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Interview with WALTER OBERMEYER

Holocaust Oral History Project

Date: March 24, 1990 Place: Berkeley, CA

Transcriber: Cindy Pickens-Jensen

(may be
incomplete)

1 Q MY NAME IS RENE @CASIF, AND I'M HERE
2 TODAY TO INTERVIEW WALTER OBERMEYER WHO IS
3 RESIDENT OF SAN FRANCISCO AND THE PRESIDENT OF
4 TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL JUDEA CONGREGATION. BETH
5 ISRAEL JUDEA CONGREGATION?
6 A Very good.
7 Q WALTER, WOULD YOU PLEASE -- AND TODAY
8 IS MARCH 24TH, 1990. WE'RE IN BERKELEY AT THE
9 HOME OF ALICE HAMBURG RECORDING THIS INTERVIEW.
10 AND I'D LIKE YOU TO CONTINUE OUR INTERVIEW WITH
11 THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION. WHERE WERE YOU BORN
12 AND -- I'M SORRY.
13 A Rene, I'm very relaxed. I wish I could
14 make the same statement about you.
15 Q I'M FINE.
16 A Okay.
17 Q I'M GOING TO BEGIN BY ASKING WHERE
18 WERE YOU BORN AND THE CONDITIONS OF YOUR
19 CHILDHOOD. I KNOW YOU WERE BORN IN GERMANY, BUT
20 tell us exactly. And I know you moved after that,
21 so --
22 A I was born in bath size [OEF/]
23 [HRUPBDZ/] Germany. And I'm sure that not very
24 many people know where that is.
25 Q NORTH RHEINE?
26 A No. It's fairly close to Hanover and

1 beer [RA/] bill. I don't know whether bead
2 [SREUL/] is a familiar town or city. And I live
3 there about 17 years. This was a spa which
4 catered to people with respiratory diseases and
5 you drank some water which was a cure all, I
6 presume. And anyway, my -- I was born there and I
7 would say I had a very happy childhood. I lived
8 there for seven years. And my father was a
9 merchant. And we lived in a very nice home, and
10 it was very easy for me and I had good friends
11 there. And this all came to a focus when my
12 father died in 1930. That was before Hitler. And
13 that was a very traumatic experience for me.

14 After that we moved to Augsburg which
15 is Bavaria, and which was a bigger city. And we
16 moved there for the simple reason that my mother's
17 sister lives in Augsburg. And I spent seven years
18 there. And then came to the United States.

19 Q AND WE HAVE A LOT MORE STORY IN
20 BETWEEN, I THINK, ABOUT -- I CAN IMAGINE THAT
21 THERE IS A LOT MORE ABOUT YOUR LATTER SEVEN YEARS
22 THAT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO TELL US ABOUT. THE --
23 MAYBE THE JUDISH COMMUNITY. THE KINDS OF FRIENDS
24 YOU HAD. WERE THEY -- THE FEELINGS AND --

25 A Okay. I tell you, are you speaking
26 about the friends I've had.

1 Q YES.

2 A I might again speak about where I was
3 born. I'd a very, very good friend there and
4 after Hitler came to power and came back there
5 every once in a while because my father's family
6 was there. He wouldn't recognize me. I mean, we
7 we were very, very good friends.

8 Q HE WAS NOT JEWISH?

9 A He was not Jewish, no. There were not
10 very many Jews in both [SAUFL/] okay lands. And
11 you wasn't to talk about Augsburg.

12 Q NO. BUT THIS IS JUST, WHAT YOU JUST
13 SAID, WAS WHAT I WAS HOPING YOU WOULD GIVE US A
14 FEELING OF, THE COMFORT, THE LACK OF COMFORT, THE
15 TIME WHEN YOU FELT A CHANGE.

16 A Well, I remember when Hitler took over
17 in 1932 and my mother and I lived in Augsburg. I
18 was going to school, of course. And at the
19 reorganize [TPHAUS/] [KWRUPL/] and I remember the
20 first strong troopers, the people in brown shirts
21 marching through there.

22 Q WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS THEN?

23 A I should also again -- I should refer
24 back again.

25 Q WE KNOW THOSE SYMBOLS, BUT CAN YOU TRY
26 TO TELL US WHAT YOUR FEELINGS WERE?

1 A Yeah. I will in a minute.

2 Again, I want to refer to bought shuts
3 Oakland.

4 Q YES.

5 A I remember one day we were standing on
6 our porch. My father and my mother and I, and a
7 troop of brown shirts marched by. My father got
8 terribly upset at the time. But that was my first
9 experience with the Nazis And I might -- might
10 have been 12 years old -- no, I was less. I was
11 maybe nine years old.

12 But then again in Augsburg then when
13 Hitler came about, of course a big change took
14 place. And what amazes me really is that the
15 adults, Jewish adults at the time didn't realize
16 what was happening. And they were hoping or
17 expecting, or whatever, that this whole thing was
18 going to blow over and nothing was going to
19 happen, and it was going to return to the old
20 times, which even as a child, I couldn't see.

21 So -- and --

22 Q WHAT WAS IT LIKE IN THE SCHOOL WITH
23 THE --

24 A Yes.

25 Q WERE YOU GETTING THAT MESSAGE VERY
26 STRONG IN SCHOOL?

1 A I think I did. Although I would say
2 again I had good friends who invited me still to
3 come over to their place. I wouldn't go so --
4 because I felt I shouldn't endanger their life or
5 their position. And I didn't do it. And I also
6 didn't participate in hiring [HAOEULG/] or singing
7 the German national anthem be it [TKOER/] shun
8 [TKER/] [WAUS/] or the Nazi national anthem the
9 horse west he will detective.

10 And I was on the high school soccer
11 team. I dropped out, on my own volition. And I
12 took a stand, which when I look back on it now
13 probably was very dumb. But I'm -- I'm glad I
14 did, because I -- it could have really cost me my
15 life when it comes right down to it. I remember
16 they used to sell during the wintertime these
17 various objects to raise money except for the
18 poor, and I'm sure it went for the Army rather
19 than -- maybe [SOF/] it went for the poor. And
20 when they approached me, I told them I was
21 Jewish. I mean, I mean, I look back on it and I'm
22 not too sure whether that was so smart.

23 Q YOU WANTED TO HIDE THEN PROFILE?

24 A Well, yeah, maybe probably. Yeah.

25 Q I'M NOT SURE I HEARD THAT BEFORE.

26 BEFORE THEY TRIED TO --

1 A But, you know, I found it interesting
2 in school that the fellow students respected me a
3 lot more than -- I remember there was another
4 Jewish fellow there we used to tag along with the
5 Natzli line or whatever, and I -- I think I -- I
6 earned their respect by being the way I was. So
7 it --

8 Q HOW BIG DO YOU THINK THE JEWISH
9 COMMUNITY WAS IN @AUGSBURG AT THAT TIME OR YOUR --

10 A Approximately -- well, we only -- we
11 had one main synagogue there which was very
12 beautiful. And has been restored. Maybe we had
13 500 families. In the suburb there was a -- I
14 think an orthodox synagogue. There was an treats
15 harbor, I believe. I don't know. I've -- I had
16 never went to this one. Although I would say that
17 speaking about what kind of synagogue did we have,
18 it was -- I think it was more orthodox than
19 anything else. For example, New Year's, Rosh
20 Hashanah and Yom Kippur, people stood -- men --
21 I'm sure women did too. They stood -- they were
22 upstairs, of course.

23 They -- they stood through the entire
24 day. There was no break in services at all. It
25 was amazing. And the rabbi too, of course.

