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OK. This is tape 4, side A. We're continuing the interview with Max Liebmann. We were just talking about getting back in touch with Hanne once you were in Switzerland in the labor camps.

That was not the problem, because we corresponded already, when I was in the camp and she was still in France. And the mail worked miraculously quite well. And once she was in-- in-- in Switzerland, I saw her every six weeks.

And now you want me to go through this again with-- with all of it, because this is all on the original tape.

Yeah, well, maybe let's move ahead to what happened when-- when the war was over.

When the war was over, that was very simple. We had nowhere to go. We-- we knew we didn't want to go back to Germany. Even so-- I don't know if Hanne mentions it in her tape-- I was released from the facility I was in to participate in a social service course in Geneva. And while I was in Geneva, one day I was contacted by a-- a Mr. Bauer. He would like to meet with Hanne and me. We were not married yet. But Hanne happened to be in Geneva already, and I was in Geneva. So he invited us one afternoon for a cup of tea.

And that was a very-- and a very interesting conversation. I wasn't quite sure if the man was a left-wing socialist, or if he was really a communist. But the purpose of the conversation was to try to entice us to go back to Germany when the war was over, because it would people-- they would-- they would need people like us to start building. And by going back to Germany, he meant East Germany. And this was-- became a very interesting conversation, because I told him I am not interested in going to East Germany, when the Soviets have camps like the Nazis.

I am mentioning this simply because years and years later, while we were here already for a long time, we saw an obituary for this man who had-- who was with the Russians eventually, and got into trouble with them, was sent to Siberia, which I mentioned to him, you know. I don't want to be involved with a government which has Siberian labor camps, et cetera. Was eventually released, or exchanged. Became a-- an aide to Mr. Willy Brandt, who was then the chancellor of Germany.

And when he died, we discovered in the obituary that he was a man that we talked to. And whatever I told him about the Russians happened to him.

What was his name. Do you remember?

Bauer. I don't know his first name. So that was-- and after I finished this social service course, I went back to internment.

We got married at the same time in Geneva. And then Hanne joined me in-- in camp. I got permission to-- she got permission to come with me into camp, for which we had to pay, by the way. They charged me the same amount of what the Swiss personnel had to pay. And so we weren't in Switzerland until we were able to obtain an-- an affidavit to come to the United States.

What were the internment camps like at that point after the war?

They had not changed. It was-- we were-- I was not in a camp. I was in a home for families. And these homes had not-- that has not-- it did not change because the war ended. Maybe the conditions were slightly more friendly from-- from the top down, meaning from the government on down.

But all they wanted-- wanted us to do was get out-- the sooner, the better. In fact, I had a cousin in Switzerland, the same cousin where I was when I first came, who would have loved to have me in his factory, to run the inside so that he could go out and sell on the outside. And this-- we ran into so much trouble with this that I decided-- we decided it is not worth to pursue, and we are going to America, since we had a visa. We had an affidavit, and we were able to get the visa.

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When we started to look at this, could we stay in Switzerland, the federal government said, if the canton government will accept you, it's fine by us. The-- the canton government said, we have-- you are welcome to stay here if the local government will accept you and give you permission to stay. The local government said, if the canton government says, yes, we will stay.

So it was a constant back and forth.

Catch-22.

Catch-22. And so we decided, to hell with it. We come here, to the United States.

Were there other places you considered going?

No, we had nowhere to go.

Well, excuse me. We talking about Israel.

We were talking about Israel. But this was another sore point. My parents-- I had an-- an uncle and an aunt who went, in 1934, already to what was then Palestine, with money. They left Germany at the time, because their-- their money basically was in Holland. My uncle was a-- a representative of Dutch tobacco firms. And you know, in-- in Germany, one smoked cigars from here to doomsday.

So he sold a lot of cigars, and he also sold, had a representation of a manufacturer of cigar boxes, which gave him such a nice income that the tobacco money stayed in Holland. And when the Germans pressured him to bring the money in from Holland, because they needed for an exchange, they emigrated to Palestine.

