

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Walter Meyer
April 28, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Walter Meyer, conducted by Ginger Miles on April 28, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Austin, Texas and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This tape is a part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Walter Meyer, conducted by Ginger Miles, on April 28th, 1999, in Austin, Texas, at Walter's home. This is a follow-up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videotape interview conducted with Walter Meyer, in 1996. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape one, side one.

Answer: All right. My name is Walter Meyer, M-e-y-e-r.

Q: Okay. And I -- We're going to start with the post-war, or really, I know the story, a very touching story about the Red Cross taking you home, and I wanted to ask -- my first question is, when do you identify the end of the war, or liberation period, as some call it?

A: Well, when the Americans occupied the city of Düsseldorf --

Q: I should ask, where were you?

A: I was in the basement of my house, because the city -- the Americans were across the Rhine, not only was the city bombarded by the air, but also by artillery, so we were in the basement of the apartment building in which we lived.

Q: When you say we?

A: That is my parents and I, plus the other tenants.

Q: Your mother had gotten tenants for -- in the same house, or --

A: Well, it was an apartment house of six apartments.

Q: Okay. And going back just a little bit, when the Red Cross took you to your mother -- to your home, is that right? Do you remember any particular impact that the Red Cross had on your rescue? A lot of people have memories about the Red Cross and their work.

A: Well, it was not actually the Red Cross. The Red Cross wanted to take me to a hospital and I insisted, I said, "No, I am dying, I want to go home." So I -- An old taxi cab, converted into somewhat of an ambulance took me home and I told the driver, "Go and ask for my father. Don't shock my mother, because I haven't seen her for some time." And -- So, later on, I heard he went up, asked for my father, wasn't there, then he told my mother that he had something for her, and my mother thought that it was a suitcase that my father had sent from France. And he had finally said, "Look, why don't you go with me?" So I -- my mother walked down. It was snowing, and she looked into the car and she was a little confused because she didn't recognize me. And so then I told her, "Mother," and finally, after she looked three times, says, "Walter?" And that is when she called a neighbor to have to carry me in, and I remember the neighbor touched my legs and they were inflamed and extremely painful. So, eventually, they got me in and someone in the train had given me an apple, that caused me to have a little diarrhea, so I asked them to take me to the bathroom. And shortly thereafter, the bell rang, it was my father and my mother yelled, "Paul, Walter is here." So he came and he saw me and then he just couldn't control himself and cried for a long time. Then they sh --

Q: Why do you think he was crying?

A: Because of my condition.

Q: He also did not expect to see you?

A: No. Maybe three days later, two policemen came looking for me, and my father said, "Yes, he is here." And he brought them in and he uncovered me, said, "Do you want to take him like that?" And I think I weighed about 78 pounds. And one of them knew me because I was a star swimmer, and they told my father, "Nevermind, we're going to say that -- that he was not here." So they left and then we accommodate -- accommodate ourself in the basement. Maybe a day, maybe two, maybe three days later, my father, upon my mother's suggestion, tried to find a doctor who assured my parents that there was no hope. So a priest was called, who gave me the last sacraments, and -- but obviously I didn't die. And then when the Americans marched in, I think it was April the 12th, my father went to see the commanding officer, told him about me and they came with the military ambulance, and took me to a German hospital which was occupied by an American medica -- medical company, and I was with them, ooh, for quite some time.

Q: How far from Düsseldorf, from your parents, were you?

A: Oh, three blocks.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful.

A: Yeah, the hospital was kind of --

Q: So the hospital was taken over then, by Americans?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you say that there was a Jewish man in charge, a doctor?

A: Yes, Major Hermann.

Q: And one of the questions that I wanted to ask you is -- is a long time sort of prospective from the post-war to the present time is, from here, from this doctor, have you experienced prejudice because you are a German in certain circumstances, and if so, where?

A: Oh well, once with Major Hermann. We didn't -- It didn't mean enough to him that I had suffered and that I was not, in quote, a Nazi. I was a German and that was enough for him, he being Jewish. After that -- No, I think -- Well, of course, when I traveled in France, at that time it was near impossible to tell somebody, I am German, they would have liquidated you. So I traveled through France as a Frenchman. I have participated in conversations like, these Goddamn Germans, these horrible, these this and this and so on and so forth. So, except -- until when I came to South America, which is about as pro-German as you can get, in any part of South America, and quite anti-Semitic. So as a German, no, except for the -- the -- the time immediately after the war in other European countries, where I didn't dare say that I was German, other than that no, I had -- there were no repercussions because of my heritage, no.

Q: I want to go back to your being in the hospital and three blocks away and how long you were in the hospital and did you see your parents?

A: Yeah, my parents came from time to time and I remember that I gained, oh sometimes as much as a pound and a half a day. And one day the American doctor told me that my

heart would not support so much gain of weight and that I had to get up and I thought that was a bad joke. But I remember h-he telling me that I had to jump on one leg 13 times and then on the other one, where little by little, I went -- some GIs drove me around in a wheelchair and I would do sketches of the GIs. And then, maybe it was two or three months later, I walked with this cane and I was released and I was then with my parents. And Americans, shortly thereafter, were replaced by the British.

Q: In the hospital?

A: No, not in the hospital, as occupation troop. The -- The -- si -- The American military zone -- part of the American military zone became British. They -- They re-divided geographic areas, where the Americans stayed in Frankfurt, Heidelberg and so on and the British used another part of Germany and of course the Russians took all of East Germany.

Q: You had quite a -- a rich life since, which is why I wanted to start here, and I also had a question, although I understand that you were a person who loved adventure, I wondered how long you stayed at home, and why did you go?

A: Situation in Germany was rather unbearable, Black Market, one German would denounce another German for being a member of the Nazi party, for having done this or that. The entire country was destroyed, Düsseldorf 75 percent. There didn't seem to be a future. Money did not exist, it was bartering. Coffee, cigarettes, butter were the main items for bartering. My parents had lost my brother, who had fallen to his death in the Alps. My mother continuously cried. So it was a period of depression and even though at

that time it was an impossibility to leave, you couldn't leave -- you couldn't go in the street after 10 o'clock. But somehow I flirted with the idea of going to America. And anybody with whom I would have shared the idea would have declared me insane. I went to see a teacher of mine, an old teacher who -- I understand that he had an estate, or his family had an estate in America. And I didn't know that much about the difference of South America and North America, to me America was America. I went to see him, and I remember he asked me, "Where do you want to go, eventually?" "Well," I said, "America." "What part of America?" And I said North America just to give him an answer. He said, "Well, I'm very sorry, but my family has an estate in -- close to Buenos Aires, in Argentina." Then I went to see my father, and I told him that -- that I was going to try to leave. Said, "You know that's impossible." Well, I said, "I'm going to try." And he said that, "If I didn't know you, I would say you are crazy, but -- but there's no need for me to say anything. All I say that whatever person you meet, just expect them to be no good and if they are good, you're going to have a very pleasant surprise." That was his advice. I had previously tried -- well, let me explain that many Germans in large cities, knowing that the cities were to be or were being bombed, took certain items of value and shipped them to relatives in rural areas, which happened to be the Russian zone. My parents had shipped a suitcase to some friends. And going to the Russian zone was quite an adventure and I went to the Russian zone several times. And that itself is quite a story.

Q: Was this the Russian zone in Germany?

A: Russian zone in Germany.

Q: And that meant that the Russians were in charge of everything [indecipherable]

A: They were the occupying force, and they were terrible. So, we're -- going to the Russian zone was in itself something like going to a foreign country. I had gone there twice, so I figured that somehow I sh -- I should be able to go. I had an address of a relative of a friend in Belgium.

Q: What was your motive for going?

A: Oh, I was sick and tired of Germany, of the situation in Germany, thought there must be better places in the world then, than corruption, Black Market, degeneration, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Q: So you said goodbye to your parents?

A: Well, I didn't say, excuse me, I didn't say goodbye, I told my mother that I was going to a water polo championship, and she said, "There's nothing like that." "Yeah," I said, "yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll be back next week." I came to see her again seven years later. So she didn't know that I was gone. She thought I was going to be away for a few days.

Q: Did you tell that to her to protect her, if anyone asked, or --

A: Oh, yeah, I -- I -- no, I told that to her because she would not have allowed me to leave, and I didn't want her to cry. So I stow away to Achen, which is right on the border, and there I -- I had some cigarettes with me that I gave to a railroad employee, and I asked him -- I spoke to him with a French accent and I told him that I had been in Germany as a French prisoner of war and that I'd fallen in love with a German girl and I'd come to see her and I needed to go back. And I wondered whether he could help me,

whether there was a train going across. He told me about a cargo train and well, I hid in that cargo train and went to Belgium. I went to see an old farmer. Matter of fact, I visited the farmer's son last year. And he told me, "Don't come up, they're looking for Germans all over the place, so --

Q: How did he know you?

A: He didn't know me. I told him who I was. He was the cousin or nephew of a lady in our neighborhood. You have to underst --

Q: Oh, sorry.

A: -- You have to understand the situation. The border towns in Germany and Belgium, they were German during the Kaiser. After the Kaiser, they -- they became Belgium. Hitler took it back, and after Hitler lost, they returned to Belgium. So those areas, like Alsace-Lorraine, they all speak German and they're probably more German than Belgian, or Germ -- [indecipherable] so anyway, he gave me some sandwich, an apple, and told me that I should wait for the milk truck. It took me to Liège. Well, at -- at noon time, I was in -- in Brussels and I stayed a few days in Brussels, visiting with a friend of my father. Then I went to France and eventually I became a sailor. That went on until December of '48, when I stow awayed on a -- on a Dutch freighter and went to South America.

Q: Before we get to South America, I -- I was interested that you learned English from American GIs. Could you --

A: Well, I didn't learn from them, let's say that I progressed, cause I had had English in school, and I was -- I'd always been a linguist, so languages are not of any difficulty to me, and so, with the GIs, I had a very good opportunity to practice and to learn more vocabulary and maybe become a little more Americanized in -- in my speech pattern.

Q: And this is while you were in the hospital?

A: True, true.

Q: So, how did you get to South America now?

A: Well, I stow awayed on a Dutch freighter and went first to Brazil.

Q: How -- Do you remember the name of the freighter, or --

A: Yeah.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Par-Parkhaven. Pay -- P-a-r-k-h-a-v-e-n. One of the oldest ships on the ocean at the time, was still a coal ship, and then a -- there weren't too many coal ships around any more.

Q: Coal, c-o-a-l?

A: Yeah.

Q: And from what port did you --

A: From Antwerp.

Q: How do you stow away?

A: Well, at the time, in different ports of Europe, I went aboard ships, and -- well, the first time I went on a ship was I worked in a nightclub in Bordeaux drawing portraits and

a captain walked in and he was -- he was quite drunk already, but I did his picture anyway and he paid me and he drank more, and eventually he was unable to -- to walk, and I felt sorry. And in port cities, there's always danger of being attacked. So, I took him under my arm and took him to his ship, which was the Silver Ocean, a Swedish ship, and oh, it must have been three in the morning, and when I woke up, we were on the ocean. He looked at me and said, "Who are you?" And I told him, he said, "Well, if you helped me to come aboard the ship, I ought to help you." And he gave me a seaman's book, which is kind of an ID card for sailors, and with a seaman's book, you can actually work on almost any ship that needs help, but I lost the seaman's book eventually. Anyway, with him I went to Casablanca. I went back to continental Europe and I was trying to stow away on an Argentine ship, but the captain kind of smelled --

Q: What part of eur -- you mean you went directly back on that same ship to return to --

A: No, I went -- went back on another ship and went to Toulouse. From Toulouse I think he went to La Rochelle. La Rochelle to Lavre, and I went eventually -- went to Rotterdam, Amsterdam and eventually I came back to Anverb and I received at the post office, letter from my father, who said that, "Dear Walter, there -- you will not be able to leave Europe for America. Your mother has baked special cookies for Christmas and I ask you to come home and be with us for Christmas." And I wrote back, "If I don't get a ship until next week, I'll be home." And that's what I would have done, but on December the 16th, I was on the Parkhaven and stow awayed on the Parkhaven. I had someone who helped me. The way it goes when you stow away from a European port, you try to stay

hidden for at least two days, until you're far away from the British Isle, because if not, speed boats will pick you up and bring you back. Captains hate stowaways aboard.

