

Today is October 22, 2003. We're at the Temple Beth El in San Mateo, California, interviewing Louis Pais. My name is Peter Ryan, interviewer. Anne Grem-Saldinger is doing the videotaping. Could we begin by my asking where and when you were born?

I was born in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1927.

And how many people were in your family?

My mother, father, a brother and sister and myself. And where are you chronologically with your brother--

I was the youngest.

Your brother was the oldest or your sister?

My sister was the oldest.

And how much older is your brother?

My brother died. But he was four years older than I am.

And what did your father do?

He was in business. He was in the scrap business, steel peddler.

What kind of living arrangements did you have in Amsterdam?

We lived in a home, an individual house, and very comfortable.

How long had you been there? Do you know?

I've been there 14 years.

Your mother, did she work or was she a housekeeper?

My mother worked in my dad's business. She helped him run the business.

How long had they lived in Holland?

All their lives.

And your family tree goes back to--

My family tree goes back to Holland about 400 years, 300 years, somewhere in there.

Do you remember your early schooling?

My schooling?

Yeah.

Yeah, I do.

Tell me what you remember.

Well, I remember going to-- I remember my friends. As a matter of fact, I still have a high school friend living there. And I remember that was it was a pretty nice life in Holland. It was very-- you could-- the Dutch were very free to do anything they wanted to do and any religion they wanted to have. And it was a very nice life.

Do you remember your earlier schooling?

You know, I don't. I don't. I remember I didn't like it. And I remember playing hooky and getting caught by the police and being brought home, much to my embarrassment. I remember those parts of it. I preferred sports to going to school and studying.

Soccer?

Mostly soccer, yes. You're right.

Was the big meal in Holland at midday or--

No, it was the dinner.

Dinner?

Dinner, about 6:00 at night.

And everyone would be there everybody would be present and accounted for.

And was there a lot of talk, a lot of exchange?

Yes. Yes, there was. My dad always had good stories to tell.

What kind of stories?

Oh, about his business days and what kind of business-- he directed most of his talk to my mother. But we were all involved in it. We were all made part of the family.

Were you a religious family?

No, I can't say we were. My mother was very religious. My dad didn't care for it at all. And we sort of went his way. But my mother did keep a kosher home, you know, to the point where we had two kitchens, one for milk, one for meat. But my dad never much cared for it.

Did you have a bar mitzvah?

Yes, I did.

So your mother kind of carried on that tradition?

My mother-- yeah, she was the one that really pushed the religious part of it. But my dad, sure, he was into the tradition of the religion.

Did you celebrate holidays?

Oh, sure. Oh, yeah. Any chance to stay home from school was good by me. But Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah we used to go to Temple. But that's about it. We never much-- when you talk about religion, I remember my dad, you know, you're not supposed to ride in the car on the Sabbath. And my dad had walked two blocks and keep his car away from

the house on Friday nights and walked two blocks.

And my mother knew it. And didn't do anything about it. But my dad didn't want to offend her. So he went to work and never suddenly said a word to him. He'd take us with him once in a while. Jeez, I just remember that.

And you got a Jewish education then? Do you remember that?

Yes, I did get a Jewish education. We all did. We all got a Jewish education.

Was that outside of school?

It was outside of-- no, as a matter of fact, I went to-- gosh, you know, I don't remember. I think I had my Jewish education in school.

It was part of school?

It was part of school. So I must have gone to a Jewish school for part of the time. But then as I got older, I went to a public school.

Did you have any Jewish education at that time?

No, not that I remember.

You must have had some to have the bar mitzvah, no?

You know, you're absolutely right. I had to have had it. But I just don't remember.

Yeah.

I remember my bar mitzvah. And we were occupied by the Germans already at that time. But I remember walking to the shul. But, you know, I don't know where I learned. I don't recall at all.

Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood or was it mixed?

No. No, it was a mixed neighborhood.

And your friends were everything?

My friends were everything. They were all mixed. It was just like here.

Were you ever made to feel conscious of your being Jewish by your--

Before the Germans came in? No, never. Never. It was not it was not-- it was like here. [BUZZING] Oh, that's mine. Just ignore.

OK.

Was your family very political?

No, but they were interested in politics, my mother especially, very interested, very into politics. They were-- I would guess what we call liberal here today is my guess that that's what they were.

Both of them?

You know, I have no idea-- yeah, my dad was, yeah. Yes, he was. Yes, he was liberal too. Yeah, a very generous man, very, very liberal, yes.

And was there much talk at the dinner table about what was going on in the world?

You know I'm sure there was. Given the nature of my family, I'm sure there was. But I don't remember.

And that's why I said I wish my sister were here. She could really fill you in on that. But given the nature of things, yes, I would say there was.

Was there much awareness in Holland of the possibility of being invaded?

Oh, yes. Oh, well, not being invaded, but there was a lot of awareness of what was going on in the war. And there were a lot of German refugees in Amsterdam running around the streets. And my dad or my mother would explain who they were, what they. There were some victims of concentration camps.

Could you tell that they were refugees?

Yeah, I think so.

Tell me how.

They were dressed different. I don't think they had the means to dress the way we did. And there was one poor guy, I'll never-- we'd have Friday nights you always had people coming in the door asking for money and help. And I know nobody was ever turned away.

And I remember there was one poor guy running around the streets making all sorts of bird sounds and everything. And my dad told me that he'd been tortured by the Germans. And so who knows?

So your father knew some of the--

Oh, my dad knew what was going on. Oh, yeah.

You said they knocked on the door. Would people join you for dinner?

No, they'd come in. My dad, you know, he always knew who it was. And he said, I'll give him this and give him that. But they all got money and maybe-- I don't think food, but they all got money. They they'd come and collect money. And nobody was ever turned away. I don't know.

No, I don't think it was food so much. There was no food shortage in Holland ever, until the war started. Then it got bad.

You remember the day of the invasion?

Oh, yes.

Tell me what you saw or what you remember.

I remember clearly waking up to the sound of machine guns, or what I imagined were to be machine guns. And I looked out of my window. And over the church tower, there were airplanes chasing each other. And my guess is they were British planes chasing the Germans. I don't think the Dutch had an air force.

But I remember that, yeah. I remember it very clearly. And I remember the day when the Germans came in to Amsterdam.

What day was that?

That was the-- the war started May-- did it start May 10? Then the war ended May 15. And they came into Amsterdam May 16.

Did you see them come?

Absolutely.

Everyone was out on the street?

I think we were looking out the window.

I see.

We might have been on the street. I remember it very clearly. Yeah.

That must have felt awful, hmm?

Yeah. As young as I was, that felt bad. That was not good because I just--

How old were you at that point?

I was-- at that point, I hadn't been bar mitzvahed yet. So I was 12 at that point. And I just the day before had been to Rotterdam with my dad right after they laid it-- after they bombed it and they flattened it. And my dad wanted to see it, and he took me with him. And I remember seeing that.