So in 19-- end of 1938, my parents asked my uncle to take me to Palestine. So I said, I could go to the conservatory in Jerusalem. And my uncle felt that he couldn't take this responsibility. He didn't have enough money. God knows what else. So as far as I was concerned, Israel, after the war, was not an option. I wasn't interested.

But eventually, we were obtaining-- we were able to get a-- somebody gave us an affidavit, and we came here. So we arrived here on March the 3rd, 1948.

Do you remember, when you first got here, what you-- what you felt?

Well, it was-- well, you know, we had to-- it was a strange country. And we came with a two-year-old child-- our daughter. And--

What did we feel when you came here?

Bewildered.

Bewildered.

I-- I wonder if you can move over a little bit, or-- and I could--

I would say we were somewhat bewildered. Maybe also the feelings that we had after. We were somewhat bewildered.

Don't forget--

Also maybe the feeling that we are finally at a place that's going to be permanent.

And not only this--

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And we are not going to be chased from one place to another.

And not only this, but it was also the first time that we were free, because don't forget, we were not free in Switzerland. This is something most people don't want to understand. We were internees. And we--

I mean, in many homes, in most of the homes, life in the Swiss refugee homes and camps, it was bearable, OK? Nobody expected any luxuries, or anything like that. We were satisfied with having a roof over our heads, a bed to sleep on-- or sleep in-- and to have food in our stomachs.

And you know--

We didn't demand anything. We didn't expect anything.

And on weekends, you know, aside from going every six weeks, having leave for two or three days, on weekends we could go to the villages. And based on my position, I was free. In the offices, I was free to go to-- out anytime I wanted to go out. I didn't even-- I didn't have to ask.

But Max, we could do that in [NON-ENGLISH], as well, as long as you had done your--

Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.

--work or whatever your assignment was. Nobody asked where you went during the day.

No. No.

You could go. But still, you were not free.

You were not free. You had a-- you had a regulated life.

OK? You knew you were not free.

Evacuated by somebody other than yourself.

You knew you weren't free. And coming here was the first time since 1940 that we were free people. So all of it was also overwhelming. And then, of course, comes the immediate worry. Now, what are you going to do? How are you going to support yourself?

We came here with $90, and we were three people. And the family had provided us with one week of a paid facility in the Stephen Wise house. Rabbi Stephen Wise ran a house where refugees like us would stay for a few days.

For more, except we--

We--

Because of the HIAS, or whoever it was at the time,

Yeah.

--told us we have to get out of there and go to the Hotel Marseilles--

Yeah.

--which they were running in order to get any help, which eventually they didn't give us any help.

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There was no help. And besides, within a week I had a job. Within 10 days I had a job. And I started to work.

And tell me about your first job.

First job was with an--

Importing.

--import-export outfit. And I worked in the office. I didn't know anything. My English was limited. And I didn't last there very long. They fired me pretty soon.

Uh-oh. You got sick. That's why they fired you.

Oh, yeah.

You got sick because of your knee.

I got sick with-- I had a problem with my knee. I couldn't walk. So they fired me.

And I was in bed, I think, 10 days or two weeks.

Whatever.

Then I got another job. And from then on, I worked, until, of course, in 19-- in November of 1915, I got sick like my wife with TB.

1950.

'50. That's what I said. I said '50.

OK, sorry.

I-- I got sick in November of 1950 with TB. And our daughter had to go to a foster home. And we went into a sanatorium. And I was in there, I think, 18 months. And my wife was in there 21 months.

And when I came out, I was on what was called half time, meaning I had a work tolerance supposedly of four hours. And we were not supposed to do more because one feared of a breakdown, that you would get sick again.

And at that time, the state of New York had a program where people who had TB could be retrained. And under this program, I was able to go to a commercial school, where, in-- how many months was it?

It was nine months.

Nine months, I took four years of college accounting.

I thought it was two.

Four.

Four. Sorry, I underestimated your capability.