Q: Could I ask you, before we get too far on this ship, did your father know that you were leaving, whereas your mother did not? He knew where to write you.

A: Yes. Oh, by that time -- by that time, of course after one week, I didn't return and I sent letters home, s-so oh yes, my mother knew I was gone. She still hoped that I would be back soon. And so, on this ship, I think the second day, the chief steward came and discovered me. The beds generally have curtains so the light doesn't bother you so much and he drew the curtains and he saw me there. And they convinced him not to report me to the captain. By they, I mean the few guys who knew about me. And so he said, "Well, can't leave him here, you have to find another hiding place." So they put me to the most horrible place of all places, and that is where the propeller of the ship is. Well there is a -- there's a small ladder going down if you have to repair the propeller, and there's some old, big ropes lying there. And I was there, well, I guess a day and a night. And boy, you could always feel the water comes almost to your feet and then goes back down and it's solid black. I mean, a -- a -- a dungeon is nothing in comparison.

Q: Did you have food?

A: Yeah, they -- they -- they dropped some food down, or they let it down with a rope, so I ate a little bit. Well, anyway, after that time never passed, they finally got me out and -- and then took me to the captain and the captain, remember asked me about my nationality and I told him I was French.

Q: You had no passport or anything like that?

A: No, I have no passport and -- and he -- oh, I told him that I was -- spoke Dutch and he asked me to pronounce Slavaninga, which is a city in Holland and no Frenchman can pronounce Slavaninga, it's just impossible. So I says Slavaninga, he says, "You're not French." And so I told him that actually I was from Alsace-Lorraine and I also spoke German, and he kind of accepted that and he told me what to do and I became a coal trimmer. A coal trimmer is one that shovels coal and shoves it to the firemen, who in turn put the coal into the fire. So I worked together with a -- with a black guy from Curaçao, his name was Lovey. And I had a shift from four to eight in the morning and four to eight in the evening. I began to do drawings, copies of photographs and I became rather popular on the ship and the captain called me one day and told me that we were going to first go to Vitória in Brazil and that he asked me to be quiet, that he would not turn me over to the authorities. I had told him that I had an uncle in Utawai who was waiting for me, and that came because I had met some guys on an Argentine ship. One of them had told me that his family lived in Montevideo, that I was welcome. Then he gave me an address in Montevideo. The other one gave me an address in Buenos Aires where I could stay. So anyway, I told the captain that I had an uncle in -- in Montevideo and he said, "I'll bri -- take you Montevideo, so just don't move in Brazil and let the immigration and the police come aboard and I'll take care of you." And so Lovey, my companion, asked me, "What did he want?" "Well," I say, "he told me that he wouldn't turn me over to the authorities." He said, "You can't trust the captain, there's no way he will protect you.

He's going to turn you over to the authorities and you'll be shipped back." Well, I didn't want to take a chance, so we came to Victoria -- Vitória --

Q: In what country?

A: Brazil.

Q: Okay.

A: And, see, the foreign ship never comes into the port, it's always a pilot that guides it in. So the pilot came, I said, "This is it." So I jumped and swam ashore. But a police boat picked me up. They took me police station -- I was not allowed to swim there and then they didn't ca -- quite know what to do with me. An interpreter came, and he happened to speak English so-so and German quite well. I think his grandfather was German. And I convinced him not to turn me over to the immigration offices in Rio.

Q: This is the end of side one.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: -- interview with Walter Meyer, tape one, side B.

A: So I convinced this German speaking interpreter to let me go and I stow awayed on the same -- same ship, for the second time. The captain was extremely furious when he saw me. He -- He -- I -- He could hardly believe that I had not trusted him and I convinced him that there was too much at risk, that I didn't want to go back and well, he finally understood and said, "Well, I promise you I'd take you to Uruguay," and so he did. And I went to see the family of the man who told me that I could stay with his family

and I was told very clearly that there was no way for me to stay there, that the man was on th -- on the sea, that he would not be back for another month and that I should go to Argentina, would be easier than Uruguay. So I went back to the captain, I told him that I talked to my uncle, who had moved to Buenos Aires, and, "Please Captain, take me there with you." And he said, "No, police in Argentina is little -- too bad, I don't want any problem. But if you stay here, sooner or later we'll come back to Uruguay and we'll take you back with us then." "Well, thank you very much." I think he gave me 10 Uruguayan pesos at the time and told me that I would always be welcome. Then --

Q: Welcome on his ship?

A: On his ship.

Q: So he liked your work and your -- personally?

A: Oh yeah, he li -- he liked me well. Three o'clock in the morning, I went to visit the -- you have two branches on a ship, the -- the officers and the engineers. The engineers, the chief engineer, first engineer, second engineer, depending upon the size of the ship, they have a third and the assistant engineer, that's one who went to school and is doing his internship. Well, that was Chris. Told Chris, "I have to go with you." And he said, "I'm going to lose my license, I can't help you." Well I said, "Nobody will know."

Q: What license?

A: His license as an engineer. So, at three o'clock in the morning I came aboard. People were asleep. I left a little -- I had a little suitcase, small, little suitcase with clothes that I left with him, and I had nothing on but shorts and he took me under the -- under the

fireplaces. There are all kinds of pipes. He took me underneath there and he said, "Be quiet here, nobody will find you." Well, I was there until the next day, and I heard by the noise, the -- the ship was moving. It was going across the river Plate to Buenos Aires, which is eight hours -- 12 hours, something like that. And the size of my room was about like being in a coffin. What I didn't know is that the crew, the firemen, knowing that they would be in Buenos Aires for about a week, and they didn't need any power, because the pilot would pull them in, they began to clean the fireplace, and all the warm ashes fell on me. A-And I was beginning to realize that I was losing my conscience and I just couldn't stay, so I crawled through the door and I came out. And I had a big layer on -- of ash on me. They told me later that they thought I was a black guy. They rinsed me with the water hose and then they recognized me. "What are you doing here?" Well -- And they called the chief engineer, the captain was asleep and the chief engineer said, "I'll have to tell the captain. I'm very sorry, I can't assume this kind of liability and you will be handed over to the authorities."

Q: Authorities where?

A: In Buenos Aires. So, I decided to go for a swim again, and I swam about -- oh probably about four or five miles to the port of Buenos Aires, until I heard some policeman screaming. I assume they said you -- you're not allowed to swim here and I said, well, don't worry. I got out and jumped on a Norwegian ship. I remember they asked me, "Where you coming from?" And I pointed way, way out there, "I came

swimming from that ship,” and they kind of celebrated me like a hero and gave me some special soap, I was oily, and --

Q: What language did you communicate in?

A: English.

Q: English.

A: And I was a little scared because they had told me there was sharks, and so -- and the River Plate is filthy because all the ships throw all the debris in the water, so when I was swimming, I hit a piece of a board, of wood, or something like that, and I was always scared it was a big fish. Anyway, I waited for my ship to come and after the authority had come aboard, everything was cleared. Then, I went to visit, and the captain saw me and said, “How in the world did you get here?” And I laughed and I said, “Swimming.” So then he said, “Let me tell you again, any time you want to come with us, you’ll always be welcome.”

Q: What did he admire about you?

A: Well, that I had done the impossible, swam from his ship. I mean, it was an unusual thing to do. So then I went to see -- I went with Chris and I had the other address of this Argentine officer, Asketta was his last name, that I could stay with his grandmother. So we found the address, which wasn’t too far away from the port, but I was told no way I could stay there. And Chris had to go back to the ship, and it was January, it was the 24th of January, 1949.

Q: And Chris is?

A: Chris is the assistant engineer. And I ended up close to Plaza Italia, a big, big square with a large, large park. And that's -- that became my house for a couple of weeks. So I became a homeless and I remember oh, the fourth day, I saw these horse carriages driving around the square very slowly and I was curious. You always find somebody who speaks either German or French or English or whatever, and I learned something rather interesting. They were walking around -- slowly around the square, because those were driving hor-horses -- horse carriages. Anyway, there was a -- the famous circuit -- the racing circuit of Buenos Aires was close by and I heard the noise in the morning where the race cars came. There were gar -- guys putting these big blocks in the curve -- straw blocks. And some guys were building little kiosks where they sold sodas and so on. And I made friends with one and helped him, so I had free sodas and maybe a sandwich. And I took some of the blocks and built myself a little house, to have some protection. It was hot, and summer in Buenos Aires is very humid, very unpleasant. Well that's -- And I stopped people on the street and asked them if they had maybe a pesos to spare, that I wanted to eat something.

Q: What I'm wondering is, were there a lot of people after the war, who were just traveling around, like you, lost? Or -- What were you seeking? Did you know?

A: Maybe there is something innate in me and that is seeking adventure. But -- Th -- Y -- I owe you an answer to your question, and that is, traveling was extremely difficult because, well, as a German of course, Germany did not exist, hence there was no passports.

Q: W-W-Why did it not exist?

A: Well, because it was occupied by -- by different -- as a country it didn't exist, it did not have a government. The British were there, th-th-th -- so there was a military government, but there was no passport of any sort, so you couldn't go anywhere, it was totally out of the question. And others, of course, other -- other Europeans, well, why would they travel? This was not the time, like today that the Dutch go as tourists to Tunisia and so on.

Q: I was more referring to a lot of Jewish people who were in Displaced Persons camps and families who were separated and -- did you run into any of these?

A: Well, that was -- that was immediately after the war, you had refugee camps. In Germany there was one cl -- and I know quite a few Jewish fellows in -- close to Frankfurt in a refugee camp. Most of them were, I think, Polish Jews. And they were trying to be -- they were displaced, so were -- they were -- they were trying to be organized and sent back, but there was no traveling per se, no, no.

Q: So you didn't find a lot of comrades, friends to travel with?

A: No.

Q: You were very solitary.

A: Oh, very much so, yeah, yeah, very much so.

Q: So, where are we now?

A: Well, we are in Buenos Aires, and --

Q: You said that South America was very friendly to German. Could you all of a sudden start speaking German, and --

A: Yeah, I was not -- As a matter of fact, I would find eventually, people who would say things like, "You know Walter, the only mistake that Hitler made, he didn't kill all of them." That's what you would hear.

Q: In South America?

A: In South America.

Q: Why do you think South America felt that way about Jews and why do you think that they were so friendly to Germans?

A: Because the Germans, first of all, there are large German colonies in South America, in Argentina, in Chile and Peru. Chile, mostly. And the Germans are very desirable immigrants. They're not trashy. They become teachers, they become professionals. They integrate, marry natives, contrary to the British. So they're very much desired and in demand and some of them become outstanding citizens, some of them enter politics, some of them become statesmen. So, as a whole, German immigration, even in Texas here, I mean, people go out of their way to say, "Oh, my grand-grandfather was German." It doesn't make a damn bit of difference to me, but they show you that -- they will not go out of their way to say that their great-grandfather was Polish, but if he was German, they will let you know. And of course, there's many, many German towns here, Brownsville, Fredericksburg, Neiderveld, all kinds of German festivities and so on. So, anyway, going back to South America, then products made in Germany meant quality.

Q: Did you meet any Nazis?

A: No, the only one that I didn't meet, but I -- that I saw once, somebody took me to have a beer at a place where Germans would go. There was General Galland, the very famous young German Air Force general who had shot down, I don't know, 200 British planes, or something like that.

Q: It's G - a -- ?