26 Q YOU HAD A JEWISH EDUCATION?

1 A Well, sure, we -- you know, part of --
2 since you didn't have separation of church and
3 state in Germany, part of the curriculum was
4 religion. And the Jews were in one place and the
5 Catholics were in another place and the
6 Protestants went somewhere else for religious
7 school. And --

8 Q NOW, HOW LONG COULD THAT TAKE? OF
9 COURSE, THAT WASN'T REALLY SANCTIONED BY THE --

10 A As far as I -- it continued until I
11 left, and I left in 1937. I don't know what
12 happened after 1937. So -- but I would say I
13 learned my basics of Judaism in religious school.
14 And I think I was good because I think it's
15 important. I also was bar mitsvahed in @Augsburg.

16 Q SO WHEN YOU SAID YOU SAW THAT FIRST
17 TIME IN THE BROWN SHIRTS, WAS THAT THE FIRST
18 MOMENT OF FEAR, THAT FIRST TIME THEY WALKED
19 THROUGH? I MEAN THE REAL FEAR FOR YOUR LIFE?
20 OR --

21 A To be perfectly honest with you, I was
22 too dumb to fear, really. I didn't fear.

23 Q BUT IN LOOKING BACK, DO YOU FEEL THAT
24 WAS THE TIME THAT --

25 A Looking back on it, I shouted really
26 what I did was really not very bright.

1 Q TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE
2 CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO YOUR -- TO YOUR
3 EVACUATION LEAVING, WHATEVER AND --

4 A Well, I must give full credit here to
5 my mother. Because I came via children's
6 transport. And she made application and she
7 knew --

8 Q WHO DID SHE APPLY TO?

9 A The highest.

10 Q NOT JUST --

11 A Yeah. Sure. I never did find out who
12 sponsored me. I have no idea. I -- again, I -- I
13 was going to say I want to give my mother full
14 credit, because there was a sacrifice for her.
15 She knew she could not go with me, you see. So --
16 but she applied, and I was fortunate enough to --
17 1937 to be able to go via Children's World
18 Transport to San Francisco, via New York.

19 Q DID YOU HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS?

20 A No. I did not have any brothers or
21 sisters, which was lucky, really. Because there
22 would have been more worse for my mother to get
23 everybody out. You know.

24 Q WHAT ABOUT YOUR MOTHER?

25 A My mother came in -- was able finally
26 to leave in 1938 after crystal [HRAL/]. And,

1 however --

2 Q DO YOU KNOW HOW SHE ARRANGED IT?

3 A Via a visa, which was given by my

4 foster parents here.

5 Q ALL OF THESE THINGS SOUNDS LIKE

6 WONDERFUL STORIES, THOUGH. LITTLE DETAILS. I'D

7 LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE FOSTER PARENTS HERE

8 AND MAYBE SOMETHING ABOUT THE TRIP OVER, THE OTHER

9 CHILDREN WITH YOU.

10 A All right. I was going to say

11 something else now.

12 Q NO. YOU TAKE THIS -- AND I'LL TRY TO

13 -- I'M SORRY. SORRY.

14 A That's perfectly all right.

15 Well, anyway after 1937 fortunately --

16 oh, yes. We were talking about my mother.

17 Q YOUR MOTHER?

18 A That's right. She left in 1938. The

19 sad thing there was she got on the boat all

20 right. She got sick on the boat and died into New

21 York. Of but anyway --

22 Q WHAT DID SHE DIE OF?

23 A She was in a coma. She had diabetes.

24 Q I SEE.

25 A And I'm sure all the excitement that

26 was going on in Germany didn't help her. Now, you

1 say you'd like to know --

2 Q WELL, THE -- YOU SAY, YOU KNOW, YOU
3 KNOW, YOU WERE ON A CHILDREN'S TRANSPORT, BUT
4 THAT --

5 A There wasn't a -- if you think there
6 were a bunch of kids, it sounds -- there were
7 maybe -- there were maybe 14 Jewish kids.

8 Q 14. HOW MANY DO YOU THINK WANTED TO BE
9 ON THERE? DO YOU KNOW?

10 A I would have been foolish in my mind
11 anyway.

12 Being able to get out and stay there
13 would -- we would have been like committing
14 suicide in my mind anyway. Other people are
15 wrong.

16 Q I WAS THINKING OF HOW MANY MORE PEOPLE,
17 HOW MANY MORE CHILDREN DO YOU THINK WOULD HAVE
18 WANTED TO BE ON THAT TRANSPORT.

19 A Everybody. I shouldn't say that. You
20 know, I had a cousin who got out to England and my
21 uncle's son. We lived in bar [SAUTS/] [AUF/] land
22 buy father's brother and for some. I don't know
23 why he came back, can you imagine that? After
24 he'd gotten out he came back, and the whole --
25 everybody ended up in concentration camps. I
26 can't believe it. But, you know, like another

1 uncle in -- again in the same area who in 1937
2 built a new house. I can't -- I just can't
3 believe those things. But anyway he did it.

4 Q AN OPTIMISTIC PERSON?

5 A I don't know whether you call it
6 optimistic.

7 Q AND SO THIS IS MAINLY YOUR FATHER'S
8 FAMILY THAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT WENT TO THE CAMPS?

9 A Well, my mother family -- my mother had
10 a sister who lived in -- who got out in maybe '36
11 to San Francisco.

12 Q WELL, LET'S -- SOME OF THE THINGS I WAS
13 TRYING TO FIND OUT THAT THE AMOUNT OF FAMILY THAT
14 YOU HAD AND WHERE THEY WENT.

15 A As far as I know, I have a cousin in
16 New York, and that's the end of it really. I
17 don't know where anybody -- most people died in
18 concentration camps. Some people got out and died
19 in the meantime. I don't know. I can't tell
20 you. And I had another uncle who -- again from my
21 father's -- my father's side -- there were eight
22 brothers and sisters. My mother's side were only
23 two.

24 Q DO YOU HAVE ANY RECOLLECTION IN
25 AUGSBURG ABOUT THE NEIGHBORS, ANYONE HELPING YOU,
26 THE NONJEWISH PEOPLE WHO MIGHT LENT A HAND? THERE

1 WAS A HIGH [AUS/] WAS YOUR LIFE LINE?

2 A Lend a hand in what respect?

3 Q WELL, THEY WEREN'T FACILITATING YOUR
4 LEAVING --

5 A No.

6 Q -- IT WASN'T ANYTHING LIKE THAT?

7 A No. It's -- I don't know how they
8 really helped. I mean --

9 Q NO, I DIDN'T SAY THEY DID. I WAS JUST
10 ASKING WAS ANYONE LIKE THAT?

11 A I'm sure there were, but like I told
12 you, I really refused when it come right down to
13 it, for whatever I did, because I didn't want to
14 endanger their lives.

15 A You know.

16 Q DID YOU GO WILLINGLY?

17 A Yes.

18 Q DID YOU WANT TO LEAVE WHEN IT WAS TIME
19 TO GO?

20 A I mean -- I hate to -- of course leave
21 my mother, but I mean it didn't make sense. I
22 mean, I was only 14. Children had more aware than
23 grownups. I think also the reason why many of the
24 grownups had difficulties leaving in my mind is
25 that some of them were very wealthy. I'm sure it
26 was difficult for them to part with their

1 physical --

2 Q THE HOUSE AND THE --

3 A Yeah.

4 Q -- THE PROPERTY?

5 A That's right. So especially if -- they

6 could take -- nobody could take anything out in

7 1937. They would have had to start all over again

8 in the United States or wherever they go.

9 Q SOMETHING THAT'S EASIER IN HINDSIGHT,

10 RIGHT?

11 A Yeah.

12 Q TO IMAGINE?

13 A Right, but I'm just saying, I think we

14 all -- I think we are all interested in staying

15 alive.

16 Q YES, I'M SURE.

17 WHAT ABOUT -- I'M GOING BACK AND FORTH

18 WITH YOU, BUT I'M CURIOUS ABOUT YOU COMING OFF ON

19 YOUR NEW ADVENTURE, YOU KNOW, YOU'RE FLEEING FOR

20 YOUR LIFE BUT YOU'RE ON THIS SHIP WITH ABOUT 13,

21 14 OTHER JEWISH KIDS.

