

Interview with HERBERT WALLACE  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
Date: December 13, 1990 Place: San Francisco, CA  
Interviewer:  
Transcriber: Darla J. Gardner

Q: GOOD MORNING, HERBERT

A: Good morning.

Q: I AM GOING TO CHAT A LITTLE BIT WITH YOU, AND I WOULD  
LIKE YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD, WHEN YOU  
WERE BORN, WHERE YOU WERE BORN, AND HOW YOU GREW UP.  
MAYBE YOU CAN TALK A LITTLE ABOUT THAT.

A: Sure. I was born on June 16th, 1918, in Offenbach,  
Germany, and my parents are both deceased; come from a long  
line of people who have lived in Germany; and I grew up in  
Offenbach until 1936, when I left for Berlin where I entered  
a Jewish hospital in Berlin to become a registered nurse.  
In 1939, -- 1938 rather, I went to Leipzig to assume another  
position at the Jewish hospital there. And that's when all  
hell broke loose, as far as I was concerned.

Q: I'D LIKE TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT YOUR EARLY  
YOUTH. HOW YOU WENT TO SCHOOL. DESCRIBE YOUR HOME LIFE A  
LITTLE BIT, IF YOU MAY. WHAT IT WAS LIKE, IF YOU HAD SISTER  
OR BROTHER, WHAT YOUR APARTMENT OR HOUSE WAS LIKE, AND WHAT  
YOUR FATHER WAS DOING.

A: Let me start with my father and my mother, who had a  
house, a private home, in the town, and my father was a  
partner in a leather goods, naturally, leather goods,  
factory in Offenbach, and we had a very nice home, a very

nice life, a comfortable life, which we couldn't duplicate any more in this country. My sister was born about 9 1/2 years before I was, so I was the latecomer, and I went to school at the usual age of six, for four years, and went onto, I don't even remember the name of the school, when on until it was no longer possible to go to school, when I was told one day I could no longer assemble with the non-Jewish pupils, and I had to go to some other school. The only opportunity that was available to me was to go to what they call a Kauftenwhich [phonetic] was --

Q: THE TRADE SCHOOL?

A: The trade school is correct. And until one day, and I remember it very vividly, when the teacher was starting to teach about Nazi philosophy and facism, and then he looked at me and he noticed that I didn't belong in there, and said, "Oops," he said, "I don't think you belong in here." And I was excused, cause I never went back again, either.

Q: YOUR FIRST SCHOOL, THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, WAS IT A PUBLIC SCHOOL OR JEWISH?

A: Yes. A public school, yes. I went to public school all the way, except for, approximately, one year, I went to a private school in Switzerland.

Q: AND HOW OLD WERE YOU THEN?

A: About 8 or 9 years old. And that was one of my good memories in life. It was 1928, and I remember the winter olympics there.

Q: WAS YOUR FAMILY OBSERVANT IN JUDISM? VERY RELIGIOUS?

A: No, not at all. The Congregation in Offenbach was a very, what's the word --

Q: ASSIMILATED?

A: Assimilated, of course. Assimilated, and we went approximately twice a year on the high holidays, that's when we went to the synagogue. It was a close community in many ways, particularly my father and his people in the business knew each other very well and became friends, and the Jewish community was very close. Even closer after 1933, when people were forced into the situation to get to know each other better and to assemble more frequently in order to be brought up to date of the situation.

Q: DID YOU GO TO SUNDAY SCHOOL?

A: No, only before bar mitzvah, which, of course, took place in 1931, now wait a minute, mathematically, it would be 1931.

Q: JAR YOUR MIND?

A: Yes, it still works.

Q: DID YOU HAVE A LOT OF JEWISH FRIENDS, OR DID YOU HAVE A MIXED GROUP?

A: Mixed. Mixed group, yes.

Q: WHAT WAS IT LIKE WHEN HITLER FIRST APPEARED ON THE SCENE? HOW DID IT MANIFEST ITSELF FOR YOU IN YOUR DAILY ACTIVITIES?

A: The only word I could find at the moment, particularly, at that moment, was curiosity, what was this all about. I was a little too young to understand fully, at that time, the impact that it would have later on. But I was not politically active in any way.

Q: DID YOU FEEL ANY RESTRICTIONS COMING UPON YOU, IN ANY WAY OR YOUR FATHER OR MOTHER?

A: The first impact that I noticed, of course, was the signs pasted on the Jewish windows, on shops. I don't remember the exact words it said, but it said, this is a Jewish shop, or whatever it was. I don't remember.

Q: JEWS NOT WANTED HERE?

A: Something, whatever it was. That was the first visual impact that I noticed, and, of course, you couldn't help but learn about it through your home and through your friends, and the anti-Semitism in school, which was accelerating at a fast pace. The experience of anti-Semitism existed all the time in school. Particularly, the bullies in school,

whenever, without making some remarks in school, but otherwise the impact came on slowly.

Q: DID YOU BELONG TO ANY JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS AT THE SPORTS CLUB OR --

A: The Jewish Boy Scouts. Very devoted to it, very interested in it, and very active in it for quite a number of years. And there, of course, I met many of the Jewish people, Jewish friends and people whom I had known. And that became a very enclosed group, and being threatened at times when we went away on hikes. But by other people who noticed that we were Jewish and not physically, but verbally abused, but otherwise, no particular antagonism.

Q: NOW, YOU, I'M SURE YOU HAD A RADIO, DIDN'T YOU?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: YOU LISTENED TO THE SPEECHES, HITLER'S SPEECHES, GOERING'S SPEECHES. WHAT WAS YOUR FEELING AT THE TIME, YOUR FATHER'S FEELING, RATHER, IN REGARD TO LEAVING GERMANY. DID IT EVER CROSS HIS MIND AT THAT TIME IN '35, '36?