A: G-a-l-l-a-n-d. And he had been imported by the Argentine government to work as a -- I assume as a consultant or something like that, in the Argentine Air Force. I saw him kind of from far away. But no, I had never -- I had never -- no, I'd never met any [indecipherable]

Q: Because many were in hiding there in South America when --

A: Yes, I understand that, but no, I never met anybody and later on I heard that some had been in Argentina and they were down in the Pategonia, and -- but no, I never met anybody.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay. So we are in Buenos Aires now and I stop people on the street, asking them to help me with a pesos or two. And, then I go to restaurants and draw sketches and I meet one who helps me get a job in a -- in a place that makes posters for the subway, so I do a little painting there and they say, "Well, we can't employ you for too long, because you don't have documents." And one day I -- a friend of mine said, "Why don't you drive out to Martinez, which is a suburb where the film studios are and they always need temporary

workers. Maybe you get a job there.” And I went there, and without going into too many details, I met an American movie star by the name of John Carroll, who is long dead. He had come down to do a picture with Adele Marra and with -- with the Argentine actor who became famous later. I used to room with him and that was Fernando Lamas. And so John Carroll somehow liked me, and I went from living one day under a tree and the other day on an old mattress, I went to one of the most beautiful estates in Buenos Aires, which he had leased, and became his assistant. Went to Buenos Aires to exchange money, helped to organize a party. I did whatever. Of course, that lasted only while he was there, and then he said, “I want you to come to America, to be with me.” And he took me to the German -- to the American consulate. And I remember I was a little surprised that the consulate’s name was Gerra, which was a very -- which is a very Spanish name. And I was told, “Well, you’re German, and that means we have to put you on the waiting list and the way it stands right now, it’ll take about six years.” And --

Q: They knew you were German then?

A: Yeah. At that time, I didn’t have to hide any more. Let’s see. Oh, maybe my next job was singing in a -- in a nightclub.

Q: So you just gave up your opportunity?

A: Well, John went back to the States, and I had made some connections. Another thing, John went to this nightclub with me once, called Zanzibar and they had a couple of German waiters, and they were rather nice, I went to visit. And one day, there wasn’t much traffic, and I took the microphone and sang a little, “Night and Day.” They said,

“Why don’t you sing? We need somebody.” So I made a little money and I think I knew three songs and sailors would come in, ask, “Why don’t you sing this, why don’t you sing this?” All I knew was three songs and I was always happy when the hour was over. So that’s how I started. One day I met -- a customer came and I did a sketch of him, and he said, “Do you like the country?” “Yeah.” “Well, why don’t you come up north, to Salta?” Well, that’s like coming from New York to Texas, something like that. So I took the train, went there and went to Salta, northern Argentina, close to the Bolivian border. Worked for him and eventually I came to have a small tobacco plantation.

Q: Your own?

A: My own.

Q: How did you afford it?

A: Well, h -- I worked for him. People take a long siesta and I said well, if I work a little for him during siesta time and I have a little time in the evening and work for myself, and he had about 20 acres, or maybe 30 acres. Said, “Could I have that land for me, to plant some tobacco for myself?” And he said yes. So, I slept maybe six hours, I felt that was enough then. But that -- I had -- I was going to be somewhat of a millionaire that year, because the tobacco was beautiful and Peron had decreed that nothing any more could be imported, ev-everything had to be made in Argentina. So --

Q: Peron being the president?

A: Yeah. So, no more tobacco from outside, so the national product went up in price and I was going to make a hell of a lot of money, but the day of harvest, the locusts came and destroyed everything.

Q: How long had you been in South America by now?

A: Oh, a year and a half, something like that. And -- So then, other people asked me to run their farms for them. I had made many friends. But eventually I left Salta, I went to Chile and worked as athletic director for a -- a copper mine.

Q: That's quite a switch isn't it? Tobacco farmer to --

A: That's quite a switch, yup. I worked in Chookiearnata in northern Chile and I went to Bolivia and I don't know how much -- how many details you want, but I did many, many things over a relatively short period of time.

Q: What made you move again?

A: Something didn't work right, or somebody told me about a golden opportunity to drive cattle from Bolivia to Brazil, three months on horseback.

Q: I would like to sort of keep bringing us back when -- knowing, in your travels, your experience during the Holocaust, were these thoughts running through your head, of being in prison, or of what might be -- happened to your parents now, or do you remember thinking about the past?

A: Well, you think of the past, except when -- when what happens to you is so rich in adventure, then you don't have much of an opportunity. The past always comes back when you're a little depressed, or when you have a lot of time. New things happen, you

meet a new woman, you meet new friends, you -- things are going okay, you have a -- you're going to a party, you have a ball, or you're in danger. The good thing is that the Holocaust taught me to be able to be long times without food. I'm a very tough man. So, I always laugh, here in America, people -- people always starve. I am starved, I am starved, when they haven't eaten for three hours, and they can't live any longer without a Coke. You know, I go -- I drove yesterday non-stop 12 hours, doesn't bother me. And I don't stop to drink. No, I have a little bottle of water next to me. So -- So you -- you do think of the -- of the miserable parts in life when you're depressed, when you're miserable, then you think of more miserable things and eventually you feel sorry for yourselves. But if things go well, or new adventures happen, then you don't think of that.

Q: So, how much longer were you in South America before you first went to the United States?

A: First time I came to the United States on my way to Europe. I obtained a tourist visa.

Q: From?

A: In Peru, to visit the United States as a visitor.

Q: And you had been in South America for how long?

A: Well, from '49 to '54, and -- which brings upon another -- another series of adventures. I came to -- to Miami --

Q: Tell me what -- what it looked like to you when you landed. I --

A: Oh, I tell you, my first impression was that I went through immigration -- see, everywhere in the world you would be Mr. Meyer or Dr. Meyer, whatever the case may

be. And the guy looked at me, he said, "Hi Walter. Where are you going?" And I thought, "Oh my God, these guys are the FBI, they know everything about you." I was -- I was absolutely impressed that he would call me by my first name. Then, the casual way of being -- I remember in Miami at the time -- this was new to me, so I couldn't get over these bathrooms, bathrooms for colored people. There -- There was no such a thing anywhere in the world, except South Africa.

Q: Had you been to South Africa?

A: No, I hadn't been to South Africa, I went to South Africa later, but even South Africa, you didn't have bathrooms for colored people, you just didn't have bathrooms for colored people. But you didn't have white and -- and -- and colored. So -- And the bus rides --

Q: You mean where people sat?

A: Wh-Where people sat, blacks in the back and so on, that was totally new to me.

Q: Did you ever -- ever relate that to your experience in Germany, in relation to Jews?

A: A-Absolutely. I often thought, they who tell us that we should not segregate, we should not do this, look at them, how they treat people just because they have a different color. That's -- That's -- I couldn't quite cope with that. Another big disappointment was, I think it was July or August and it was hot in Miami and there was a Shriner's convention and I could only find one room, in the upstairs of the Grellan Hotel, an old wooden hotel, and no air conditioning. And I bought some Cokes to put under the sheets. And then I went down, I saw a sign, I said, "Oh, I'm going to have a cold beer." I had never in my life seen root beer. I thought root beer was just another beer. So I drank root

beer, I still have the ugly taste in my mouth. Anyway, from Miami, I went to -- to Dallas

--

Q: Well, you were alone again?

A: Oh yeah, I was alone. I went to Dallas. I had known -- see, Braniff Airline had a headquarters in Peru. Peru was headquarters for the southern atmosphere, or southern -- southern region. She was an employee, and --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: A stewardess, a stewardess. And she lived in Dallas and she gave me her card, "When you come to Dallas, I want you to come and see me and I want you to meet my folks and I'll show you around." So I went to Dallas, and checked into the White Plaza Hotel, and I met her a day or two days later, and she said, "Walter, you're spending a lot of money. The White Plaza Hotel is an expensive hotel," [indecipherable] it was not too far from the airport and -- "Well, why don't you check your suitcases in -- you put your suitcase into my car, we're going to Oklahoma to see my folks, and on the way back, I check you into the YMCA." That's the way it happened, and the YMCA you don't have bathrooms in your room, you have bathrooms down the floor, and somehow, while I took a shower, somebody swiped my money out of my suitcase, and I had maybe 10 or 20 dollars left. So, friends of this girl, one day they invited me to the first football game that I saw in my life, which -- which was so boring it was pathetic. Then they told that -- I wanted to go to California, see John Carroll, so they had told me that there were opportunities to drive a car. Okay.

Q: This is the end of tape one, side two.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side one, of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview, conducted with Walter Meyer, by Ginger Miles, on April 28th, 1999, in Austin, Texas. On the way to California --

A: Well, you know, in every town, if you, for example, your company moves you to New York, then you leave your car with the company and that gets a driver that drives the car, and generally gets an allowance of 30 dollars for gas, or something like that. So, I got one of those cars, a Chevrolet Bel Air, and drove from Dallas. And I had to deliver it in Salt Lake City.

Q: To do what?

A: Deliver the car.

Q: Oh, deliver.

A: And upon delivery, I would get 25 dollars. And I went through a little town close to Denver, called Castle Rock. Policeman stopped me, speeding and crossing the yellow line. And I remember he made it very clear, "You want to pay, or you want to see the judge?" I said, "I want to see the judge." Well, the judge was not there, it's 11 o'clock in the evening, so I went to jail. And I remember there was a cowboy in jail and I couldn't understand a single word of what he was saying. Anyway, the next day, the sheriff came and took me to have some food and said, "Well, we have to keep you another day, we have to check on the car first." Well, the next day I went to see the judge and the judge, there was no mercy, so it was the ticket plus court costs and I had a -- a ring, a gold ring

from Peru, that the deputy sheriff went with me and -- to a restaurant and I told the people what my predicament was and somebody bought it for five or 10 dollars, I don't remember how much. And somebody else, realizing that I was a foreigner and I need a little help, said, "Well, I tell you what, I'm going to contribute some gas to your car." And I remember an old pump, that you had to move like that. And I was on my way. Shortly thereafter, a deer jumped right into the car and put a big dent in the fender. And I got out and I felt sorry for the deer, and I was going to catch him and see -- anyway, cars went by. Eventually the deer jumped back into the woods, limping. I drove on, police car stopped me. They took me to a little police station. "Anything you want to report?" "No." "Nothing?" "No." "Okay, you don't want to tell us what happened?" I had no idea they were referring to the deer, I thought they meant that I was in jail the night before [indecipherable]

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So I said, "Well, I was in jail the night before." "Oh, we got us a jailbird." Well, finally they said, "For not reporting -- When you hit a deer and you don't report, it's 500 fine or 50 dollar fine," it was a big amount for me. And I finally became furious and I said, "You know, I dreamed of this country many, many times. Of the liberal way, of democracy. When I came to this country, nobody ever stopped me and told me that if you hit a deer, you have to report. There's no sign or anything for that. So, if you want to put me in jail, fine." There was a captain or lieutenant, so he said, "Let him go." So I was on my way again, came to Salt Lake City, delivered the car and they looked at the fender.

They said, "Well, we owe you 25, the repair cost 18, so here's seven dollars." I had seven dollars in my pocket and I was in Salt Lake City, and I hadn't slept well, I slept in the car. So I asked this auto auction, that's what it was, would they allow me to leave my suitcases in one corner there and I wanted to see the city a little bit, so I walked through Salt Lake City and I saw a beautiful little house, room for rent. Oh, it was so inviting and I knocked at the door. So neat and clean. So I -- "Can I rent your room for a day or two?" "Yes." "Okay." And I slept, I slept beautifully and the next day I went to restaurant. I went to a stationery store and bought some drawing paper and a pencil, went to a restaurant, said, "Do you mind if I drew your picture?" He said -- I gave it to him, which always invited other people to look over your shoulder, "Would you do mine?" I said, "Two dollars," or one dollar, I don't remember how much I charged. So I was there for a couple of days, drawing pictures to make a little money, enough money to pay for the -- for my room. I went back and at the auto auction they told me that there were two soldiers. They were taking a car to Los Angeles and maybe they would give me a ride. I talked to them, they said, "Well, how about you pay your way and you do the driving?" I said, "Fine." We drove from Salt Lake City to Las Vegas. At some service station, the soldier boys had flirted with two ladies, I think it was mother and daughter and had invited them to have a good time in Vegas. So in Vegas, they said goodbye to me, but they gave me a few dollars and said, "Why don't you take the Greyhound bus?" I took the Greyhound bus, and arrived in Los Angeles and checked into the hotel across the Greyhound station. And from there I tried to reach John Carroll, no luck, until finally the

operator told me, "No more telephone calls, you have to make a deposit first." I left a suitcase, took bus and went up to the San Fernando Valley and eventually, oh, the first person I met was John Derek, who died not too long ago, Bo Derek's husband, with whom I rode horses later on. And he told me how to find John Carroll, who came, and then they took me in a big, Buick convertible to Los Angeles, paid the hotel, get my suitcases and cunup -- come up and stay with them and -- but my experience at the United States, being in jail and the deer, and so on, if anybody had asked me, and I believe people asked me, "How do you like it here?" I would have said, "I hate it. I don't like it at all." The segregation policies and so on. It wasn't -- I had not learned enough about America to -- to understand it.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: Well, you have to spend a little time in America to understand why Americans the way they are, their way of living, their heritage, the history of the Black and so on. It takes a little while to understand. Anyway, I left -- I left Los Angeles and took a plane from Burbank to New York and then from New York, I went to Germany, spent a little time and then eventually I returned to Peru.

