationing, and things even when they were rationed, they were not always available. But this was not just for us. It was for all the people. And of course, you wanted to get some news. And it was you had to listen and read the German papers. And you knew you were not going to get the whole story. But there was nothing we could do about it.

And so there were rumors going around of this and the rumors for that. And in the end, it didn't make any difference. We knew. I never saw a bullet fired where I came from, or a bomb dropped then. That came later, after we left. But sure, everything was you saw nothing but uniforms on the street, soldiers and so on.

And we stayed close to home. That's the most important thing. We just didn't take a chance.

Harry, from your hometown, from your friends, and cousins, and neighbors, what happened to everybody? Well, now, my father said, my father had a very small family. He had a brother who died quite young, and he had no children. He was married. And I told you about my sister. Now, my mother had a very large family. And we don't know exactly how many perished. I know one aunt of mine perished that was my father's sister-in-law. She perished. And she was the last one to take care of my sister. She lived in Frankfurt, and my sister was in the Jewish orphanage in Frankfurt. And she took care of her as much as she could, and she visited her, and she used to write to us.

But then all of a sudden in 1941, all correspondence stopped. So I only read many years later that most of these Jews were sent to the Lodz ghetto from Frankfurt. I didn't know it at that time. And so we never heard from her again either.

And on my mother's side, I had one interesting. My grandfather, for instance, lived in the state of Baden, B-A-D-E-N. And the Jews there, for some reason, all the Jews in that-- where Karlsruhe was the main town. And they he lived in a very small town where my mother was born. All the Jews were taken to France into the Pyrenees. I don't know if you know this or not. And they were sent to a concentration camp run by the French called Gurs, right on the Spanish border.

So my grandfather, and my aunt, and my uncle, they were sent there. And in the meantime, I had an aunt and uncle who lived in France. They had migrated there right after Hitler. And they lived in unoccupied France. And they tried everything to get my grandfather out of there. And he succeeded in getting him out, but he passed away the very next day they got him out of the camp. He was 79. So he had a nice age. And my aunt and uncle finally got out of that camp I believe in '41 or '42, and came to this country, by way of Africa.

But many, many, many thousands there died of starvation. And there was terrible conditions there. But they were not put to death there. They were there on orders of the German government, held by the French, the Vichy French. So this is now as far as aunts and uncles, other than that, I do not know, no. I didn't lose anybody.

You had talked about the four weeks that you were in the camp.

Yeah.

Can you tell me what the daily life was like there?

Well, the daily life was that if you got a few hours sleep at night, you got up. And believe it or not, the Orthodox always found a way to organize a service the first thing they did. They have a morning service. And then you would go outside, and I believe you got something called coffee, and some kind of a gruel, which amounted to-- I don't remember all the food. There was only it was terrible.

And then you would just hang around the camp. There was nothing to do. And all the people would stand together and talk. Sometimes you had to line up. You had to be counted and all that. And of course, things that we usually don't talk about, the worst there was the sanitary facilities. There was none. There was nothing but ditches. And if you weren't very capable of balancing yourself, you could fall into a ditch and never be seen again. There was just no facilities there.

As I mentioned, there was no way to bathe or wash yourself. There was no water there. This camp was just put up, this

part of the camp I should say, was just put up to accommodate these Jews who were coming in from the Kristallnacht. And there was no water there or anything. And so you stuck around all day. And later on, I think we were there about a couple of weeks. They had organized canteens that was where the Germans, I guess, made some money on few Jewish people. And you could buy a cracker, or a piece of chocolate.

But I had no money, so I couldn't buy anything. I think one of my relatives, it was, they gave me a little money one time to buy something. So there was actually in this camp, there was no work or anything like that. I can give you one incident which was a terrible incident. One time, the Germans decided they're going to want to do something to all the Jewish lawyers. So everybody who was a lawyer, they put them in the middle of the barrack.

And these civilized people took boards and broke their legs, because they were lawyers. And the doctors were told if anybody treats these, people they're going to put them to death. So I must say, there was a lot of heroic doctors there, because they used underwear. They used pieces of wood to make bandages, and what do you call it?