I took four years of college accounting. And after that, I had a profession. And I started to work as a bookkeeper. You know, cut my teeth on this. And from then on, I worked either as a bookkeeper, then an office manager, then controller in various jobs.

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My last job was with a greeting card company, National Greeting Card Company, which was a public company, where I was comptroller and vice president of operations in a-- in a division in New York.

Tell-- tell me more about life in New York. You-- I-- I know that you-- they had offered-- they had wanted you to go to move to Iowa.

Yeah, not to Iowa. Illinois.

Illinois. Sorry. Yeah.

They-- yeah. And so when I was there, when we went down to the HIAS, they said, why don't you go-- or it was NYANA. I don't know which-- one of these organizations who took care of new-- newly arrived refugees.

They said to me, maybe you should go to Peoria, Illinois. I said, who? What? And when I started to ask, and who's going to pay for it, I said, of course, your relatives. We don't have money.

So I said, forget it, and we walked out. And I had my-- I had a job. And this is how I started to work, you know.

[INAUDIBLE]

I mean the-- the job I had was just enough to get by. And the next job was a little better-- et cetera. So you know, you eventually work yourself up. And after we got sick, and we got out, we went on welfare until I was out of school. First I was alone for three months. Then my wife came.

And then, of course, the-- the only thing we had in mind was to get started to work again. And so I said, we could take our daughter back.

Well, it was also dependent on having an apartment.

Yeah. And we didn't have anything. We had no apartment. We had no furniture. We had nothing.

So the first thing we did is we got-- when I was permitted to work, I got a job. And we lived in a city housing project.

Well, after the government just gave us more money. Yeah, as I mentioned before, after the government gave us dispensation so we could move into public housing--

In a federal-- it happened to be a federal facility in Fort--

Federal housing.

For housing in Fort Greene, in Brooklyn. With-- I started to work. I was working. We were able to buy some furniture. And-- but soon after I started working, I reached the upper limit of low-income housing. In Fort Greene was low-income housing, which meant we had to move.

So we moved into a so-called middle-income housing, in Astoria, which was a very nice apartment. And our daughter started, I think, school.

No.

No she start-- she went to school in Fort Greene.

She went to school in Fort Greene.

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And then, when we moved, she went to school in Astoria. And eventually, I think it was time for us to get out of--

Public housing.

--public housing, because the income was bigger than it was acceptable. So we bought a--

Co-op.

--a co-op apartment in Jackson Heights. And we lived there, I think, some 17--

18 years.

--18 years. In the meantime, I could progress in my job. And after 18 years, my wife wanted the house, which we should have bought much before in-- in-- when we moved out of public housing, we bought the co-op, which was very cheap.

And--

What is this about?

Do you want to-- do you want to-- do you want to hold on for a second?

Yeah.

I think we're back on.

We have one, besides.

We're back.

Can we play back for one minute?

Just to remind, we're--

Yeah, where we--

--talking about buying a house.

Yeah. So eventually, it became time to buy a house. And we started to really scout around. That was 22 years ago. And you know, when you buy a house, when you buy a house the first time, you have all kinds of ideas what you want, and slowly as you start shopping, you know what you don't want. So you go by elimination till you find something which you think is suitable. So we ended up here where we are now. That was 22--

It's 23 years.

23 years that we have the house.

So we talked-- Hanne and I talked a little bit about just how your experiences during the war have sort of affected maybe the-- the type of parents you've been, and the type of people you've been, in terms of--

Well, look. We--

--choices you're made.

We tried not to get our daughter into the refugee atmosphere. We did not speak too much about where we were, and

what we have. But--

Yet.

And we did not-- we did not, like many did, give her a guilt complex. It was difficult enough for her to have been away from us while we were sick, and that bothered her tremendously. And eventually she needed psychiatric help, much later, in order to get out of all of this.

We tried not to, really, as I mentioned, to make her think she has to do this or that because of what happened to us.

Yeah. That we did not do. In fact--

We did not put this on her.