Q: So, you got to see your parents again?

A: I went to see my parents and that was then --

Q: Seven years?

A: Seven years.

Q: And had the condition of Germany changed or improved?

A: Yeah, considerably, because Germany was rebuilt maybe -- maybe throw a percentage at you, 60 percent. So, it was hardly recognizable.

Q: And by now there was a government in place?

A: No, there was still -- yeah, '54 there was -- oh, I have to do some thinking now.

[inaudible] Yeah, there was now a German government, Adenauer was chancellor and the trains were rolling on time and things had normalized.

Q: And your parents, how was that, to be reunited after seven years?

A: Well, it was -- My father had become my greatest fan, because to him, that a young man would be able to leave Germany, and make it all the way to America, that was -- he'd formed the -- the -- the admiration club. And he wanted me to stay and work with him. He had started a technical translation office. He was doing rather well. Semi-retired. In other words, he was his own man now, he was not an employee any longer. And -- But, once you have tasted any part of America, or for that matter, any part of America or Africa, then Germany, or Europe is not attractive any longer. Their way of living, the density of population, the -- the many, little problems that don't exist here. The generous way of living versus existence in Europe. So, I couldn't get used to the -- to the German way of living any more, I wanted to go back into the world.

Q: From Germany?

A: Well, from Germany, I went back to Peru, which was -- which had become my home, and oh, I did a number of things, but ended up breeding some horses and --

Q: By now you spoke how many languages?

A: Oh, wa -- five. I had started a swimming school in Peru and I was coach of what they call the Peruvian Olympic team. And many people in Peru believed, like people all over the world, I assume, that polio was contagious. And parents of polio affected children knew that water was very good, called hydrotherapy, or water therapy, and they wanted me to take care of their children. But the others, when they heard that I was going to deal with polio children, they kind of shied away, being afraid that it would be contagious. So, I kind of concentrated with them during lunchtime. From 12 to two, I had nothing but polio affected children. I became extremely successful, economically and in every way and I then dreamed of having -- well, I have to explain, when you go from Lima east, for about -- less than an hour, and you come to an area where the sun shines, while right in Lima, a situation is a little bit like Los Angeles, the mountains push the clouds back, so you have this dampness over Lima. It never rains, but you don't see much of a blue sky, but you go a little inwards, the sky is blue, the sun shines and wealthy people begin to have beautiful homes there. And in that area, I wanted to build the most elegant swimming school, where people could have a cup of coffee and watch through one-sided glass, see their children and -- and so on. Well, I had a child in my school, that learned to take the first steps. Her father was president and owner of one of the largest bank houses. And he told me that any money that I needed, would be made available.

Q: Was he grateful to you for --

A: Yeah. He just couldn't get over that I was able to make his -- his grandchild walk. So I said, "Well, at least I would like to have the land and maybe then you can help me to

finance the rest, any time.” Well, that was a project that I was very much involved with, and a friend of mine, a Swiss architect, helped me to design something which was partly underground. Well, at that time, somebody had inquired about the Peruvian passel horse, which is a very special breed of horses and -- and I was involved a little, I had a few horses myself and I loved them because they’re very elegant, they have a beautiful gait. And the horse association’s secretary called me and they didn’t quite know how to handle this request from the United States and so I kind of took over and eventually the idea developed to take 12 stallions to the United States. Shortly before that time, I have to explain; Peruvian parents, parents of polio children used to go to Warm Springs, Georgia with their children. But eventually, they thought, why not bring a doctor down here? We give him a car and a chauffeur, it’s cheaper and we don’t lose that much time. So, a doctor came from Georgia and I was introduced to him and he was rather complimentary as to the fine work I had done, and I told him that everything I did was based upon common sense, but I had no schooling in water therapy, but I would like very much to pursue some kind of course. And he invited me to come to Warm Springs, Georgia. I thought, I get a diploma that I can hang on the wall and -- and then I know what I’m doing, and take it from there. So, I was asked to establish contact with horse loving people and I made the same mistake that everybody else makes, and that is everybody believes that Texas is the horsey-est state in the nation. It’s not, California is, by far. So I wrote to Texas and oh, I ended up with the Good Neighbor commission, the governor and eventually, I don’t remember how, but I ended up with the San Antonio Chamber of

Commerce, and I was told that we would escort the governor with our horses, during the Battle of Flowers parade, which is Texas Independence Day.

Q: So you had two businesses going on in Peru. One was the water therapy and swimming and the other was the Peruvian horses.

A: Yeah, the Peruvian horses was not a business, was -- was a pleasure.

Q: Pleasure?

A: Yeah.

Q: But you are now preparing, I thought, to Georgia.

A: Yeah, well, what I -- what I -- what I thought was, we take the horses, get a lot of money for the horses and from there, go to Warm Springs, Georgia. And then I return, and I have money to buy land, to build my school and so on. Well, we had sent some photographs -- a few photographs of horses to San Antonio and the lady at the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, gave those pictures to a guy who had Palomino horses. And he looked at the pictures and they saw they were white -- not all Peruvian horses are white, but those particular pictures happened to be of -- of a couple of white stallions and he put two and two together, white, Spanish, those must be Lipisotter horses. We had quoted some -- We had given them a price idea, so I thought that was rather cheap. So I got a letter that all the horses are placed. And so I said, "Well, they're sold, let's go." I had two horses of my own and others smelled the business, said, "Walter, why don't you take mine?" And there was an American who had a freight line. He had an old flying boxcar, and we put 12 stallions in there, had two helpers.

Q: On the plane?

A: Put them on the plane and we shot each one with tranquilizer, so they stood like the wings. Went to Panama, landed in Panama, were a little late, we couldn't -- we couldn't unload the horses because of quarantine regulations, so we tried to water them, lost a lot of time. Then -- In retrospect, I understand that he didn't have a -- a landing permit for Houston, but we kind of made an emergency landing. One of the horses had gone with the hoofs, had stood up with the hoofs, broke the window of the plane. I mean, it was a disaster, but we -- we made it in Houston. We were not able to unload the horses. They went from the plane on a truck and they dusted us and the horses and the quarantine officers were there. It was the biggest mess. And then -- I had been told that horses for breeding do not pay duty. Well, I was told that, but in reality, it's horses for breeding, if you're an American citizen, you bring horses for breeding, you don't pay duty, but as a foreigner, you bring in horses, you do pay duty. We were not prepared to pay. We -- We prepared to cash. So, the guy with the big truck was told, "Don't unload the horses until you get the money." Jack Sellars was the guy with the Palomino horses in San Antonio, who was called and he said, "I'll take care of it, just bring the horses over here and I give you the money to pay for customs and so on." Well, th-the driver of the big truck, 18 wheeler, was Black and fell asleep while he was driving. So I took over, drove to San Antonio, and while he was asleep -- oh, Jack Sellars was there waiting for us and I realized he -- he realized that he had made a mistake, we didn't have Lipisotter horses, and Jack Sellars kind of disappeared. We were at the coliseum in San Antonio with 12

horse, I said, "Unload the horses, before he wakes up." And I told him, "Go back and don't worry, we'll pay sooner or later." Well, the press came and there I was with 12 stallion and two helpers, so the president of Lone Star Brewing Company, Harry Jerzek, bought three horses, for way below our costs. People always take advantage. That was enough money to send the guys home and I was alone with nine horses. And horses eat more than people do. So that's the way it started. Harry Jerzek was a very important figure and he introduced me to people here and there and he organized a race, an endurance race from San Antonio [indecipherable] 34 miles on the Fourth of July, 1958. And I had coached a cowboy to go with me, and we rode each a Peruvian horse and we won. And we were to cash 500 dollars, but then we were told, "No, no, no, no, no. The 500 dollars would have been to anybody who would beat you. Nobody beat you, so there's no money." I didn't understand that too well, but anyway. Then, as we arrived, I tied one horse up and the little lady felt sorry for the horse, because the horse was totally exhausted and I gave him water, which was the worst thing to do. Th-The horse died the next day. So I lost one horse. Well, there I was now with eight horses. And well, not too long thereafter, I placed some horses, see, "Can I leave some horses on pasture with you?" "Yeah, sure." You become known, you make friends, you meet people. And I bought an old truck converted it and made it two stalls. I said, "I'm going to try my luck," and took two horses to California. And so then I spend time in -- in California, placed some horses and --

Q: Is this where you met Clark Gable?

A: Met Clark Gable -- Yeah, I met Clark Gable at the time. I was in Palm Springs and Frank Bogart was Mayor of Palm Springs, twice. Told me once, "Why don't you come along, we need -- we need an extra bowler." And so I bowled with Clark Gable. And I think Zsa Zsa Gabor was on the other team and a bunch of people. Clark Gable was an extremely nice man, as a matter of fact. There, I'm with Clark Gable.

Q: You have a picture of that time, or are you going to [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, it's that time, I show it to you. While I was there --

Q: Now, who's in that picture, the picture you just showed me, who was in it?

A: That's Clark Gable and his wife, Kay. And, at the time, Clark Gable was trying to lose a little weight and he had a bet going on with a na -- a guy by the name of Ray Rand and whoever loses the bowling will have to lose an extra 10 pounds. So he wrote on the photo, "Thanks for the bowling," because we won it, he didn't have to lose an extra 10 pounds. Clark Gable was one of the most decent man I met in Hollywoods, which is the phoniest place on earth, probably. I met many, some were very nice and some invited me. I rode horses two or three times with Walt Disney, who invited me to see Disneyland, and not only see Disneyland, but see behind, where they repaired carriages and did all the maintenance work and so on. That was quite nice.

Q: I'm assuming this is beyond another trip than the one that you took the two horses.

A: That was -- That was the -- the one with the two horses.

Q: So, you stayed there?

A: Yeah, well, I came back to Texas, took care of a few things, maybe sold two horses to Mr. Masterson in Houston, then went back to California.

Q: Land of promise?

A: Yeah. And rode horses with Anthony Quinn and John Derek. We used to practice fast draw. And I stayed at John Carroll's house in Granada Hills, with Wade Preston. Wade Preston was the star of Colt 45, which was a st -- a dumb, stupid western series. Anyway, I met Jack Warner once, in the desert. And that was the time when the studios had kind of re-organized and would offer you a s -- I think it was 600 dollars that I was offered, 600 dollars per month for five years.

Q: For what?

A: To be on contract.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is side B, tape two, of interview with Walter Meyer.

A: So I'm in California now, and -- and what I tried to explain to you, that studios, once they felt that they had discovered a star, or someone they could make a star, they offered all kind of monies. The new policy was, let's pay them 600 dollars per month for five years. If they become stars, we make a lot of money, because we don't pay them any more than 600 dollars a month. And if they do not become stars, we don't lose much with 600 dollars. That was a time when Burns -- you na -- remember Kookie, with the comb? Well, he was trying to make -- he became quite popular with the kids. He was making

600 dollars a month. I had signed a contract, because I had met Jack Warner, who invited me and said, "Why don't you try it out?" I thought, "Why not become a movie star?" So I signed a contract, which I broke shortly thereafter, because Frank Bogert, my very dear friend, one day said, "Do you want to meet President Eisenhower? He's in -- in Indio," or one of the desert places. And I met President Eisenhower, who had started the People to People program, which was kind of a forerunner of the Alliance for Progress. And he said, "Why don't you do some good will," and so on, and that appealed to me much more than Hollywood.