22 A Yes.

23 Q WHAT KIND OF SHIP WAS IT? WHERE DID

24 YOU GET THE SHIP?

25 A Got the ship in [PWRAEU/] [PHA/] half

26 [convenience|convenient], and it was a liner, SS

1 Berlin, German, German liner. And we didn't have
2 any difficulties on the boat, as far as I
3 remember, anyway. Except I was terribly seasick.

4 Q THAT WAS ENOUGH FOR YOUR PREOCCUPATION.
5 AND WHERE DID YOU LAND?

6 A New York. And I stayed maybe in New
7 York for a couple days.

8 Q HOW WAS THAT? DID YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?

9 A No. It was terrible. I mean, it
10 wasn't all that terrible, but it was terrible. I
11 think it -- we must have facilitated to a degree
12 that my aunt's husband had a sister there who --
13 with whom I stayed for a couple days and they had
14 a couple of daughters, they schlepped me all over
15 New York. And I never forget it. I came one day
16 to Columbus, October 11th.

17 Q AND A FEW YEARS LATER?

18 A Yes. And I know -- I remember they had
19 -- I was -- I tell you it was a -- an overwhelming
20 experience. Number one is I remember we drove in
21 a taxi and they had a plastic bubble on top. And
22 I never seen anything like it. A radio in the
23 car. We didn't have a radio in a car in Europe.

24 Q DID YOU HAVE A CAR?

25 A Yes. And -- no, we -- we did not have
26 a car after we left bar [SHUS/] [OUF/] land. No,

1 we did not. But in bar saws [OUF/] land we did
2 have a car. And --

3 Q SO YOU --

4 A -- the sky scrapers.

5 Q DID YOU SEE THE BUILDINGS?

6 A It's amazing you know. You think the
7 whole thing will collapse on you or something.
8 And I forget what they call it. They used to have
9 cafeterias there and sort of fast food. I think
10 they called it auto baths.

11 Q LIKE CORN DOGS?

12 A You put in a dime or 25 cents and you
13 got a hamburger already done for you. And I
14 remember they were testing Central Park. They
15 were testing, I guess, anyway going to have a big
16 deal on October 11th, you know, one, two, three,
17 four testing, you know. That's the only thing I
18 understood maybe.

19 Q YOUR FIRST --

20 A My first few English words.

21 Q THAT WAS YOUR BEGINNING?

22 A Yeah. And Rockefeller Center, I
23 remember.

24 Q SO YOU WERE A TOURIST WHEN YOU ARRIVED?

25 A Yeah. Then we took the train. I was
26 also overwhelming experience.

1 Q THE SUBWAY, YOU MEAN?

2 A No. I'm talking about the train from
3 New York to San Francisco.

4 Q OH, YOU CAME IMMEDIATELY TO SAN
5 FRANCISCO.

6 A Yeah.

7 Q I SEE. I DIDN'T KNOW THAT.

8 A And basically that was my first close
9 contact with Blacks. I never -- you know, I'd
10 never seen any Blacks in Europe, except on Shirley
11 Temple movies, Shirley Temple movies, you know.
12 And big pearly white teeth. It was -- it was an
13 experience. And lots of experiences, really.

14 Q WHEN YOU WERE TAKING THAT TRIP, YOU'RE
15 TALKING ABOUT THE PORTERS?

16 A Yes. That's right.

17 Q NOT THE PASSENGERS?

18 A Not the passengers. There weren't any
19 Black passengers as far as I remember at that
20 time. We probably don't think to be sometimes
21 fear that the Blacks have not made a lot of
22 progress, but they have, really. I mean, there's
23 a lot of room yet for improvement, but I mean,
24 there's a vast difference.

25 Q NOW, WHO DID YOU TRAVEL WITH FROM THE
26 TRAIN AND YOU CAME OVER. BY YOURSELF OR --

1 A No. With the other kids. Some of them
2 got off at Denver and someplace else. And we have
3 a lady, woman, who was in charge of us, and I --
4 otherwise we would have been up a creek. We
5 wouldn't have been able to communicate.

6 Q DO YOU EVER HAVE REUNIONS WITH THESE
7 PEOPLE?

8 A No. I don't remember where anybody is
9 anymore, to be perfectly honest with you.

10 Q WELL, I AM EAGER TO KNOW ALSO WHAT KIND
11 OF LIFE YOU HAD WHEN YOU GOT TO SAN FRANCISCO AND
12 WHO WAS YOUR NEW FAMILY?

13 A Well --

14 Q YOU KNOW, IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

15 A Fine. I was very lucky. I was really
16 fortunate, because I was put into a family which
17 was very, very good to me. As a matter of fact,
18 I'm still in contact with them. And whoever is
19 alive, you know, my foster parents have passed
20 away in the meantime. They were in their '50s
21 when they took me in. They had three children,
22 grown, expecting -- in other words, they were
23 grand -- up and coming grandparents at that time.
24 You see. They took me in. And they -- they
25 were exceptional.

26 Q THIS WAS THE FOSTER FAMILY?

1 A Exceptionally nice people who
2 incidentally hail from Romania. And came just
3 before the big earthquake in 1906. And they told
4 me all about it. They lived in the Golden Gate
5 Park or someplace.

6 Q CAMPING?

7 A Yeah. At that time the city really was
8 destroyed. You know. And what's also interesting
9 is there were members of congregation Beth
10 Israel. Isn't that interesting?

11 Q YES. WELL, SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE A
12 LOYALTY THERE THAT GOES BACK.

13 A I don't know whether there's a
14 loyalty. You know, it's interesting when we came
15 -- we lived in Marin County. And when the kids
16 had flown the coop, so to speak, we moved back to
17 San Francisco. And we went to all synagogues and
18 temples to see which -- to which synagogue we
19 wanted to belong. And we hadn't been in Beth
20 Israel today it was out of Brotherhood Way. We
21 live on the other end as you know, other end of
22 town.

23 Q YES. THAT'S NOT THE EASY WAY?

24 A Yeah. But it's easy. It's maybe 15,
25 20 minutes. And we -- we didn't like the other --
26 temples or synagogues and we went to Beth Israel

1 Judea and liked it a great deal.

2 Q I THINK WE SKIPPED A LOT OF TIME AND
3 TERRITORY HERETO.

4 A Yeah. Where would you like me to
5 continue?

6 Q WHERE? LET'S SEE. I THINK THE FRIENDS
7 YOU MADE WHEN YOU WERE FIRST ARRIVED IN SAN
8 FRANCISCO, THE SCHOOLING, THE EVENTUAL -- YOUR
9 EDUCATION, YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR --

10 A All right.

11 Q YOU HAD THIS OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK. I
12 MEAN, I'M NOT SEEING YOU AS A PERSON WHO'S HELD
13 DOWN BY YOUR PAST.

14 A That's correct.

15 Q NOT -- I CAN SEE THAT?

16 A I mean, it doesn't help you.

17 Q NO.

18 A I don't think.

19 Q SO WHEN YOU MOVED TO SAN FRANCISCO,
20 WHAT SCHOOL DID YOU GO TO?

21 A Okay. I went to Precidio Junior High
22 School. Had -- my study about -- one of my fishes
23 experiences at junior high school not being able
24 to speak English was really -- not traumatic, but
25 it was difficult. I tell you I didn't have any
26 time in -- any difficulties in math, for example,

1 because I was basically where as I was put back.
2 I started in a low seven. That was okay. I
3 couldn't speak English, you know. And I tell you
4 the only trouble I had basically was in English
5 and social science. I drew pictures in social
6 science. I took them out of the book, you know,
7 because I couldn't do anything.