Splint.

Splints so they could function a little bit. And this was one incident. And so every day there was something else. But I don't know. It was just at a moment's notice, something like that would come up. And sometimes for two or three days, there was nothing. So it was hard to predict.

The only thing that's the worst thing there is the hopelessness you feel. You feel helpless and hopeless. You don't know whether you're going to stay there four weeks or 40 years. There was absolutely no way to know that. Unless they told you when you got out, we wouldn't know.

Any other examples you remember?

Yes. I remember a friend of mine, as a matter of fact, at the 50th anniversary of this Kristallnacht, I met the son. His father and I were in a concentration camp together. And he-- I guess lost his mind. And he wanted to commit suicide or something. He ran against the window, and ran through the window. And he was bloody all over. So the Nazis carried him out, and they put him in a chamber, what was called the water chamber. They used to put water in them. Some of them died. They blew them up with water.

Now he got the water torture. I don't know exactly what it consisted of, only what you hear, what I heard. And after about three or four days, he came out of there. But he never said another word. He was absolutely mentally completely gone. And I understand when he got home, he died very soon afterwards.

And I know one case where if you got sick, that was the end of you. There was no treatments. If you had any kind of a severe illness, you didn't get out. But the funny thing was, when you were released from there, they put you in front of a doctor. You had to strip naked. And the doctor looked you over. If you had one spot on you, they would not let you go. They would never want you to be able to tell anybody, look, what they did to me here. I know I had a tooth missing. And I had to-- I had to swear up and down that this had nothing to do with my stay in the concentration camp.

And so there was brutality, like I, said beatings practically every night that took place of somebody. Some people, of course, who lost their mind, they jumped in the electrified wires, and killed themselves that way, and so on. So this was going on all the time. And you only had to look a few feet away from me on the towers, there were these guards sitting there with their machine guns. So you couldn't go very far.

What was the cause of the brutalities? Like what happened?

You mean why there was brutalities?

Well, I tell you, when you're in a concentration camp, I think it goes for everybody. First, you get to know the character of a person. Some people are able to cope with things, and others are not. By that I mean the animal instinct often takes over. The self-preservation comes into effect. And, for instance, it was very difficult to go to sleep at night. You

wouldn't take your shoes off, because the next day, you may not find your shoes anymore, because somebody else robbed you, took your shoes. And who was it? It was fellow prisoners, right?

Or if somebody passed away, they cleaned them out if they had any jewelry on them, or any money on them. They would take that away from them. And some of these people, these who did this robbing, was our people too. They were caught by the Nazis. Because maybe they were released, or they some were sent to another camp. And before they were taken out, they had to take their clothes off, and they were stripped. And they were searched. And they found this gold and this money on them, and such, and jewelry.

And they knew that it wasn't theirs. So they beat them practically to death, if they caught them. This was one of the things people did. That's why I say it's very easy to be civilized when you live in a nice place, when you have money in your pocket. But when you're in a place like this, where you're stripped of everything but your own persona only, then a real human being comes to the fore. I would think that would happen anywhere, if you were stripped of everything, and had no hope, so to speak, and you'd do almost anything. A lot of people did that. And those were our people too.

So stealing was--

One of the things, yes. I mean this, in other words, some try to enrich themselves. They would not rob you while you were alive or anything like that. They took from the dead people. But if they needed shoes, they would steal the shoes from you. Whether they sold them or something, I don't know.

Anything else about the camps you want people to know, your experience?

Well, a camp like this shows man's inhumanity to man. That's all. And it should be a warning to every civilized person that it can happen, and to guard ourselves against that, all of us. It's very, very important because it can happen if some madman takes over.

When you went back to your town after the camp, and after Kristallnacht, what did you find?

Well, first of all, I have a friend there who we went to school together. So I knew him. He was there. First of all, the town, as I knew it was not the same anymore, because in September of '44, they destroyed about 80% of the town. The English came one night, and the whole inner city was destroyed. The place where I was born that was still there. But most of it, so I didn't recognize the city anymore.