Q: Why do you think that is? Why do you think you were inspired to -- for good will?

A: Going from North America to South America overland? My God, this was -- this was an adventure. I mean, you could hardly drive. So, and --

Q: So, it was to serve people from --

A: It -- It -- It -- The -- The -- The philosophy behind was to bring people closer together, so we would understand better, our brothers south of the border. And so I met, well, all the presidents going down. And I drove, I had --

Q: From?

A: [indecipherable] with me from Los Angeles. I came through Texas, then I went all the way to Peru. So I did that, and of course, by that time, I had had a fine opportunity to become acquainted with life in the United States. I had met friends and I had decided that I would return and live in Texas, or at least try to make a living here.

Q: Why Texas over California?

A: Because I knew more people in Texas than in California, and -- and palm -- as a matter of fact, I wanted to return to Palm Springs. There was a lady who wanted me to run a spa, with an emphasis on physical education and -- but she -- she had a heart attack, she died, so that never -- never became true. So it's not that I absolutely wanted to become the te -- wanted to come to Texas, I wanted to come to California, but I also had friends here. So eventually, I returned overland to --

Q: In a car?

A: In a camper, to the United States and came to Texas and I was then introduced to then vice president Linden Johnson at his ranch.

Q: So this would have been 1962?

A: Yes, that sounds good.

Q: And how did you get to go there to the ranch, how did that happen?

A: Harry Jerzek, of Lonestar Brewing Company, kn-knew Linden Johnson well and felt that a man of my caliber should be -- should be welcome by the president and -- well, by the vice president then, and so he made arrangement and I was told to come on such and such a day, I think it was a Sunday morning that I met Linden Johnson.

Q: And your first impressions?

A: My first impression was the same as the second and third impression, that he was a rather unpleasant man.

Q: In what way?

A: Later, as I came to know him better, and traveled with him a couple of times to Mexico, he would be the extreme of a charming man, and would say, "Walter my man, how are you? How is -- How's the family?" And the next day he would look through you, as if you didn't exist. A man he was, who was used to having people do anything for him. Took advantage of his power and of course, remember those who did things for him. But not a pleasant man, not my kind of man.

Q: Now, I'm -- I'm interested in LBJ very much, but I'm also interested in the fact that he asked you how was your family. Now, is this literal, did you by now have a family?

A: Oh yeah, I married a -- a Peruvian girl when I arrived in Lima, I married a girl that I had known for some time.

Q: In what year?

A: In -- That would have been 1960.

Q: So by then you were with her, and --

A: Yeah, well I brought her with me overland.

Q: You brought her with you?

A: Yeah. And we had -- we had our first child, Heidi, born in '62. So that is why the question, how is the family. Matter of fact, when he asked me how is the family, there was already number two.

Q: And Lady Bird, did you meet her?

A: Oh yeah, I know Lady Bird well, she's one of the most delightful ladies that you could possibly meet, very considerate. But, you know, I know Lucy, I know Linda. I taught

Linda's children how to swim. But, when you -- when you ask somebody, "Did you know?" And I think the question should be, "Have you met?" Because you don't really know those people intimately. Yeah, I've -- I've been with Lady Bird several times. She sent me a picture not too -- too long ago. I had -- I had done a Blue Bonnet painting for her. So, I'll show you that picture in a minute.

Q: So would you have been in -- Did you settle in Austin?

A: When I came back -- When I came back, I settled first in San Antonio, because the president of Peru asked me to represent the country as Consul and later as Consul General. One day I had to deliver a speech at the University of Texas, as a diplomat. And my speech must have been somewhat radical. Talk about the Alliance for Progress. The one who had sponsored the speech, was the late George Sanchez. They named the College of Education after him. George Sanchez was one of the most outstanding, finest human beings I ever met. And we became friends. And he said, "I would love to have you with me in graduate school." Said, "I don't have any transcripts or anything. I would love to join you." "Well, I would rather have you without transcripts than all these monkeys," and blah, blah, blah. Well, he wrote a letter to the registrar. The letter was cosigned by the late William Drake, Professor Drake. They asked that I be admitted and I assume the registrar didn't quite know what to do with me, but he couldn't -- he couldn't just do that. I mean, I had nothing to show. So, they referred the letter to the graduate dean, who was out of town, so it went to the associate graduate dean, Lahor Hughes. Wonderful guy, who said to himself, according to him, if two professor write letter like

that and want this guy so badly in graduate school, I want to meet that man. So he called me and he talked to me for an hour and a half and he said, "I'm impressed. Would you consider it fair if I called for a special committee and let the committee decide whether you should be admitted or not?" "Yes,"[indecipherable]

Q: And you had not gone to college?

A: No. So the committee met and unanimously recommended that -- that I be accepted and three years later -- oh, I drove from San Antonio to Austin every day for three years, and got my Ph.D., and --

Q: In?

A: In history and philosophy of education. That was the first of three Ph.D.'s. Then I ran the center for international education, became quite involved in academic life, trying to -- to bring professor from other countries to interchange, by way of education understand better, what makes other people tick, about their culture and so on. But, we didn't have any money. The monies went into aerospace. You couldn't get any money at all.

Q: This was early 60's? Mid 60's?

A: Yeah. So, eventually I left and then associated with Walter Jenkins, who was Linden's first secretary. This was the t-time when Mr. Johnson left Washington.

Q: Where were you when Kennedy was shot?

A: On the way to Houston.

Q: On the way to Houston. So we're talking a -- a year -- a few years after.

A: My father had sent a car that I was going to pick up at the port of Houston. And I had a Black guy with me whom I -- I loved dearly, good mechanic. And we stopped in one of those little towns between here and Houston. And I said, "Let's have something to eat." And the guy said, "He's not going to eat here, he has to eat in the kitchen."

Q: And so this was pre-'65?

A: No, that was '63. Yeah, '63.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was the day that -- th -- th -- th -- the day Kennedy was killed. So I said, "Well, do you mind if we," -- w-we were four. "Can we all sit in the kitchen together?" "Yeah, I don't mind." So -- And I think I was a little nasty like. I hope you don't expect a tip or something like that. You know, I was a little disturbed that --

Q: Were all the others Black?

A: No, no. There was only one Black and the others were a little embarrassed about the situation then.

Q: But they truly let you sit in the kitchen?

A: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. So, as we left, we heard a loudspeaker of a radio, President Kennedy was shot, and shortly thereafter, where he's dead. So that was on the way to Houston and of course Mr. Johnson became president, and --

Q: Did you have any dealings with him while he was president?

A: None whatsoever. So, let's see, I left the university, I believe in '67.

Q: From the -- You got another Ph.D.?

A: Not from this university.

Q: Oh.

A: No, no, no. I left the university in '67, I was [indecipherable] work with Walter and all that, become all kinds of different things that I could tell you, but I don't believe that we want to go into effen -- every little detail.

Q: Had you yet become a resident and citizen?

A: Yeah, well -- Oh, yeah, I had become a resident, because even before I left for Peru on this overland trip, before -- I had gone to immigration a number of times, to extend my visitor's visa, until one day, the offer said, "Well Walter, don't you think that by this time you should know whether you like it here or not?" Those were his exact words.

Q: Who said this?

A: The -- The immigration officer. And I said, "Yes, what can I do about it?" He said, "Well, we can -- let's go into change of status and make you a resident." "Okay." Then I had to undergo a physical examination and they said, "Well, we cannot okay it, w-we have to take another x-ray, because," -- the x-ray of my lungs revealed tuberculosis, but they didn't know whether it was active or whether it was scar tissue. And I don't remember why I had to go to New York, but I said, "Why can't I speed up the process?" And I went to Staten Island and another x-ray is taken, they realized it was scar tissue, then they okayed it, I became a resident. Shortly -- Well, we didn't have any money. I think I took a trip once, to Oklahoma for President Johnson --

Q: While he was president?

A: For the former president, I meant. You still call him president, of course, but he was not in Washington any more. And whenever -- wherever I went, oh yes, somebody said, "What would you like to eat? Wa -- I take you here, you know somebody who would pick you up at the airport." And I went to -- "How about some German food?" And I tasted the sausages, I said, "These are German sausage, these are not American sausages." Well, I found out that there was a German butcher in Dallas. And I had the idea of opening a little German restaurant, as an investor, in Austin, which became probably the most successful restaurant in Austin, called Hansel and Gretel. Any of the old-timers will tell you, we had classes there, we have weddings there. I -- We gave five scholarships each year to the University of Texas. I mean, it was packed at all times.

Q: Well, what years were that -- was that?

A: That was '69 through '74. I never thought of running it, but one day I came back from a trip and I had a few partners, Walter -- Walter Jenkins was one. And I didn't know how much we owed and I -- I had a certain liability there. I said, "I'm going to take over." I took over and -- and it became quite a thing, Hansel and Gretel, so I ran that. That unfortunately, or fortunately, became part of the divorce settlement.

Q: From the first, Peruvian wife?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And, so then, when I left the --

Q: You were divorced in what year?

A: Oh, that must have been '74 or '75. Then, I -- I had learned, in one opportunity, I had become a little interested in hypnosis. And there was a professor of psychology at southwest Texas State University in San Marcus. We became friends and I went to see him. We had another restaurant there, okay?

Q: What was that called?

A: Hansel and Gretel.

Q: Oh, okay. A branch of Hansel and Gretel.

A: Yeah, and in one room, he sometimes had a class meeting in that party room and he would have some -- show hypnosis a little. So, we became friends and he said, "Why don't you become a little involved. Your -- You're pretty good at it and use -- use it in -- in -- in therapy." That was quite appealing to me. But I said, "Hell, I need -- I need a degree in psychology." So I went to the University of Texas and they -- I went before the graduate council. "No, we cannot give you second Ph.D." I went to see Charles Lamader, the chancellor of the university, whom I had met. And he recommended that I go to the University of Texas in San Antonio. They had just begun a program in psychology and that I was going to take classes at the University of Texas, but San Antonio would give me credit for it and well, the way it worked out, their program was never approved, so all the courses they took were for the birds. And eventually, I read that there was a graduate school in San Francisco, which had started with Pomeroy, who was the right hand man of -- of Kinsey. Started the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. And I

became very much interested, because I felt that most psychological problems are sexual in nature, if you see human sexuality with a very broad context. So I wrote and yes, I was accepted. Went there and while I was there, I was asked to do a little lecturing at Antioch University. They had a campus on the west coast. And they ga -- they decided to give me credit for the courses I had taken at the University of Texas, so eventually I got a Master's degree in psychology from Antioch University.

Q: From which?

A: Antioch.

Q: Oh, Antioch.

A: Antioch. And then eventually, I went to Columbia Pacific. They accepted me and recognized, of course, my Master's degree and I did some work with them and got my Ph.D. in psychology and eventually I got a third one from the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, in San Francisco, so that was my third. Let's see, where are we? So I --

Q: Education, we're doing your education.

A: Yeah, then I did some research, mostly with Dr. Singh, professor of psychology. We wrote a paper together with -- was with -- published in England. And then I decided that - - that I -- well, li -- let's not talk about economy. In the 60's -- no, in the early 80's, I lost about half a million dollars, like everybody else, and --

Q: Your business was the restaurant and teaching?

A: No, the restaurant, I had invested in real estate and -- and because of my -- my connection with the Johnsons, I had a friend who was Chairman of the Board of -- of the Bank of the Hills, which was a bank owned by the -- the Johnsons. So, Walter, how much do you need? So I could get any amount of money. This was a period of speculation. Properties change hands three times per day sometimes and each time they went up and then everything fell, because --

Q: When was that? When was the big fall?

A: The early 80's. So I lost too much money and bankruptcy was a little against my religion and I began to paint, as a kind of therapy. I had been a -- at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf as a boy. I did a painting of the famous conductor, Carrian.

Q: Where is he from?