8 And in English I remember my first
9 spelling test work I just @marvelous really. I
10 only spelled one word wrong I remember and that
11 was "honey" and I spelled it H-U instead of H-O,
12 but anyway.

13 Q REAL PHONETIC?

14 A The teacher was absolutely amazed that
15 I would do as well as I did.

16 Q YOU WEREN'T IN A ROLL THAT ANY ENGLISH
17 AS A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAM?

18 A No. No, no. But I tell you in the --
19 basically in the difference was that I wanted to
20 speak English. And that I wanted to be an
21 American. And maybe today the various ethnic
22 groups believe in holding on to their identities,
23 you see, which might be all right.

24 Q SO HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT CAME TO
25 GAIN YOUR FACILITY WITH ENGLISH?

26 A But I do want to tell you before that

1 the real interesting experience I had at Precidio
2 Junior High School. I was assigned to -- well,
3 they made out my program, although, you know, we
4 had lots of electives, and in Germany you -- I
5 didn't have any electives. You took whatever you
6 were supposed to take.

7 Q NO CHOICE?

8 A No choice. The only choice you had
9 what school you went to, actually.

10 And I could talk about that in detail,
11 but I don't think it's necessary.

12 Q WHAT ELECTIVES DID YOU CHOOSE AT THE
13 PRECIDIO JUNIOR HIGH?

14 A I chose music somehow or other. I
15 don't know whether I chose many really, but -- the
16 first time around. Anyway, this music room, the
17 -- there's -- Precidio Junior High School was sort
18 of a U-shaped affair. And this music room was in
19 a connecting ramp, so to speak, or whatever,
20 building, they connected the other two sides. And
21 I just couldn't find the music room. I have ran
22 all over the damn place, excuse my language, and I
23 couldn't ask anybody. So and there was another
24 fellow who had also come with me, so we finally
25 ended up in the girl's shower room.

26 Q WELL, I'M GOING TO BELIEVE THAT --

1 A And the teacher came screaming at us
2 and we were very fortunate she knew how to speak
3 German. So anyway --

4 Q SHE UNDERSTOOD IT WAS YOUR LANGUAGE
5 PROBLEM?

6 A But of course. Anyway, so it would be
7 -- we had our way to the music -- it was funny we
8 look -- I look back on it. At the time it wasn't
9 all that funny.

10 And basically, you know, I would say --
11 speaking about schooling, that schooling in Europe
12 was in an elementary schools, public schools --
13 elementary schools, I would say, it was a lot
14 better than it was here. I knew a lot more in
15 most instances like in math. And they realized
16 that and from the low seven they put me in the
17 high 99 @nine and so -- so I didn't lose any time,
18 but it really was -- it was a very interesting
19 experience. And English came about -- you pick it
20 up. You hear English all day long and you want to
21 communicate you have to so you have no choice.
22 You didn't have any choice, really, you know.

23 So that wasn't -- and from there I went
24 to Washington High School, which is more or less
25 an open as far as that time, which it was an
26 excellent school. And I might say that Lana

1 Turner was one of our cheerleaders before she went
2 to bigger and better places.

3 Q I COULD SEE THAT YOU'RE AN AMERICAN?

4 A In Hollywood, you see. You see?

5 And I had certain difficulties, for
6 example, I remember in U.S. history I was on a
7 debate and it was terrible. I mean I --

8 Q WHAT WAS TERRIBLE ABOUT IT?

9 A Because --

10 Q YOU DIDN'T DEBATE --

11 A Because I was so -- I was so worried at
12 the time.

13 Q YOU SOUND --

14 A My accent, you know. And we were --
15 incidentally we were debating --

16 Q I THOUGHT YOU WERE REFERRING TO THE
17 CONTENT?

18 A No. We were debating on immigration
19 which fit me rather well. Anyway, but I was
20 terribly worried about how I would come across
21 and --

22 Q SELF-CONSCIOUS?

23 A Oh, terrible, right. Terribly.

24 Q YOU THOUGHT THE CLASSMATES WERE VERY --
25 NOT UNDERSTANDING?

26 A Maybe -- well, you had all sorts of

1 feelings, you know. Which I -- are really dumb,
2 but anyway, I did have it.

3 Q WELL, THERE WAS THIS -- YOU WERE A VERY
4 AWARE YOUNG MAN, I'M SURE, WHEN YOU WERE IN
5 GERMANY AS WELL AS SAN FRANCISCO WHEN THE FEELING
6 OF ANTISEMITISM IN BOTH PLACES MUST -- WAS IT
7 THERE? WAS IT NOT THERE, TO WHAT DEGREE DID YOU
8 FEEL IT?

9 A I didn't feel it all that much here,
10 but I might certainly in Europe.

11 Q YES.

12 A I mean, we're not talking about that,
13 I'm sure.

14 Q WELL, IT'S DIFFICULT.

15 A Incidentally referring back to Europe,
16 I was as close to Hitler as I am to you.

17 Q WE HAVE MISSED SOMETHING. TELL US
18 ABOUT THAT.

19 A Hitler decided to appear in Augsburg
20 one day. And he was at the city hall and
21 thousands of people milled around in the plaza in
22 front of the city hall. And I was there with a
23 fellow Gentile, student. And everybody was going
24 heil I didn't do it, and they says you better go
25 heil so I heil a little bit also. Then he says
26 inks east come down such and such a street, why

1 don't we go over there before even else rushes
2 over there. And we went over there and sure
3 enough he came in his Mercedes with that open
4 Mercedes that he had. And -- and the guy looked
5 like a gangster, really. Really like a gangster,
6 you know sullen look on him and that trench coat
7 and sinister. And --

8 Q A FOREIGN OBJECT IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

9 A A foreign object. I mean, he was -- he
10 was a well-known object in the community.

11 Q OH, I KNOW.

12 A But I'm just saying he looked like a
13 bum, really, which he was of course. He was worse
14 than a bum. He looked like a gangster.

15 Q HOW DO YOU THINK THE PEOPLE AROUND
16 YOU --

17 A The people around me went crazy. They
18 went crazy, believe me.

19 Q HE WAS A HERO?

20 A They went absolutely Madera. Women
21 through flowers and -- you know, I like to make
22 this statement. The German people were behind
23 Hitler 99.9 percent.

24 Q WELL, LET'S NOT WASTE TOO MUCH TIME ON
25 ALL THAT, BECAUSE -- I DON'T MEAN WE'RE WASTING
26 ANY TIME, BUT I WANT TO -- I THINK IT'S

1 APPROPRIATE FOR US TO GET TO YOUR ARMY DAYS. I
2 KNOW YOU WERE IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY.

3 A Yes, I was in the United States Army.

4 Q AND TO HEAR SOMETHING OF THAT, BUT ALSO
5 TO HAVE YOUR FEELINGS SINCE THIS IS THE YEAR
6 THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT REUNIFYING GERMANY. I THINK
7 WE SHOULD HAVE TIME TO TALK ABOUT THAT TOO.

8 A Okay.

9 Q BECAUSE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THAT ARE
10 VERY IMPORTANT TO ME.

11 A So where would you like me to start?

12 Q WELL, WE CAN EITHER GO BACK AND DO THIS
13 CHRONOLOGICALLY, TELL US ABOUT YOUR LIFE UNTIL THE
14 PRESENT, OR WE CAN GO RIGHT INTO THAT SUBJECT
15 SINCE YOU'RE FEELING STRONGLY ABOUT HITLER RIGHT
16 NOW.

17 A You mean the reunification.

18 Q YES, THE WHOLE SUBJECT AS IT'S COME UP
19 AND THE QUICKNESS THAT -- THE SPEED WITH WHICH
20 THEY SEEM TO WANT TO MOVE.

21 A Well, we are certainly living in
22 interesting times. Nobody would have expected --
23 suspected a year ago what's happened today in the
24 eastern block.