A: Yes and no. This is a dual answer. Yes as far as the eventual outcome, was questionable as to what's going to happen to us. No, as far as assimilation came to haunt us for the rest of our lives in Germany and the disadvantages and the procrastination of getting out. I remember a story that somebody told me that a lawyer went to court in

Hamburg and observed the judge who made a -- and came down with a verdict, which was not a judicial verdict, it was certainly a biased verdict and the lawyer was Jewish. And he said, "If we have no longer any justice in this country, I think it's time for me to get out." And that's always stuck with me. I think that he left immediately thereafter, and I think he was a smart man. I wish we would have all listened to him a little more and followed his example. But we didn't. So, anyway, in 1936 a friend of the family said I will take care of your going to the American consulate in order to put in for a visa. And at that time he procrastinated for approximately, I don't know how many months, which cost us a good number of years in waiting for our number to get out. We did get out, but we'll get to that a little later. So, people didn't realize how important and how urgent it was to take the necessary steps to get out as quickly as possible. That's from hindsight.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY EXTENDED FAMILY IN OFFENBACH?

A: No.

Q: AUNTS, UNCLES?

A: No family, except our close family. None in Offenbach, no.

Q: SO YOUR FATHER DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF BROTHERS, SISTERS?

A: Not, yes, there were three brothers, I brought pictures of the family in case you wanted them. There were three brothers, and two sisters. None of them lived, except my father lived in Offenbach. On mother's side, there was one sister, one surviving sister, two twins from -- had died previously of diphtheria. And the aunt lived in Leipzig and immigrated very early with her husband and son to Israel. And that was the extent of the direct decedents of my grandparents. And a good number of them did not make it out of Germany. Some of them went to Holland and did not make it out of Holland either, where they were either deported, but I'll tell you about that later. So there was no direct family. Lots of friends, a lot of acquaintances, and some of them are still in contact with who live here, yes.

Q: CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR DAILY ACTIVITIES WHEN YOU WERE A TEENAGER, HOW YOU WENT ABOUT, HOW WAS YOUR DAD AND HOW YOU SPENT YOUR DAY?

A: School was exactly not my favorite occupation. And I was a happy-go-lucky kid. Bicycled through much of Germany and then I remember my father took me out on Sundays, we went into the woods in order to have lunch someplace, and it was a nice life, I had a good time. And, so, when I look back, it was a happy youth, except my mother was very ill for many years, so I was very close to my mother. So it was a matter of being -- taking care of her sometimes, maybe that steered me in the direction which I went in my later

life, professionally. She had multiple sclerosis for nine years. So, that influenced my youth to some degree. My sister left very early. She was a medical student in Germany, went to Italy and graduated with a medical degree in Italy and with her -- after medical degree -- with her PhD and she's now here in this country, retired in Santa Fe. She'll never accept the word retired, of course.

Q: NO. WHY DID YOU GO TO ITALY?

A: Of necessity. It was the only country that would take her at that time, in order for her to continue her education after being a domestic.

Q: SO WHEN DID YOU FIRST, SERIOUSLY, THINK OF LEAVING GERMANY, AND HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT IT?

A: To refer back to the person who made the application for a visa to America in early 1935 or 36, we finally, we realized very early on that any delay in applying for a visa for the numbered quota, visa quota, that we were not in the early batch to get into America, to get a visa for America. Through a distant relative who finally got the family together and said we have to do something to get out of it, get out of Germany; and he wrote to relatives in this country on behalf of, I think, almost 18 people he applied for, and they deposited the money in London in order to get a temporary visa to stay in London and then come to America. And, of course, that saved our lives in getting out. The



relatives were located in Newark, New Jersey, at a very large department store, Vanberger and was direct decedent of my mother and the family, my mother's decedents, but same family. So that's how we got here. But how did I realize to get out, I must admit that I never liked the German philosophy, I never liked it. And my sister and I both had a very unique approach to it that this was not our country really; and that the, well, I suppose, the kids here would call it the squareness in which we live. It was just not our cup of tea. It was not our approach, and we were never happy in that respect. So, in particular, in retrospect, I was very happy to get out and get to England and come to this country.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER? WHAT DID HE FEEL ABOUT GERMANY ABOUT BEING A GERMAN AND A JEW IN GERMANY?

A: He felt Jewish. He always observed his Jewishness within the assimilated German Jew. And he liked Germany. He was very happy in it, and I think, except for business reversals during the Crash, and his wife's illness, he was a happy man in Germany.

Q: HOW COULD HE KEEP HIS BUSINESS -- KEEP ON WORKING HIS BUSINESS?

A: The business, with the Crash after 1920, I think, it was 1929 when he had built a new factory with his partner, who was not Jewish, and I can't remember the, with the Crash,

the mortgages were called in, and they were not able to meet it at that time. So, they had to liquidate, and he had to change professions, he became an insurance man and tried to liquidate his business, and he took that over in order to continue the liquidation and remodeling the large factory. I've got pictures of it in case you want to see it, and so that kept him busy and also doing a temporary type of job. It was very hard on him to go through this type of loss of dignity. Loss of a developing business, which was excellent. To be judgmental at this point doesn't do any good. But you could not foresee the Crash anyway. But it morally demoralized him to a great degree, and his wife being so sick, and the future was bleak.

Q: WHERE WERE YOU KRISTALLNACHT?

A: Kristallnacht. I was in Leipzig at the Jewish hospital as a nurse and the SS came in 1938 -- is that correct -- '38, yeah. I opened the door for them, and they went through the various rooms and wards to look at the patients and see what nationality they were; and this was one of my most traumatic experiences during that particular time. They put people on this side and people on this side. Those that were to be taken away personnel, physicians, and nurses, and those ambulatory patients at the time. And they assembled in a particular area in the corridor, and they put me on the to be taken away. And as they went into the next room, I went into a room where they had been already. It

was the only way I could escape. How I did it, and why I did it, I have no answer for it. No ready answer, because it was just divine guidance, let's put it that way. And most of these people were taken away to concentration camp, temporarily, at that particular time. My father was taken to concentration camp for a month.

Q: WHERE WAS HE TAKEN?

A: At home, he told me the story later on that in his typical German fashion, and I used this again, he was sitting with his little suitcase all packed, waiting to be taken away. He's not -- He was not the only one in this type of attitude and the orderliness of the Germans, you had to comply with. So he was with many of his friends, and including the Rabbi from Offenbach, and many of his acquaintances that went all to the same concentration camp. He was there for about two weeks to four weeks, I don't remember the exact time, and then he was released.

Q: YOU DON'T REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE CAMP?