And the following day, the Germans coming in-- or the two days later, the Germans coming in to Amsterdam. That didn't feel good.

You went in to Rotterdam--

Uh, huh,

--the day after they were bombed?

Yeah.

That must have been some scene.

I remember the fires. But I don't really remember what it was like. Yeah.

How did you understand all of this as a young boy?

You know, I have no idea. I really don't know. I just from-- you ask if there was conversation at the dinner table and we talk about what the Germans were doing and what they were doing to the Jews especially. And, you know-- so, yeah, you caught it, yeah. I mean there was no hiding. Nobody ever hid the facts of what could happen. We were all aware of what was going on. It was a strange time, very strange time.

How far was your house located from the main part of Amsterdam, the city center?

Oh, we lived in southern Amsterdam. So maybe two or three kilometers.

So when the Germans came in, they paraded in?

Oh, they paraded right by the house. And they were stationed-- there was a big school, Vossius Gymnasium. That was a college. And they took it over. And they stationed their troops there. That was about two blocks from the house.

So what changes took place after they came in?

Well, every morning at 6:00, they'd come marching by the house in their damn uniforms and their damn songs. And I'll say one thing for them, they knew how to march and sing. And, boy, they sure did it. They were just-- it was-- everything changed really.

Were you scared?

No, I can't-- I was probably too stupid to be scared or too young and not totally understand what was happening. I can't say I was ever really scared. The thing that was more scary were the air raids at night. And you'd have the shrapnel all over the house.

I remember going up to the roof with a friend of mine. And there was shrapnel from the anti-aircraft guns. And those shells had come down. The shrapnel would be all over the roof. I remember that. That was amazing.

Now, this was when the Germans were invading?

They were-- no, they'd already occupied. And the English had come over and bombed the harbor or whatever they were bombing. And this went on all the time.

How did that feel to have an ally bombing your country? Were you in favor of the air raids? Or--

I have no recollection of it, of my feelings about it. And no recollection at all.

When did it begin to pinch the family that you were occupied?

Oh, I think pretty soon it started. I know my dad was preparing to get out, preparing for something. After the war we talked about that. And my dad had wanted to stay in Holland and hide out on a farm. And he had a farm there where he could hide out.

And after the war, we found out that no German troops ever set foot on the farm. Never. They was so far in the country.

This was in the north?

It was in the north. Yes, it was. Yeah, it was in the north. But my mother kept pushing my dad. I remember that. She just wanted to leave. She didn't want to stay.

Did your father know the people who had the farm?

Yes. Yeah, we'd been fishing there, before he'd take us and we'd go fishing there. And I knew the farmer and his family. And they were really-- they were good people, yeah.

Were they Jewish?

No.

No.

No, I don't think they even knew what a Jew was is my guess that they wouldn't even know. But they, after the war, obviously we were still friends with them. And that's how we got a lot of our food from them. But my mother was the

one that insisted with my dad that we get out.

And did you?

Yes, we did. In '41, we escaped.

So from May of '40 until sometime in '41, when was it in '41?

In September.

So you were in Amsterdam up to that time?

Mm, hmm.

Any trouble with the authorities or--

No, the real problems-- well, you know, you were always on guard. I mean more and more you were on guard all the time. And I remember one of my uncles was one of the first Jews in Amsterdam to be killed and talked about that.

How was he killed?

You know, I don't know. My guess is he was just shot and dumped someplace. I think he was shot. He's a good guy too.

You remember him?

Oh, yeah, I remember him because-- I remember him because he liked us kids the best. He was one of those uncles that all the kids liked. And he always played with the kids. And, yeah, my guess is that he was probably resisting. That would be his way to go.

So your father had been preparing to leave?

Yes. And where did they-- oh, he wanted to go up to the farm.

He was thinking of going to the farm, I guess. And my mother just wouldn't hear of it.

Do you know why?

She just wanted to go to America. She just wanted-- well, on the day-- we tried to get out of Holland the day when the Germans invaded. That was May the 10th. And May the 12th, we tried to get out of Holland by going to IJmuiden and trying to get out on a boat to England.

But that didn't work. And we were there for-- we were there a long time I remember. We were outside of the harbor. And the Germans strafed the area where we were. That was one of-- probably one of the worst scenes that I remember getting--

And where were you?

We were on the highway from Amsterdam to IJmuiden, which is the harbor. And we were right outside the harbor. And we were going to go on a boat that was going to England. And then the Germans-- then we couldn't get on. And the boat left without us. And about a half hour later, we heard that the boat had been sunk.

And that was either an omen or who knows what. But the Germans were continually strafing us there and no longer the place.

It would have been illegal to leave, wouldn't it?

Oh, yeah, well, it was--

It wouldn't have been with the German sanction.

It wouldn't have been with anybody sanctions. But the war was still going on.

Right. And England and Germany were at war.

Yep. And Holland and Germany were at war. But my dad or mother thought it'd be a good thing to try to get out on one of those barges. And I remember at night coming home along the highway. That was the-- they used-- it was the oil harbor is where it was. And all the oil storage tanks were burning, unbelievable fires. It was crazy, crazy time.

So was that a big letdown that you couldn't get on the boat?

Again, to me, no. I'm sure that to my parents, yes, I'm sure it was.

What did it seem like to you? Was it like an adventure?

Yes, you know, that's the right word. It was like an adventure. I don't think I realized the dangers involved until the German planes started coming over and strafing us. And that's when you realized that it was pretty serious. But I have just such a vague recollection. Probably if I've done this 10 years after it happened I would have remembered more vividly.

Had you packed everything up to leave? Do you remember if you had to--

Just packed a suitcase and that was it. I think they were ready to give everything up, leave it all behind.

So you returned to your house?

Return to the house, yeah.

Now, during that time, you said that during German occupation before you left, you had your bar mitzvah. Do you remember were you able to carry on your daily life normally?

Yeah, went to school. And everything was still fairly normal. We left apparently just in time because after we came back, after the war, we'd heard that the next day the Germans came to the house to pick us up. Now whether that's true or not, who knows? But it probably was true. They were all set to pick us up.

So there were no distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in terms of who could go to the school?

No, not yet. No.

And you didn't have to wear a star?

No. No.

And you were able still to practice Judaism? The synagogue functioned?

Mm, hmm.

And your father's business was left alone?



Till we left?

Till you left.

Yeah, he was left to run it.

They didn't interfere?

Well, they brought in a-- I forget what they call it, but a supervisor, a German a supervisor, who just let my dad run it.

Didn't interfere?

No.

Was it still his business?

It was still his business. And he still had his money. But that all changed very rapidly.

How?

The Germans took everything over. And they took all the money and everything. But that was after we left.

OK. How did you decide to leave?