A: Carrian was the -- the -- the -- the head of the Salzburg or -- the Salzburg's Philharmonic Orchestra. And somebody from Switzerland came to visit and -- and was crazy about this painting I had done of Carrian. And I got a letter, "Would you send a picture?" And eventually, to make the story short, "Would you sell it and how much?" And I remember my daughter was with me, I said, "Do you think 2000 dollars is too much?" She said, "If you sell this painting for 2000, I'll never talk to you again." I said, "Well, how much?" "10,000." I -- Well, the Swiss have money so I -- 10,000 and they paid 10,000. Then I was invited to have a show in Europe. Carrian asked me to do a painting for the Vatican. So I did a painting for the Pope and I was asked to come to Rome.

Q: Which Pope?

A: The present one, John Paul, and you will see me with the Pope on the picture as we come down. And then I had several shows in Europe. I had a lot of money and I paid what I owed. And I have been happy ever since.

Q: Well, now your daughter is -- you discussed, is from the first marriage?

A: Yeah, I have three children out of the first marriage, one died not too long ago, so there is a girl who is, What is Heidi, 35. She had three children, she is in west Texas, she is a rancher's wife.

Q: Where in west Texas?

A: At Saint Angelo.

Q: I'm from Abalone, so --

A: Oh, okay. And then there's a boy who is here, he's a very prominent man. God knows what all he does. And -- And by sheer coincidence, one day on the way to the university, on a rainy, cold, miserable day, I was driving and I saw this student, I assume, missing the shuttlebus to the university and I stopped and I said, "I'm going to the university, I don't want you to miss classes." She became my wife.

Q: Your present wife?

A: She is Chinese and she is probably the -- not probably, she is without any doubt the finest human being I ever met in my life. And with her I have Asai, who was born what, 16 months ago. So this is the beginning of the final chapter of my life.

Q: With a new family.

A: Right.

Q: That's wonderful. So, before we go now, between your family and your education, the return to -- I can't say it right, Ravensbrück?

A: Ravensbrück.

Q: Ravensbrück. Is there anything else you want to fill in, as far as your history, before we return?

A: Oh, I don't know. There are so many things, but I don't believe that they would contribute much.

Q: Okay. I'm interested in -- in how this -- how you got reconnected with your roots in Germany and with the Holocaust, and what led you to return.

A: Well, after my parents died, my father was born in a small, little town -- as a matter of fact, my cousin is visiting from Germany. I have relatives on both sides, Germany and Belgium.

Q: Your father died in what year?

A: My father died in '73, and so it is not that I have a tremendous, strong feeling towards my roots. I'm very attached to the little town in which I spent part of my childhood taking care of the cows and milking the cows and where I have some relatives left, and where I like to go, with their buis -- beautiful forests.

Q: That town is?

A: That -- That little town of 600 people is called Holleerath, H-o-l-l-e-a-e-r-a-t-h.

Matter of fact, a friend of mine just wrote a book about the Jews in that part. He gave me

his book, the Jews in -- in that part of Germany, the development, the history of the Jews there and so on, it's quite, quite interesting. Their names and what they did and so on. So, it is not so much Germany, I'm -- I am as much attached to -- to, now Libya and to South Africa, as I am to Texas, so I don't have these enormous roots, really.

Q: All right, before we go to Ravensbrück, I think I should turn over to the next side --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- to the next tape.

A: Sure.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape three, side one, of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Walter Meyer, conducted by Ginger Miles, on April 28th, 1999, in Austin, Texas.

A: I don't think so. We can always get together again. I don't know, you asked me the question, what would you --

Q: I'd like to focus on the place that was a concentration camp, and where you ended up and maybe if you could just give us a little background about when you were there the first time, just like a paragraph or something, and then about your return trip.

A: Well, the first time was in 1944. Went to Sachsenhausen first and from Sachsenhausen, went to Ravensbrück. Of course, Ravensbrück was a very small camp. Ravensbrück consisted mainly of satellite camps. Ravensbrück acted as a -- as a headquarters. And I went to one of those satellite camps, but they all were under the umbrella of Ravensbrück.

Q: This is from prison, to --

A: From prison to concentration camp. Concentration camp, to me -- to me, was actually an improvement, because I was in solitary confinement in the prison. The concentration camp, at least you can talk to others.

Q: And you were considered a political prisoner?

A: I was considered a political prisoner. So, in that concentration camp, did not mean as much as the word implies. To me, it was not getting worse. As a matter of fact, it was getting a little better.

Q: You didn't fear for your life?

A: No, I feared for my life, but not -- not of being killed, rather, a-a-a-a-at the very end, I feared I was -- I was afraid I would die.

Q: Because you were sick?

A: Because I was -- I was sick. See, I had tried to escape, I had done several things. My conduct in prison was so that three times I was put in the bunker, for one month each time, with 200 grams of bread and butter, I -- bread and -- and water. So --

Q: You were only wishing for butter.

A: Yeah. So that puts you down pretty fast. And then, where they needed soldiers, I was called and I was told that I should be ready, I would be transferred to a penal company, which meant the first line. And I refused, because I was in no condition to be a soldier. That refusal prompted then, the transfer to a camp, to a work camp. And Ravensbrück was a work camp, as a matter of fact, one of the toughest work camps. So, the first time I went to Germany, I had decided, beyond any doubt whatsoever, to visit the warden of the prison in which I had spent about a year, and kill him.

Q: Is this Spider?

A: Yeah. And I went there.

Q: When was this that you went?

A: Oh, that was when I went in -- I assume that was when I went back in '54, after the -- after seven years. And, you know, I -- I had made up my mind to say, "Do you remember me? May I refresh your memory?" And then eventually I would have killed him. And I

knocked at the door, and a lady came. I said, "I come to see Dr. Soikner." She said, "Well, I'm very sorry, but he's no longer here, he moved to Hamburg." Well, that of course changed the whole thing. I was not about now to take the next train to Hamburg, because from Frankfurt to Hamburg is a long way. So, I kind of -- kind of forgot it.

Q: May I ask you here, then it had been seven years, and even more than that from the time that you were in the camp, or in the prison, and you carried this hate. Why - I don't - I know that he was aw -- in -- very, very bad to you, but can you figure out any other reason why you carried this hate toward him? Was it more than just him?

A: Oh, because I don't believe that -- well, I never understand how man can be so evil to man. That's -- That's -- I have never come to understand that. This particular man had no right whatsoever, to be so cruel, so sadistic, to a boy of 16 years.

Q: He was beating you, and more?

A: Well, he was not beating me personally, but he ordered that I be beaten, he ordered that I be put into a little cell with nothing but two slices of bread for -- for four weeks. This was the ultimate of cruelty, but he was a sadistic man, who -- and there are millions like that in the world. So, he's just one of them. But I carried his image with him and -- and I still dream of him, once in awhile.

Q: Still?

A: Yeah.

Q: You still dream of him?

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, I still dream of him. Once in awhile I see myself -- I do a lot of scribbling with a pencil and I see myself doing his profile. I say, "Dammit, why do I do this?"

Q: What do you mean by doing his profile?

A: Oh, I start drawing and before I know it, I have his nose and I have his profile there.

Q: Maybe he represented, because I know, from your childhood on, with your father as mentor, you were anti-authoritarian. So, it's terrible for anyone to be in prison, but for someone who is as anti-authoritarian as you, perhaps could he have represented something greater than just himself?

A: Yes, that is -- that is -- that is very true. I mean, I was very much like putting an eagle in a cage. I was free. I was supposed to be born in Texas, the son of a big rancher, see? But it didn't happen that way. So, yes, I hated him passionately, I mean passionately. I don't know in retrospect -- these are all good questions, and nobody can answer -- what would have happened if I had killed him? Would I have sleepless nights over him? I don't know that, it didn't happen.

Q: Well, this brings up a comment that you did make, that you have killed and I just wondered, although I know it may be very unpleasant. Can -- Can you say what -- what circumstances you were in?

A: Well, I -- When I went into the western zone -- see the Russians -- Americans were very nice and they picked up scientists and brought them over here. Like Werner Ferbrown and son. The Russians would ship anybody to Russia, and they would do the

screening in Russia. If you were an engineer, fine, if not, well we can -- we can still use you. So --

Q: They were not as discriminant?

A: Oh no, no, no. They could use all kinds of people. So one day we were stopped at a border crossing --

Q: This was around what year?

A: Oh, that was --

Q: After the war?

A: -- '47 -- '46. End of '46, maybe. And I had a young lady with me who was -- well, in my area I had become somewhat o-of an expert. I had gone twice into the Russian zone, "Let's go with Walter, he knows his way." Well, we were stopped, taken to an old forest ranger's office, and some of the women were raped. And we were marched, and I knew, from here, by train, we'll end up in Russia. And an elderly guard with a machine gun was behind us, and I began to have like epileptic attacks, just to see how he would react. And finally I got hold of his gun and killed him. So that was one of those situations, and we -- we ran, and nobody crossed the border for a long time there.

Q: How did you travel? What car, what --

A: Oh, we were running, on foot.

Q: Just by foot?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: My God.

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah. So that was -- that was -- that was that.

Q: Yeah. Well, so in other words, it was self defense, right.?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: You were defending yourself and others.

A: Yeah.

Q: So I think now is a great time to go back to your more recent past, and tell first, how did you get the opportunity or the inspiration to return to the camp?

A: I was invited to meet a friend of mine in Berlin. I have a friend in -- a Belgian friend who has a very large factory of making bakery equipment, ovens and so on, in South Africa. And every four years, the largest baker's convention exhibit is in Berlin, enormous. And -- And I promised that we would meet there and said -- you know that close -- I was always a little hesitant to go back, I didn't want to remember and past is past. But he said, "Walter, if you want to go, I'll lend you my car."

Q: How far was it?

A: Oh, from Berlin, maybe 60 miles, 70 miles, 80 miles, something like that. So, I had drove up there, and unfortunately the man's camp -- well, the woman's camp did not exist any more and the man's camp didn't exist any more. The women's camp, at least the -- the permanent buildings were still there. The -- The prison part, where the women were. The barracks were all gone, because they had typhus, everything was burned down. The man's camp was gone, there was a -- a Russian military company was there, so I couldn't even go through. So the only thing I did is went into the main building, which

was the administration building of the SS, and got a couple of pamphlet or something. I remember the lady told me something, I don't remember what it was. I said, "No, you're wrong," and I corrected her. And she said, "How do you know?" I said, "Well, I was here." And she looked at me. "I don't remember [indecipherable]" But anyway, that was -- that was it and I remember when I stood there and I wanted to cry and I just couldn't, and I was like -- like a stone figure. I was -- It was tough, and it was very difficult to -- to drive back. But it was -- it was -- it was bad. So --

Q: Your thoughts upon driving back, or standing there, can you recall any?

A: Yeah, well, so many of the details came back. When I saw an S man shooting somebody and when they threw a -- a head close to the wire. I mean, all these -- all these reflections came, and how I worked hard and how my feet looked and my hand were blistered, and so, a mosaic of pictures arose and I was in bad shape. I was in bad shape. And for some reason -- I don't know whether there's a medical reason for it, I know when I went for the interview in Washington, I had to pause a few times. I was going -- I thought I was going to break down. I didn't. And I want to cry, but I can't cry. I have the same sensation, but I can't cry. I have a daughter, whom I love dearly, and she suffered greatly of depression. And a couple of months ago, she was house-sitting for a friend of mine, and found a gun, and put the gun in her mouth, killed herself. We had a little memorial and I spoke and again, I had to pause and I thought I wouldn't be able to make it. My voice went and well, eventually -- eventually I made it, but those are the situations

that I wish I could -- I would have this nice relieve and could cry for awhile, but I can't, so, anyway.

Q: So you had no one to talk to there? No one who had shared the experience?

A: No. No, no, I was all alone, I was -- There's a church there, but no.

Q: I'm very interested, Walter, if you have met Jewish survivors who you've talked with about your experiences?