Because what used to be the old city, which with their winding little middle-aged streets, they were all gone. And it was all modern streets now. And so what I found there was that the people, when they talk about the Nazis now, they talk about their grandparents, not their parents anymore. That's after 50 years. So when I went over there at this time, they asked us in a letter before if we were willing to appear in a school and tell our experiences under the Nazis to children.

And so when my wife and I went over there, a teacher called me on the phone. And that was on a list. And I went there. And there were 17-year-old boys and girls in the high school, and we talked. I was supposed to be there an hour. And the teacher asked me if I could stay there for two hours. And we talked and discussed what went on. And they asked questions. And they couldn't fathom some of the things that were going on.

But now I understand this new generation is learning a lot more about the Holocaust than the old one. And also, I may say, while we were there on November the 8th, 9th, 10th, all the television stations in Germany were full all night long of what went on in '38. And there were all the various memorials that were going on, and so on. It was all over and all the networks over there.

So could it happen there again? Maybe. I don't know. Who knows?

You came over here in '40?

Yeah, in December '39, we arrived in New York, right.

And what happened once you got to New York?

Well, in New York, we knew we're not going to stay there. We were actually-- we were first thought we were going to Richmond, Virginia. That's where our guarantor lived. But he had an office in New York. And he told us to go there, and they'll help us out, which we did. And they told us that we should go to San Francisco. The weather was better there. It was. And they would take care of us here till we get started.

And so we stayed in New York a few weeks, and visited around. They told us to stay around and relax. Then we went to Chicago, stayed there a few days. And then we came to San Francisco, and we reported to the Jewish Family Agency. At that time it was called the Eureka society. And they helped us out for the first two months or so. And then I got a job, with the Jewish club here, the Concordia-Argonaut Club.

And my mother got a job as I guess you'll call it as a maid, she was working cleaning houses for \$0.25 an hour. And so we slowly established ourselves until the war broke out. I don't know if you knew this. When the war broke out in December 1941, all of a sudden, we were Germans again, because there was a decree here in San Francisco and all over the West Coast that enemy aliens had to be home at 9 o'clock at night till I think 6:00 in the morning.

So all of a sudden, we were enemy aliens again. So for several weeks or months, I think, we had to stay at home at night after 9 o'clock at night. And I, for a while, had permission to go to work, because I worked till 10 o'clock at night. But that was later on taken away from us. And it was only, I believe in, maybe February 1942 that that ban was lifted.

So that we could go out again, but we were not allowed to go anywhere near the ocean, across the bay, across the Golden Gate Bridge. We could not be found near the waterfront, as enemy aliens.

Why?

Because we were considered Germans. You remember the Japanese were evacuated. The Germans and the Italians, believe it or not, were supposed to be also evacuated from here. This was later on canceled. But we were restricted. For instance, my dad wanted to work for the shipyards, to work on ships. So he was allowed only to work on one company, which had I think they were not right on the waterfront. We could not go to the waterfront.

And later on, the first time that my parents could live normal again, this was when I was drafted into the army. Then this was all taken-- that was then canceled for my parents, because I was in the service.

What happened when you were drafted? What did you do?

Oh, well I tell you the truth. I was drafted actually with limited service, because my eyesight was never very good. So I was first taken to Monterey. And from Monterey, I went to basic training in Idaho. And from Idaho, I went to Fort Lewis, Washington. And from Fort Lewis, Washington, had the first experience, believe it or not, with Germans again. Because we got prisoners of war there from the Afrika Korps.

And they put me in the hospital as interpreter when they were sick. So these were real Nazis. They were absolutely the worst. These were kind of elite troops in Africa. And then later on I was sent to South Carolina into a prisoner of war camp, German prisoners of war. Those were already just common soldiers who were not the elites anymore. And I was an interpreter there.

In your two experiences as an interpreter, did they know you were Jewish?

Yeah, I'm sure. They must have.

What was that like for you?