A: I don't remember. So, to go back to Kristallnacht, the next day, the SS came again in order to see who was left, and they saw me and didn't say a word. I don't think I was -- let's say, mature enough or too observant enough in order to keep my face away from any of those authorities in order to escape, really. Afterwards, I continued working there at

( the Jewish hospital in Leipzig. I think I better have something to drink.

(Break taken.)

I -- I TALKING ABOUT YOUR FATHER. I'D LIKE YOU TO CONTINUE A LITTLE BIT IN TELLING ME ABOUT HIM, HIS FEELINGS AND HIS ATTITUDE.

( A: My father and I did not have the best of relationships with one another. And it's only later in later life that we really reconciled and got more of a mature adult understanding of one another. And, as I think I mentioned before, his life was not the easiest of life. He had too many problems that, in retrospect, really have to think it was very difficult for him to leave Germany, was not easy for him. He had a wife in the hospital towards the end of her life, his wife's life, my mother's life, and he would not have left her had she not died before. And the business reversal and losing everything, which meant a great deal to him. To all of us, really, because he was the provider, and he was the man in the house, that it meant a great deal to him. He left finally in 1939, just about in May of -- in June of 1939. That's two minutes before midnight, just about before he could get out. And he came to England, and my father and I both went to get -- came over in a convoy to America in '40. And he started a new life. I have to give him credit there, that he started a brand new life and made a living in this country.

Q: WHAT WAS IT?

A: He was in 19 -- he must have been 50 -- 60, something. He died when he was 65.

Q: DID YOU IMMIGRATE TO ENGLAND TOGETHER OR --

A: I came -- I left first. On Memorial Day of May, 1939 at 6 o'clock in the morning. An interesting experience, of course. May 1st, it was a holiday in Germany. The border guards looked at my passport and, of course, with a "J" in it for Jew. And once I crossed the border into Holland, the other passengers in my compartment said, "Are you visiting?" I said, "No, I'm passing through." And I expressed my joy having crossed the border that sort of stuck in my mind. And I visited my father's brother and his family for a day before I went to England. My father followed me shortly thereafter.

Q: IN ORDER TO GET INTO ENGLAND, YOU HAD TO HAVE SOMEBODY OVER THERE, RIGHT, TO SPONSOR YOU?

A: Yes. Same family in America deposited sufficient money with the Jewish agency, the Doonesbury house at that time in England in order to make the entire family plus all the peripheral relatives come to England and live there for a year or so. Some of them came as domestics, which was easier, and they deposited that money for that for us and gave us visas originally so --

Q: YOU SAID YOUR MOTHER DIED -- WHAT YEAR DID SHE DIE?

A: 1938.

Q: AND YOUR GRANDPARENTS, WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

A: I never knew any grandparents, paternal or maternal. They were an integral part of the family because the family history was a very important part of my mother. She was very proud of her heritage, which documented goes back to 1500 in Frankfurt. And I never knew any of them, except my pictures and that's so I could never -- I never had the joy of grandparents.

Q: DID YOU HAVE A FAMILY TREE?

A: Yes. Incomplete. I don't have it with me, but in part only. My mother had it documented in the book. Which went into a van lift which was -- only got as far as Holland and got sold off, and in there was the book, you probably have it here, too, Stambrooffumehude [phonetic], which was written by a Professor Deets. He was not Jewish. And he delineates the Jewish families in Frankfurt and my mother with great deal of pride always documented it back to 1500.

Q: AND YOU JUST TRANSLATED IT, IT'S CALLED THE BOOK OF THE FRANKFURT JEWS?

A: Yes.

Q: SO, THAT'S A LONG WAY TO TRACE YOUR FAMILY.

A: Yes. On my mother's side. Of course, as you probably know, in order to immigrate, you have to have the birth and death certificates, as well as the marriage certificates of your grandparents as far -- in order to get clearance to get out. I don't know why, I still don't understand it, ordinary people do have grandparents. But you had to bring the certificates to the police department in order to get out of -- get clearance to get out and my father's parents and grandparents came from the Rhineland.

Q: WAS YOUR NAME ALWAYS WALLACE?

A: Mallach.

Q: YEAH?

A: Yeah.

Q: THAT'S VERY SIMPLE, RIGHT?

A: Very simple. Change one letter in the name from the "H" to an "E" at the end.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME?

A: Goldschmidt.

Q: WAS SHE RELATED TO THE BANKER GOLDSCHMIDT IN FRANKFURT?

A: She was related to -- I don't think so, no. She -- Very distantly related to Spire from the Bank Haus Spire -- distantly related on paper to the Rothschilds. But who

wasn't related to Rothschilds? She was related to a local poet by the name of Bernard as well as Hinner. But all that is part of her heritage and a very proud heritage.

Q: AND YOUR SISTER, YOU SAID, LEFT ALREADY WHAT YEAR?

A: '33, I think. In '33 or '34, it must have been '33 and I saw her off on the train going to Italy. I remember that, and she stayed in Italy until 1938 when she went to England, also, as a domestic -- domestic or a -- domestic, yes. Not as a housemaid, but as a -- taking care of two children of a Jewish family, and she was there when I arrived, and she secured some lovely quarters for me to live, and then my father came later on. If I wander, let me know, if I go too far.

Q: IT'S FINE, I'M SO CURIOUS. I WANT TO KNOW SO MANY THINGS. WOULD YOU CARE TO DESCRIBE YOUR LIFE IN ENGLAND FOR ME?

A: Yes. I'd be very happy to, because it was a very interesting life. It was for the first time a freedom that was hardly known and the curiosity and learning the language was one of my major tasks, really, which I looked forward to. I learned English in school, and I liked the language very much. So, I went to the libraries and tried to read the London Times, and I would not exactly suggest that this being the best method of learning English -- little difficult. But I enjoyed my life in England very much.



Made friends, lived in what you call a boarding house with all English people, and, which was a good exposure to the language.

Q: YOU HAD MONEY?

A: Pocket money, yes -- out of money deposited from -- by the relatives in order to live, and it presented no problem.

Q: WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE WAR BROKE OUT?