A: Oh, I have a -- I have a very, very dear friend, Dr. Samuelson. He used to be chairman of the language department San Antonio and gave me a job once. I taught languages for awhile. We get together once in awhile. He wrote a few books and he edited my book. And -- And we philosophize quite a bit, we have many things in common. I married a Chinese woman, he was married to a Cuban woman and after the divorce, married a Vietnamese girl who is about half his age and had three children with her. A very happy man, very bright. So, we philosophize, and -- and --

Q: Was he in the Holocaust?

A: Oh yeah, he was in the Holocaust. He spent quite a bit of time in Buchenwald. He is, I think Bill is two or three years younger than I. He is a Poli --

Q: So he was a teenager?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah, he is Polish. So we speak.

Q: And what do you talk about, in relation to the past?

A: We do not speak so much about the past, we talk more about humanity. You see, contrary to -- of course, every time somebody asks me, "What did you do in the war? Were you in Germany in the war?" I said I was i-imprisoned. "Oh, so you're Jewish?" I mean, automatically, it's assumed that I'm Jewish, and I'm not. I went once to the Holocaust museum, up to the archives and I'm registered as a Jew. I said, "Well, wait a minute, I'm not Jewish." "Well, do you mind?" "No," I said, "I don't give a shit one way or the other." But they have me as a Jew there. The m -- The -- The -- The -- The name Meyer, could very easily be Jewish, very easily. It's an old, Roman name, I mean, it's a Hebrew name to start with, like Golda Meir, it's -- it's called the enlightened one. We talk more about humanity, education and even though Jews do not allow you to make comparison between persecution, systematic killing of Indians in the United States, depression and persecution and killing of Blacks, the history of the British in the world, the history of the French in the world, the history -- I mean, there's hardly a country in the world that can say we have never done anything wrong. So, the Germans were the only ones who did mass extermination in such a scientific way and it depends a little upon how you want to look at things. Is this -- Is this indicative of the German scientific mind, or is this the ultimate degree of cruelty? I mean, there are many ways of -- of looking at things. Are Germans by nature more cruel than others? No, hell no. I think French are much more sadistic than Germans are, as a whole. I look at the history of the Jews, ha -- how they have been prosecuted. I look at the church, having done nothing whatsoever to help alleviate things. So, I am more a member of the party that accuses the

world, rather than pointing the fingers at one or the other. And I'm pretty sure that I'd find as many sadistic Israelis as I find any -- anywhere in the world. I don't believe that I'd want to be associated with a typical Marine Sargent.

Q: Of any race?

A: Of any race. American or whatever. An American Marine Sargent is a son of a bitch from way back. He's a killer.

Q: Trained to be.

A: Trained to be, right. And he's not going to ask much. If you tell him -- I mean, you know, in -- in -- in -- in Mississippi [indecipherable] deputy says, "How about killing a -- killing us a nigger this weekend?" Can you understand? There are people like that everywhere. The Germans went a little too far, and of course, if I were a Jew, I would not allow for this to be forgotten. I fully understand that.

But you have to go a little beyond that, and I understand. I remember once I wrote a letter to Elie Wiesel, the very famous one, when he protested that Reagan was going to go to the Bittburg cemetery, where SS soldiers were interred. That was -- And I tried to correct him, said, "SS were not all killers. Some SS were volunteers. Some were recruited into the SS. They had no choice. But not every SS member killed Jews, or killed anybody. So I don't know whether those in the cemetery were killers or were totally innocent bystanders." And I encouraged. I wrote him, he never wrote back. I said, "Why don't you go with Mr. Reagan and hold your hand and start something new? Start a peace movement. Show them that you're willing to give it a try, instead of, no we have to

remember, we have to remember.” You don’t do much good by doing that. Certainly you remember, certainly you -- you want to prevent things from happening again. Look at Yugoslavia. We don’t talk much about Rwanda, where millions of people got killed -- slaughtered, not killed, slaughtered. Because they’re Blacks, what the hell ca -- who gives a damn, right? Yugoslavia’s a little closer, they’re, in quotes, civilized people. I mean, up in the 20th century, people kill each other for religion in Ireland. You [indecipherable] it’s -- how is it possible, huh? People do weird things. I never, never will understand to what extreme man can go in what he does to his fellow man. That’s beyond me.

Q: Do you make any sense or can you connect the shooting in Littleton, Colorado on Hitler’s birthday?

A: Oh, I think -- I think that’s a little overplayed. I -- I don’t believe that Hitler has anything to do with it whatsoever, I don’t believe so. I look at Colorado, it does not -- I mean, it -- it’s -- it’s horrible, and to hear that one of the killer’s mother, after it happened, had her hair done in front of the school, you know, like ‘I don’t give a damn.’ I think that the horrible thing is in the United States, and throughout the world, is that the family, which was the strongest unit, is totally falling apart. So kids grow up, no father image, single parent. They grow up without anything whatsoever, and try to get attention. I tried to get attention on the streets. When you need attention, you need attention, whether it’s negative or positive, doesn’t make any difference. So, I can understand what has happened in Colorado. Do I like it? Of course I don’t like it. And I feel sorry for the victims, of course. But, it is an outcome of a ruthless, non-family life, which has -- I look

at my -- my -- our nanny, who's a lovely woman from Croatia, but she would probably pay money to see Jerry Springer. Have you ever seen Jerry Springer on -- on -- on -- on -- on television?

Q: No. I -- I know who he is.

A: You ought to see the program, what they see and there are millions of people standing in line to watch that.

Q: Why?

A: Why? Because people love to see se-sensational things. Like in the west, originally, they stood in line to see a hanging. That's the way the world is, we're just terrible animals.

Q: But it's interesting though, your family -- your first family is still close to you in Austin, around -- around the Austin area, isn't that right?

A: Yeah.

Q: So you stayed connected -- very connected with that family.

A: Yeah. Don't -- Don't -- Don't -- Don't forget that I have been longer in Texas than anywhere in the world. I've been much longer in Texas than I had been in Germany. I know how to speak German, of course, but I have been here for -- for a lifetime.

Q: What is it about Texas that -- do you think appealed to you?

A: I love the -- the wide, open spaces. People are friendly, whether that friendliness is a very profound and truism, or you never know if somebody says good day to you, does he really mean for you to have a good day, you don't analyze that. People as a whole are

very friendly, eager to help. I have many friends here. Life is relatively easy. Climate is rather pleas -- a little hot in the summer, but not that bad. I have, of course, one of the choice homes in -- in -- in -- in this area, with a gorgeous view and I can go swimming any time. I have a boat. It's not too far from anything. You take a plane, you're in New York in no time. You go to Europe. We have a new airport that will be in operate in a couple of weeks, or three weeks.

Q: I noticed that you have a picture of yourself with Ann Richards, could you say how you know her?

A: I met Ann Richards when she was county commissioner. She is one of the most delightful women in the world. Sharp as can be, humorous as can be. Matter of fact, she wrote -- there's Ann Richards.

Q: Oh. Would you read her -- her comments about your book?

A: Yeah, "Walter Meyer is a remarkable, courageous man, who survived the horror of Nazi Germany and made America his home. His considerable charm and talent shine through in this wonderful volume. Ann Richards, former Texas governor."

Q: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, we haven't discussed much about the book, about your -- your -- anyone who writes a book, I know, as a writer, has to be extremely motivated and I wonder what motivated you to do this.

A: Over a period of years, people, knowing a little about my adventures -- and some of them are very extreme, "Why don't you write a book, why don't you write a book?" Well, I wrote and then I said to myself, "This looks a little too much like Hollywood,"

and I threw it away. But you get older and older and said, "I should really write," and then I begin more seriously, and one day I ran into a graduate student, a very fine, talented writer. I said, "You want to give me a hand?" And he wanted to make a little extra money. So he helped me and we then became very disciplined. And it was to be published by the Holocaust Museum, and it had to go through three editors there, and they all okayed it. And then it went through to -- two independent sources in Germany and they had to decide whether the book was a contribution to the --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: -- and --

A: And so the Holocaust Museum decided not to publish it.

Q: Based on?

A: Based upon the fact that two independent sources in Germany had decided that the book did not represent a new contribution to the history of concentration camps, and so on. So then I had a -- a list -- I think Mr. Gelb from -- he's one of the editors there.

Q: At the museum?

A: Michael Gelb, yeah, gave me a list, and I wrote to one and two and it's not only difficult to write a book, but it's very difficult to find a publisher, I can tell you that. And -- But I had a list and there was an 800 number for the University of Missouri Press. I called the 800 number and said, "This is Dr. Meyer, may I speak to the director?" Well, I assume that she thought maybe there was an accident or something, a doctor needs to go

through, so I talked to the director, I said, well -- I had written a query letter and I said, "May I read the query letter to you over the phone?" Said, "Yeah, please." We kind of liked each other over the phone. And after I finished the query letter, she said, "I want to see the manuscript." So I send the manuscript and two months later she called and said, "Well, it's always so difficult for me to tell people that, unfortunately we have to turn down their," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I said, "Here it comes." "But in your case, it has to be published." So, University of Missouri Press said leave everything as it is, and so this was it, so --

Q: They didn't ask for any changes?

A: No, no changes whatsoever. There's a picture here, at least there -- yeah, there is one. I should find it. So this came out just a few weeks ago, and I was --

Q: How many?

A: Just a couple of weeks ago.

Q: Oh, congratulations.

A: Yeah, well, thank you, and it seems to be doing rather well. And, so that's -- there I am when I was 16.

Q: Oh, and what does the uniform?

A: It's the Navy, because I was -- I was in the Hitler youth and the Hitler youth was divided and -- this is Lovey. Remember when I told you about Lovey?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That's when I was a sailor on the Parkhaven, shoveled coal, you see.

Q: And he was from where?

A: He was from Curaçao.

Q: Curaçao.

A: From the Dutch West Indies. So that's the book that just came out and I have been asked to do a little tour for Barnes and Noble.

Q: Will you be coming to New York?

A: God knows, maybe yes.

Q: I imagine.

A: Yeah, and --

Q: You'll have some tough audiences there.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: That's where the tough audiences are.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Ph.D.'s will really help.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Well, I have a few questions from Arwin Donohue for you, so -- follow-up on your life, I think.

A: All right.

Q: Unless you wanted to add something about the book, or thoughts that you've had. I know that finishing a book is sort of like, I've been told, having a baby. You know, afterwards, there are all sorts of -- well, there may be depressions and then there may be

joyful experiences, or connections with other people. Were you reconnected, so far, with anyone from your past in Germany?

A: No.

Q: Do you expect that?

A: No, I have contact to my cousin here, to another cousin, who's coming to visit me with his wife. But others, don't forget, I'm going to be 73 years old. Most of the people are dead. So there are not too many people round there. I have one friend who is close to death now. He is a year younger than I and we used to have this Jewish boy hiding in our basement. We never understood why they were against him. We were talking about that last time I saw him. But he is pretty much in bad shape, everything.

Q: What is his name?

A: It's Eddie Wylant. He carries a little bag with him, you know, his kidney don't function well, God knows. So --

Q: I wanted to ask you now that we're on the physical, cause I know you were wa -- you had TB and you were beaten and you discuss in the '96 interview, pain in your legs. Have you had physical problems that result -- that come back, from that time?

A: The only thing that is evident is that as a consequence of malnutrition, nerves in my legs have suffered greatly. And so, I cannot stand for a long time, then I begin to dance around and try to find -- especially on concrete floors, okay? But, other than that, I'm -- I mean, I had back surgeries, but I cannot stand here and look you straight in the eyes and say the surgeries can be attributed to my being imprisoned. So --

Q: What about your experience, not just being in prison, but in watching -- in getting sort of a close up, but outsider's view of -- of what happened in the Holocaust to Jewish people, is there anything beyond the physical that you think had informed you, that informs your decisions, as to where to go and what to do and what your interests are, from that time.