We did not put the on--

She always knew the story, because she heard us speak about it. She heard us speak about it to my aunts and to other people. But we didn't say, you have to do this or that because--

And besides, until we discovered, in 1983, that we are considered Holocaust survivors, we really didn't consider ourselves as such, simply because we always were under the impression that Holocaust survivors are only those who were in the east. We were not in the east. We were on the west, even though we were deported, we were in camps, et cetera.

And in 1983 was also the time when we got involved with the Holocaust in some shape, form, or manner. We were invited to a-- no--

Yeah, we were invited to an-- to an affair. However, our involvement in all of this started with the publication of a book entitled, Lest Innocent Blood be Shed. This book was written by Professor Hallie of the Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. And it dealt with Le Chambon. I mean, I saw the book advertised in the book review with a picture.

It was--

I says, I know these people.

It was in the-- not a-- advertising. It was in the Time-- in Time magazine.

In the book review--

Yeah.

--of the New York Times, Max.

Oh, OK.

OK? And I said, I know these people. And so, of course, we bought the book. And then I read it.

Then I wrote a letter to Professor Hallie. And this is how we slowly moved into this-- in this direction, because he used the letter that I wrote him, and used it in many occasions in his lectures he gave, or speeches he gave. He then wanted us to come along with him repeatedly when he spoke.

Which we did.

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And so there was a slow progression of getting involved.

Our involvement with the museum in Washington came supposedly through the tape we made in 1990, '93, something like that?

No, no. '90.

'90? And Mr. Meed apparently, the man who is in-- started or co started the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, apparently saw the tape.

He saw the tape in his capacity as a chairman of the contents committee of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. This was before it was opened. And then he contacted us and invited us to a--

Fundraiser.

--fundraiser in Washington, to which we went. We met with him. And then he invited me to become a volunteer. And eventually, I did become a volunteer there. And I'm there for the last seven and a half years.

Is there any reason why, before 1983, or before this-- this time period, that-- that you weren't involved, or maybe weren't-- I mean, did you talk about it amongst-- amongst yourselves?

I was still to get involved. Well, as I mentioned, our first involvement came through the book.

Yeah. We-- look, we were, to start out with, busy making a living. My wife worked. I worked. Our daughter was growing up. She eventually, in 1967, graduated-- no, in 1963 graduated high school, and went to college. So we were busy making a living.

Just-- just like every-- just about everybody else, became really involved at the end of their career, or when they retired. Very few that were involved before that. There were some, yes, like Mr. Chase in Connecticut, who made an unbelievable amount of money in a very short time. And he was always involved, from the beginning, helping--

He isn't anymore.

Well, OK.

But I mean, you know, we were busy making a living, and trying to live as normal a life as possible. We have friends here, which go on-- on both sides, for myself and for my wife. Most of our friends, our social friends-- I have music friends. That's a different story. They're all mostly Americans. But our social friends go back to our childhood.

You see--

You're-- you were friends now and then as well?

Yeah.

Yeah.

First.

Look, some-- one of my friends, I went to school. We started in second grade. We are still friends. Our wives got along when we came here. So we-- you know, this continued. There are people like this on-- on my wife's side.

So there was-- we have a-- a-- a gentile friend who once said to us, you are an incestuous society. We mostly get together with-- with our friends from Germany. And since I am working at the American Gathering, of course, we have

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other-- we made other friends which are all survivors.

And what was interesting is, I found, when we talked for the first time to survivors, that in many things, we thought alike. We didn't even know this. And you know, survivors mostly married survivors, and like to congregate with survivors, and speak about the times, which were lousy. And so slowly, you know, this is how this worked.

And when I retired, and I-- I started to do a lot of music playing-- but if you do a hobby on a-- on a daily basis, it soon becomes not a hobby. And you're looking elsewhere. So when the opportunity came to-- to start working again, I said, yes, I will go--

On a volunteer basis.

--on a volunteer basis. I said, yes, I will come one or two days.

And on the first day, I realized-- I said, I work full time or I don't become a volunteer, because there is nothing in between. You-- I don't-- didn't want to-- want to stuff envelopes, and do things like this. And say, this is what you do if you are volunteer here and there. So I started to work in the office.