Well, we left--

And how did you find out how to leave?

My dad had made contact with the underground and arranged for a car to drive us to the border of Holland and Belgium. And my dad had a man working for him, Donzlar, who took care of everything after my dad left and who helped him prepare everything. But it wasn't just our family. My dad also made arrangements for his brother's family. That was his brother, his brother's wife, and their two children. So there were nine of us that left.

In a car?

In a couple of cars.

Couple of cars.

And we drove to the Belgian border. And in Belgium--

Was there any problem getting over the border from Holland to Belgium?

We were-- again, I think we were stopped a couple of times, but nothing serious. I mean--

Did you experience any fear on that drive? Did you know that maybe you were in danger if you got caught?

Probably. I'd have to be pretty dumb not to know you were in danger. And when we got to the border, there was definitely danger because the German troops were checking everybody. But we got on a train. And the train took us to Brussels. In Brussels, we changed trains.

Now, had the Belgians capitulated already? Oh, yeah.

Yeah, the whole war was over. It was over and done with.

Yeah.

We got on the train. We changed trains in Brussels and went to Paris. In Paris, we got off the train, and we went to a safe house or a safe hotel or someplace safe. And late at night, we got back on a train that took us to the Spanish border.

There were nine of you?

There were nine of us.

And was there anyone at the Spanish border who was going to help or what?

God, who knows? Maybe God, maybe his helpers. We didn't know. We had no clue.

You were just going to take your chances.

Yeah.

And there was a lot of guarding of that border.

Yes, there was. But the underground knew where to go, how to get across. And we did.

Did you have to walk over the mountains?

Yeah, went over the Pyrenees.

Walking?

Well, we drove part of the way, walked part of the way. And, you know, I wish I could remember better.

Now, this is September?

This was late September.

Was it cold? In the mountains.

Eh, a little bit.

Not snowing?

No. No. And we got on a train in Spain and went to Bilbao.

But wait a minute. Did you have a guide?

Yes, we had guides. The underground had taken care of everything. And we had guides everywhere.

So you cross at a place where there were no guards?

Must have. I can't imagine guards letting us through.

Do you remember how your father made the connections with the underground?

I have no idea. We never-- it may sound strange, but after the war, we never talked about it again, never talked about what happened those days ever again.

Do you know why?

No.

I'm trying to think why that would be. You know, you mentioned earlier that you lost almost 89 people.

I think there were 89 family members, were all picked up. They all died. And if you can imagine my 78-year-old grandmother being put on a transport and gassing, what's the point of that? I mean-- I mean if you do that, what kind of human beings are they? I mean--

Were you your father and mother from large families?

Yes. We had fairly good-- my mother's family was big. My dad's family was-- yeah, it was a good-sized family too. It was very-- I think one or two cousins survived. My mother's sister and her family survived. They were hidden away in Belgium. And they survived.

Were they in a city or on a farm?

They were outside of a city. And my brother stumbled onto them while he was in the army. And when he was coming up on the front there, when they were moving into Holland or into Belgium, he stumbled upon them.

He was in the American army?

No, he was in the Dutch army. He was in the-- well, it was a Canadian army. It was the Princess Irene Brigade.

So when you went to Canada, he got drafted?

No, we never went to Canada. We went to-- we came to America. He volunteered when we got here.

Was this before-- this is before we got in the war?

Yeah.

OK. I was trying to figure out how did he get to Canada.

Yeah. He went from New York. He went to Guelph, Canada. And that's where he got his training and everything. Then he went to England.

So did your father and mother lose practically all of their families?

Most of their families, yes.

Now, your mother had a sister that would--

Survive. My mother's sister survived and her family.

And your father's brother. Of course, he went with you.

My father's brother went with him. My father's sister was shot the day the war ended. I think it ended, what, May 5 that the war end in Europe. She was shot the day the war ended.

My father's nephew, both nephews survived. My father-- my mother's family hardly had any survivors. My dad's family had a few. But, you know, what, 99% of the Dutch Jews were killed. So what are your chances?

How long did it take to go from Holland to Spain?

A month.

A month.

Just about. Nah, about three weeks. About three weeks.

Do you know what kind of papers you had?

You know, I just the other day-- I don't have any-- when my brother died, my niece found my passport, which wasn't mine. It was a forgery. And somehow or other, my brother had saved it. And I gave it to my nephew. And everything was forged. Nothing was real.

And it didn't say Jew on it?

No, it did not say Jew on it. I mean if it said Jew, you were gone.

Yeah.

So your father had obtained these false papers--

Oh, he did well. But it was-- he only did-- no, I shouldn't say that. He did well because my mother pushed him. It was really my mother that said we'd got to get out of here.

And do you know if they had to pay a lot of money to--

They paid a lot of money. They paid a lot of money.

Even so, they must have been stopped a number of times in that month.

Oh, my dad, while he was trying to get the papers-- the first time around we escaped, we went to Switzerland but were turned away and had to come back. But that was before that. And it was a lot easier in the beginning. It was a lot easier. And as time went on, it got harder and harder to get out.

Do you remember about that incident with Switzerland?

My sister knows. I don't remember. To me, they were all trips. And we went here, we went there. And we went back.

But everyone was disappointed when you got turned back?

Yeah, the Swiss were not very good. And we came back. And then my dad was-- they put him in jail for trying to bribe a German officer. And then they bribed somebody else and got him out. So it was just-- we were just lucky. God was really watching over us. Because without that, you couldn't have made it. It was just impossible.

So your father was arrested?

Yeah. Doing what he thought was the right thing to do is-- but they got him out again. And then the second time around, it was successful. But I remember him carrying bags of money, literally bags of money, and my brother helping him carry it in the car. I remember that.

Dutch money?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Was your father actually a part of the Underground?

No. Well, who knows? I don't know. As I said, we-- after the war was over in May of '45, my dad went back to Holland in June of '45. And we went back in the fall of '45. And once we got back to Holland, we never talked about it again.

Even your mother?

No. Never talked about it again. Not with us. Not with me around anyway. And I don't think anybody really-- I mean things were just-- the conditions were terrible when we got back there. It was just unbelievable. But nobody ever talked about how we got out again.

Why did you go back, do you know?

Yeah, my dad wanted to go back. Holland was his country. It was his family's country. Holland had been very good to him, to us. And, you know, I'm just reading a book about the Dutch in the 1400s and 1500s now and how free and liberal everything was. And so he just wanted to go back.

And, of course, when he came back, his business was in ruin. He was bankrupt and-- but--

He knew it would be hard if he went back, didn't he?

Yeah.

And it would have been relatively easier if he'd stayed in the United States.

Yeah. So that was a sacrifice to go back?

That wasn't his thing. His thing was to go back. We all went back.

How did you feel about going back?

Not good. I wanted to stay here. I'd become an American. You know, I'd been to junior high and high school, and I'd become an American in that short period. But it was just the right period. It was just the right age to do that.

And I didn't want to go back. But we did. And once we were there, it was OK.

But when you left-- just going back to that journey again-- do you remember what you could take with you?

I remember I had a suitcase with clothes. I remember I had a sweater. I remember that very clearly. I don't know why. No.

It was-- for me-- that's kind of selfish, but for me, it was probably a harder time after the war than during the war because after the war we came back to Holland. We'd lived in New York fairly, not very comfortable, but fairly comfortable. There was always food. There was always heat. You were never hungry or cold. And we came back to Holland. And there was no food, no clothing, no heat, very little electricity. It was nothing.

Did you go back to the same house?

Yes, went back to the same house, which had been lived in by the German supervisor who took over my dad's business. But the guy, Donzlar, the man that ran the business for my dad, had saved almost everything for my dad--

Oh, yeah--

And my mother-- for my family.

And the equipment?

No, the equipment at the yard was all blown up. That was all blown to hell. But I'm talking about stuff in the house and things like that. He kept most of it there.

But let's pick up the trip from the time you got over the border in Spain.

Went to Bilbao. And we stayed in a hotel. Now, you have to remember there were nine of us that had to be taken care of. And we stayed in a hotel, and we spent about four weeks there.

Why so long?

Oh, because-- that's another-- we couldn't get-- we had exit visas from the Germans and the Spanish. And the Americans wouldn't give us an entry visa into the United States. They didn't want any more Jews here.

So we managed. And they hung it on Spain didn't want them to take us. So my dad got us entrance visas to Cuba and got the Cuban consul to give us entry visas, or the American consul to give us entry visas from Cuba to the United States. I mean how ridiculous can it get? But I remember-- and that may have been one of the reasons my dad didn't want to be in America. I don't know.

Because they wouldn't accept you when you were in Spain?

Yeah.

So if you came from Cuba, you were not considered--

Then we were fine--

Refugees?

We were not-- that's right. Yeah, that's-- we never even got off the boat in Cuba. But the boat docked in Cuba. And we went ashore. My dad did whatever he did with the American consul. And now we were people-- not citizens, we were residents of Cuba going to the United States. We were not refugees from Germany, or from Europe.

Now, when you were in Spain, did you have to go to Portugal to get the boat?

We got on-- no, we got the boat in Spain, yeah. I don't remember where. It made a number of stops, went to Lisbon, went to Portugal, and from Portugal went to Cuba. It took three weeks to go across from Portugal to Cuba.

How big a boat?

A very small-- it was a freighter.

A freighter.

Freighter, very small boat.

Did it sail by itself?

It sailed by itself, the Marques de Comillas. I have--

That's the name--

Of the boat.

When was that?

That-- when?

Mm, hmm.

It was in--

'41.

In-- what was it? It had to be November. It had to be November.

That was a rough--

Because we came here November-- we came here the week of Thanksgiving.

Do you remember before you left?

Did people get seasick?

Oh, I'm sure.

Did you?

I don't think so. I don't think I did, no.

No.

I didn't.

Did you realize that you might be in danger of being sunk?

Yeah, that did occur to us because we always-- every day we tried on our life vests and everything. I don't know what good that would have done. But, yeah. But there were so many phases of the whole trip I just don't have any recollection at all. None.

Were there other refugees on the boat?

Yeah, there was another Dutch family on the boat, the van den Bergs. And we saw them in Holland after the war. They went-- he went back to Holland eventually too. Yeah.

So you went to Cuba, just stayed in the harbor, and then went to New York.

Yeah.

And so that--

On the same ship. It's amazing that thing stayed afloat that long.

Did you know anyone in New York?

No. My dad-- my dad had a friend who knew a guy in New York, another Dutchman, Irving Grufeous. And he met us at the boat. And nobody spoke English. And my mother spoke English. I didn't speak any English. My mother spoke English. My dad spoke English somewhat. He spoke God knows how many languages, but none of them real well, but well enough to get along.

But this Dutchman met us and found us an apartment on 72nd Street in New York.

72nd and what?

I think it was between Riverside and West End Avenue, one of those huge buildings. And then--

When you landed in America, did you still have the suitcases with you?

Yeah, still had two suitcases. And believe me, we looked weird. I'm sure we did. I can just imagine it.

So he found you an apartment right away?

Found us an apartment right away.

All nine of you? Or just--

No, you know something, I don't remember. It may have been all nine of us the first time around. And then afterwards, my uncle and aunt found a place. And my mother and dad found a place on 103rd Street. And we lived there for a while.

Did your father try to work?

Yeah.

What did he do?

He-- well, we moved. We moved to Wilmington, Delaware, for a little while.

Because he had a job?

Because he had a job in a steel company. But we didn't stay there very long. And then we moved back to New York.

It didn't work out?

You know, I don't even remember why. But my brother went in the army. My sister got a job in Washington. And--

Was there any difficulty in the family about your brother volunteering?

No.

Your father was OK with it?

Fine with it.

Yeah. OK.



Yeah. And, you know, I-- my mother and-- I don't know what my dad did. I'm sure my-- oh, I know, my dad was dealing in stocks. He had some stock brokerage house that he was dealing in in New York.

You mean you worked in the--

Yeah. Well, he was like a broker. Yeah. But then--

But couldn't speak English?

Oh, by then he spoke better. He was-- I'm talking about two years later now.

Oh, OK.

And it was '41, '42, '43, '44, by then he was speaking English. And obviously by then, I spoke English.

Where were you living then?

We were living again on 103rd.

On account you liked it up there?

Yeah. Yeah, that worked out well.

No news from Holland? You didn't know what was going on?

Oh, we had no idea what was happening. We had heard somehow, I don't even know how, that my grandfather, my father's father, had died. And then later on, we found out he died of stomach cancer. So-- but all the others were-- the bulk of them died in the concentration camps.

And what were you hearing from your brother?

Oh, he was fine.

Was he in combat?

Yeah. Yeah, he was in Europe a couple of weeks after D-Day and there till the end of the war.

Was that his first combat?

Uh, huh.

And you? What was it like for you?

Oh, you know, I sort of went with the flow, I guess is what you would call it. I made friends in New York, made friends in school, and finished high school in New York. And that's when we went back to Holland in October. It must have been October of '45.

Now, did your mother keep kosher in New York?

She tried. Yeah, she bought at the-- it was very difficult to keep kosher with my dad. It's not that he was disrespectful or anything. He just he didn't care for it. He just-- nah, religion wasn't his thing. And so--

So would he mix things up?

Oh, I don't know. If you mixed anything up, there was hell to pay in our house-- if my mother saw it. And--

Did you follow the war with interest?

Yes.

Yeah.

Oh, God, yes. Listen to-- now, we listened to Gabriel Heatter. You probably don't remember him.