A: On September 3rd, 1939, I was in London when the sirens started blowing. I ran home to get my gas mask, I wasn't far from it. These types of things stick in your mind. I lived in Hendon, which was in northwest London, and then you had to register with the police and give up your camera, never got it back, either. So -- And then in early May of 1940, we left -- my father and I left London for America in a convoy.

Q: DID YOU EVER EXPERIENCE ANY ROUND-UP IN ENGLAND AS AN ENEMY ALIEN, BEING A MALE?

A: No. I was not classified as an enemy alien, I don't know what classification I got. I was able to -- I was able to move about, within limitations, and not be sent to the Isle of May [phonetic], or Isle of White [phonetic], which one, I don't remember.

Q: ISLE OF MAY [phonetic].

A: Isle of May [phonetic], okay. No, I had no problems.

Q: NOT YOUR FATHER, EITHER?

A: No, neither. So we made lots of friends and we were able to travel to Oxford and Cambridge and to various other places so we really enjoyed our, as you can qualify our life in a temporary situation without it being able to work and the three of us -- my father, my sister, and I were together in London, so it was a pleasant time.

Q: THERE WERE NO RESTRICTIONS ON YOUR TRAVELS?

A: Limited, you could not go into certain areas, but, otherwise, I had no restrictions.

Q: SO AFTER, YOU HAVE VERY FOND MEMORIES OF ENGLAND?

A: Yes, I do. Yes. I'm always happy to go back to it. Some childhood friends and their families and children live in England now, and we -- we go visit them every so often.

Q: WHOM DID YOU LEAVE BEHIND IN GERMANY? WHO WAS CLOSE TO YOU?

A: My father's family just about -- as I mentioned before, there were three brothers and two sisters, all but two brothers -- ultimately, arrest from the concentration camp. The two sisters lived in Elberfeld [phonetic], where they have a very fine store of linen,

trousseau and linen for many, many years. They went to concentration camp.

Q: WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES?

A: Pala and Funny Vallach [phonetic], and my uncle, who lived in Rotterdam, Holland, his wife, his two sons, and his mother-in-law were hidden, and were ultimately discovered and sent to concentration camp and disappeared. That was -- I have the names of the concentration camps where they went in the papers. Sometimes you shut these things out so you don't remember it.

Q: DO YOU KNOW THEIR NAMES?

A: Yes. Hugo Vallach [phonetic], Trulah Vallach [phonetic], was his wife, her mother was a Anna Heimann [phonetic]. The sons of Hugo and Trulah Vallach [phonetic], was Gecht and Ans Vallach [phonetic], and they were hidden, as I said, and disappeared in concentration camp.

Q: AND DO YOU HAVE ANY DETAILS OF THE TWO SISTERS WHO WERE PICKED UP AND WHEN THEY WERE PICKED UP?

A: I don't have the dates, but I know the concentration camps and just disappeared.

Q: AND WHEN DID YOU FIND THAT OUT?

A: I don't remember. I think my sister was able to get that information, unless my uncle, who lived in Richard's --

my father's brother, Richard, was the only other one who escaped from Germany. He lived in Toronto and he probably got the information when his family how his family vanished.

Q: WAS YOUR FATHER ABLE TO TAKE ANY OF HIS BELONGINGS OUT OF GERMANY, ANYTHING HE OWNED?

A: He shipped lift van with all the things in a that -- his furnishings that he wanted to take and the lift van was sent on, forwarded to Holland and was caught in the war, so it could not be forwarded, it was auctioned off. The details of which are only found out many years afterwards through an attorney in Frankfurt who pursued the matter and with the German thoroughness of documenting everything, it came to haunt them, because they auctioned off the contents of the lift van in order to pay for the storage fee, and there was a surplus of approximately \$30 or \$40. I don't remember what was, and that was in a savings account; and we got that back after decades of it being sold off, of course, no records what they got for it, but the surplus that they took in was deposited so that was the spoils my sister and I were able to divide later on, about \$10 each. So that was a -- but it's indicative of the German guide of documenting everything and --

Q: THE GERMAN THOROUGHNESS?

A: That's right.

Q: AS THEY WENT ABOUT IT. WHAT ABOUT YOURSELF. DID YOU GET ANY OF YOUR PERSONAL BELONGINGS, LIKE PICTURES, HOW DID YOU BRING OUT THOSE PICTURES, THE ONES YOU'RE GOING TO SHOW?

A: The ones I have here, I think, we carried with us when we left. Some of it, my father took with him when he went out, and when he died here in New York, when he died in New York, we collected all of them, we have it here. And I always had the project of putting it all together in an album, but that's later on in life, not yet.

Q: YOU BETTER GET GOING.

A: Yeah. I know. Would you want me to take those out now or later on?

Q: LET'S RETRACT. YOU WENT TO HOLLAND, YOU STAYED WHAT, ABOUT A DAY IN HOLLAND, OR WHAT?

A: I think two days with my uncle and aunt.

Q: THAT WAS BY TRAIN, RIGHT?

A: That is correct, yes.

Q: AND THEN YOU BOARDED A SHIP OR --

A: Yes. I boarded from Hookman, [phonetic] Holland, to England, and I'm not a good sailor. In crossing the English channel, I knew all about it, and I would not want to repeat it. That channel crossing. I was pretty sick that night. But when you take the boat train to from wherever the ship

-- the ferry arrives and to London and to buy -- my sister was waiting for me there since she had already arrived, and I was very glad to get some sleep and get some rest in a safe haven.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE AUTHORITIES WHEN YOU FIRST ENTERED ENGLAND? WERE YOU QUESTIONED AT LENGTH OR COULD YOU TALK ABOUT IT?

A: No. I don't remember any particular problems, we had to go to -- it was a particular police station where you had to go to later on in order to file all your papers and -- but I don't remember any particular problems. I had a visa to stay there, and so not that I remember any problems.

Q: YOU WERE ABOUT 20 YEARS OLD THEN?

A: I was 20, yes, and I celebrated my 21st birthday in London with the great -- it was a great event.

Q: AND YOUR ENGLISH STARTED IMPROVING?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: YOU HAD SOME IN SCHOOL, DIDN'T YOU?

A: Yes, yes. It was a favorite language, I always liked it. My father spoke English because he had some affiliation in London, he traveled to England about once a year, and he had a business associate in London who represented his

particular firm and sales people who did their English selling there with the leather goods.

Q: SO THAT WAS IN 1939, AND YOU SAID IN 1940 YOUR ORDER NUMBER CAME THROUGH?

A: Yes.

Q: DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY BOMBINGS AT THE TIME?

A: No.

Q: NOT THEN, YET?

A: No, no. Air raid sirens, yes, but no bombings, no.

Q: SO, YOU LEFT BEFORE?

A: Yes, I did, yes.

Q: TELL US A LITTLE BIT WHEN YOUR ORDER NUMBER CAME, HOW YOU FELT AND WHERE YOU WENT TO -- TO THE CONSULATE AND ALL THAT?

A: I wouldn't mind going back for a moment, a little further back, cause you reminded me of an event in Leipzig which was in 1938, 1939, after Kristallnacht, and we volunteered, and people who were in the -- taking care of patients. We knew of people who were discharged from the concentration camps who were released from concentration camps and we went to the railroad station to take care of these people as they came in. And some of them had to be

taken to the hospital because they came in pretty poor condition -- medical condition. And, of course, in no time, I caught diptheria from one of the patients. So to end my career in Leipzig, I had to go to a city hospital at that time in order to be isolated, naturally, in order to get cured of the diptheria, which was a pretty miserable disease. And while I was in the hospital, pretty sick, I got the message that my visa had arrived. I couldn't even -- to go to England, I couldn't even use it, and that was really a psychological impact that I was not going to accept so easily, I wanted to get out in a hurry. But anyway, I had to get well and to reoperate so I took another several months before I could go home to Offenbach again in order to take care of all the necessary formalities and get out. So I just --

Q: I'M INTERESTED TO KNOW, YOU SAID YOU WERE MOTIVATED BY YOUR MOTHER'S SICKNESS TO GO INTO THAT PROFESSION -- INTO THE MEDICAL PROFESSION. WAS IT VERY COMMON IN GERMANY, AT THE TIME, FOR A MAN TO BE A NURSE?

A: Much more common, if you related to an attitude in this country, much more common, yes. It was not unusual to become a male nurse.

Q: HOW MUCH TRAINING DID YOU NEED FOR THAT?

A: Same as any RN -- but don't compare it to what we train here.



Q: AND WERE YOU TREATED AT THAT TIME FAIRLY DECENTLY DURING YOUR TRAINING?

A: Yes, indeed. Yes, it was a Jewish Hospital, so you were among your own kind in Berlin and --

Q: WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE HOSPITAL?

A: Israel Yiddish Connink [phonetic] House in the Iranian [phonetic] House in Berlin. I only remember it because I saw it yesterday.

Q: IN LEIPZIG, WAS IT A JEWISH HOSPITAL?

A: Yes, of course, it had to be. Of course. You couldn't work in any other hospital in a city hospital or any other. It had to be a Jewish hospital, and now training, you cannot compare, you can't even compare medicine as it was in those days as it is today. But the motivation certainly, as you said, very rightly, it was my mother who was ill and I had an interest in it in going into -- I would have preferred to become a doctor, but that was not possible. They didn't have sufficient education, a possibility of an education, and secondly, monetarily. I was not allowed to; and you could not enter medical school at that particular time in Germany any more so we had to do the next best thing.

Q: WHAT SORT OF WORK, IF ANY, DID YOU DO IN ENGLAND?

A: No work at all. I was not allowed to work. So I didn't mind it at that time.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?

A: Yes.

Q: AND YOU WANTED TO ENJOY YOURSELF?

A: Yeah. Enjoy my freedom. Enjoy what I always thought other countries might be like and to perceive the different attitude in a democracy and in a country that so entirely different from where we came. It was an eye opener.

Q: HAD YOU EVER TRAVELED ABROAD DURING THE TRIAL?

A: Yes. I went to Switzerland a number times. I went to Czechoslovakia once and went to, I think that's all I remember at the moment.

Q: AND DID YOU HAVE ANY FAVORITE COUNTRY YOU WERE DREAMING ABOUT OR READING ABOUT YOU WOULD LIKE TO LIVE IN?

A: I think, at that time, a dream had to border on reality rather than fantasy so England was the country that I wanted to go to. It's --

Q: AND YOU WERE NOT DISAPPOINTED?

A: No. I was not disappointed, no. Of course, I knew, ultimately, I had to come here to America, but I never regretted it. I had a good life here.

Q: DESCRIBE A LITTLE BIT YOUR EXODUS FROM ENGLAND TO AMERICA, HOW THAT CAME ABOUT.

A: As soon as we knew that we could get our visa to -- or affidavits for America, we booked passage on a -- at that time, was Koon White [phonetic] Starline in order to come over here, and we left from Liverpool; and at that time it was wartime for England already, not really for the United States, so we had to go in a convoy and that means zigzag and cross the Atlantic and again, I was not the best of sailors for the first couple of days, but the rest was alright.

Q: WHAT KIND OF SHIP WAS IT?

A: It was a regular passenger ship, SS Britannic.

Q: IN ENGLISH, REGISTERED?

A: English registered, Koon White [phonetic] Starline ship.

Q: DURING WARTIME?

A: Yes. Very nice ship.

Q: DID THEY TELL YOU WHERE YOU WOULD DEPART FROM OR WAS IT KEPT A SECRET FROM YOU?

A: To the best of my recollection, I think they told me where the assembly would be, whether we would depart from there, I'm not sure, it's a good question. I don't remember that for sure. Just let's get it over with and get out and get in safe journey.

Q: AND YOU SAID IT WAS A REGULAR PASSENGER SHIP?

A: Yes.

Q: NO TROOPS?

A: No.

Q: HOW MANY OTHER BOATS WERE THERE, OR SHIPS, I SHOULD SAY?

A: I don't remember how many, but there were merchant ships, as well as destroyers, escort ships going across the Atlantic, uneventful.

Q: HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU?

A: Seven or eight or nine days, I think.

Q: WHERE DID YOU LAND?

A: Good question. I think New York, or Canada? No, I think New York, yeah. I'm not sure any more, as long as we landed, yeah.

Q: DID ANYBODY MEET YOU AT THE BOAT?

A: Yes. A distant cousin met us at the boat in New York, I'm glad you asked me. My memory, sure, it was in New York that we arrived here and we met here and they had secured enough rooms for us in New York.

Q: HAD YOU MET HIM BEFORE?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: SO WHAT DID YOU DO YOUR VERY FIRST WEEKS WHEN YOU WERE IN NEW YORK?

A: Tried to get acclimated and see what -- how this country, how this looks like, big New York City, and I knew that I had to start working in order to make a living. And through various connections, I was able to secure a position in Westchester County, north of New York City in a sanitarium as a nurse again.

Q: WERE YOUR CREDENTIALS GOOD?

A: No, they were not, no, so I was an uncredentialed nurse to -- but not in the capacity of a nurse in the sense but as an attendant in the sanitarium. And I worked there very happily until the war broke out in this country, and Uncle Sam said come here, and I was drafted into the Army. And I was in the Army for almost four years.

Q: DESCRIBE A LITTLE BIT WHAT YOU DID IN THE ARMY, PLEASE.

A: I was on limited service, due to a physical condition at the time, and started off with the Infantry; but they realized early that I was not exactly what they needed in the Infantry. They transferred me to a hospital in Charleston, South Carolina, and I stayed there as an x-ray -- I had a choice of becoming either an x-ray technician or an operating room nurse, and I know what an operating nurse means, and that means on-call 24 hours a day so I got smart; and I learned to become an x-ray technician.

I was very fortunate in that respect in that life was as comfortable as you can expect in the Army in a general hospital as compared to the situation of a fighting soldier. I became a citizen very quickly, due to having joined the Army and changed my name officially at that time. And applied for intelligence in order to interpret and there was assigned to -- transferred to, a prisoner of war camp, but the papers got somewhat messed up so from G2, which was the intelligence branch of the United States Army, they then sent me back to a hospital in Rome, Georgia, and from there I was eventually transferred back to Fort Dix, New Jersey, where I was discharged after almost -- not quite four years in the services.

Q: WERE YOU EVER CONSIDERING TRYING TO BE SENT ABROAD WITH THE ARMY OR DIDN'T YOU HAVE ANY SAY IN THAT OR --

A: No. I was not based on limited service which restricts you to either -- in this country, only, I imagine, yeah.  
No.

Q: WHERE WAS YOUR FATHER NOW? WHAT DID YOU DO?

A: My father started off with becoming a representative for South American leather goods which, of course, he knew -- leather goods was his business, leather goods was his manufacturing, and he miraculously really got himself into make a living, make a decent living, and, but not for very

long; and in 1946 he died in New Jersey, where he was on a trip in a hotel.

Q: DID HE BECOME A CITIZEN?

A: Yes, yes. So, it was not easy for him to come back, what we said about Germany and his attitude and his -- his Germanness -- it was difficult to accept American ways of doing business and so on, but he did extremely well, considering.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR SISTER?

A: My sister came over here in 1945, while I was -- '44, '45, I don't remember exactly, she too came over from England in a convoy; and she pursued her profession in order to get accreditation as quickly as possible; but she did not practice and get her license. She had an MD. She had a PhD, also, from Italy and she became a psychologist and continued that as a analyst, psychologist.

Q: WHERE?

A: In New York City, and practiced there in Connecticut and retired about a year ago to Santa Fe, where she's starting all over again.

Q: OH, REALLY.

A: Yes.

Q: WONDERFUL. WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE WEST COAST?

A: In 1969, after 16 years as administrator of a medical group, I felt it was time for a change. My wife had retired or was retired from her position since as a nurse. She -- The office was transferred to Virginia, and Virginia was not one of the places where we wanted to move in order for her to continue. So we thought we'd take a trip out here, and we decided to move out here in 1969. And we had friends here. Some distant relatives. So we both took six months to come across and finally in 197 -- I started here in San Francisco in '70, yeah, 1970, again in medical setting, at Saint Mary's Hospital Medical Center and as associate controller.

Q: WHERE DID YOU MEET YOUR WIFE?

A: In New York City. We got married in 1948, married for 40 -- going on 43 years.

Q: GREAT. DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN?

A: No children, no.

Q: AND YOUR WIFE ALSO WORKED AS A NURSE, YOU SAID. DID SHE WORK OUT HERE, TOO?

A: She worked, yes she did for a limited time. She was actually -- she worked for a good number of years as an industrial nurse, which is in industrial care of the employees, and she worked for a company in New York City in the administrative headquarters of a large chemical --



chemical company, so they retired her after they moved the offices to another state.

Q: HAVE YOU BEEN BACK TO YOUR NATIVE COUNTRY WHERE YOU WERE BORN, WELL, TO THE CITY YOU WERE BORN?

A: I've been back to the country once, and that was in 1985 for the first time. I've not been back to the city I was born in, and I went back to Germany on a trip that my wife and I took through the Scandanavian countries; and I finally decided if I wanted to see a certain part of Germany I had never seen before, and so we did.

Q: WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS?

A: It took me long times to make that decision, and, obviously -- and very mixed feelings of going. Contemplating the trip -- it was with appprehension, in a way. I had no idea what my reaction it would to any reaction I might encounter and also how people would feel. So I was very sensitive to it when we arrived in Cologne and went through the mozel [phonetic] part which I was always wanted to see, I had never been there. And sensitivity can be advantageous as far as being alert or disadvantageous as far as being very sensitive to any movement. But I found no incidents, no occurrence which would uphold my suspicions and my feelings about -- people were pleasant, were extremely nice. I encountered nothing at all, nothing.

As a matter of fact, I can tell the story about a woman in particular, part of Germany, the name escapes me, get back to it then in a minute, Solberken [phonetic], we stayed in a hotel, were going to Paris or London, we hadn't decided it yet, and I noticed that I needed medical attention, and the woman, who was not the youngest of persons, but was what I would say middle aged at that time, was the most helpful individual. She spoke English to some degree, but she was such an extremely pleasant, helpful individual -- when she said, "We in Germany have wonderful doctors who certainly could take care of you." And I was pleasantly surprised, let's put it this way, and not in the usual manner in which some people would have approached it. She was almost taken aback when my wife said it wouldn't be advantageous to me to stay here. I don't speak German, and I would have to stay in a hotel, and that would be quite expensive for however long it would take, and we had friends in London who made the arrangements for us, for me, rather, and they picked us up at Heathrow and made the reservations -- reservations -- the arrangements at the hospital in London. But I had no unpleasant experience.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN GERMANY, DID YOU TALK GERMAN TO THE GERMANS WHEN YOU FELT THEY SPOKE ENGLISH, WOULD YOU RATHER TALK GERMAN TO THEM, OR DID YOU HAVE HESITATIONS ABOUT DOING THAT?

A: Conversely, I'd rather speak English than German. My German is very fractured, yeah.

Q: OF COURSE, YOU TOLD ME YOUR WIFE WAS NOT NATIVE?

A: Native. Born here.

Q: AND SHE DOES NOT SPEAK GERMAN?

A: No, she does not speak German, and there are very few people who speak German who we know or of German origin. So our orientation is not towards it, and it makes a lot of difference.

Q: HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ANTISEMITISM IN YOUR WORK IN AMERICA, EITHER EAST OR WEST COAST?

A: Of course. Particularly in the Army. But then you have to consider the source. Some people wouldn't know what a Jew looks like, except he didn't have horns, as we used to say; and, yes, you do encounter it in the masses of people, you find people who don't know what a Jew is or what he is and so when you don't know, you're attacked; and I found it that way, particularly in the Army. Otherwise, it's a, you might call it, a social antisemitism which is not a frontal attack but social antisemitism. Overall, I would say it's very limited. It's more obvious in the community itself that you find it as we know. At the moment, it's more than it has ever before, but not on an individual basis, and I,

too, am very active in the communities. I'm busier now than I was when I was working, to pursue my interests.

Q: DOING WHAT?

A: After retirement in 1981 from the hospital here in San Francisco, I took my sabbatical, which comes once in a lifetime for some, and I decided to go to a community college to be active in it, took courses and became active in the student organizations for emeritus college, which is for older people and, too, became active in the student organization, became the chairman of the Associated Students of Emeritus College and became interested in it. It went then back to the old medical, was appointed by the county to the health counsel, which was an advisory body to the board of supervisors in Merrin [phonetic] County and became a -- the first chairman of the Board of the Buck Center for Research in Aging, which I am still extremely active, still on the board, still an officer, secretary/treasurer of the board. I've been there since 1986. And next Tuesday I, hopefully, will be reappointed to another term, three-year term, to the Board of Directors.

Q: IT DOES SOUND AS IF YOU'RE VERY, VERY BUSY.

A: Indeed, I am.

Q: WONDERFUL.

A: It's so that life can be pleasant and my wife, too, is a commissioner on the commission on aging for eight years. So we're both very active indeed.

Q: CAN YOU THINK OF ANY INCIDENTS OF ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL US YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN TO MENTION? WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE A LITTLE TIME AND THINK OUT ABOUT IT OR CAN YOU THINK OF IT NOW? LET'S GO BACK TO YOUR TIME IN LEIPZIG WHEN YOU WERE A NURSE THERE, AND AS YOU WERE MENTIONING BEFORE, THE SS CAME AND RAIDED THE PLACE, COULD YOU TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR PHILOSOPHY OF WHAT YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE DOING AT THE TIME?

A: I don't know what I was thinking. I think I'd like to address, rather, what I did. Opening the door for them and letting them in and observing and viewing and being part of the action there is not so much thinking that I did, I think, as just an action which came naturally and not realizing what was going on. I think innocence, youth and inexperience, although being fully aware of what the world or in Germany around us and what was going on, but the realizing of the consequences wasn't there to that degree, so some of the action, as I mentioned before, was just you did it without really thinking in the same sense as to exactly what you were going to do. Self-preservation, of course, was part of instinct, and it must have been with me, otherwise I wouldn't be here to tell the story, and the impact really came when I came to realizing that the head

surgeon was taken away; and since I was involved with surgery, there was no one else there, except somebody who could -- was the assistant surgeon, so there was no -- little or no surgery could be done, and we dealt with some sick people out of the concentration camps.

But the real impact came, really, and it's never left me, is the disappearance of the family; and that -- when I come to think of it, it still haunts me in the sense that these are dear ones. loved ones, whom I know I've spent vacations with them, and they invited me; and they're all gone and that's -- they would have -- no longer be alive. The parents who no longer be alive of these, and, but it still, yesterday, when I looked at the pictures and took out the pictures; and I looked at the family and saw I noticed I was getting older and getting softer from the -- and you don't think about this everyday. So that's -- you get softer and softer as you get older.

Q: WHEN DID YOU HEAR THE WORD "CONCENTRATION CAMP" FOR THE FIRST TIME?

A: I don't think I could pinpoint it as to exactly when. I know that in the family, of course, was of the Kristallnacht, but that's not the answer -- the question -- an answer to your question. I think the Rabbi of your synagogue, of our synagogue, in Offenbach, was taken away if I'm not -- if I'm right, temporarily, to a concentration camp. I'm not sure of it and, of course, the whole

community, the whole Jewish community, was very much aware of it as to the existence of it. But I'm very vague and very gray in my memory of that as to when, of course, the family talked about it, and everyone else was aware of it -- when exactly, I don't know.

Q: WAS THE NAME OF YOUR RABBI?

A: Max Teenumum [phonetic]. Dr. Max Teenumum [phonetic] was the rabbi. I just received recently from the Offenbach, second volume, of the history of the Jews in Offenbach. Somebody wrote it and sent with it a listing of those who still are distributing all -- those, the children and survivors who are all over the world with the addresses, names and addresses. But I've never been -- never been back to it, and I don't intend to.

Q: YES. YOU TOLD ME BEFORE YOU DO NOT WANT TO GO BACK TO OFFENBACH, RIGHT?

A: No.

Q: YOU HAVE NO DESIRE TO?

A: I do, and I don't, but mostly, I don't. To jar my memory, we're doing this this morning; but to see how things have changed, I'd rather keep in my memory as to how I remember it. Pleasant and unpleasant, both. I'd rather try to remember the pleasant things.

Q: HAS YOUR WIFE EVER EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO SEE WHERE YOU WERE BORN?

A: Yes, but not strongly, no. She's seen pictures I have, a picture of our home, and I took -- she knows about our home life in Affenbach, and so it has changed from what friends who have lived across the street and nearby are still friends have told us that it has changed a lot from what it was, so let it be.

Q: BUT ISN'T THAT TRUE OF ALMOST EVERY PLACE YOU KNOW, PROGRESS CHANGES, RIGHT?

A: We don't have to go very far for that.

Q: RIGHT.

A: So long as it's progress in the right direction.

Q: WELL, HERBERT, I'M REALLY GLAD THAT YOU SHARED YOUR STORY WITH US, AND I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR THAT, AND WE ARE VERY ANXIOUS TO SEE YOUR PICTURES NOW, SO --



(Pictures shown.)

Q: TELL US WHO THIS IS, PLEASE.

A: This is my paternal grandmother, the picture was taken in Dusseldorf, Germany.

Q: OKAY. WE CAN PUT THAT AS THE PHOTOGRAPHER THERE?

A: Yes, and that's the name in which the town it was taken. I never knew her.

Q: CAN YOU GUESS FROM HER AGE WHAT YEAR THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN?

A: I have no idea, no idea what her age was, fairly young woman, I would presume, because it's --

Q: SO, WHO IS THIS NOW?

A: This is my paternal grandfather. Yes. Taken in Germany, Dusselberg, also.

Q: OKAY, GO AHEAD NOW.

A: This is my father's brother, Hugo Vallach [phonetic], and his wife Trulah Vallach [phonetic], taken in -- I don't know where it was taken. They lived in Hamburg and later on in Rotterdam, then into the concentration camp.

Q: WHICH CAMP?

A: I have to look that up. I have it in some of the papers. Do you want me --

Q: AND TELL US WHO THESE PEOPLE ARE.

A: These are the three brothers, Valjach, my father, Otto, the oldest one on the left in the middle is middle aged, Hugo, and the youngest one, Richard on the right. Where it was taken, I have no idea. But that must have been taken when they were pretty much the prime of their life.

Q: ALL RIGHT.

A: These are the two sisters, Vallach and that is Funny Vallach [phonetic] on the left, and Pallah Vallach [phonetic] on the right. And they lived in Elberfeld [phonetic] at the trosseau and linen shop. They disappeared in the concentration camp, also.

Q: OKAY.

A: In 1937, I visited my uncle and aunt Hugo Valach and Trulah Vallach [phonetic] the couple standing up and I'm on the left, the other couple is unidentified, and I don't know it. The last I saw them, once more, after that. They disappeared a in concentraction camp, also. I was a nurse in Berlin at the time they asked me to come and visit them on my vacation.

Q: AND TELL US WHAT THIS IS, PLEASE?

A: This is our home in Offenbach. It's a house, a three-story home with many good memories, and we were forced to sell it to a non-Jewish family in order to affect a transfer of Jewish property. At a loss, of course, and it's still standing from what I've heard. The uniqueness about it is the house number, which was 118 and 1/10th, since the original property was divided into three houses, 1/10th and 3/10ths. This was our home in Offenbach.

Q: AND THIS, PLEASE?

A: This is my mother, holding me as a young baby. I have no idea how old I was, and that's my sister on the right, and it was taken in the hometown of Offenbach, I presume.

Q: OKAY.

A: I think this is a photograph of my mother before she was married or shortly thereafter, and, of course, a handsome, young woman. Very fashionable, and I think it was taken in Frankfurt, her hometown.

(Photo change.)

A: This is my father as a dashing young man, as he used to call himself, and I don't know whether it was before or was this just prior to his marriage to my mother. Where it was taken, I don't know.

(Photo change.)

A: My mother and father in the inevitable photograph, taken in Italy, someplace, mother on the left, father on the right, which was always one of the popular photographs of a couple on a journey.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THIS, PLEASE.

A: This is the picture of my father's military company during World War I. And I have no idea who they are, except individually, except my father who is in the upper right-hand corner. That's my father who proudly told us about his military experience at home, just about -- He was in the Home Guard of some sort. I have no idea of what it was.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THIS, PLEASE?

A: This is the factory and sales offices of my father's factory where he was a partner with JJ Frank, who was his other partner, his other partner. This was shortly after the completion of the building in 1927, '28.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THIS, PLEASE.

A: This is my mother's sister in Israel. She and her husband immigrated early to Israel, approximately 1934, '35.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THIS, PLEASE.

A This is my mother's sister in Israel. She and her husband immigrated early to Israel, approximately 1934, '35.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THIS, . . .

A: These are twins, which apparently run in my mother's family, and my mother's sister's son was married to a person in Israel; and they had twins; and I've never seen them. I don't know their names. They still live in Israel, I presume, and I have no idea who they are. They must be grown up by now.

Q: THESE PEOPLE?

A: This is, in the middle, is again my mother's sister. Her husband, on the left, was the architect, also, of the factory of my fathers, a well-known architect in Leipzig of the Jewish synagogues, of the cemetery and various other Jewish buildings. On my right is their son and who is the father of the two cousins of mine whom I've never met. I saw him again once in New York, where he came with his second wife, an Egyptian Jewess, and never heard from him again. I have no idea where he is. He went to Maine and sort of disappeared out of sight. Certainly like to know what happened to my two cousins. Children, my cousin's children, rather. No idea.

Q: AND WHO IS THIS?

A: This is my mother's sister's husband, who was the well-known architect, Reely Holler [phonetic] in Leipzig, who was an early Zionist, and moved with his family to

Israel, as I mentioned, about '33, '34, and he died in Israel.

Q: TELL US WHO THIS IS, PLEASE.

A: This is my uncle Richard Wallace. He changed his name to Wallace, too, and who lived in Toronto after immigrating to Toronto, Canada, and his two offsprings, his son and a daughter live in Toronto now, too.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THIS ONE.

A: This is the Vallach family, and I think their two boys and two girls, but I cannot definitely identify them by name, individually, because I didn't want to make the mistake of putting the wrong one on there. But they are early pictures of the Vallach family.

Q: YOU MEAN YOUR FATHER'S SIBLINGS?

A: Father's siblings, that is correct, yes.

Q: SO YOU MAY BE IN THERE, BUT YOU'RE NOT CERTAIN?

A: I'm not cert