But you know, to come back to your question about our daughter, when we first came here, we deliberately did not move up, let's say, to the Washington Heights. This was--

A ghetto.

--where all the German Jews had settled. Like any immigrant group, the Italians are in one place, and the Jews are in another place, and the Irish lived somewheres else. We deliberately did not do that, because we felt that our daughter, growing up here in this country, has to know everybody-- not just one group of people. If I live in an area where they are predominantly, let's say, German-Jewish immigrants, the kids in school will be the offspring of these people. So she is surrounded by the same atmosphere, right? We did not want that for her. We wanted her to grow up with everyone.

As an American.

We still have our friends from Europe. We still have our friends from school days, and even before. But I felt that she needed more than that. She needed to know the whole spectrum of people, and not just one group.

And I mentioned before, very soon after I came out of the sanatorium, I started to play chamber music. I played it. I played learned -- learned the cello in Germany.

And there is a whole group of people all over the United States who played chamber music. So eventually, I found-- or they found me. I started to play chamber music, which I have been doing all my American life. And this is a totally different group of people. We don't mix those two.

Well.

We don't, really. Music is music, and social is social.

Yeah.

When-- when--

But we are friends, just the same with all of them. We have a vast circle of friends.

We have a vast circle of friends. And particularly, when you speak about people with whom you make music, this goes over the-- decades.

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Decades.

Decades. I-- I play with many of these people for 20 and 25 years.

And how many of these people, who-- who aren't your survivor friends, how many of them know that you are a survivor?

Oh, I make-- no-- I make--

All of them. All of them.

All of them. I make no bones about it. I don't hide.

And how-- how many of them are curious, and ask you stories, and--

Very few.

How did you converse with them about it?

Very few.

Very few. Look, our-- those of-- of our friends who came here in the '30s really didn't want to know about our experiences either when we came. It was a taboo subject. They didn't want to know. They didn't want to face it. They were lucky. They came here in time. And some of them, to this day, really haven't asked us much about our experiences during this period.

How does that make you feel?

Look, I have accepted this a long time ago. And some people can't cope with this, you know, or don't want to cope with this, and don't want to be burdened with the-- with it.

And you know, some of our friends classify us as we came here before the war. You came after the war. It's--

There is a difference.

There is a difference.

There is a difference in understanding of certain things, which the people who came here before the war do not have. They simply do not have the understanding. There is a lack of-- whatever.

Comprehension. I don't think anybody who is not a survivor can comprehend what this was all about. It's just-- it's not--

It's not the same thing.

You can't comprehend it. You might have heard a lot of stories, but you can't comprehend it, and nobody--

This is tape 4, side B.

Mm-hmm.

And we're continuing the interview with Max and Hanne Liebmann. We were just talking about the people who came before the war, how did they-- how they can't comprehend the-- the-- the experiences of a survivor.

Look, basically, those who came before the war moved to America. They didn't have the experiences we had. Most of

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them came even before Crystal Night. And those who came after had a whiff of it.

But you know, they were young. They were teenagers, and/or younger, and you look at it with different eyes as a-- as a teenager or as a child than you look at these things as an adult.

Well, let me ask you this. You said that-- that no one who didn't go through those experiences can comprehend. So what do you, then, do? Do you try to tell your story and make them comprehend, or do you just--

No. We have never-- we have never--

Well, I--

Or, as it seems that you've done, you've-- you've-- you've preferred to-- to socialize with people who have those sort of experiences, so it seems.

No, we socialize with our-- we socialize--

--we socialize--

--with both groups. But with our friends, we never imposed the-- or forced them to listen to our story. They didn't want to-- didn't want to listen, fine.

In the beginning, they didn't want to listen. They know now-- some of them-- some of it. It is really never a topic of conversation as such. We might speak of the Holocaust in general, right? But the personal thing never really becomes a topic of conversation, or very little.

The people who came here were Max's. Well, they just moved here. Yeah. Yes, they moved here. They had their own problems when they came here in the '30s. There was a Depression. It was hard to find work. The women who had never worked in their lives, and had maids in Germany and wherever, now became maids, right?

So they had a different set of problems-- an entirely different set of problems. No, their lives were not threatened. They were not starving. Antisemitism was great in this country. Things like that. They had their own set of problems.

Surely, in our eyes, or the eyes of a survivor who was in Auschwitz, or Bergen-Belsen, or wherever, it is trivial compared to what they or we went through.

And you will find that many survivors like to congregate with other survivors, and they always speak of their experiences.

It never fails. It never fails.

It never fails. This is a-- a good way of-- how would you call this? It is mental therapy for those who-- who are survivors.

Has that been a part of your marriage, that sort of--

I don't think so.

No, it hasn't.

I don't think so.

So you don't talk with each other about your stories?

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No.

No, because the story is--

They were the-- they were the same story.

--essentially identical, right, with little variation. It's identical. So there is nothing to really talk about.

I had a cousin who lived in Prague, and she and her husband were extremely lucky to survive. They were in Auschwitz. They were in Theresienstadt, then in Auschwitz, and in many other slave-labor places. And one of the cousins in Switzerland once said, they never talk about it to each other. I said, there is no need for them to talk about it. They know each other's story. They lived through it. They don't have to go and say, what happened in this place, or what happened in that? They know.

So we don't have to talk about it. We know.

No. No. It's-- it's not necessary.

Well, let me ask you this. At-- at this point, you look back on that history, and you have-- you have certain stories that you know, and that you tell, and you tell in schools, or-- are there still times when you remember new things, that all of a sudden you'll remember something, or that isn't part of the story that you usually tell?

You want to hold on for a second?

Yeah.

You know.

Yes, a few weeks ago-- you know, I speak in schools. And I tell them of the day when we were deported, and what went on.

And she speaks without notes.

And all of a sudden I realized, something is missing in my story. But what is it that is missing?

And then I remembered that this morning, a young girl was in our house-- a Jewish girl-- whose mouth was very loose. I mean she-- she's a character. She would say things that she shouldn't say, right? And the Gestapo came and arrested her in our apartment.

And we all saw it. Well, one more time she talked too much in the wrong place, and you know, said something. They arrested her before we were arrested. We didn't know yet. We just knew that that young lady, she was maybe a few months older than I, was arrested.

And that was the thing that had slipped my mind totally and completely till I realized there is something. There is something in that story. What is it? And then it finally came to me, that she had been arrested before we were taken away.

It was [INAUDIBLE]?

Mm-hmm. Sometimes--

She is here.

You know, sometimes there are small details that you don't--

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You miss.

You miss. You miss them. Sometimes it's a matter of not having enough time to go into details when I speak. Sometimes you really-- you know, like, I did not tell you when you-- we were speaking here, when you interviewed me, about my grandmother on the train. I mentioned that she lost her mind, that she was totally-- and a kid would say "she lost it." So it is this Mr. Weil that you have here on your notes.

Well, at one point after the SS had gotten off the train in Chalon-sur-Saone, we were able to get the one doctor that was on the train. He was the last doctor in the city I come from, from Karlsruhe was-- Jewish-- was allowed to practice. By the way, he couldn't call himself a doctor anymore. He was some sort of a healer.

And he was able to come to our car. And he took a look at my grandmother. And he assessed the situation, and gave me several sleeping pills for her, which I managed to get into her-- not a small undertaking, without any water or anything.

And the intent really was clear, right? Unfortunately-- and it sounds horrible-- unfortunately, there were not enough. And so the poor woman had to suffer two and a half more months. OK this is a, as you say, a detail. Not a small detail, but something that I didn't mention when I was speaking to you.

There are things that you even have forgotten about for 40 years yourself, and then, you know, come back to you sort of later in life then as you're--

Not really.

Not really.

Some people do say you have a marvelous memory, but I don't know whether it's such a good memory as having absorbed everything, you know, that went on in-- or as much as I could absorb as a child.

Yeah, there are things like I don't usually talk about, when one day, on a nice summer day, and the doors to the balconies in our dining room were wide open. And in the street, a bunch of Hitler Youth were marching. And they were singing one of their horrible things, that when the Jewish blood jumps off the edge of the knife, things will be twice as good.

And my brother got up, and went out on the balcony, and watched them marching by. And I became totally hysterical, right, because I thought it was outrageous that he stepped out, that he shouldn't do that, right? Yeah, sometimes you forget to mention these things.

But they don't really slip out of your mind, you know. You might temporarily, when you speak, not mention it, you know, because you're involved in whatever you're-- what else. But it doesn't really get lost.

What-- what struck me the first few times when we spoke, and that time is we spoke together, our first major effort in this respect was an invitation by Princeton University. And what struck me then was we were in an academic surrounding. Our audience was mostly intellectuals-- lawyers and doctors.

And we got questions which were slanted to what they thought they would like to hear. And you know, you had to knock this down. It was-- it struck me that some people, Americans, have-- had preconceived notions. And it was quite difficult to answer this question in such a way as to make it clear to them that their notions are not right.

What sort of notions?

Well, you know, the questions, they wanted to hear certain things, and we didn't play ball with this. There is always-- we had-- we had-- the only thing I can think of right now is-- and this has come again and again. What-- what the question was, in-- in Le Chambon, what prompted these people to help? And they thought this was-- I don't know what.

And we tried to explain to them that when you-- when they helped, it was, A, spontaneous. And they might not have known 10 minutes ago that they would help, because it's a question didn't come up. You know, they did this for religious reasons, for moral reasons.

But one didn't know from the other. There was no organization in Chambon-- you know, you do this. You do that. And the widow of the pastor, who was [INAUDIBLE] always said when she spoke to people, if it would have been organized, it would have failed.

The left hand did literally not know what the right hand was doing. There might have been people in the house next to you, and the people who lived next to it didn't had no idea what these people were doing. And maybe tomorrow they would take people, and nobody else knew. One didn't talk about it. It was spontaneous. When the need arose. And this was something very difficult to convey to people.

Did you go back and visit there?

Oh, yeah, we went there a number of times. We even participated at their first symposium-- historical-- historical symposium-- where they were trying to put things together in an orderly fashion with historians. And there was a controversy, which was very interesting.

There was a historian who researched this, a young French PhD, who stood up and said, there were 150 people-- 150 Jewish, young people-- who were in this village. The man was almost lynched, because what he found was, the 150--

50.

Oh, 50 people. He found the 50 people are registered in-- in police documents, who were officially registered as living in a forced residence in Le Chambon. That there was something going on all along during the war, where people came and went, and were fitted with false papers, never entered his-- his brain.

The man was almost lynched, and-- and he was called a revisionist, and God knows what, because he took the number. He disputed, you know, that there were 5,000 people who were helped. And the 5,000 number came from a man who forged papers. He's a doctor today in France, but at that time he was a teenager who knew how to forge papers.

You know, you get all kinds of crazy ideas. This historian didn't understand that if you are illegal, you cannot be counted. You're not there officially.

When I was in Le Chambon, nobody knew I was there, and certainly not the officials or the police. I came. I was hidden. I came back. I was fitted with false papers, and I went. And that happened before this man who-- who said he made at least 5,000 false paper, was ever in this village. He came much later. So you have all kinds of things where you have to dispute even historians.

I had a-- we had the confrontation at the occasion of the opening of the research institute in the US Holocaust Museum in Washington. It was years after the museum was already open. We had a confrontation with a German professor who was considered the German authority on the Holocaust.

He never-- he-- he-- he stated in a speech, which he had prepared, and which was slated for publication, that the first deportations in Germany happened in 1941. Oh. There was, in March of 1940, there was Stettin, who were deported into somewhere into Poland. Then there were we, with 6,504 people, who were deported to-- to France. And there were, of course, the expulsions in-- in October of '38 of the Polish Jews without a proper Polish passports into no-man's land between Germany and-- and Poland.

Never mentioned it. And he got so upset when we confronted him and told him that he is revising history. I'm talking about Professor [PERSONAL NAME] So you know, there are-- we are trying to keep all of this historically correct. And that is a big undertaking.

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Did you ever think 20 years ago, or however many years ago, that you would be so involved with--

No.

--doing that sort of thing now?

No. Because we are so far removed from organized religion that it never occurred then to us. And we were too busy. We never belonged. We belonged for three or four months to a Jewish congregation when our daughter went for a few weeks to Sunday school. Other than that--

She went two-- one or two weeks.

Other than that, we never belonged to an organized congregation or anything.

We are non-joiners.

We are non-joiners. We are not religious. We don't practice. That doesn't mean we are not Jews. And we may not be Jews in the eyes of the Orthodox, the ultra-Orthodox. But nobody ask us if we were religious or not religious when we were deported.

So why then do you think you're so involved now with hearing people's stories, and socializing with survivors, and being part of the gathering, and--

That is--

I think one has to give something back to society.

To society, yeah.

I think it is necessary that the young people know about it, that they understand what can happen when a dictatorship takes over. When I speak to the kids, I always tell them that you have to do everything so democracy doesn't get lost, because the choice is zero after that, that they have no future and no life in a dictatorship. These are really some of the reasons.

So they know what has happened, right? And that they can learn from the experience of others what mankind can do.

Yeah. And the motto of the-- the basic motto of the American Gathering is [? thekor ?] in Yiddish, gedenk, and in English, "remember."

I--

Do you speak any Yiddish.

Only a few words. But I wanted to show you this. Someone in the museum sent me this, which I thought was interesting. This is Netanyahu. And he says, this is the lesson of the Holocaust, to this and only this, that the existence of the Jewish people is tied to Jewish sovereignty and a Jewish army that rests on the strength of Jewish faith.

Yeah, but this Jewish faith, of course, is somewhat, in my book, nebulous, because the ultra-Orthodox in Israel don't serve in the army. They don't even recognize per se as a state of--

[INAUDIBLE].

You know, the sad INAUDIBLE] these people don't want the state.

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But this is a very specific--

Yeah.

--sort of lesson of the Holocaust. I wonder, you know, if you have your own sort of idea of what the lesson is.

The lesson is, remember. Teach, so that it will never be forgotten.

Teach tolerance. Teach understanding. This is what I ask of the children-- to get to know each other. To understand and respect each other. Because if that all breaks down, then you get hatred. And hatred, we cannot live with that.

Many times the children ask me, do you hate? And I will ask them, do you know what hate does? And they look at me. I said, you know who gets hurt first when you hate is you yourself, because your soul dies. Before the other guy knows that you hate him, you are already destroyed. And they look at me, and then they start thinking about it.

So I'm not only telling them what happened to me, but I'm trying to tell them what they have to do, and what they have to learn, and the consequences they have, you know, if things go wrong.

And you know, one of the functions I have in the American Gathering is I act actually as an ombudsman on behalf of survivors vis-a-vis of the claims conference. Many people can't get what they think they should get-- a pension-- for whatever reason. And there are many restrictions why they cannot get it.

And the personnel of the claims conference is basically Russian, with a-- a to us totally alien mentality. In Russia-- I always say, in Russia social service-- not social service. Civil servants are not there for you. You are there for civil servants. And that is the attitude which you get when-- when a survivor calls the claims conference with a question. They can't get answers. They get nastiness.

So I am the one. They're calling us. And my name by now seems to be known up and down the country. Call Max. Max might be able to do something for you.

So I am trying to be something of an ombudsman. And if I explain to some-- some of them why they cannot get that pension which they are longing for, I do it in such a way as not to offend them, while when they get the answers from the claims conference, it is done in such a way that there is an absolute hatred against it. That is one of our functions.

Is there anything else you'd like to add about--

No. I think we have talked long enough.

OK.

[LAUGHTER]

Well, thank you so much. It's been wonderful. All right.

You're welcome.

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