25 Q RIGHT.

26 A Or that even -- or that the Wall was

1 going to come down. I like to preface my remarks
2 by saying that last year my wife and I were for
3 the first time in Germany. In other words, there
4 had been a lapse of time of 52 years, and we were
5 coming from Paris and I had made up my mind if
6 there was going to be any problem, I was going to
7 take the next train back to Paris. But we went to
8 bar [SOTS/] [AUBG/] land and I was surprised. I
9 find that -- and I'm -- and I -- I feel that I
10 cannot hold the younger generation responsible for
11 what their parents have done. And I was amazed
12 what I did find in Germany.

13 I know one teacher, for example, sent
14 out his students to ask older people on the street
15 what they had done during the time of Hitler and
16 how they had believed. A lot of them didn't want
17 to answer, but -- the future is not with those
18 people in my mind. The future is with the young
19 generation. And --

20 Q WERE YOU VISITING SCHOOLS? WERE YOU ON
21 SOME SORT OF A PLANNED PROGRAM OR WERE YOU JUST
22 TALKING TO PEOPLE?

23 A We went back on an invitation from my
24 home town. And it was also the [SRAOEU/] --
25 500ths.

26 Q WAS IT A CHURCH GROUP?

1 A No, it was the City.

2 Q THE CITY?

3 A Yeah. The City had done that and they
4 were 20 people who responded to this. I mean, the
5 community -- Jewish community in bar [THAUTS/]
6 [AUBG/] land was very small. So -- but they
7 really bent over backwards to make us
8 comfortable. As a matter of fact, in one of the
9 auditoriums at the park, at the -- where they
10 dispense all the waters or whatever, which is very
11 -- sort of very lovely, got a small lake there and
12 it hasn't changed all that much. They had invited
13 a Jewish singing group from Amsterdam to perform
14 one evening, amongst other things. That was --
15 and like I say, I -- I felt that the younger
16 generation studying with the students wanted to
17 change this.

18 Incidentally, I also found something
19 very interesting there: We -- I wanted to go back
20 to my school that I had attended there, and nobody
21 wanted to stop there. I couldn't -- we couldn't
22 figure out why.

23 So anyway, my wife and I went on --
24 went to the school on our own. And I don't know
25 where they -- you're familiar with it, but the
26 birth rate in Germany is a negative birth rate.

1 In other words, we have less kids all the time.
2 And they have a surplus of schools, so what they
3 had done as we found out, they are using -- the
4 particular school that I went to as a home for the
5 homeless. And I think that was very smart.

6 Q THAT'S VERY NICE.

7 A And then we talked to some person there
8 who had come from Eastern Germany who now lived in
9 bar [SAULTS/] [AUBG/] [HRAUPBD/] and is getting
10 started. I don't know where she lives now. In
11 that school.

12 Q IT WAS LIKE A RECEPTION CENTER?

13 A Yeah. If you want to call it that.

14 Q FOR RESETTLING?

15 A I think that's -- I think that's a good
16 idea. Of course, you don't see any people on the
17 street, you see. Come in. In the bigger cities
18 you do too, not in that small city.

19 Q SO YOU VISITED OTHER CITIES IN THAT --

20 A Yes, I went to Augsburg. These were in
21 week [inches|instance] [PWAUBG/] -- we were with
22 Augsburg and we had come from Paris. So anyway --

23 Q SO WERE YOU GLAD WHEN YOU LEFT OR WERE
24 YOU -- WAS IT GOOD TO BE THERE? DID YOU HAVE
25 ANY --

26 A We were pleasantly surprised.

1 Q YOU FELT MORE COMFORTABLE THAN YOU
2 EXPECTED?

3 A Exactly. If you don't have -- if you
4 don't anticipate too much, you're better off. And
5 I did not anticipate anything, really, so --

6 Q BUT NO -- MEMBER OF YOUR VERY CLOSE
7 FAMILY WAS REALLY TAKEN OFF BEFORE YOUR EYES
8 AND --

9 A No. We didn't have anybody left in
10 Augsburg, you see. My aunt had left, and there
11 was nobody else. So everybody else was in bar
12 [SAULTS/] [AUF/] [HRAUPBLDZ/] and a lot of people
13 there went to concentration camps and died.

14 Q SO HOW DO YOU THINK THE -- THIS NEW
15 GERMANY -- THE NEW GERMANIES ARE ABLE TO COPE WITH
16 REUNIFICATION?

17 A I don't have as many of a problem there
18 as a lot of people have. I think. And simply
19 because of the European community. I feel that
20 Europe will somehow, some way all of Europe, that
21 is, United States state of Europe. I'm sure
22 you're familiar what's happened.

23 Q YES.

24 A Within the Jewish -- within the
25 Jewish --

26 Q EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY?

1 A But 19 two @1992 they're supposed to
2 have the same monetary unit, English is supposed
3 to be the language. So I don't see what all the
4 big difference is whether Germany is united now or
5 whether it's going to be united under the European
6 community, economic community. I think it comes
7 out about the same way.

8 Q YOU DON'T FEAR NATIONALISM IN -- I just
9 HEARD SAYING --

10 A He feels.

11 Q -- HE FEARS GERMAN NATIONALISM, PERIOD?

12 A However, let me add one idea, and that
13 is we have to be very vigilant. And by "we" I
14 mean France, England, the United States and Russia
15 that what happened before does not happen again.
16 You see. Because in my mind and everybody else's,
17 if -- if France and England would have stepped in
18 there when -- when Hitler went into the Rheine
19 land, that would have been the end of Hitler. But
20 instead -- I don't have to tell you all the
21 stories including chamber land [peace|piece] in
22 our time, et cetera. It's ridiculous. But we --
23 it's like anything else. Like you and I, nations,
24 have to face problems, problems don't slide by.
25 Q DO YOU FEEL THAT THEY HAVE EMERGED AS A
26 DIFFERENT -- A DIFFERENT COUNTRY?

1 A Certainly -- a democracy was an unknown
2 factor in Germany, in -- I would say in most of
3 Europe, except for England and France where --
4 where do you find democracy? Until just now.
5 Certainly not in the ball cast. Certainly not in
6 the Austria -- what was it? Hungarian empire.

7 Q THE HUNGARIAN EMPIRE?

8 A Certainly you don't have any democracy,
9 or Germany never had any democracy. Most of these
10 nations didn't come about until the 19th century.

11 Q IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THIS --

12 A Germany didn't come about until 1871.

13 Q SO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE MORE difficult
14 for this dictator or military regime to emerge
15 now?

16 A Now.

17 Q IT WAS TOO MUCH --

18 A I would say it was easier for Hitler.
19 Number one, the economic situation was bad, and
20 the German people at that time, I feel, were
21 easily led. I think the --

22 Q YOU WOULDN'T DESCRIBE THEM THAT WAY
23 NOW?

24 A I hope not.

25 Q YES?

26 A I don't think so, but like I say, we

1 have to be vigilant. I think in -- in 19 there
2 again even before when Hitler got -- finally got
3 to power, the Germans were -- if you give them a
4 band and a uniform and have them march, they liked
5 that, and told them what to do, you know. They --
6 they had --

7 Q IT WAS BETTER THAN THEY HAD?

8 A Yeah.

9 Q HOW ABOUT -- I THINK WE OUGHT TO GET A
10 LITTLE MORE BACKGROUND ON YOUR LIFE SINCE THAT
11 BOYHOOD. I THINK WE -- WE HAVE -- THERE'S A LOT
12 MORE TO LEARN ABOUT YOU.

13 AFTER -- LET'S SEE. HIGH SCHOOL --

14 A High school, yes.

15 Q YES.

16 A High school. Okay. After high school?

17 Q NO.

18 A Why not after high school?

19 Q IT'S UP TO YOU. THIS IS UP TO YOU. IF
20 YOU HAVE SOMETHING YOU WANT TO TELL US ABOUT HIGH
21 SCHOOL, WE'D LOVE TO HEAR YOU. YOU FELT YOU HAD
22 GOT ALONG WELL WITH YOUR CLASSMATES BY THEN?

23 A Yes.

24 Q YOUR LANGUAGE PROBLEM HAD DISAPPEARED
25 MORE OR LESS?

26 A My accent was --

1 Q I TOLD YOU IT WAS BETTER THAN
2 @@KISSINGER'S?
3 A And that makes me feel good
4 immediately.
5 Speaking about friends, you know, I
6 have friends who -- friendships that I made then I
7 have now. And I think that's marvelous, because
8 it doesn't happen so much. And --
9 Q WHERE DID YOU MEET YOUR WIFE?
10 A Some -- I would say on the tennis
11 courts.
12 Q THAT WAS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL OR --
13 A After -- after --
14 Q WAY AFTER. OKAY. ALL RIGHT. I DON'T
15 WANT TO SKIP --
16 A Not all that far, but -- but I mean
17 considerably after, because in -- in the meantime,
18 I was in the Army which -- to which you alluded a
19 minute ago.
20 Q RIGHT. RIGHT. OH, THAT'S THE PART I
21 WOULD LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT.
22 A And then he was at the University of
23 California.
24 Q IN THAT ORDER?
25 A Yeah. In that order.
26 Q HOW ABOUT YOUR ARMY EXPERIENCE?

1 A We'll get the Army experience.

2 Q THAT I WANT TO GET OUT.

3 A I couldn't join the Army, which I

4 wanted to, because I wasn't a citizen, you see. A

5 lot of kids became citizens because of their

6 parents became citizens, but since I didn't have

7 any parents yet so, therefore, I did not become a

8 citizen until I got in the Army. And I -- as a

9 matter of fact, I was an enemy alien, which meant

10 I had to be home at 8:00 o'clock at night and so

11 on. But I can't understand that.

12 Q THIS IS DURING YOUR -- DURING YOUR

13 SCHOOL YEARS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?

14 A No. I'm talking about I was already

15 out of school then.

16 Q YES.

17 A I graduated in 1940 or something like

18 that.

19 Q UM-HUM.

20 A 1941.

21

22

23

24

25

26

1 A But you get in the United States was
2 in a very precarious situation. I feel.

3 Q YOU DIDN'T LIKE IT, BUT YOU
4 UNDERSTOOD. IS THAT THE --

5 A I didn't -- right. You see.

6 Q DID YOU KNOW ANY JAPANESE PEOPLE?

7 A I had a terrible experience with a
8 Japanese fellow, incidentally, when I was in high
9 school -- junior high school. We took the same
10 math class and we were sort of friendly. And we
11 were super ahead actually in algebra that the
12 teacher didn't know what to do with us, so we went
13 outside and cleaned erasers and --

14 Q AND THAT'S HOW YOU BEFRIENDED THE
15 JAPANESE?

16 A Then I start learning that the Japanese
17 were expanded at that time with China and
18 everything. He was -- I think his father was a
19 Japanese consul here in San Francisco. He -- he
20 have no idea he became so mad, and that was --
21 actually my first bad experience. I mean -- I
22 mean nothing runs smoothly, but it was a major bad
23 experience.

24 Q BUT HE WAS NOT AN AMERICAN, THOUGH?

25 A No, he was not.

26 Q HE WAS A JAPANESE VISITOR.

1 A Um-hum.

2 Q BUT I WAS THINKING ABOUT MAYBE FROM
3 THE --

4 A I didn't know any other Japanese. No,
5 I -- I did not. But again, let me say I was a --
6 it was a bunch of friends at the other here when
7 you all of is you had we saw these big headlights
8 that Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. We really weren't
9 prepared. The Army was playing around with guns.
10 We were lucky they didn't invade Hawaii which they
11 could. I think people were afraid, you know,
12 what Japanese would do here. I don't want to make
13 an excuse for the camps over there, but I -- I
14 find that some people want to compare the camps
15 that we had for the Japanese with the
16 concentration camps which is -- I mean it's
17 ridiculous. I'm -- I'm -- again, you see, I'm not
18 @@condoning it, but I can understand what we did.

19 So, anyway --

20 Q THE ARMY?

21 A The Army.

22 Q -- THE ARMY --

23 A How did I get in the Army?

24 Q YOU WERE A CITIZEN OR NOT?

25 A Yeah. Right. And it was in Monterey
26 and they had -- we got there and it wasn't really

1 an interesting experience.

2 Q YOU WERE A RECRUIT?

3 A No, no.

4 Q A PRIVATE?

5 A Yes. I remember one thing.

6 Woke us up some 4:00 o'clock in the
7 morning, some dumb time, to give us this test we
8 were going to take, you know. I forgot the name
9 of it. General classification test of some kind,
10 so they would find out a little about you and
11 where to put you. And at the time I -- well, I
12 knew a little bit about radio, so I told them I
13 like to go join the signal corps. That wasn't all
14 that bright either. But they were very bright.
15 The Army was.

16 They put me in the Air Force. That was
17 part of the United States Army at the time. And I
18 was lucky. I really was lucky.

19 Q WHY?

20 A Because -- well, aircraft was the best
21 deal I could have gotten, you know.

22 Q WHERE DID YOU GO?

23 A Eventually I ended up in the Pacific,
24 but that's not the point. It was better than --
25 than running up the beach -- not the beach, but --
26 oh, yes. The beach. It would have been in the

1 front line with the advancement strapped on my
2 back. I would have gotten in the signal corps.
3 So, anyway, I gotten into the United
4 States Army air corps, and [TED/] me going to
5 radio school -- at first we went, of course, to
6 basic training which was Fresno -- must have been
7 110 or above, and doing calisthenics. We used to
8 have the ambulances run it, racing around the
9 field to pick up the guys who passed out. But
10 again, I sort of have an stubborn instinct and
11 whenever I felt I was going to get a little dizzy,
12 I quit so, therefore, I didn't pass out.
13 Q UM-HUM.
14 A They had classified me as a radio
15 gunner. So I went to radio school in Sioux Falls,
16 South Dakota. And incidentally, I became a
17 citizen there in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in the
18 county of Minnehaha. Did you know that?
19 Q I HEARD THAT.
20 A Minnehaha. Very important.
21 Q WHAT ABOUT ALL THE TIME YOU'RE IN THE
22 ARMY. WAS THERE, YOU KNOW, THE OTHER RECRUITS AND
23 THE --
24 A It was terribly --
25 Q IMITATING GERMAN MEN OR --
26 A I have met all kinds of people, real.

1 All kinds of people I met before. And -- you.

2 Q YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE --

3 A There were no Blacks incidentally. It

4 was amazing.

5 Q SEGREGATED?

6 A Yeah. And it might have been in the

7 infantry, you know.

8 Q THEY WERE THERE?

9 A But in the air corps, I didn't see

10 any.

11 Anyway, I graduated from the school and

12 got to know a little bit about South Dakota and

13 Sioux Falls and its surroundings.

14 Q IT GETS COLD THERE?

15 A Yes, but during the summer it was hot.

16 Humid. You wouldn't believe it, really. They

17 used to have insects around the streetlights. You

18 couldn't see the lights.

19 Q SO DID YOU -- YOU HAD A TOUCH OF -- OF

20 COMMUNITY -- BACK WOODS COMMUNITY LIFE IN THIS

21 COUNTRY.

22 A Yeah.

23 Q THE PEOPLE IN SIOUX FALLS DON'T

24 THINK --

25 A Like Philadelphia, you see.

26 Q DO YOU HAVE ANY FEELING ABOUT -- THERE

1 -- THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS WITH YOU, THOUGH, WITH
2 THE RECRUITS?

3 A No.

4 Q AND THINGS LIKE THAT. YOU GOT ALONG
5 VERY WELL WITH THEM?

6 A Yeah. Right.

7 Q YOU LIKED --

8 A I had some experiences, and I met some
9 very nice people in Beresford, which is about 40
10 miles below Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Who
11 invited me over any time. It was amazing. You
12 know, in San Francisco we didn't have any butter
13 or meat or anything -- we had some, you know, but
14 there you couldn't -- they had everything, whipped
15 cream, you know, the works. It was amazing.

16 But anyways it was -- it was
17 interesting. And the Jewish people, go in the
18 department store, they were awfully nice when I
19 was in Sioux City.

20 Q DID THEY SEEK YOU OUT OR DID YOU SEEK
21 THEM OUT?

22 A I don't know how I met them. I met
23 them some way or other. It was fun.

24 Q DO YOU HAVE ANY EXPERIENCES IN THE
25 ARMY YOU WANT TO TELL US ABOUT OTHER THAN SIOUX
26 FALLS?

1 A Yeah. In -- then I went to gunnery
2 school. And I graduated all right, but -- I also
3 had an experience there. One night in Yuma,
4 Arizona, you see, I went to all the choice places.

5 Q YUMA, ARIZONA?

6 A Yes. And I woke up one night and I was
7 break out with blisters all over the place. And I
8 thought there must have been some kind of flees or
9 something. We were sleeping in tents there and I
10 went to sick call the next day and I told them I
11 had some bugs, must have been biting me. They
12 said, "You got bugs all right. Chicken pox." Can
13 you imagine that at that age? So I went through
14 that number. But anyway, I -- like I told you, I
15 was seasick coming over years ago so -- and so
16 they decided -- I graduated all right, but they
17 decided to ground me. And from there I went into
18 AECS, which is Army Aero Communications System,
19 which I did control tower work and that sort of
20 thing, direction finding. And I was -- again I
21 was very fortunate.

22 Q THEY DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE USE OF YOUR
23 GERMAN LANGUAGE.

24 A No. But they sent me to the Pacific,
25 you see.

26 Q I SEE. THAT'S NOT USING IT OVER THERE?

1 A No. So but anyway, I was lucky because
2 I was a really good unit.

3 Q I THINK THEY DID HAVE SOME
4 INTELLIGENCE, SOME GERMAN --

5 A Yes, I know they did.

6 Q BUT THEY WEREN'T GOING TO MAKE USE OF
7 YOU IN THAT?

8 A No. I had gone through radio school.

9 Q RIGHT. RIGHT. YOU WEREN'T IN
10 INTELLIGENCE?

11 A No. They wanted to make use of my
12 schooling. Anyway, again, I was very fortunate.
13 And I finally wound up in the Pacific and --

14 Q SO HOW LONG WERE YOU IN THE ARMY?

15 A Three and a half years.

16 Q 1940 TO --

17 A '46.

18 Q '43 TO '46?

19 A Yeah.

20 Q I SEE.

21 A I was in the Pacific. I was -- we
22 started out -- again, I was on a cruise ship going
23 to New Caledonia. I want to tell you something it
24 was a disaster, real.

25 Q SEASICKNESS?

26 A It was really a disaster. The -- the

1 ocean, Pacific Ocean was smooth as glass. I was
2 so conditioned to run to the railing I couldn't
3 quit. It was awful.

4 So anyway, we landed in New Caledonia.
5 From there I went up to good lands canal, RR
6 islands. And from there -- Solomon Islands, which
7 is near @@Boganville. And then I was again
8 fortunate. They sent me to the Fiji Islands where
9 I spent the rest of my time till I went back home.

10 Q BUT WHILE YOU WERE IN SOLOMON AND
11 BOGANVILLE AND -- YOU WERE IN ACTION?

12 A No, I was not. We had one air raid at
13 moan [TKA/]. The place came from -- came from
14 @@Boganville. And they came in low which we
15 didn't expect and they really clobbered
16 us. Next time they came in low we were ready,
17 so -- but anyway, there were a lot of Australians
18 and -- on Fiji there were a lot of Australians and
19 people from New Zealand with whom I became very
20 friendly.

21 Q I'M SURE.

22 A I came back and I -- I came back just
23 in time that some schooling for G.I.'s, return
24 veterans --

25 Q THE G.I. BILL?

26 A The G.I. bill. I was lucky in that

1 one. And I got English 1A -- now English A. No,
2 I didn't have to take English A.

3 Q BUT YOU WERE --

4 A Took English 1A and took the History
5 17A which -- you know, U.S. history, and there was
6 only maybe 10 weeks or something like that. And
7 the classes were -- that was incidentally under
8 the San Francisco City College system.

9 Q SO, I SEE.

10 A And that was -- I want to tell you, the
11 two instructors or professors, whatever you want
12 to call them, were one of the best I've had,
13 Berkeley -- I only was at Berkeley others. They
14 were tremendous.

15 Q AT CITY COLLEGE?

16 A They were super. I mean really --

17 Q WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES?

18 A Names, I'm a dead duck to start out
19 with.

20 Q OKAY.

21 A Anyway --

22 Q SO YOU WERE PREPARED TO ENTER BERKELEY
23 THEN. IS THAT IT AFTER THAT?

24 A Yeah, well, I tell you the way I
25 started at Berkeley was I met an old friend of
26 mine as I was leaving City College there one day.

1 And he said --

2 Q HIGH SCHOOL FRIEND?

3 A Yeah. And he says -- he told me he was

4 going to go to Berkeley. And he has got a place

5 over there already, would I like to move in?

6 That's how I started at Berkeley. I was the --

7 debating whether I should go to Berkeley or to

8 Stanford, so that's how I ended up at Berkeley,

9 but I ended up in Berkeley.

10 Q IF YOU'VE GOT HOUSING IN BERKELEY YOU

11 GO TO BERKELEY, RIGHT, CAN'T TURN IT DOWN?

12 A Sort of fell into that thing.

13 Q WHAT DID YOU STUDY THERE?

14 A Jewish engineering, which is -- which

15 is business administration.

16 Q I HAVEN'T HEARD THAT FOR A LONG TIME.

17 A Yes.

18 Q THAT PHRASE.

19 A I really didn't know what to take, and

20 I went through all the summer sessions and I

21 finished in two and a half years. And but

22 anyway --

23 Q PROBABLY TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY YOU

24 DID THAT NOW, RIGHT?

25 A No. No the mistake I made was I had a

26 year and a half left, you see on the G.I. bill. I

1 should have gone -- I should have gone to Europe,
2 do some graduate work, you see. That would have
3 been clever. But I didn't do it. Because most of
4 my friends were working or had responsible jobs
5 and I was -- I figured it was about time that I
6 entered the mainstream.

7 Q HOW DID YOU DO THAT? DID YOU --

8 A I walked --

9 Q DID YOU GET A JOB OR --

10 A I got a job, yes. It wasn't all that
11 easy at the time. We were sort of in a rescission
12 or something. I don't know whatever it was.

13 Q POST-WAR RECESSION.

14 A And -- were you --

15 Q 1951?

16 A No. '48, '49.

17 Q OH. RIGHT. YOU GRADUATED IN TWO AND A
18 HALF YEARS.

19 A I walked into amongst many other places
20 -- I walked into Levi Strauss. And I was a very
21 fortunate.

22 Q YOU WORKED THERE?

23 A 29 years.

24 Q OH, MY. I SEE. SO WHAT KIND OF A
25 CAREER DID YOU HAVE THERE? DID YOU MOVE UP THE
26 LADDER AND ALL?

1 A What I did was I started out in -- in
2 an a department which was -- which was jobbing,
3 socks, underwear that sort of thing. They gave
4 all that up. And from there I went into sales,
5 which afforded me a good income.

6 Q I'M SURE YOUR OPEN PERSONALITY WAS GOOD
7 WORK?

8 A So I started out -- I remember very
9 distinctly. I was one of the training -- the
10 sales training course was about a year and a
11 half. I was one of the top salespeople as part of
12 the training. And there was a phone call from the
13 sales manager asking when I'd like to go to Texas
14 or whether I like to have the outskirts of San
15 Francisco. I took the outskirts of San Francisco,
16 which again wasn't all that brilliant, because
17 that was real tough and Texas would have been a
18 lot easier, but anyway at the outskirts.

19 And then from there, which was -- well,
20 I don't want to go into this. It's not
21 important. From there I went to Bakersfield for
22 nine years, which had the highest per capita
23 income -- per capita sales in the United States.

24 Q OH, MY.

25 A Incidentally, Levi's went down. There
26 were known as Jewish RR or what else?

1 Sheepherders. You know, all the sheepherders wore
2 Levi's. But we had a lot of the -- we had a lot
3 of other items to sell that the -- western wear
4 and so on. And then downtown San Francisco opened
5 up, and I applied for that and I got the downtown
6 San Francisco. And you might think that was a big
7 break, which it wasn't.

8 Q IT'S NOT THE PLACE TO SELL JEANS?

9 A That's right. It wasn't -- probably --
10 if not the worst, probably the worst territory in
11 the United States. And but anyway, that's all
12 neither here nor there.

13 Q WE MISSED A FEW YEARS.

14 A It worked out very well.

15 Q BACK TO THE TENNIS COURT WHERE YOU MET
16 YOUR WIFE?

17 A Oh, yes. That was after. That was
18 after Berkeley. And she was still over in
19 Berkeley, and we played tennis and went swimming.
20 My wife is very athletic and she was in Berkeley.
21 She was a recreation major which turned then into
22 a school -- she became a school psychologist. And
23 several years back she got a Ph.D.

24 Q AND WHAT DID SHE DO HER THESIS ON?

25 A What?

26 Q WHAT DID SHE DO HER THESIS ON?

1 A First of all her Master's was on
2 testing. And her thesis was on -- you got me. I
3 do know what it is, but I forgot. Isn't that
4 awful?

5 Q YOU TOLD ME, I THOUGHT.

6 A What the heck was it?

7 Q YOU WERE SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT HER
8 DOING SOME WORK ON CHILDREN IN THE Holocaust.

9 A Yes.

10 Q SHE HAD --

11 A Yes. Yes, of course. She was --

12 Q I'M SORRY. I THOUGHT --

13 A Right, right, right. Now -- now, of
14 course. Her thesis was -- does my blushing show
15 up on the television here?

16 Q NOW, YOU'RE --

17 A Thank you very much. It was children
18 of survivals of the Holocaust.

19 Q THAT WAS HER THESIS?

20 A Yes, that's correct.

21 Q I WAS VERY IMPRESSED WHEN YOU TOLD ME
22 THAT.

23 A And she compared -- for example, the
24 divorce rate and the mixed marriages and so on.

25 Q IS SHE A SURVIVOR?

26 A Yes.

1 Q AND WHERE DID SHE COME FROM?
2 A Berlin.
3 Q AND I SEE. AND DID SHE LOST A LOT OF
4 FAMILY?
5 A Not as much.
6 Q DID SHE COME --
7 A She did not. She came with her
8 parents. And practically -- she got out --
9 difficulty getting out, but they did.
10 Q HAS SHE EVER BEEN RR BY THE HOLOCAUST?
11 A No, she has not.
12 Q AND HER NAME IS VERA?
13 A Vera.
14 Q OBERMEYER?
15 A Well, yes. Doesn't necessarily be
16 Obermeyer. My daughter has kept her name
17 Obermeyer.
18 Q YOU HAVE CHILDREN?
19 A Yes.
20 Q MARRIED CHILDREN?
21 A Married children, yes.
22 Q HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE?
23 A Three. One boy and two girls.
24 Q AND THEY'RE ALL MARRIED?
25 A They're all married. They're having
26 children and one is expecting.

1 Q HOW MANY IS THAT ALTOGETHER?

2 A It will be five. Five grandchildren

3 I'm talking about now and three children.

4 Q YES.

5 A One boy. A boy, 38. And two girls.

6 Q THEY'RE STILL --

7 A 35 and 33.

8 Q AND DO THEY LIVE HERE?

9 A Out son who just came through here and

10 visited us lives up in Oregon. And he is a U.S.

11 forester -- Forest Service.

12 Q THAT'S -- THAT'S INTERESTING.

13 A Yeah. I think it's marvelous. And

14 he's married and has two children. One boy was

15 down here for his seventh girl day just now and a

16 little one, two years old. And they are very,

17 very, nice grandchildren.

18 Q I'M SURE. DO YOU FEEL THAT -- THAT

19 THERE WAS ANY KIND OF APPREHENSION WHEN YOU WERE

20 -- WHEN THOSE KIDS WERE YOUNG YOU KNOW, WHETHER

21 EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE SCARED YOU ABOUT FEAR FOR

22 BEING A JEW AND IN A COUNTRY LIKE THIS? YOU SEEM

23 AS THOUGH YOU WERE @@EXUBERANT AND CONFIDENT AND

24 YOU LOVED IT HERE AND ALL THAT. DID YOU EVER HAVE

25 ANY MISGIVINGS WHEN THEY CAME HOME WITH STORIES

26 MAYBE OF --

1 A No.

2 Q -- ANY PROBLEMS LIKE THAT?

3 A No. Really you know -- you have

4 problems --

5 Q ANY ANTI-SEMITISM OR --

6 A Really. I mean, if you wouldn't have

7 any problems in life it would be very boring,

8 don't you think? Yeah. So sure they have

9 problems. Anti-Semitism or whatever. And so have

10 I, you know. But I don't think you -- I think the

11 good things far outway the bad things.

12 Q OH, YES.

13 A I -- I -- I don't think we should dwell

14 on the bad things. However, I don't believe you

15 should forget, and I think that's very important.

16 Q AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE.

17 A Yes.

18 Q MAYBE THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO END IT.

19 YOU SHOULD NEVER FORGET?

20 A Yes. We should never forget. By all

21 means.

22 Q I'VE ENJOYED INTERVIEWING YOU, WALTER.

23 A Well, I've enjoyed talking to you. And

24 despite the fact that we didn't find the place so

25 easily --

26 Q THERE WERE SOME OBSTACLES IN OUR WAY.

1 A Roadblocks. We didn't have --

2 Q I SHOULD GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO
3 SAY, YOU KNOW, AT THIS POINT, BECAUSE I'VE ASKED
4 SOME QUESTIONS AND YOU'VE HAD TIME TO THINK BACK
5 AND FORTH. IF THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE YOU WANTED
6 TO SAY IN GENERAL TERMS ABOUT MAKING SURE HISTORY
7 IS RECORDED OR WHATEVER. WHAT'S IN YOUR MIND?
8 DON'T LET ME READ IT, IN OTHER WORDS. ANY OTHER
9 THINGS YOU WANT TO COVER IN THIS INTERVIEW THAT I
10 HAVEN'T RAISED?

11 A I think we covered the basic points.
12 Not in detail, but --

13 MAN MAN: I have a question. I'd be curious
14 to know what the logistics were in getting onto
15 the Children's Transport. What the specific
16 logistics were involved in doing that. And then
17 what, say, a day was like on the transport and
18 then how long --

19 THE WITNESS: Sure.

20 MAN MAN: -- that trip took and --

21 THE WITNESS: Let me say, first of all, I
22 had an absolutely marvelous meal whenever we left
23 [PWRAEUPL/] [ER/] how [SRER/] after which I was a
24 total loss because I was so damn seasick. But how
25 did I get on the transport? It wasn't a transport
26 really. Didn't I point that out somewhere around?