Oh, I remember Gabriel.

Remember Gabriel Heatter? Gabriel Heatter and then Walter Winchell on Sundays. But Gabriel Heatter there is "Good news tonight." Yeah, you don't remember him. Yeah.

You're pulling rank on her.

Huh?

I said you're pulling rank on her.

That was the big thing. Yeah, we followed the news very carefully, yeah.

Particularly as it pertains to Holland?

Well, no, basically as to pertaining where the troops were. Worried about my brother. We knew what was going on in Holland. There's nothing we could do about it.

Did you know about the famine?

We knew that they were there. We didn't know that they'd been exterminated. No.

Were you able to have any communication in the earlier days?

No.

No.

No. Somehow, I know somehow, and I'm not sure how that worked, but we did hear about my grandfather-- my dad's father, my grandfather. I don't even know how we got that news. But, no, there was no communication at all.

They knew that you had gotten safely to America?

They knew we'd gotten away.

Now when you were in high school, did you have Jewish friends? Christian friends? What? Anything? Everything?

Well, at first it was mixture. You have to remember I went to school, I didn't speak English.

Right.

And there was one teacher-- what was his name? Gerber or something like that-- who took pity on me and kept me after school and worked with me every day, speaking English, working on English.

Wow.

And he really did. I mean I probably never appreciated it when he did it. But when I think back on it, that's the only way that I really learned English and to speak properly. And he urged me to read comic books. And the comic books would tell you by looking at what they were saying you sort of learn. But I owe him a lot. He really-- he saved me a lot of grief.

What were your favorite comic books?

Oh, I think there was Batman and Superman. And, you know, I don't remember. But I remember reading comic books and putting two and two together and putting the language and the pictures together.

Did your sister have trouble with the language?

My sister spoke English. She'd learned it in school. There's that age difference at that age was just enough so that she had the education and I didn't. And I was getting my education here, while she'd already had it.

Now how old was she?

She was 20.

20.

So she spoke English.

People who come at your age learn the language quickly.

Just like that.

And the older ones have trouble.

Yeah.

So she knew English.

She knew English from school. And we'd spent six months in England before the war, my-- again, my mother urged my dad to move the family, get them out of Holland. And we moved to England. And--

Was this just because of the Germans?

Because of the Germans-- because of the war, yeah. And this was in 1939. And we moved to England. And August 31 of 1939, my dad said, I've had enough, there's not going to be a war. And we moved back to Holland.

[CROSS TALK]?

And two days later, there was war. He just didn't want to leave Holland. He loved Holland. The man truly loved Holland.

And, you know, when I read the history of Holland and how things were I can understand it. They were totally, totally free. There was no there was no religious persecution.

Not like in some of the other countries.

No. I mean, of course, there was antisemitism. That was everywhere. But it wasn't open and rampant like in other countries.

Did you ever experience it in Holland?

Antisemitism in Holland? No.

Did you in America?

Yes.

Where?

In New York. Not antisemitism as much as anti-refugee or immigrant type thing. I was a kid in New York who didn't speak English. So who the hell did they beat up first? They pick on the guy that can't talk.

You can't rat on them.

That's right. Well, you know, I had a great thing. My mother had made me a sign. And it said, I can't understand you. Well, when a kid said something to me, I put the sign up. And he shouted at me. He thought I was deaf. And not that I couldn't speak English. I told my grandkids that one time, and they just thought that was a great thing.

So were you picked on?

Yeah. Yeah, no doubt about it.

For how long?

When I got smart enough to hit back, when I realized if I hit back they'll stop picking on me, they did.

How long did it take you to figure that out?

Well, maybe a couple of weeks. Didn't take very long.

That's pretty good.

I mean, you know, hey, you don't want to get beat up every night.

Yeah. Did your mother like it here?

My mother loved America.

And your father was not too happy?

My mother loved America. She loved everything America stood for. And she was forever grateful to the United States, always, always thankful.

Was she sad then to go back to Holland?

Well, I don't think she was sad. I think she would have just as soon stayed here. But, you know, she was married to my dad. And she knew she had to keep the family together.

So you all went back in August of--

My dad went back in--

You went back in November?

I went back in October or November. I don't really remember.

With your mother?

With my mother. My mother, my sister, and I went back together. My brother was there from after the war. And my dad was there already. And--

And how long did it take before your father could get on his feet again financially?

Well, that took a while. That was a tough go. That was. But again America and-- you know, I don't think most people understand what the Marshall Plan and everything did for Europe and how generous the Americans were. And it's-- sure, the Germans gave us repatriation money. But where did the money come from America? America footed the bill for everything. And the American taxpayer. And it's pretty amazing.

So I was sending some of my money to you without knowing it?

Yes, thank you. [LAUGHTER] Sure. I think we forever been like that. We are just a very generous country.

Did he try to start up the same business he had had before?

He rebuilt the business.

He did.

He rebuilt the business, yes, he did.

And how old were you when you went back?

18.

And were you finished with your schooling?

I wasn't finished, but, yes, I was finished. I went to-- I came back a year-- I came back a year later and I went to college, went to Fordham. Or it may have been two years later.

On your own?

Yes. I came back, stayed with friends. That just didn't work out.

Fordham?

Fordham. That didn't work. We had no money to start with. All the money was going to Holland to start-- to try to rebuild the business. It just it didn't work. I mean, me being here, them being there.

Why did you come back here?

I wanted to come back. I didn't want to be in Holland. I mean if you had any idea what Holland was like in the first two years after the war, you wouldn't want to be there either. I mean, it was just an impossible situation. And there's very little anybody could do. It just had to evolve.

What was it like for you when you got there?

Well, I was lucky. I told you about this high school friend I had. And I found him. And his family had all been killed. So he moved in with us. So that worked out OK. And I went to work for my dad. And so did he, as a matter of fact. We both went to work for my dad. And then--

What were you doing? What were you doing?

I was doing anything they told me to do, you know, sorting out metal. We had a metal yard and working in the metal yard. You know, physical labor really.

And your brother, what did he do?

My brother was helping run my dad's business. He was helping my dad. Again, he was four years older than myself so--

And your sister, what did she do?

You know, I don't know what she did. I mean I think she just was home. I don't really remember what she did. She didn't go back to school. So maybe she helped my mother run the house, you know. I really don't know.

I would think that your parents weren't too happy that you decided to come back to America.

No, my dad was very-- I disappointed my dad many times. So it wouldn't be the first, it wouldn't be the last time. But we were free to do what we wanted.

Yeah. What was the big disappointment about you?

Not going into the business with him. And I really-- I was like my mother. I really liked America. I want it to be in America.

Why didn't it work at Fordham?

I was all alone. That didn't work out. And again, I probably never really liked school.

So what did you do?

Well, I got a job at Gimbels as a stock boy. What was going wage at that time? \$0.25 an hour?

If you were lucky.

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I think you're right. And that was a pretty good job.

And that was enough? That was enough to-- what did you have an apartment?

I lived with a friend of mine in New York who lived on 102nd Street near Broadway. I lived with him for a while. But eventually, I went back to Holland. I went back to Holland for a while. Never really wanted to stay there. Told my dad I'd stay. But lying through my teeth. And--

You knew it.

I knew it. I knew I didn't want to be there.

So how long did you stay before you came back again?

We stayed till-- God, I hope you don't hold me to these dates. But I think it was around '48 or '49, maybe '49 I came back. And at that point-- it might have been later. I'd have been '50. I don't remember. Boy, I just don't remember.

When you went--

It was '49. It was '49 because I had to come back because I had to go in the army. Now I remember. I had to go in the army. I went in the army for the Korean War.

You were an American citizen?

Yeah.

You had become one in your first stay?

I became one-- I was an American resident. And I had to go in the army. And I became an American citizen automatically when I went into the army.

Same thing they did in the Iraq war.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah. Everybody became Americans.

Right So you could die for your country.

Nothing has changed.

What was that like for you, the Korean War?

I never went to Korea. I was in occupied Germany. I was one of the occupation troops in Germany.

Where?

I was in Frankfurt. I was in Gelnhausen. I was on the Czech border where we were having all that trouble with the Russians. My army experience was no different than anybody else's.

How long were you in?

2 and 1/2 years.

So that's ironic. You went back to Holland, knew you didn't like it, wanted to come back here, came back because you had to because you were drafted.

Yeah. That's it. I got drafted.

And then you're sent to Europe. So--

Yeah-- you're not far from--

Yeah. No, and I went to visit my family while I was there, yeah. But that's how-- now, I remember. I was drafted the day of the war-- June 25, 1949. And that's when the Korean War started. And I remember it because it's my sister's birthday. That's right. I'd forgotten about that part.

Did you speak German? Is that one of the reasons they sent you to Germany?

Oh, they put me-- they figured out that I spoke a whole bunch of languages and that I was good at math. So the army, the captain there, whoever, said, you know, something, I think we'll send you to Germany in the artillery. Now, I don't know what languages and math and all that had to do with it, but anyway.

Did they use any of your skills in the army?

No.

No.

Did they use yours? No, of course, not.

So when you finished with the army, what?

When I finished with the army, I came back and I moved to a town in upstate New York. I'd made up my mind. That was it. I was staying here. And at that point, I was old enough and self-sufficient enough.

So I moved to Binghamton, New York, and worked for a printing company, Hall Printing Company, in Binghamton, New York. I got married, had children. 1972, left Binghamton, came to California.

Why?

Got a-- we got-- we, my wife and I, we're divorced. That's not why I came to California. I came to California really, my brother lived here. He'd moved here. And I like the weather. Climate was a big factor in that.

Binghamton is cold?

Oh, terrible. But I still have some good friends there. And--

So your brother came to America. You came to America.

My brother came to America. He decided to give up on Holland in 19-- you know, I don't exactly-- I was married in '52. Let's see, Ethel and I met in '51, married in '52. My brother came in '53, came back to America '53. And then he moved out here to California.

Right away? Pretty soon?

Pretty soon, yeah.

Did he know something about California?

No. He got in a car and drove cross-country and decided this is where he wanted to be.

Were you attracted to the printing business? Did you anything about--

No, it was a sales job. And the guy just gave me the job. And it turned out I did well at it, and, yeah, it was OK.

And when you came to California, you came by yourself?

I came by myself.



What did you do here?

I worked with my brother in a business for a little-- in a distributing business for a little while. And then I went back into the printing business, selling printing.

Did your mother ever get back here?

No.

She was the one who wanted to come.

She's the one that always wanted to be here. She did come-- she did come to Binghamton. But-- and, as a matter of fact, she made my dad buy her a house in Binghamton.

Really?

Yeah. Yeah, houses in those days, what, \$9,000. Hey, it wasn't that expensive. And because at that time, there was a fear of communism in Holland. And she wanted to have a place to come to.

Because she didn't want to caught again.

She wasn't going to get caught again. And she was very happy that I was here. She always encouraged me to come here, never made any bones about it. And then she came to visit us in Binghamton. And, yeah, Ethel and I lived in Binghamton for, oh, 20 years, 19 years and my mother come to visit, my dad too. But my dad more reluctant than my mother.

He wasn't as enthusiastic?

No. He was not. I don't know why. He was always grateful that America was here, you know. But he never wanted to be here, no.

Did your sister come back to America or--

Yeah, she came-- my sister came back in 1953 for a year, but then went back to Holland.

And stayed?

Stayed, married, had a family. She lives in Israel now. I have a daughter that lives in Israel. And they wouldn't be anywhere else.

Do you go see your sister?

I go see my daughter and my sister both, yeah.

Israel appeal to you?

No. No.

Not your country?

I thank God that Israel is there for all the people that want to be there. But do I want to be there? No.

And Holland, what does Holland appeal to you now?

Nah, I don't much care for Holland.

Have you ever been back?

Yeah, I've been back. I've been to see my friends. But do I want to live there? No. Well, this is where I want to live. With all its faults, America is still the best country in the world.

And what does Judaism mean to you now in your life? Anything?

Yeah, I'm very bound by the Jewish traditions. Do I believe in the religion or do I feel for the religion? Well, it's the only religion I know. I mean if I were to be religious, I'd be Jewish. I wouldn't ever want to be anything else.

Now you had children. How many?

I have two children, and my wife has one.

And any of them boys?

One boy.

Did they have a religious ceremony?

Well, Bob did. Bob-- well, Bob-- well, Judy is very Orthodox. She's-- she married-- well, she and her husband became Lubavitch after they got married. And so they're well into the religion.

My son is into religion like I am. He's a once-a-year Jew, goes to Temple Yom Kippur. But are we Jewish? Yes, we're Jewish. I would never be anything else. I wouldn't want to be anything else.

Do you think that some of the experiences that you've described today-- the occupation, the escape, coming to America, going back, coming back again-- do you think that it's affected your life?

Yes, it absolutely has. And as I get older, I feel it more and more.

What is your feel?

I keep having dreams. And the dreams are always about the Nazis, always. I don't know why. But they always are.

Yeah, it had an effect on me. There's nobody-- you've talked to maybe thousands of people. And I'll bet they all say the same thing. Nobody can go through that and not have an effect, have it affect you. That's just impossible.

Do you think it's hindered you?

Do I blame my failures on my past? No. I don't think so. Not in that way. Has it hindered me in-- I don't know whether it has or not. It's never been a pleasant memory.

And like I said, the years after the war were even tougher.

Just because of the deprivation that was going on?

Oh, it was terrible. It was just-- I don't think you can explain-- well, Bill would understand, Sterns. I mean he was thrown into that similar situation where people don't even know where they belong. They don't know where to go. That's a terrible thing.

And when you're hungry that there isn't anything to eat, I mean that's-- I mean there literally isn't anything to eat. It's just

almost impossible to believe.

Yeah. And this is after the war?

This is after the war. That's the spring of '45, more people died of starvation in Holland than of anything else. It was just terrible. They had literally, literally starved the population. It was just terrible.

So you think your memories of Holland are intertwined with the Germans being there?

You know, I-- yeah, probably. I don't remember a whole lot about Holland. I remember growing up and having a good time with other kids and, like you say, playing soccer and all that and--

Those are good memories?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Yeah, they are.

Do you have particular values or attitudes that you think stem from some of those difficult experiences?

Yeah, I think I have some bad attitudes about other people, especially Germans. And I've passed my total hatred of Germans onto my children, which I wish I hadn't. I really-- and I want to say this to my son especially, don't ever carry on that hatred. That doesn't get you anything. And just because I tell you to hate the Germans or dislike them, don't ever do it. It's not worth it. It's not good to hate people. It really isn't.

And I know that stayed with me. And I've passed that on to other people. And I really want to be more tolerant of other people. And I know that I'm not. But that's part of the past.

Does that same experience, does that broaden to tolerance of other people? Is it specific the Germans?

I think it does. I think it does. I have-- I don't tolerate stupid people very easily. But for the rest, I tolerate almost anybody.

But to this day, I do not tolerate Germans. I just can't stand them. I just don't want to be around them. And I don't want my children to be like that. And there's no need for that. It really doesn't gain you anything.

What was it like for you then to be an occupation soldier in Germany?

You know, I've asked myself that question a lot of times. But I did whatever was right. I think. And we didn't have much contact with the Germans. We really didn't.

We were stationed in Gelnhausen, which was the SS barracks right outside of Frankfurt. And we were pretty much kept away from the Germans, unless you were on military police duty. And then you walk the streets. But no contact.

Were you an MP?

No.

No.

You were just put into that situation. You'd be walking with the MPs. But, no, we were guarded-- we were border patrol. We were on the Czech-German border. And the only ones that bothered us were the Russians. And so--

Were there Czechs who were trying to escape?

None that I ever saw. But I'm sure there were. I'm sure there were.

You didn't have any dealings--

No, I had no dealings with that at all.

Was it unpleasant for you to be in Germany given your feeling--

Yes, I have never been to Germany other than in the army. I just will not go to Germany. My wife has wanted to go. There's a lot to see. And I'm sure it's a beautiful country. I just have never wanted to set foot in Germany. But again, I don't want my kids to feel that way. I really don't. It doesn't prove anything.

Well, it proves that feelings are tenacious. And we don't get rid of them easily.

Yeah, you cannot-- how can how can you get rid of that? For some reason-- and this is probably for you more than anybody-- is I can never get that picture of my grandmother out of my mind. How do you put a 70-year-old woman on the transport? How do you do that?

Where did she go? To Auschwitz?

Who knows?

Don't know.

Was she in Westerbork?

No, she would have been too old to go to Westerbork. They didn't clear her through Westerbork.

Right from Amsterdam?

Right. Yeah. And those are the things that--

You remember her, your grandmother?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Now, you talk about religion, my grandmother was religious. And again, my grandfather, her husband, wasn't terribly religious. That seemed to run with the women there.

But my grandfather, my paternal grandfather, was a kosher butcher in northern Holland. And then they moved to Amsterdam to be closer to my mother and us. And he used to take care of me.

Your grandfather?

My grandfather, yeah. He was a good old guy. I don't remember a whole lot. I remember he was bald. And I don't remember him as well as my father's father. But I remember-- I do remember-- he died before the war there. Thank God he never had to deal with that. Yeah.

And your grandmother, the one that--

She was religious. She was Orthodox. Yeah.

Was she nice to you?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Oh God, yeah. Yeah.

So you liked that? You like that from her?

Oh, I like my grandparents. Yeah.

Maybe not as much as your uncle that everyone liked so much?

Well, that was-- he was-- everybody has an uncle like that, don't they?

Or they wish they did.

And it didn't surprise me-- I remember not being shocked that he was one of the first Jews killed in Holland. But that's the way he. He was right out front. Yeah. I mean you're talking about stuff that happened 55 years ago. It's a lifetime.

You know you have a New York accent?

I'm told that almost every day. And I don't care. I'm not about to lose it either.

I think it's charming. Anne, anything you want to ask?

How is it for you to be talking about this today? More memories coming through--

Yeah, it seems kind of weird to be talking about it. It's-- I wished I'd done this 30 years ago when it was still a lot clearer. And--

It wouldn't have happened 30 years ago because we had the same kind of thing going on here that you had in Holland-- didn't want to talk about it.

Yeah. That's the strangest thing that we-- I'll answer your question first. It's strange bringing up all of that stuff. And I'm thinking of-- starting to cry now-- it's bringing up thoughts of my aunts that I hadn't thought about in 50 years. And my mother's family. And I mean--

People you cared about.

Yeah, cared about. They were our family. And it's amazing that-- you're right, we didn't talk about it. And we should have talked about it.

No one wanted to hear.

No one wanted to hear. I did this one time-- I was telling my granddaughter in her Hebrew school, the one in Boston, wanted me to come to her class and talk to her class about what it was like under the occupy-- what it was like to live in Holland while the Germans were there. Well, you know, I glossed it over a little bit. But they were interested. And she's only-- well, she's only 13 now. And so that was about three years ago.

But you're right. Years ago nobody wanted to hear about it. And we didn't want to talk about it.

And I asked Bill why he didn't want to talk about it. And neither one of us have a real good reason. Maybe it just sounds too implausible. I don't know. I just--

Do you feel like people can believe all what happened?

If I were an outsider and somebody told me some of the things that happened, I don't know if I'd believe it. I mean, it's

almost impossible to believe what these people did. I mean you could punish them for eternity and the price wouldn't be big enough.

And then I sit and watch at home, and I watched the History Channel. And I look at what happened 500 years ago, 300, it's all the same thing, only they weren't Jews. They were God knows what. And people were always killing people.

Too many times they were Jews, though.

Too many times they were Jews, yeah. That's-- I just don't understand that. And I--

How do you make sense of that in your mind? Why the Jews?

I don't know. I go to Israel. I've been to Israel a lot. And one of the first times I was ever in Israel was with my dad in 19-- either '50 or '51. My dad and my brother went in '50 or '51. Who knows why the Jews, you know.

And here, you just saw these people working hard. And they're building a country and building an economy. And why do you want to kill them? What sense does that make?

Have I ever denied that I'm Jewish? No. Why? I mean I know that happens, but that-- if you don't like the fact, I'm Jewish then don't like me. It's just about the way it is.

But you had touched a very deep source when you said, has that affected my life or our lives? How could it not?

Are there other ways in which you feel that that's affected you and how you live?

You know, I don't know. When I got remarried, I remarried a woman who wasn't Jewish. Who is, you know-- she's really more into Buddhism than anything else. But she had a daughter, Janet, who wanted to become Jewish, and I didn't want to be bothered with it. And I don't know why not. But I wished I had. But I didn't.

Marci has wanted to be Jewish years ago. But she saw how little I cared. And it wasn't that I didn't care about being Jewish. I just don't care much about religion. I really don't believe that religion is God given or God made. And I still believe that. I--

Did the girl become Jewish?

No. She became nothing. I mean, she's a mother and has four lovely kids, but religiously nothing. The only one that really knows where it's at with religion is my daughter, Judy, in Israel. As she carried it over the brink as far as I'm concerned. I mean, she went too far. But she's happy with it. So--

Do you think maybe being Jewish failed you in your life?

No. No. Why has it failed me? No.

Do you think more consequences because of--

No. Because I was Jewish? No. None. I think it's been an advantage being Jewish. I think you're more prepared for things, for anything. You're prepared for anything that may happen.

Will it ever happen here? Will it ever repeat itself? I don't know. I hope not.

Do you think it could?

I think it could. I think it could. When we get too many self-righteous people in charge, it could. I think we always have to watch for it. I think we have to be on guard, which in itself is a detriment. Why should we have to be on guard all the

time? It's not right.

I was interested in your feelings about your hatred of Germans. Why do you think it's not a good thing and that one shouldn't carry it on?

I think you just breed more hatred all the time. I think the German people understand their history. I think they know what they did. I think they know what they're guilty of.

And by hating them, even today, for something that they had nothing to do with, I don't think it proves anything. I really don't. I really don't believe it proves a thing.

I would never ever buy anything German, you know, own it. And then a few years ago, I finally relented and bought a German car, not for me, my wife. She wanted a BMW.

And I thought about it. I thought about it. And then I said, this is crazy. I'm not going to do that any longer. I always remind her she's driving a Nazi war machine. [LAUGHS] But other than that, she enjoys the car.

Underneath the hood is a tank.

Yeah. There's always a tank or a gun ready. And I think that's what hinders me in times. I always think of them as guns and tanks. When you see them walking in crowds, they're always parading. And, yeah, it stays with you forever I think.

You remember Mort Sahl?

Oh, sure.

Yeah. He had a whole routine about how he bought his BMW-- I mean, his Volkswagen Beetle. And the machine guns were mounted on the front fenders.

I don't remember that.

Yeah.

Oh, yeah, that's-- if you're my generation, that's what you associate Germany with. Now, the funny thing is I don't feel that way about Japan. They weren't any better. Now explain that to me.

They never picked on a particular group like the Jews. But they did think that they were superior to all the countries that they occupied and didn't treat the native populations very well, which is one of the reasons that they didn't do so well in the war.

You're right.

When you were still in Holland, did you feel that people you knew turned their backs on you in any way?

No. No. The Dutch were-- in the early part of the war, the Dutch were very eager to help Jews. Later on, your own life is involved. I mean it's kind of scary putting your life on the line for somebody you don't know. A lot of them did. But--

So did you have any resentment about what happened then afterwards towards the Dutch?

No. No. None at all.

And when you talk about the Nazi occupation, are there other incidents that you remember from that time of what it was like for you?

Other than-- you were told every day to be careful. But it's something you tell your kids anyway. But I think my mother was more on top of it than my dad really.

But life went on. And it took the Germans a while to settle in their way and stir things up and make it bad for everybody. But now do I remember any specific incident happening to me? No. No, I don't.

It sounds like your mom was very vigilant and--

She was the one that-- my dad knew how to deal with people and get us out of there. But she's the one that said we've got to get out of here-- more than once. Yeah.

Quite a journey.

It was an amazing-- I'm sure that when I think back on this, I'll think of lots of other things that happened. But you're right, it was an amazing thing that can happen in such a short span of time. You have to remember, this is all happening in four years. That's pretty amazing. How can all that happen?

I remember being in New York with my dad, neither one of us speaking very good English. And my dad wanted to go to a baseball game. We went to a Giants baseball game at the Polo Grounds. We had no idea what baseball was all about. It's little things like that.

Did you enjoy it?

Yeah, I liked it.

Did he?

Oh, I'm sure he did. He was a big sports fan anyway. I'm sure he did. Yeah.

When you were talking about hatred, you wanted to address it particularly to your son?

Yes.

Could you say why?

Because for years I passed this hatred of Germans onto him.

To him in particular?

To him in particular, yes. And I don't want that. He is not-- if you knew Bob, he's just not like that. I mean he's a very nice, easygoing guy, very fair, very tolerant. I don't want him to be like me. Hatred is no good.

You make it sound like he isn't.

He isn't. He really isn't. He's absolutely nothing like me.

So it didn't take?

Thank God it didn't take. Yeah, I wouldn't want it to take. No, it doesn't do-- it doesn't mean-- it doesn't prove anything.

Are there other things that you learned from your experiences that you would want to pass on as lessons for the next generation?

Well, that's a thought-provoking question, isn't it? Well, I think we've talked about one thing. And that's always be on



guard. As a Jew, you must be on guard for anything that can happen.

Be vigilant. Be tolerant of other people, yes. I've learned that being tolerant of other people helps. I think that helps.

I think my-- I've always been very racially tolerant. So I can't say my racial tolerance has been helped by that. But I think-- I really-- one religion or the other, it doesn't matter to me what you are.

My son-in-law in New York is Catholic. I could care-- I mean he's just the most wonderful guy in the world. He's a terrific guy. And so, no, I think part of my experience has been be tolerant and understand that just because somebody is one thing or another doesn't mean you don't have to like them. I think it has made me more tolerant. It's made me understand things a little bit better.

Has it made me more religious? No. I don't know what-- I don't know what makes a person religious and not religious. I don't under-- I don't know.

Am I looking forward to my grandson's bar mitzvah? Yes, that's the one thing I live for to make his bar mitzvah.

How old is he?

He's going to be 12 next month. Big Red Sox fan, so he's not very happy today. [LAUGHS] Oh, well. But does that mean religion or is it tradition? I think it's probably tradition more than anything that I want to see him become bar mitzvah. And that's why the battle. Yeah.

We certainly want to thank you for coming today.

Why--

Allowing yourself to be interviewed. Appreciate it very much.

I wish I'd remember more of some of the stuff that you'd want. I wish-- again, I wish my sister were here because she could-- there were some things that happened, and I'm sure that she could tell you more exact than I can.

You did fine.

I do the best I can.

Sure.

Excellent. Thank you very much.

I want to thank you both very much, all three of you.