Well, I was warned by my commanding officer. You're here as a soldier. Your personal feelings, he said if you can't do

it, then I'll see you'll get another job. But I mean the soldiers that were there, and for instance the way I felt personally, first of all there was some I knew were anti-Nazis. Because they separated the anti-Nazis in the prison camps from the Nazis.

If you volunteered and you said you were anti-Nazis, you were sent in a separate camp. And there you were interrogated very thoroughly by all kind of agents from the government. And if you pass that, you were sent to a camp, I believe, in Massachusetts. And they trained you for civil service in the post-war Germany or something.

So there were quite a few of those who were just soldiers. I don't think after thinking about it later, many years later, that there were many Nazis. They were drafted like I was. And they were, of course, I had very bad feelings about them. But I tried my best to do my job. That's all. And I mean I had daily contact, but not too many. And some of them even spoke English.

What about the ones from the Afrika Korps, the elite?

They were absolutely I would say unrepenting Nazis. And they didn't think they were defeated. The others knew they were defeated. Because they were actually what we captured in France in the beginning, and the ones who came to United States, they were actually second-rate troops. Those troops were on the Russian front. Some of them were wounded on the Russian front. And they send them to rest on the Western Front. And then they were caught when the war broke out. It was only much later that the more elite troops came to the Western Front.

So these guys were, first of all, they were not young anymore, many of them. At that time, for me they were older, in their 30s. And they were already through the Russian campaign, they already had suffered. They used to tell me stories about what went on in Russia. I mean, I said, thank God it went on that way that Russian winter there and all that. So they were telling these stories. So they were not the best of troops.

And the African Corps troops, what was that like for you?

Well, there was-- I tell you what. They had one incident in Washington, in Fort Lewis on Hitler's birthday, which on the 20th of April. They decided to celebrate or something. I don't know what they did. I think they hoisted a Nazi flag or something. I can't-- I don't know the exact thing. So anyway, the commander of the camp got about 10 tanks. And he said, you go on this bullhorn, and you tell them in German, that if they don't take the flag down within 10 minutes, we're going to level the camp.

Well when they heard that, they took the flag down. And I think there for punishment, I don't know what they gave them. They gave them bread and water for a couple of days.

Do you know what became of those guys?

I do not know. Because I left Fort Lewis. I tell you, the one thing is that these German prisoners feared, that's especially the ones I had in South Carolina, when the war was over, they feared that they would be sent to France, not home, and to work in the coal mines in France, which some of them were sent incidentally. So there were a few who committed suicide. But other than that, we treated them pretty well here. They had it pretty good.

The only fear they had that they were not going to go home. And there was always rumors going around camp that this would happen. But most of them, I think, went home.

What was it like for you to see these people whose country had certainly ruined your normal life being treated pretty well in your new country?

Well, I felt this way. I assumed and I think I was right that the American soldier who was captured over there was treated maybe not as good as they. But they were treated, I don't think very few died in the German prison camps. Because if they were hungry, they were probably hungry because the Germans themselves were hungry. And we did not pamper them here. We had one commander I remember he used to order the food for the camp. He said send me 10

sacks of potatoes. And I wanted only rotten ones, or things like that.

So he lost a son in Germany. And I think he was shot down in an airplane. He hated them. But other, they had to work quite hard, I mean what was allowed under the Geneva Convention. They worked in sugar cane fields. They worked in corn fields. Cotton, they couldn't pick. They were not good enough for that, and other chores they had to do. And they had to work. But other than that, they were not mistreated in any way.

So personally, you were able to see yourself as a soldier, and not as a German Jew?

Absolutely. I was told that. And I knew I had to do that. As a matter of fact, my dad, there was a few American officers, who were quite frankly friendly to these German prisoners. That shocked me more than anything.

Could you say anything?

To the officer? No. I couldn't say anything to the officer. But I mean, you could feel it. They wouldn't say anything directly, but you could feel it.

That is shocking.

Going back to your time in Germany, are there any specific times you remember, examples, incidents of things that happened that you want to put on the record?

Well, I mean in a daily life, like I said, we knew we were citizens second class, because we were not participating in the community anymore in the country we lived in. We knew this. And like I said, for a young person who liked a little fun now and then, it was very, very difficult. And of course, my parents were always afraid that I would do something or go someplace and get in trouble that way. And the Nazis just picked you up.

And like I said, it was not uncommon that if you were on the street, and a gang of Germans came and recognized as a Jew, they would chase you. And if possible tried to beat you up, and did beat me up at times. I remember on my bar mitzvah, I had a bar mitzvah with a fat lip. Because the day before, some Nazis cornered me, and started to fight with me.

And I always wore glasses. I was very afraid and I had to take my glasses off in a hurry sometimes. So we knew, sure, we knew that like I said, the people who were your friends, or were your neighbors, kids you went to school with, they wouldn't talk to you anymore. And all of a sudden, you saw them with Nazi uniforms. I mean it was just something we're finding we had to get used to, so to speak, because we couldn't get out.

When the gangs would run after you, could you defend yourself, or what happened?

Well, yeah I did. I mean I did the best I could. But if five or six kids come after you, there's not much you can do but cover up. That's about all you can do. Like I say, I used to go to a what was called in those days a gymnasium school. It was like a semi-private school. And I went there only for one year. And the only reason I could go there is because my dad was a combat soldier the First World War. I was allowed to go to the school.

And when I went home, every day I used to take my belt off, I had a big buckle on it. And I would swing that buckle around my head, and I ran all the way home. Because I knew they'd come after me. And that's why I said the parents decided to form their own schools, so we didn't have to go through that anymore.

And you went through ninth grade? Or no wait, through high school?

No. I tell you. I went to what it's called here? Till I was 14. So it's eighth grade. That's as far as the regular school in Germany was.

And then?

And then I went as an apprentice, and I stayed. I was about two years an apprentice in the restaurant business, a Jewish restaurant in Frankfurt, two different places. And then we emigrated. And all the restaurants was closed. At the Kristallnacht, they destroyed all the Jewish businesses. They went in there with the axes, and so on, and so forth. And everything was destroyed, and so was his business.

What was life like in Frankfurt?

I had not-- the only thing I did in Frankfurt, I went to work and I went to sleep. Frankfurt had a huge Jewish population. There was about 25,000 Jews in Frankfurt, before Hitler. And the same thing happened there. The Jews there were very much more mistreated in Frankfurt than even where I came from, because of the numbers. And I remember that I did not see it personally, that the Jews who were arrested on Kristallnacht in Frankfurt, they were all herded into a huge auditorium. And they were beaten already there, and mishandled, by the hundreds. But this is only what I heard. I did not see it.

Now, when you came back, after Kristallnacht, did you go back to Frankfurt, or you went back to your hometown?

No, I didn't go to Frankfurt. I just went to the hometown. And what was it?

We were invited, incidentally, by the government. They paid for our fare and hotel. And I must say they gave us a tremendous reception. First of all, they invited hundreds of people. There was 250 came last year in November, and half of them were from Israel. They were Jewish people who had migrated to Israel.

And of course you can imagine what it felt like for me, to see some of my school chums, boys and girls, 50 years later. And of course, the big tragedy is I'll probably never see him again. And we all had stories to tell, and they had tremendous events for us. They brought in a chamber orchestra from Israel. And they put on the music night. They had the reception in a city, a huge, not in the City Hall. But in a city building, where they had a big luncheon for us.

And the mayor, who incidentally his father already, his father was the first mayor after the war, installed by my cousin, who my cousin at that time was a captain in the intelligence of the American army. And he was in charge of installing the government in our town. And his father was the first mayor there. Because he was a known anti-Nazi. And now his son is the mayor there.

And the city there, just to tell you, built a temple. It cost 16 million marks. There's about 130 Jews there. Most of them are from Israel. And a lot of them studied there. There's a technical high school there. And some Jews from Romania, from Iran, from Russia, very few only very few used to live there years ago when I was there. And they built a temple for 200-seat capacity, and 100 for the men downstairs, and 100 for the ladies upstairs. And it's a beautiful temple.

And then they even catered kosher dinners. They brought all new dishes. They imported the rabbi to oversee the kashrut. And then they had also an ecumenical service there in one of the main churches for Catholics, and the Jews, and Protestants. And at the opening of the temple there was a Protestant and a Catholic minister there too. And they even have a rabbi there. He's originally from Romania, and a very good cantor they have.

Harry, what I meant was after Kristallnacht, in '38.

Yeah.

When you went back to your town in '38--

Oh, yeah.

--what did it look like? Was anything different?

You mean after the concentration camp you're talked about?

Yeah.

No. The town was still the same. Well for me, of course, my only aim was to get out of there. That was what I was consumed with, and my father and mother too. We tried to get out of there, and the German became very arrogant after Austria was taken without anybody doing anything about it, and then Czechoslovakia. They were all behind Hitler.

Can you give me any examples?

Well, they had huge rallies going there. The Nazis had rallies and holidays for this. And the people would shout themselves silly with Nazi slogans. And when any of the Nazi leaders came to town, I mean they were all behind them, at least, I didn't know anybody who was not. And I remember my dad telling me the day we left Germany, he went to see an old friend of his, a doctor, who's a German, anti-Nazi to the core. And my dad said goodbye to him. And he said, well, he said, I'm glad you're getting out of there. But I must tell you this. We are going to win this war. Can you imagine that? And he was not even a Nazi, saying that. That's how confident they were.

Was it hard to live? Did you have to deal with Nazis?

Well, you dealt with them when you went to business, to stores. But I mean as far as having to get out of their way or something like that, like I said, we never went any place. We did our shopping, which was usually in a neighborhood. There was no more Jewish stores. I don't think there was any more left in late '38, they were all gone. So we depended to go to non-Jewish stores. And they knew us, and they gave us our merchandise.

And I'm sure that some of them, they may have regretted in some way what was going on, but nothing they could do about it either.

When you say there were no Jewish stores left, were people not allowed to have stores? What happened?

Well, like I said, most of them were destroyed at Kristallnacht. They came and they smashed everything to smithereens. And so there was no more-- they didn't couldn't rebuild it. And then most of them have left already. There was not that many Jews left. I bet you out of the 5,000 that lived there in '38, well they could have been 2,000 still there. Because a lot of the Jewish people from little towns around there came to the bigger city, kind of to mash into the scenery, so to speak, because in these little towns everybody knew them. So they came to the bigger city. And so we always had people coming in.

But many more left. So I don't think there was even 2,000 people left in '38. And I know in '39, most of those were gone.

Harry, is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

Well, the only thing I say this. If a future generations see this, it should be a warning to all people to be vigilant, to take nothing for granted, to make sure that their liberties are guaranteed, and that they contribute to make sure that it stays that way.

What happened to us, probably hundreds of years from now this be just a little part of history. But we can't forget that we lost 6 million people. And we shouldn't forget. And it's our duty and it's the duty of other generations to remind our people what can happen if we are not vigilant.

Do you think your experience during the war made any influence on how you raised your daughter?

Well, I don't know if it made any. We tried to-- she was very Jewish in her upbringing. She was very interested in her people. But it was not easy for us to tell her what happened to us. She heard it from my grandparents at times. And we tried to remind her at times. And I think she's aware of it. But she has to live her own life, I guess. And we tried to teach her most of all, to be a good person, and to be aware of what can happen.

But other than that, incidentally she was a child who was, when she was five years old, she went to Hebrew school, and she was very much brought up in a Jewish tradition. And she still is. And she knows what it's all about, I'm sure.

I just want to tell you mazel tov on her wedding.

Oh, thank you very much.

Yeah.

Thank you.

Harry, unless you have anything else to say, I think that's about all I can think of to ask.

Well, I thank you for this interview.

Thank you.

And I hope it's some benefit.

We appreciate it a lot. It's very important to do. And I know it's hard. And every word is so important.

Thank you.

Thank you. OK.