A: Well, my interests right now have to be, I have given the children I have -- the children I have left, about as liberal education as possible and I have never allowed any form of segregation to exist in my family. And the daughter I have now will grow up to be as liberal, as objective, as understanding as possible. Of course, I have no voc -- no -- no control over whether she going to -- going to end up at the age of 25 with drugs or something like that. I-I hope not. Other than that, I look left and right and unfortunately, whenever you see something like the Holocaust, you -- you -- you would think that something like that can never happen again and I wish I could believe that, but I can't. So, atrocities in the world are not a dampener, or not a way to tell people, "Let's go into mass education and prevent this from happening again." No, no, there are many, many prisoners or leaders who said, "Let's keep people as stupid as possible, because it's so much easier to govern them. Let's create some sort of sickening nationalism and let's teach them that the Albanians, or the Jews, they are no good, they are responsible for your bleeding, they are responsible for your bad economy, they are the ones." I see it again and again and again. So, humanity has not changed and will not change, unless there is some -- some kind of enlightenment.

Q: In considering the small daughter of yours, who I saw, and her generation, what would be your greatest hopes that she may be? I mean, I know the greatest fear might be drugs, but the greatest hopes that she might take away with, say when she reads her father's book?

A: That she will become compassionate, understanding. That she will ask a thousand questions why, why, why, instead of accepting blindly. That she will learn about other cultures and grow up to be the kind of person that you must love.

Q: But, I wanted to ask you some of the follow up questions from Arwin and one of them is your -- your birthdate, and your father's and brother's full names.

A: My birth date is 31st of May, 1926. My brother's full name was Paul Meyer. My father's name was Paul Meyer. My mother's name was Henriette Meyer, and her maiden name was Sommerhauser, S-o-m-m-e-r-h-a-u-s-e-r.

Q: This is an interesting question, I think, that you mentioned that, in your '96 interview, that during the time you were in Ravensbrück, which I'm only pronouncing this as an American child, in the quarry, there was a hierarchy of nationalities among prisoners.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: At what rung of this hierarch-archy were you and other German pris-prisoners?

A: At the highest level.

Q: The highest level?

A: Mm.

Q: You were privileged at all, because of your nationality?

A: No, that was not privileged. It just happened to be divided like that. It had nothing to do with -- wi-with -- with a privilege. I mean, we were -- we were picking rocks.

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: So that was not -- that was not the -- the highest level was just as bad as the lowest level, so --

Q: Were there any Jews in the camp?

A: No.

Q: So, was there mixing between ethnic or national groups?

A: There was -- There were -- There were quite a few Russians, Poles. When I say there were no Jews, that I know, okay? There were some, I understand, some French prisoners of war were there, and maybe a few Czechs, and so and so.

Q: I really like this next question, it's, listening to you talk about your experiences during the war, Arwin is struck by what seems to her to be a very optimistic attitude. Is that an accurate assessment? Did you feel optimistic at all at that time, or did it come back later?

A: Well, Miss Donohue, I have been asked that question many times, and there seems to be evidence that I am optimistic, but I want to make a correction. My optimism is not -- is an innate thing. In other words, I do things not because I'm optimistic, but because I do not think that the consequences may be devastating. You understand? People prepare themselves and say, "If I do this, if I get caught, oh my God, what am I going to do?" I let things happen and then I think, "What am I going to do now?" So, I don't know whether optimist is -- is -- is an accurate word to describe me. I think I am rather -- I would rather

use the word irresponsible, because in my past, I have been too -- playing with fire too much, and that is an irresponsible act. Oh, I'm going to get away with it, ah, nobody's going to catch me, or nobody's going to see me and I have no fear. But there's a difference between having fear as a consequence of intelligent thinking, or having no fear because I just don't give a damn. I'm -- I'm -- I'm -- So, I'm an adventurer really, I'm a Gypsy by -- by -- by sheer and weird conglomeration of genes.

Q: And speaking of genes, did you say something about no Jewish blood for five generations? Does that indicate --

A: I had to prove that.

Q: How did you prove that?

A: Well, you had to prove that in Germany.

Q: Oh, so you don't know what happened before that?

A: Before five gener -- hell, no, I could have a lot of Jewish blood, but no. You had to prove that for five generations, you were Aryan.

Q: Had to prove to whom?

A: To the government.

Q: When did they ask? Did they ask your parents?

A: Well, when you -- when you -- for example, were you a member of the Hitler youth. And in Germany, you see people in Germany like -- like in other European countries, they were born here and they died here, so it's -- it's -- it's very -- it's not like America, say, "Where did your grandfather come from?" "I don't know." In Germany, you know

where your grandfather, your great-grandfather, where they all came from, see? My cousin lives in the house in which my father was born and that existed in 1590.

Q: Your cousin that's visiting here?

A: This cousin here.

Q: Wow. Well, that's the sense of -- Is he a similar age to you?

A: No, she is much younger --

Q: She.

A: -- than. She is 56.

Q: Uh-huh. You didn't know her then?

A: Oh yeah, I've known her forever.

Q: Oh.

A: I knew her as a baby.

Q: That must have a -- a very -- a feeling of closure, doesn't it, to have a relative from that time, and --

A: Yeah, she is very close to me, she is a good woman and she lost her husband with cancer and her son was involved in a head-on collision, so he was in coma for three -- three months. And she is a fine, fine, fine woman. Good woman and my parents loved her to death.

Q: When did your parents -- I know you told me about the death of your father, but you didn't -- When was the last time you saw your mother and father?

A: I saw my -- my father maybe six months before he died. I went to Germany rather frequently. And my mother died in 80 ti -- no, my mother died in '79. And I saw her in the last weeks of her life.

Q: Here's an interesting observation by Arwin, on relationships with your parents after the war, particularly your relationship with your father, whom you seem to have seen in the early days as the chief force against which you rebelled. You actually mention now that, or that in '96 interview, that you are exactly like your father. What do you mean by this? Is this possibly a tie-in with his feeling -- your feelings about authority in general, after the war and today?

A: W-Well, my father thought that beating me up would conform me. If he had a been somewhat of a psychologist, he would have said, with a little sugar and a little candy, Walter is going to be a fantastic human being. But he beat me up until I was blue and red, a-and at the age of 12, if you had given me a gun, I would have shot him. When he saw me after the war, from then on he tried so hard to undo and redo and he was the most unselfish man I ever met. And he tried to give me his right arm and his left arm, until one day I told him, "You cannot buy my love. Just forget all the bullshit. I -- I -- Let me try to forget." And I came to love him, and I miss him. I wish he would show up some bi -- weekend. Death is a kind of miserable thing, anyway. So, when I say I am very much the way he was in many ways, I'm a rather unselfish person. I never buy things for me. It's my wife who buys a new shirt or something, I don't go. I don't particularly care how I look. I don't particularly care what I eat. I don't need any luxury whatsoever. I don't need

a new car, as long as the one I have runs. So, in that respect, I'm much happier with -- with beans, than I am with -- with -- what do the Russians have, the fish eggs?

Q: Caviar.

A: With caviar, yeah, you know? So, my stape is -- my taste is simple. So, I am as impatient as he was. I'm a little -- I tend to be violent, as -- as he was.

Q: In -- In what way?

A: Violent especially by, if I see a uniform, uniforms have a tremendously bad impact on me and when they -- well, you know, not too many years ago, I had a problem with a policeman and I broke his -- his -- his -- his nose. You don't do that, you ought to control yourself. It's difficult for me to control myself. It gets better as I get older, okay? So, I have many of my father's traits, but I've also let -- like my mother, I have all the artistic blood from my mother and so on, and so on.

Q: You said that she was writing?

A: She wrote beautifully and she wrote poetry and she was oh, she lived in a -- in a -- in a world of art, in a world that doesn't exist. She was a dreamer.

Q: Where did you have a chance to read her writing?

A: Well, she wrote a bunch of things that I have. How she met her husband. Everything is written in -- Oh, she had a beautiful choice of words, and --

Q: Journal?

A: Yeah.

Q: In German?

A: In German, of course.

Q: Do you think that your -- your ability to paint came from her?

A: I -- I have to assume so, because there were a few painters in my family and sculptors on her side.

Q: There are?

A: Yeah, not on my father's side. My father's side are all farmers.

Q: That came in handy in your many jobs.

A: Yes.

Q: Both farming and painting.

A: Yeah. This, by the way, is a painting I did of my father. That's my father there on the wall.

Q: That's a beautiful painting.

A: Mm. [inaudible]

Q: Are you still painting now?

A: Yeah. I did a painting not too long ago that was shipped to Germany, yeah, mm-hm.

Q: That's a very -- a very major gift, I think.

A: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Q: And I want to see what else we've gotten to --

A: Okay, hold it for [indecipherable]

Q: All right. Now, who is this?

A: Lady Bird.

Q: Oh. And this is your painting that you --

A: That's the painting in the back, yeah.

Q: That she has, uh-huh. "To Walter Meyer, with so many thanks, Lady Bird Johnson."

When was that?

A: Oh, maybe a year ago, something like that. There is Lady Bird up there. And there is the president with his family, and there's the president with his family.

Q: And the pope, is that the pope up there? That's the cardinal.

A: No, that's Cardinal Spellman.

Q: But you haven't continued your cut -- your connection with Catholicism?

A: Oh no, no, no, no. [inaudible]. I'm not -- I am not a -- I am not a church-going man.

Matter of fact, I have many problems with the church. So that's Ann Richards, "To my friend Walter Meyer." Let's see, who else is there that you might be interested in?

Q: Clark Gable would be mine -- my -- my first choice.

A: Clark Gable [indecipherable], yeah, yeah. Well, there's Bo Derek up there, see I'm in the picture above my father there, I'm with Bo Derek.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Those are pictures where I'm on horseback. You see up there? Those are all horse pictures.

Q: From the movies, or --

A: Yeah, they are partly. And this one here is when Governor Connolly, after he was shot -- I was asked to go to Germany to promote tourism to Texas. And I went with Senator Richter and this is when we came back, he was shot, so this was in '63, '64. Yeah, '63.

Q: I don't know if I should just ask what does your wife do?

A: She is a computer engineer. She works for Dell.

Q: So, you've given so much, I think -- a question which I think is interesting is, going back -- you mentioned going back to your father's -- your mother's -- your -- the hometown where you grew up.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And I'm wondering if you ever met, earlier -- on your earlier trips, did you meet any of the townspeople that you had known then and did you discuss -- did they know what had happened to you, or did they know what had happened in the Holocaust?

A: Well, you have to understand that there are people that certainly they knew about me, and there are people, or there was one in -- man in particular who threatened to denounce my father for having listened to the BBC. When I came back, I was told, "Do you remember so and so?" Well, my attitude was then, "Oh, let's forget him." As a matter of fact, my father is the one who encouraged me to ask for rehabilitation from the German government. Reparation money. I said, "Oh, they can't buy my health back and so on." Finally, when I came to Germany, he insisted that we go to an attorney who was trying to reinstate me because I had missed the deadline.

Q: What year would this have been?

A: I don't remember, in the 50's, I assume. Anyway, the Germans rejected me, because in Germany, if you miss the deadline, you miss the deadline. And we brought forward that I was in the jungle of Peru and I had no idea that there was a deadline. No, no way. And so I said, "I'm going to try it myself, just to see how the Germans handle this." And I wrote to, and had quite a correspondence with a member of parliament, a member of the *bunderstock*, who was head of the judiciary, I think. And he made it very clear, "Sorry, Walter, you missed the deadline." So, in Germany, you miss the deadline, in America there are exceptions to the rule, in Germany there are not. So, I forgot all about it and the people -- the people, some of them died, some of them I didn't want to have any association with whatsoever. And, you know, Germans tried very hard to claim that, "Oh no, we were never Nazis, we were always against it," and so on. But that's what you have to expect. Nobody's going to say, "Yes, I'm guilty." People don't do that. So, you know. Anyway -- So, I have not -- I know people who benefitted greatly during the Hitler regime, and do I want to make a big issue, do I want to? No, I -- You have to know that whatever you do has some kind of positive result. If not, why touch it? It doesn't do any good.

Q: Well, thank you so much. Is there anything else you want to add? I -- I'm sure there are many things, but --

A: I don't know. You tell Miss Donohue, if she has any questions, to write them down and send them to me and I will answer them to the best of my ability.

Q: All right. This concludes the interview with Walter Meyer, conducted by Ginger Miles, in Austin, Texas, April, 1999.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview