United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Eliazak Lessing
June 28, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Eliazak Lessing, conducted by Joe Richmond on June 28, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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 u -- This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection, this is an interview with Ed Lessing, conducted by Joe Richmond, on June 26th, 1999. Make that June 28th, 1999. This is a follow up interview to the videotaped interview conducted with Ed Lessing, back in 1990. And the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape one, side A. Mr. Lessing, we're just going to go on and recap some of your experiences during the war, and if you want to just start talking about -- I di -- basically from the beginning of the German occ -- occupation in the Netherlands, when you went into hiding, and the [indecipherable] a short description of that time, and then we'll go into the post-war experiences.

Answer: The -- Well, as you probably know, Holland was invaded in May 1940, when I lived with my father and my mother and my two brothers, who are eight and 10 years younger than I -- than -- than I am, in a little town called Delft, in Holland. And my father was all his life a musician, and had recently opened a little clothing store, to see if he could get away from the -- th -- wi -- away from the music. On the 10th of May, two days after my 14th birthday, the Germans suddenly -- I looked out the -- out the window, and there was all German planes and paratroopers in the sky. And five days later, we were, of course -- the Dutch government ran away, the queen ran away to London, and we were an occupied country. And it didn't worry us too much, because the -- the war was going to

be over anyway very soon, we all knew that, and the Germans would never do in Holland what they had done in Germany, to the German Jews. But, pretty soon, of course, we began to find anti-Semitic ordinances in the -- in -- in the -- in the paper, and things progressed rapidly. Two years later, 1942, after I couldn't go to school any more, and we were all wearing yellow stars on our clothing, two years later, in October 23rd, 1942, we went into hiding. We were actually all set to go on the trains to what the Germans euphemistically called work relief, in Germany. We were all set, we had our backpacks ready, but my grandfather, who happened to come over fo-for a visit from Amsterdam, warned us that -- warned my parents that we -- we might not at all be going to work in Germany, that the Germans were lying, that there were rumors going around, and although no one knew where -- where we were yes going, he said don't ever go. It seems to have made a deep impression upon my parents, because at some point, they decided we're not going to go on those trains, like most of the Jew -- Dutch Jews, and we were going to go into hiding, although we had no places prepared. So, as I said, on the 23rd of October, 1942, we walked -- in the morning we walked out of our home, and never to return to that same house again. And that night my family spread around. My na -- They -- My -- My parents went one way, and my brothers went another way, I didn't know where they went. And I was left, for awhile, in that -- with our friends where we had walked to, in the suburbs of Delft. I stayed there for a little while. And from there I went to -- first address in Utrecht, two old ladies who took me in, but very soon got scared, and

I had to go. My mother, who is -- really became the -- the hero of this -- of our hiding story -- of our wartime story in general, was the only one who traveled on trains, and she went around finding places for all of us. She fou -- She decided that -- She suggested that I would bleach my hair and pretend to be a Christian boy, and work as a stable boy, s -- go find work on a sta -- as a stable boy on a Dutch farm. She then found a little farm somewhere, little farmer who had five cows, dairy farm, and that's where I went to work. That was my first farm, and it was absolute hell. I was this Jewish city kid, and I was supposed to go out at five o'clock in the morning, in the pouring rain, and -- and milk cows, and so, and I did. I -- I learned all that. I walked with bleeding feet i-in -- in wooden shoes, and -- very -- well, I don't know how long I was there. My guess is -- My guess is maybe -- oh, maybe -- maybe a half a year, I -- I'm not quite sure. The chronology is sometimes a little difficult to follow, but anyway, I -- I decided to give myself up to the Germans. I couldn't stand the -- the fear of being maybe discovered, and the loneliness. I was all by myself. I was 16 years old, and I decided that I couldn't stay in there, I would give myself up. I figured, sooner or later, the Germans are going to find me anyway, and -- but my mother again, it's always my mother in this story, who came to visit me sometimes, secretly, we would meet somewhere in the fields, talked me out of it, and said she would try and find another place for me. And she found, through a whole long story that I can't go into now, but she found a police officer called Oskam, was his last name, O-s-k-a-m, who ostensibly was a - was a Nazi Dutch police officer, came from

a completely Nazi family, and -- but -- but -- in -- in reality was a member of the underground, and was hiding about 30 Jewish men, women and children, in the little village not too far from Utrecht. And my mother had asked him if he would know a place for me, and I talked with him, and he said, "I have a place for you, but it's very dangerous. You will not be able to leave there, and you will not be able to see any members of your family. Do you still want to go there?" And I said, well -- I figured everything was better -- anything was better than being isolated by myself on a farm. And he -- when I said yes, I would like to go there, he took me to a -- a hut in the middle of the woods, where he left me with seven Dutch Resistance men, mostly -- they were mostly of the -- what shall I say? The m -- More intellectual class o-of Dutch people. They didn't look like what you would think of partisans, or anything, didn't wear machine guns, or an-anything like that, but they had built this hut. And I stayed there from -- my guess is August 1943, until -- the exact date is 29th of December, 1943. I was the only Jew, I was the youngest, I was 16 - 17 then -- I was 17 years old then, and let's see, the men would go out at night and raid police stations, and -- and ci-city halls, and -- and break in and get identity claus -- get identity cards, and -- and official German stamps, and -- and weapons. And so we were sort of a center, people would stop in, a-and take away weapons, and -- and -- and papers, and so on and so forth. I should go just -- because it will relate to later on in this story, I should mention that one day two men were brought in, one who claimed to be a Canadian, and one who claimed to be an

Englishman, and claimed to have been on a raid in -- in the -- in the Royal Air Force, on a ra -- in on a raid to Germany, and were -- their bomber was shot down, and they bailed out, and they wound up in the -- and the Resistance got them before the Germans got them, and they brought them into our hut. So here were these two men, and I was assigned to interview them, because I spoke English well. I don't quite know why, but I think I have a hint of why. My parents had lived in the United States for three years, in 1929 to 1932. So I interviewed these men, and found out that they were not German spies, but they were a bona fide RAF people. They w -- They -- They spent awhile with us in the hut, but eventually they were smuggled out by the Resistance, through Belgium, through France, and Spain, and I guess Portugal, and -- and smuggled back to England. I don't know if they ever flew again, I will find that out in -- in August. There's a -- There's a story connected with that. On the tr -- In December, towards the end of the -- 1943, we got a message, somehow another, an intercepted message that the Germans had become suspicious of the -- of the area, the woods where we were. We were -- We were in the -- in the middle of a small parcel of woods. In Holland, you don't really have forests. These were planted parcels of woods, rectangles, one after another, about four or five, and they had the very dense undergrowth of evergreens. You couldn't walk through them, you would have to smash your way through -- through the undergrowth, however, we had a secret path to the hut. As I said, in December, the men in the hut got the message that the Germans had become suspicious, and we were -- they then decided we

should set out guards, and so a companion and I drew the lot for the 29th of December, I think four to eight A.M. watch, standing right inside the periphery of the -- in the woods. Now, on the -- on the -- on the woods, in -- within the first line of trees, and that's where we saw the Germans coming, in the half dark, and it was, of course, traumatic, because I realized they had come to kill me. I was very tempted to run away, I didn't. The both of us ran back into the hut, warned the men. There was a total confusion there, cause they were sleeping in the bunkbeds, and we pulled the blankets off them, and shouted, "It's a raid, get up." And when -- when we saw that they were all out of the bunkbeds, we ran, and we ran to the edge of our parcel of wood -- of woods, and as I always say when I -- when -- when -- when I looked to the left and to the right, it seemed to me the Germans were coming around the corners of the woods, and I feared that nobody that we had left behind, would survive. We then jumped across the dirt road, into the next parcel of woods, and crashed through, and we ran and ran and ran and ran, until we wound up in a city called Hilversum, which you probably have heard about, it's the center of Dutch radio -- radio transmitter. And I can't go into the details now, but somehow another, we wound up at night in the woods again, about five miles away from where the hut was, because that was the spot where we were supposed to reassemble in case of a raid. It had been previously agreed upon. And my buddy and I, my -- my partner and I waited there in the dark. We had guns, we had nine millimeter Mauser, and we had them at the ready, because we didn't know if the men would have been tortured to reveal the place that the

Germans would -- might come and -- and ser -- I had pretty well decided then that -- that if they would come, that I would defend myself, I would -- I would try to kill, and be killed, probably, in a short gunfight. So, I was all prepared to die. It was very quiet, and then after awhile I did hear some noise coming through the woods, sounded like old metal rattling away, and thumping over -- wh-wheels on the dirt, and this bicycle rattled in the little clearing, and with a little flashlight somebody was shining ahead of it. And we didn't know who it was, we were ready to -- to -- to shoot. But nothing followed, and then we approached with drawn guns, and found out that it was not the Germans, and it was neither one of the men, it was my mother, who had heard about the raid, and had decided immediately to rescue us. Well, I think most of that escape, and so on, and my mother's part in that is probably in the -- in the video interview. We escaped. My buddy -- My mother gave the old bicycle to my -- my friend, my -- my partner, and she gave him also the little flashlight, and he peddled away into the darkness, he said he knew a place where to hide. And my mother and I pretended to be lovers, and as we approached the German guard, we talked very loud, and we giggled, and we -- you know, with -- with terror in our hearts, but we put our arms around each other, and we made kissing sounds, and the -- and the German guard whom we approached seemed to want to stop us for a second, but he didn't, and we walked by him, and as I always say, to live another day in [indecipherable] of that circle of death. After that I was close to a nervous breakdown, I needed help. Two -- Two older people, two Dutch people who lived in a very nice

mansion, put me up in a room, very peaceful room overlooking a gorgeous garden, and there I s -- recuperated slowly, I stopped shaking, and I became very religious, I found a Bible, and for the first time read something about the Jewish history, and became devoted to it, and for the rest of the war, tried to be a religious Jew. When I felt strong enough again, I left that place, and I got myself a new pair of wooden shoes, and I went out and found a new farm, now in a better part of Holland. And in the more eastern part, where the farms are bigger, and the people are [indecipherable] and I started to work this time as a real farmhand. By then I seemed to have had enough experience to work with horses, and plow, and -- and of course I had bleached my hair again, and matter of fact, I had the chutzpah to go and register myself with my false identity card in -- in the town hall, to allay suspicion. It worked pretty well, I -- I wasn't -- I worked on a couple of farms. The farmers were happy with me. Of course, every second was always a challenge if anyone approached the farm. It was like, this is maybe it. In May, 1944, my mother, coming back on the train from visiting my brother Fred, my youngest brother who was sick, was -- she had managed to put in a hospital in the south of Holland. On the way back, she ran into a expert on the train, German -- a Gestapo expert on the train, zeesha hites a deest expert, probably, and he immediately recognized that she had a falsified identity card, and he arrested her. And she -- And he put her into a -- into a separate compartment in the train, where she was guarded by a Dutch policeman on the way to Amsterdam, and that she later tells him -- I'm not quite sure any more at this point, by the way, let me interrupt

myself here for a second. I'm not quite sure how much of this is in the videotape. I'm not quite sure. I'm quoting here things that my mother and my father said in interviews conducted -- audio interviews conducted by my brother Fred. My brother Fred conducted audio interviews with the whole family, my father, my mother, myself, my brother Ott, my cousins, my wife. I have a tray with audio interviews, with the voices of my parents and everyone, and he later also transcribed it in book form, together with his son. Now, all that, I think happened after the Holocaust Memorial Museum interview. So, I don't know, you can ask me later on it -- if it's not clear, I can go back to it. As my mother said -- now I go back to what my mother as -- she was arrested, as my mother later on told in interview with my brother Fred, she ate all the paperwork that was in her -- in her handbag, so the -- so that there was -- sh -- and she swallowed it. So by the time that she got to the interrogation in Amsterdam, when they ask her what her real name was, she lied, and she said that her name was Angeline Elizabeth Van Leer, which was her maiden name. She never mentioned her -- her married name. And since she didn't have any other papers, except her false identity card, they wrote it down, and as she said, a-as a -- out of the blue sky she added, "And you have no right to keep me here, because I'm an American citizen." I don't know if that's in the -- in the video interview, either. In any case, she was sent to -- to Westerbork, Dutch camp, and from there she was sent to Bergen-Belsen, which we didn't know, of course. When I somehow heard that my mother had been arrested, I found my father and my two little brothers in a little cottage together,

in the -- not too far from Arnhem, in Holland, where -- that little cottage my mother had rented just before she was arrested, in order to be a -- a -- just a week together with her husband and her two little sons. And of course, for her this didn't work out, but my father had gone there, and my two little brothers were there, and I found them there, and I decided that rather than work on the farm, my father would need help to survive in hiding with my two little brothers. So I quit the farm, and bicycled over to this little cottage, and that's where we spent the last winter of the war. Together with my two brothers and my father, we begged, borrowed and stole whatever we could to survive, and thus we reached the spring of 1945, when we were liberated by the Canadian army, and where -- I really should say this part of your interview ends, because it was the end of the war. Many surprising things happened after that. If you want me to just go on with this now, or do you want to take a break?

Q: Well I -- I am curious through the war -- you talked -- you had your family scattered in many different places, and your mom would -- would travel [indecipherable] and I'm sure it's -- what [indecipherable] look like. How much do you know what the other members of your family were doing, where they were, did you [indecipherable] see them from time to time.

A: It's very interesting question, and -- and as I go out speaking a lot to schools and so on, that question always comes up, people ask, "How did you know where your father was?" An-And I usually don't have an answer for this. I can tell you this, I did not know

in the very beginning where my father and mother were, until the raid on the hut, when I spent one night after the raid, after my mother and I escaped out of that -- out of the woods there, I spent one night at their hi -- their hiding place, which was in Soest, in Holland. So then I knew where they were. My brothers, I never knew. But there was a little time, which I don't remember too clearly, when my brother Ott, my middle brother, s -- came to the farm where I worked, and this was my little brother who came from the city, and who needed to be fattened up a little bit, and -- of course, he was also in hiding, but -- and he spent some time with me on this farm, I don't know how long. From -- From his interview later on, I -- I deducted he was there at least three weeks, or maybe even a month. I thought it was only a week. So, that period, I knew where my brother Ott was, he was with me. But then he disappeared again, and of course, from the fall of 1944, until the liberation 1945, my father, my two brothers and I were all together. Some of the communication was achieved through my grandfather's second wife. My grandfather lived in Amsterdam, my grandmother had died years before, he marred a non-Jewish woman, and had a daughter by her. And I think that daughter, who was not Jewish, at least she was half Jewish, did not wear a star, and traveled, and I think she managed to send some messages around, and I think it must have been through her that I found where my father and my two little brothers were hiding in that little summer cottage. That's as best as I can tell you. Course we had no phones, we didn't write letters, was -- we couldn't. And -- So sometimes it -- I just -- it's all conjecture, you know?

Q: How much were you aware of what was going on in the country, or with the war, or -- or in terms of what and where, with interest to Jews? How would -- How would you get your information?

A: The minute that we went underground, of course, we were isolated from the rest of the population of the world, you could say. But here and there, you would pick up an illegal piece of newspaper. You know, there were -- there were illegal newspapers that consisted usually out of two or four pages, badly printed, and sometimes you would find -- find one of those, or somebody would ha-hand you one of those. During my time in the Resistance hut, of course I found out more, because the men listened to the BBC, and we had a map there, and we charted the progress of the Russians and whatever else was happening. And we knew about the -- the bombardments in Germany and so on. So, at that time, I was pretty well aware of where the -- where the Germans stood, and where the Russians were, and where the English were, and the Americans, and so on, and so forth. But after the raid, when I went back to the farm, I was totally isolated. The farmers had -- they would talk about the war, but they -- they didn't know what was going on. What we could see were, of course, a thousand B17 bombers flying over almost every day, and by night we heard the English, a thousand planes going overnight. We knew there was enormous bombardments. And I had several interesting -- interesting happenings at one time. A liberator bomber came down right around the corner from the farm where I worked, and that was the time my brother Ott was there, it seems, because

he, in detail, describes how that plane came down, and how we ran there, and -- and how we found a little piece of -- of Plexiglas, little piece of -- from one of the -- one of the windows of the bomber, or the -- we -- we savored it like a piece of -- this was a piece of freedom. That was one. On another farm -- this must have been already in the summer of '44, a Messerschmitt 109 was shot down, and crashed right into the ground, right near by the farm where I worked, there's -- there was another farm. And I don't where I had the chutzpah, that I -- I was devoted to flying and -- and planes before the war, already. I loved planes, and build model planes. Anything that would -- flew was to me, was fascinating. And here was a Messerschmitt 109 lying pretty much undamaged except for it's gear and so on. I-It's propeller bent, and -- and there was a German on guard there, just a soldier guarding the -- the plane there. And I approached on bike, and I asked him if I could take a look, and he said, yeah, that's all right, and I actually walked around the God damn plane, and touched it, and [indecipherable] all fascinating. How did I get onto that? Oh, you asked me about what I knew about the war. During our ha -- last hiding, with my two brothers and my father, in the little summer cottage, we found out nearby, about a five minute walk through the fields, there was a big mansion type house, and in that house lived a whole collection of people, young and old. Later on, we found that several of them were in hiding themselves. But, they listened every day to the BBC radio. So, some might say the fall of 1944, until the liberation, we knew pretty well what was going on because of the evening -- in the evening we would go there, and we wouldn't

listen ourselves, but somebody would go up and listen in the attic, where they had a radio hidden, and they would tell us, “The Russians are right near Berlin,” you know, “and the -- the invasion is going well.” By this time, of course, the sixth of June, 1944, the allied invasion of France, we knew it was happening. And then, of course, we had gone to Arnhem, which was not too far away, the disastrous attempt from the English to -- with paratroopers to capture the bridges, and being wiped out, and we thought we would be free then. So anyway, that much we knew. Arnhem, we didn’t know the disaster, although it was only a half an hour away from us, we heard all --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ed Lessing. This is tape one, side B. We were just discussing again, your ex- experiences during the war, and you were mentioning the -- the various places that you were in hiding, and one question I wanted to ask is, how many of the places where you hid, how many knew that you were Jewish?

A: The very first place, two old ladies, knew I was Jewish. The next one on the farm, the first farm, dairy farm, they did not know. In the Resistance hut, of course they knew I was a Jew, and weren’t too happy about it, by the way. After the Resistance hut, when I started going back to farming, on several farms, I registered as a -- as a -- as an Christian. And then we come to -- there are little pieces in between that I don’t even want to go --

where I was a week , or I was a week and a half, or two weeks. I was with my aunt in The Hague for -- for two weeks or something, and of course she knew was -- I was Jewish, but -- and then we come to the fall of 1944, when I joined my father and my two brothers, and there's no question, of course, there. So, the only places where people didn't know that I -- that I was Jewish, was on the farms where I worked.

Q: And again, you mentioned how your mother sort of set everything -- everything up, did a lot of the arrangements.

A: Especially in the beginning. Not for me later on, I found -- after the raid on the hut, I found my own farms. I was -- I would say I worked there, and w -- I'm not quite sure why I left to go from one farm to another. I probably thought that it was safer to not stay too long in one place. It's very hard to explain the intensity of -- of the deceit you had to practice. Your -- Your whole mind was set on deceit. What -- What hint could a farmer, let's say, get from me that I was not who I said I was, you know. Wa -- My -- My mind was constantly at work, so that I probably decided that it was not a good idea to stay too long in one place, because eventually something escapes.

Q: What sort of things do you remember, were you worried that would give you away? Something you would say, or the way you act?

A: I'm not quite sure at this point. See, this was a 24 hour a day, seven days a week comedy you played. This is like being on stage, practically 24 hours a day, every day, even when y -- when you went to sleep, you had to watch out that somebody wouldn't

hear you dreaming, or something, and say something. I had a false name. I might, by mistake, whisper my own name in my sleep or something, or s -- tell about my mother. I didn't have a mother, you know, and the mother and father had died years ago in bombardments, both of them. I mean, the stories that you made up, to -- in order t -- tho -- it was a whole -- i -- this was a whole false lifetime of history. Where did you come from, did you have family? Where did you live? How come you're working on a farm? You're from the city. How come you work so well? You know. Why -- We've had city boys here, they -- they never worked that well, they didn't know how to go plow a field with a horse. How come you know? You know, this kind of stuff, and what is he thinking? Is he talking with his neighbors about this guy we have from the city, who works so well?

Q: And was that a time where farmers may have been suspicious, that -- since that sort of thing was happening, and --

A: That I don't know. I don't know. You see, in Holland, a Jew would stand out like a -- how do I say that? A mouse on a billiard table. I could instantly recognize if I saw another Jew someplace in Holland. And I've seen some on the -- on the railroad station, once, when I was waiting for my mother to show up, and -- and I saw a man, and I immediately recognized this guy is -- is a hidden Jew, you know. So, I thought, why don't the other recognize me, maybe, you know? The -- The skill and deception was like -- it was like a spy story, spy who could construct a whole false -- false background, you

know? It was like -- And you had to make sure that you didn't slip up anywhere, not a street address, not where you were 10 years ago, not where your father and mother had died. You know, you know, this kind -- not show any dislike of big chunks of -- of bacon, or ham being put on your -- you know, not the nice bacon that we get, with slices like a half inch thick, you know, it's with all the fat on it, and farmers gleefully ate. And I ate them, and I said in my head, I said -- asked God for forgiveness that I had to do this. But all that was a -- it's like being onstage, and it's very, very tiresome, you know? So anyway, it's hard to -- very hard to explain what -- what it took to stay out of the clutches of the Germans. And I -- There was a second time when I almost -- almost got caught. The first time was, of course, the raid on the hut, second one was later on when my -- when we all lived in that little cottage, and I -- we went every day to get some food in the village. There was a central kitchen then, food being scarce, and all that. And all of a sudden I ran into a German on this dirt road leading to the village. I was on this crummy bicycle that we had, and -- and this German stopped me, and wanted to see my identity card. I was lucky, he was -- I th -- I have no idea w-what he was. You see, this is another part, to immediately gauge, if you saw a German, what kind of a German is this? Is this just a -- a -- Wehrmacht soldier? He doesn't know shit from shinola, you know, he doesn't know about Jews, or identity cards. But, I once ran into an SS man, and that's a separate story. But -- But this guy questioned me, and I couldn't figure out -- he was not SS, he didn't have the SS on his -- on his collar, and yet, he seemed to intensely question

me, you know? And I just said that I lived -- that I was a farmer's [indecipherable] farmer here down the road. I was on -- on a -- and could see him swaying back and forth. But what the hell he would have done, I have no idea, because this was -- we're talking now, probably late fall 1944, when -- when everything was already in disarray for the Germans. Any case, that was a moment when everything sort of tightened up, and you stood there, and you said, is it going to go right, or is it going to go wrong? Is this the last -- is this it? You know? And it wasn't, but it was almost. Okay, I don't know if I answered your question, but --

Q: Well, another question I had, from the video interviews, is that -- I -- I'm interested in -- in your father, it seems like, to a certain extent, he tried to maintain a normal life, during -- throughout the hiding is -- you mentioned that he had painting lessons once a week, for example.

A: Yes, he did.

Q: He -- He sounds like -- like an interesting character.

A: My father was an interesting man, he -- he was a kind of an ineffective man, i -- that -- and my mother always held him up as the artist in the family, and she was the one who took care of everything. Even -- I mean, after the war, before the war, she was the driving factor, sort of, in -- in -- you know, getting everything done. But here they were, these two people, in a room, for two and a half years. You ever sat in a room for two and a half years without going out? It's not easy. And he began to do sketches, put little still lifes on

the table, or -- and then he started painting with watercolors a little bit, and pastels, and my mother got him art materials, and it was a God given thing, you know, cause he would have gone crazy there. And then, through somehow another, they found this painter -- I have a painting of him [indecipherable] upstairs. I have several painting of my father, and also of his teacher. Found this teacher where he went once a week. I didn't want to go into the details about it, but I told you about the raid on the hut, and that my mother came to rescue us in the woods. The reason why she knew was, when my buddy and I ran off from the raid, we wound up in the city of Hilversum, I remember that my father took painting lessons from a man named Shlutter, a painter, well-known painter in -- in -- in Holland. And that this man lived in a village near Hilversum, where we were, and I decided that -- we didn't know where the hell to go, that I would to this Shlutter, because obviously he was all right, he was somebody we could trust, because he gave my father painting lessons. It so happened when we -- we took a little train there, a little -- a little sht -- a little -- little -- a -- a s-- a tram, and it so happened when we got there, my father was there, painting, you know, very quiet in the studio of this man. And my father said, "What are you doing here?" And my father never was very perceptive in things, and I told him, "Pop, we were raided," you know? "And I think all the men probably are -- are going to be dead." And he said, "Gee, gee, hm." But he didn't interrupt his lesson or anything. And he said, "So where you going to be today?" I said, "Well, we don't know, we're," -- and I don't know where we were all day, until we wound up in the woods that

night. But one thing is for sure, my father eventually went back to his hiding place, and told my mother, and my mother immediately grasped the seriousness of the situation. My father didn't. And she -- how she found out, I don't know, I think probably to Mr. Oskam, the policeman, where the hell we would meet that night. So my father painted, and my mother -- and my mother took care of the -- tried to save the rest of her family, and did, and saved herself, too, of which I will tell you. But his -- his glor-glory period came when we were all hiding in that little cottage, from the fall of 1944, until the liberation, 1945. He became a real strong father, you could almost say a brother to me. He and I took care of the boys, and ourselves. But he and I decided what -- how to find food, where to steal trees, you know. Where to beg for sandwiches from the farmers, or something, anything. It was like a team. When my father died, probably about 10 years ago, or so, I really felt like one of our team had died, you know? He shouldn't have died, we should have all died together, my two brothers, my father, and I, we were a team, a wonderful team of -- that managed to survive. And my father died, of course he died, but it was like losing a member of a string quartet, you know, and say God, you know, irreplaceable. Anyway, so I have many funny stories about my father. My father mostly is known in the family for his funny stories, because he did so many things out of -- I don't know, re -- because he didn't -- he wasn't aware. My wife always says, "Your father never was aware." My father wasn't aware of what the hell was going on. He

wasn't even aware that I was in -- wa -- you know, wa -- my life was threatened when I was there, you know, with my buddy. So, I hope that answers that question, maybe.

Q: I wonder from a certain sense that -- that led him -- that let him get through the experiences in a way different from other people.

A: I didn't understand that. What did you say?

Q: That him being aware -- sh -- maybe shutting things out, allowed him to sort of maintain some of his former life all through that -- the war.

A: That's probably -- probably so, yeah. He's an interesting man, I was never very close to him, except for that period then. I could tell you for hours about him, but I don't think this is the place to do it. He -- He tried all his life to not be a musician, and yet, he only was a musician, he always went back to it. And after the war, when we moved to -- or when they moved to Springfield, Massachusetts, my father really had -- I said, well, his only glory period was during the war, that isn't quite true. After they moved to Springfield, Massachusetts, and my father began to play in the Springfield Symphony, and he played in the Hartford Symphony, he was a cellist, and he set up a string quartet with friends, and they gave concerts in -- in Pittsfield, in the Fine Arts Museum, those were glorious times for him, because he loved music. So -- But during the war, and of course, I don't know all of it, because they were in hiding, my father and mother together, and somehow another -- I think my father probably had an easier time of it than my mother, because he could lose himself for hours in sketching a glass of water, and -- and

a little jar, you know? I have many of his sketchbooks still upstairs. So, where do we go from here?

Q: Well, let's go -- let's continue after the war.

A: Okay.

Q: Let's talk about the war ended, and -- and what happened with you and the family from there?

A: All right. I may duplicate some of it that was in the -- oh no, I ge -- I don't know where the original video -- video interview ended.

Q: It ends pretty much at the end of the war.

A: When we were liberated?

Q: Yeah.

A: Nothing after that?

Q: Very little.

A: Very little. All right, the first thing I have to tell you about is -- its' a little bit difficult, the structure is a little bit different. I must first tell you about what happened to my mother, because it -- then I can go back to -- to us. My mother, as I said, was sent to Bergen-Belsen. And interestingly enough, she had a -- she had a dream -- my mother was always a little psychic, by the way, very interesting. There were times that she would say to my father, "I think your father is maybe coming for a visit from Amsterdam today." And I don't know, three out of five times, there was my grandfather in the afternoon, you

know, ringing the doorbell. So we always thought she was, what we call in Dutch, helderzingda, clear -- clear voyant -- clairvoyant. She had a dream. I think -- I think it was in Westerbork, in the Dutch camp. She had a dream in which she saw a newspaper, a masthead of a newspaper, and that said, January 21, very big, and she woke up from it. And she thought, "I wonder what that means, if it means something." And she thought, "Either I will be dead by then, or I will be free." But then, how could she be free? I mean, she was in a concentration camp in Holland, and soon after that, she was sent to Bergen-Belsen. And one day in January, a friend of hers, who she slept with in the same bunkbed, you know, the wooden bunkbeds they had there, said, "You know, Lene," she was always called Lene, from -- from Angeline, "Lene," she said, "there is an SS guy sitting in -- in the barracks, and he's checking on people who have foreign nationality." And my mother said, "Well, I don't have foreign nationality." And her friend said, "But yeah, you said when you were interrogated in Amsterdam, you told him you don't have any right to keep me here, because I am an American citizen?" "Yes," said my mother, "so what? You know, I don't have any papers. I'm not really an American." Okay, I got to go back, I got to b-backtrack, got to backtrack for a second to the interrogation in May 1944, when she was caught in Amsterdam, in front of the Gestapo there. [indecipherable]. They asked her what's your name, and I told you she gave her maiden name, Angeline Elizabeth Van Leer, and as an afterthought they said -- she said, "And you don't have any right to keep me here, because I am an American citizen." And they

asked her, “If you’re an American citizen, where did you live in the United States? Give us an address.” And she rattled off 121 LaMartine Street, Jamaica Plains, Boston. And it’s a wonderful thing, because it was one of the addresses where we had lived in 1929, when my parents for three years, emigrated from Holland to the United States. It was a lousy year to come to the States, 1929, my father got sick, he got tuberculosis, and so on, everything went wrong. In 1932 they returned again to Holland. But they did live at 121 LaMartine Street, Jamaica Plains, Boston, and my mother remembered it, and rattled it off in front of the Gestapo, and they wrote it down. They must have laughed, but they wrote it down. So, now we go back to Bergen-Belsen, and it’s January 1945, and things are really getting bad in Bergen-Belsen. I -- Sorry, I have to s-suddenly think of S-Spiegelman’s, “Maus Two,” which bears the title -- when his father arrives in Bergen-Belsen, either from Auschwitz, or wherever he came from, some horror, comes to Bergen-Belsen, and says, “And here’s where my troubles really began.” It’s -- It’s tragic, but it’s funny. Anyway, my mother came to Bergen-Belsen, and here’s where our troubles really began. Sh -- Her friend said, “Go to this S -- SS guy.” My mother said, “Why, ba, ba.” Says, “Go, go, go anyway. So what do you have to lose?” So she went to this barracks, there was an SS guy sitting, and he was just closing the books, and sh -- he said, “What do you want?” And she said, “Well, I hear you’re checking on people with foreign papers?” And he said, “Yes,” he said, “but I just finished.” And she begged him to open the book again, and he opened the list again, and he said, “What’s your name?”

And she said, “Angeline Elizabeth Van Leer.” And he went down the list and he said, “Oh yeah,” he said, “you get yourself ready, and two days from n-now, you will be -- you will be exchanged for a German.” And she didn’t believe a word for it -- of it, you know? But two days later, there was a train standing. There was not a railroad spur into Bergen-Belsen camp, as you may ha -- may know, but there was -- people had to walk for two miles outside of the camp to -- to Bergen-Belsen, or Belsen-Bergen station, whatever it was. And there was a train standing there with a big red cross on it, and she went in there with 301 other Bergen-Belsen inmates, and as she came in -- she tells this all later on, I’m re -- I’m retelling now what she told to my brother Fred in interviews later on. She said there was an SS sitting there at a little table, and she said, “Could I have a little water? I’m very thirsty.” She had been walking. And he said, “Sit down, you’re going to get coffee soon.” And of course, she didn’t believe a word of that, either, but a little later, a nurse came in with a tray with real coffee, whi -- nobody had seen in years. And then she began to believe that maybe it wasn’t a ruse, you know? What they used to do to Germans wa -- load 1,000 people in the train, promising them to go to -- you know, be freed, and they, you know, two days later, they’d be all gassed in Auschwitz, or Sobibór. So that train really started out and went through -- was very secure, there’s a route -- route through Germany, and my mother later on says very gleefully, they all saw the bombed out cities of Germany. We’re talking now January 1945, of course. We’re approaching the end of the war. And that train would up in, I forget, Saint Dollan, I think

she mentioned. It's in Switzerland. And they came in on one side of the -- of the platform, and -- an-and another train came on the other side, and they were exchanged for Germans. And I got to tell you the rest of this, because otherwise what I tell you later makes no sense. The first night, they spent, sh -- this is a footnote to the Swiss treatment of dying -- 300 s -- terribly sick and dying Bergen-Belsen inmates. They put them in an abandoned school building on straw, and for the few -- first meal, my mother said, "They gave us white bread, and cans of sardines." And she said -- she couldn't help herself, she said she opened the can of sardines and poured the oil in the sardines over the white bread, and just ate and ate and ate. And she said, "I never was as sick in the camp as I was that night." And finally she found some relief in the morning by throwing up. It was a terrible night, she said. She'd never been so sick in all those -- in all her -- all her time in -- in the -- in the camps, or in hiding. And it got to be morning, and the others were still asleep, I think, and a little boy came by, and she had been in camp, and hadn't -- did not know what was happening in the world. And she asked the boy if it was possible to get a newspaper somewhere, and he said he could, and he ran off, and he came back with a newspaper, a Swiss newspaper, and she opened it. It said January 21st, and she was free. Now magical things, you know? That's amazing. My mother was a pretty amazing person. Anyway, the train went on, or another train, and they wound up in Marseilles, and there she was given a choice. She could go either to her sister in Massachusetts, or she could go to Palestine. And she decided she -- and the third choice was she could go to

United Nations rehabilitation camp someplace. And she decided she'd go to her sister in Massachusetts, and for there there was a -- a ship lying there, the Gripsholm, Scandinavian ship. And that was transporting wounded American soldiers. And she was already on board of the ship, and then suddenly she changed her mind, and she ran off, and one of the officers there said, "You can't do this, you already," -- but sh -- he could never impress my mother, and she ran off the -- off the ship, and said she changed her mind, she wanted to go to rehabilitation camp, United Nations camp. And so they put her on another boat, and I think they traveled for a whole week over the Mediterranean, I don't know why it took so damn long, but she finally wound up in a United Nations rehabilitation camp called Jeandark, which was located in Philipville, in Algiers, North Africa. That's where she stayed until the end of the war. Now, okay, we'll leave her there, sitting there, safe. Go back to Forthausen, where we were in hiding in the little cottage, and we are a couple of weeks liberated, and I could tell you many stories, I don't know how long you want to do this interview. I could tell you a funny -- I think I really should tell you this story, cause it is so funny. The Canadians came, and we spent three days in a dugout shelter, until -- under a fierce artillery bombardment, and then we came out, and we were free, and the Canadians settled all around us in camps, and there were tanks there, and God knows, and it was -- it was wonderful. But we didn't have anything much more to eat, so my father went -- and we had been making something that was

called coffee, but it was made out of ground up shells of -- of -- what do you call that fruit that comes from a oak tree?

Q: An acorn?

A: Acorns, ground up acorn shells. It was horrible stuff. My father went and persuaded the Canadian cook in one of the camps that this was the best stuff, and he exchanged it for three cans of corned beef, or something, which we hadn't seen in years. And so -- And we went into the woods, and we found in -- we found in -- a German mortar, and with the ammunition, and we went and sold that to the Canadians for -- for sugar and tea, and -- anyway, but -- oh no, not for sugar, for tea, an-an-and -- and bread, and -- but we didn't have any sugar. So my father peddled on this old little bike into town, and he saw there was a detachment of military police, huge guys, as he explained to them, broad shoulders, and they had these enormous gloves, and they had Harley-Davidson motorcycles with MP on it. These were tough bastards, you know? And my father went up to -- to one of them, [indecipherable] already, went up to one of them, and said, "Sir, would you have some sugar for us? We -- We've been -- hadn't had any sugar." Guy was a redhead, with a red moustache, as my father ex -- described him. The guy said, "What's the matter with you, begging around here? Say, you a Jew?" My father -- this is after two and a half years of not being a Jew, he said, "No, no, no, no, I'm not a Jew. I," -- you know -- he says, "No, I just need -- wanted some sugar." He said, "Get the hell out of here." And my father went -- left him. The next day he happened to be in town again, and

they were breaking up. The whole first division Canadian army was pulling through the village. Endless, you know, miles and miles of -- of kitchens, and tanks, and carriers, and --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a interview with Ed Lessing, tape two, side A, and we were just continuing on your story.

A: All right, this little story when my father came back into the village, and saw the military police unit breaking up, and he went up again, to the redhead guy, who was just about getting on his huge Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and revving up the engine, and my father said -- and the guy said, "Are you here again?" "Yeah," said my father. "I wondered if you left behind any sugar." The guy said, "I asked you yesterday, are you a Jew?" And my father said, "No, no, I told you I'm not a Jew." "Well," he said, "you see, I'm Jewish. I would have given you sugar if you were a Jew, but I don't give to any goyim." And he roared off on his motorcycle. Ah, this is a lovely, lovely story. You -- You got to realize that my family is a story telling family, both my brothers, and my father, and I, we all tell stories, and we remember them. So, our whole family is suffused with stories, and this is -- this is a -- a cutie from -- from the war. Anyway -- from right after the war. Okay, get -- let's get serious again. A couple of weeks after our liberation, my father tells me, he said, "You know, they told me in Barnfeld," -- a little town nearby, "there are some men -- some men who have lists, and they take care of -- of -- of -- of -- of our Jewish people." That was all he knew, you know. So he said, "I'm going to go there, find out about mutter," the Dutch word for mother, we always called her mutter. I said, "Yeah, sure." And he rattled off on this old bike, and th -- and -- and by that time, I

al-always keep on talking about rattling bikes. You see, we didn't have any air tires any more. Tires were made then either out of wooden strips, very cleverly, wound around with steel wire around the rim, or if you were a little bit better, old car tires were stripped, the rubber -- solid rubber was then wound around, and so -- but you can imagine, within about a month, everything rattled loose on your bike, so they always rattled. Anyway, my father set off, and he went to Barnfeld, and as he -- and now I'll have to quote him, because he tells this later, also in the interview, he -- he -- he reaches Barnfeld, and he goes there into a building, and behind a rickety table, he find three older -- older men, yeah, three older, Jewish men, and the -- and they said, "Can we help you?" And as -- he said, "Yes," he said, and -- and I'm trying to express this as naïve as we were still. My father says, "Yes, my -- my wife was -- was arrested, and she was in -- in -- in Westerbork, in a camp, and then she was sent somewhere to Germany, I would like to find out where she is." So they said, "Well, you're in luck, because we don't know anything right now," he said, "but s -- one of a -- one of our men is in Germany, and he is coming back with all the lists, and where everybody is." And we're talking about 110,000 Dutch Jews, shipped out. And my father said, "Oh, thank you. I'll be back in a week." And a week later -- And he tells this to me when he comes back to our little hut, we're still living in that little cottage, not a hut, a cottage. And a week later, he goes again. And as he tells it later, he said, "There I saw the three men again," he said, "but they weren't the same." He said physically they were the same, but mentally they were completely

beaten down. They said, “Mr. Lessing, we have just found out about concentration camps, and there were gas chambers there. And there’s a very -- hardly anybody is alive still.” In my speeches I always say this is the moment that they found out what we now call the Holocaust. We didn’t know. We didn’t know what happened to those trains that left every Tuesday out of Westerbork to that work relief in Germany. My father found out then, right there and then. And they found it out, too. So, it was a terrible thing, and -- and -- and they said that we have lists, but there’s hardly anybody on them. He said, “They all murdered? Murdered?” He couldn’t believe it. “Well,” my father said, “but, could you just look, maybe my wife is on there?” And he said, “Well, we give you very little chance, Mr. Lessing,” he didn’t want to [indecipherable]. And he went down the list, Red Cross list, and he said, “But she’s here, your wife is here. Angeline Elizabeth Lessing Van Leer.” “God,” my father said. “How wonderful,” he said, “where is she?” And this little old man said, “She’s in Philipville.” My father said, “Where’s Philipville?” They said, “Philipville is -- i-i-it says here, Algiers, in North Africa.” And -- And another funny story. My father said, “No, that’s impossible, cause we never had anything to do with Africa. We never were in Africa.” He said, “Tha -- those -- that’s ca-can’t be,” you know? And as he said that, the little old man got kind of insulted, and he said, “Mr. Lessing, the Red Cross never makes a mistake. She must be there. Now, you better go home and tell your children.” And so my father went back, and he came back, and he told

us, “Your mother is alive.” It was exactly a year, practically to the day that she was arrested. It was May, 1945. Well, that was one surprising thing.

Q: When were you reunited with -- with your mother?

A: I’m not quite sure, but I think it must have been in August. We -- A couple of weeks later, we went on a -- on a Canadian army truck, and voyaged back to our hometown, Delft. And I must say, we were helped enormously by the members of the Resistance, the people who have been in the Resistance, who were still in charge then, before the other creeps from -- who had never done anything, came back from London, and started to take over, and they [indecipherable]. But it was still in disarray, you know, and the Resistance people were in charge, and my father and his three sons came there, back to Delft, and they said, “Ah, Mr. Lessing.” They knew him, and they said, “What do you need?” And my father said, “Oh, we need a place to live.” “Well, we’ll give you a house, you know. We got houses from Nazis, Dutch Nazis. We’ve thrown them -- We’ve thrown them out, you know. They’re in jail now,” and so we got a -- we got a house, three floors, I mean, they’re all been a -- you know, not detached houses, they’re row houses, with three floors. And they said, “What else do you need?” And he said -- “Well,” my father said, “I need some furniture.” And, “Okay, we give you furniture.” And they gave us a -- a [indecipherable]. They had a whole warehouse full of stuff confiscated from Dutch Nazis, and we got that, and we got spoons, and forks, and knives, and even some curtain materials, you know. And -- And they said, “What else do you need?” My father said,

"Well, I -- you know, I'm a music teacher, I -- I had a piano." "Oh, we'll give you a piano." They gave him a piano. So, my father and I fixed up this new abode as well as we could. We put the furniture, which was all disjointed pieces, you know, I mean, non-matching pieces, and where we thought it would do the best good, and -- and we hung up curtains on strings, and -- and that's how we started out. And my brothers went back to school. God, I wished I could read to you the piece that my brother wrote about going back to school. He was -- See, born in 1936, must have been about nine years old when he went back to school. He wrote recently in a speech to the Michigan State Assembly, he -- he wrote a little piece about going back to school. He said that we were -- as if nothing had happened, open your book to page number 25, and he said, after two and a half years of being shit, you know, after being in hiding, after -- after denying our -- our -- our -- our -- our -- our names, and our religion, and -- it was like -- I mean, the way he says it, a beautiful speech. Anyway, the boys went back to school, and right around the corner there was a -- there were buildings of the university, and they became a -- a -- a pr -- a prisoner of war camp for -- for Germans. And the engl -- There were English soldiers guarding them, and every day we would see them march through town, you know, they went to -- God knows what they did. Oh, they -- they -- I don't know what they did, and -- and then one day, something magic hap -- magical happened. My brothers, who would go and hang around there, to see those German prisoners there in the camp, and they're looking through the gates, and one day they came, and there were no longer English

soldiers there, they were soldiers who had a Jewish star on their sleeve. And it said, Jewish Brigade. They came home, and they said, “They had Jewish soldiers there.” I don’t know, but my father and I didn’t believe a word at first. What do you mean Jewish sol -- there are no Jewish soldiers. So we went to look, son of a bitch, there was these guys, just like the English standing there, you know, guarding the gate. So, the way that my brother told it later on, my -- my little brothers went there, and they -- they said, “How do we make clear to them that we are Jewish boys?” So, my brother Ott, who was always kind of inventive, said, “Yeah, I know something. Let’s go, and I’ll stand next to him, and I’ll sing us the only Jewish song I know.” And he started to hum, didn’t know any words. And he started [sings notes] which I think it -- I’m not quite sure what it is, but he said -- it’s a well known song, I think, that people sing at Passover, or you know. And the soldier looked at him, and said, “Come here.” He said, “Are you Jewish boys?” They said, “Yes.” “Come in.” And they brought them into the camp, and they became the mascots of that battalion, and every day trucks would pull up in front of the house, and soldiers’d say, “Are the boys here? We want to take them up to a trip.” And it was all wonderful. In August, I think, 1945, I came back from a Zionist meeting in The Hague. We lived again in Delft, which is about 20 minutes by train one way. I came back from The Hague, from a Zionist meeting. My cousin had said, “You better go to The Hague, there’s a group of kids there, they all were in hiding, and they sing songs, and they dance, and then there are also nice girls there.” Well, I -- here I was, I was 18 or 19, never been

kissed, never been to bed with a girl, you know? I mean, my teenage years were gone. Girls, God. I wa -- In no time, I was on the train, and it was wonderful. There was all these boys and girls, and then there were the soldiers of the Jewish Brigade, who brought food and drink, and they took us for weekends, and I joined this Zionist group. There's also a girl there called Carla Hymons, but she was three years younger, and kind of a kid. I didn't pay too much attention to her. Course, now I been married to her for 50 years. Anyway, I came back one evening from a Zionist meeting, Sunday -- Sunday morning, came back. It was -- It was dusk, and I approached our new home, and there was an English army truck standing in front of the house, which was nothing special, because the -- the Jewish Brigade always had trucks standing there in -- but a-as I ran by, from under that -- that camouflage canvas, a woman's voice called, and said, "Oh sir, could you tell me where the Lessings live?" It was my mother's voice. I've always been warned, when doing interviews for the Shoah Foundation, watch out, departures and reu -- when people reunite, that's when people start to cry, and it's true. It always -- It always happens that way, because that was my mother -- my mother's voice, and I barely had strength to -- to say, "Mother, it's me, it's Eddie." And she came out of that truck, not at all what we expected. She was all tanned. She came in an army jumpsuit. I mean, we ex-expected this Bergen-Belsen emaciated, sick person, but of course, she had recuperated marvelously out there in Algiers, and as a matter of fact, typically like my mother, in no time at all, I understand, a few weeks after she arrived there, she was in charge of the office already.

Anyway, there she was, and we rang the doorbell, and my father came, and -- and he was just, you know, he just -- he kept on saying to her, "Just sit down, I just want to look at you." And she walked around [indecipherable] and she had -- she had boxes full of stuff to eat. And we had saved one chocolate bar, that had fallen out of the sky one day when we were still hiding in that little cottage during the winter of 1944 - '45. The English made a mistaken drop of an enormous amount of weapons and radios, and also food canisters. And I had managed to get one of the food canisters, and hide it until the Germans had taken everything. The Germans had been warned, and they came and took everything, but they didn't get this. Out of that, we had saved, for all those months, one little chocolate bar for my mother when she -- when she would come back, maybe. And here she was with boxes full of stuff, you know, with chocolates, and cigarettes, and whatever she could have got of there, out in that -- anyway, well there she was. She had flown back -- two bombers had flown from Algiers to Paris, and as I later h-heard -- this is -- I mean, this is the God damnedest ironic and horrible thing, one of the -- one of the bombers, w-with survivors, had flown from Algiers back to Europe, to France. Most of them were Dutch. One of them -- One of the planes crashed, and everybody was killed, but the other one arrived in Paris, and my mother from there hitchhiked, [indecipherable] and finally wound up in front of our house, and there she was. And my brother Ott, in his hurry to see her, he fell down the stairs, I remember. He rolled down two floors of -- of stairs, and it was pandemonium, but it was glorious, glorious, glorious. And my mother

walked around, and she said, “Oh, beautiful, this is -- is this ours? And my father said, “Yes, this is our h-home now.” And she said, “Oh look at all the furniture you have, and -- and,” -- this is the -- my father telling, you know, again, a little story, a mini story, he says, and she walked around, and she said, “Oh, it’s so beautiful, and -- and look, you even put curtains, and I,” -- she was so impressed. She said -- But the next morning, when she got up, she said, “Well, the couch is not right there, we got to move that, and those curtains, they got to go. Th-That’s -- That’s a mess, and,” he said -- my father starts shifting everything. Typically, like a woman. And then my brother said, “Mom, there are Jewish soldiers around in, and they guarding prisoners of war.” You know what my mother said? She said, “I never want to see another Jew in my life.” Oh, it was shocking. However, three weeks later, at a party in the Jewish Brigade, Italian camp, she was a performer, she was an amateur singer. She sang Yiddish and Jewish songs for them, and she just loved it, so.

Q: What did that mean to her, or to you at that point that she [inaudible] see another Jew in her life?

A: If you read what she tells about Bergen-Belsen, she said everybody stole from everyone else. She said you couldn’t leave a -- a hanky lying around, you find the next day it was gone. If you -- well, at one point -- I -- I can’t tell you the whole story of my mother, but th-there -- she tells about one night, she ca -- she wa -- she -- she managed to get a job in the kitchen, from I think midnight until seven in the morning, or something

like that, where she was once in a while be able to steal some -- a potato or something, which would -- she would then divide with her friend, or something else, a lit -- tiny bit of extra food. And she said, “One morning I came back from my job, and the whole barracks was empty.” And she said the Germans had this crazy mania, like every two weeks or so, they would move everybody around into different barracks, for no God damn reason that anybody could see. But then you had to move your stuff, and if you weren’t there when you, as she wasn’t -- she -- she came, and it -- it was in the middle of the winter, it was very cold, she says, bitterly cold. Snow everywhere. And she said, “I came, and there was no one there, and all my stuff was gone.” And she said, “I sat at the doorstep of the barracks, the empty barracks,” she said, “and I cried.” And she said, “I don’t want to go on, this is the end, I -- I don’t want to go fight any more.” And that’s her -- with her magical thing, she said, “I heard a voice saying, you must go on, don’t give up, don’t give up, you must go on, you must live,” she says, “and then I -- I schlepped myself to the barracks where they had gone, and I pushed somebody aside so I could get a place in a bunkbed, and -- to sleep. And I borrowed a blanket from a friend,” or something. Anyway, she continued on. So -- But she said you couldn’t trust anyone. They would sell your -- their -- your -- their souls for -- for -- you know, they’ll sell you for a -- for a piece of bread. So her impression of Jews was like, what do you expect, you know? Anyway, let me continue with the story, otherwise we’ll sit here until a long, long time yet, because there’s more to come on this. So, my mother was back, and I went back to

school. Now I was -- I was a terrible scholar, I -- I -- I had been to high school, and failed, had been held back. In -- In -- In desperation my father had asked a neighbor, "Wh-What should I do with my son?" And the neighbor had said, "Do you know what's a good profess -- send him to trade school, he learn profession." And then my father, "What -- What kind of a trade school? What kind of a profession," and -- and this man said, "Well," he said, "I work with people who are instrument makers. They -- They -- They -- They make and repair scientific instruments." He said, "It's a good job," he said, "and maybe your son can learn that." So, I don't know if you know the Yiddish expression, ashander? It means -- It means -- It means a -- it's a terrible thing in the family. It used to be said if a -- if a girl marries a non-Jew, that's ashander, it's -- it's Yiddish, and it means -- it's a -- it's a -- it's a terrible thing. So here my -- I probably was the only Jewish boy who ever was in that trade school. I mean, there were no Jewish kids in trade schools. They became lawyers and doctors and writers, and whatever, but here I was. I had gone to the trade school, and during the war, when the Germans decided Jewish kids couldn't go any longer in school, I was out of trade school. And now the war was over, and I went back to the trade school, and I finished one year of -- to get a diploma in instrument making. It didn't take very long after that, I worked at one jo -- I worked at two jobs, and -- with instrument companies in Delft, and first as an apprentice in the shop, and later on -- my mother made another decision for me, come to think of it. My mother said, "Why don't you take a little vacation before," you know, and -- oh, the

first job I had, I worked in a machine shop, as an apprentice tool maker, or instrument maker, and I had a -- I found out I had an anti-Semitic boss, a g -- a guy who said Jews are no good. And I told this at home, and my mother said, “You quit, right now.” And I quit. She says, “Now you to-take a vacation,” oh no, first, “go around, see if you get another job.” And I went to another -- there was another instrument company, very prestigious one, and I asked for a job there, and they said, “Well, we don’t have a j -- we don’t have a position in -- in the -- in the sh -- in the -- the shop, but w-we could take you on as an apprentice draftsman.” And I said, “No, I -- I work in the shop.” My mother said, “Why don’t you go take a vacation for a week? Go visit friends.” Which I did. When I came back, she says, “You have a job as a draftsman.” I said, “But I said no.” She said, “I took it for -- I told them you would take it.” And that was it.

Q: Let me ask you, you mentioned that your brother had gone back to school, and how strange it was to sort of all of a sudden be studying, you know, open your book to page one. What was it like, the attempt to return to normal life, and how much was it like normal life? What -- What were people -- Were people reuniting? Were people were -- talk about the experiences? What was that sort of, you know, getting back [indecipherable]

A: From my memory -- It’s going to be hard to believe what I’m going to tell you. We didn’t talk about the war. We sort of went right into picking up where we left off. I’m still saying it today in my speeches to -- to -- to adult -- when I speak to adult audiences. I say,

"We thought we would just pick up where we left off, and we did. We thought that two and a half years of hiding was an interruption, but now we were back." And life -- I joined this -- this group, my father started teaching music, my brothers went to school. Nobody talked about the war. Nobody talked about. There was no Holocaust. The word didn't exist, the beginning. I was together in this -- this group of -- of -- of we went with hundreds of kids who had been in hiding. We went on weekends, provided by the Jewish Brigade. Nobody talked about what had happened. It was as if we -- as if we were ger -- normal kids. When I think it back ows -- it seems incredible, it's unbelievable that w -- but -- but I guess we had to do it, in order to get started again. So my answer to you is that life seemed to resume normally where -- where th -- where we had left off, two and a half years before. Course, we weren't Polish Jews, who came back and then were murdered. Or, later on a Czech friend of mine here in the United States, says, "When I went back to my village, they tried to kill me, when I tried to get my parents house back." We were welcomed, and well, friends said, "We're glad you're back." We got a nice letter from the little -- the maid, who had -- we had had that -- a maid before we left, and she wrote us a nice letter, "Dear Mr. and Miss," -- to my parents, "Dear Mr. and Mrs. Lessing." She was a simple soul. "I'm so glad you're back, because I already thought you had kicked the bucket." She say -- She wrote it, something very similar in that. Life resumed. For all those who didn't -- who had disappeared, there was no -- we didn't talk about that.

Q: Even within your family, you didn't talk about it?

A: Even within our family, nobody talked about it. There was no discussion. The discussions came 50 years later. And pretty soon -- well, a -- as I said, I was in this Zionist group, I met this girl, and she was three years younger, but then a year later, my father and I, we got a -- we got a visa for the -- for the United States, which was very unusual, and my parents said, "Are you coming to the United States?" And I said, "No, I'm a Zionist, I'm going to go to Israel." Palestine, then. And they said, well -- they talked me out of if, they said, "Why don't you come with me? You have a visa now, come with us to the States. We need help to get started. Maybe you can save some money and help us get started." We didn't have any money. And so, I agreed. But I managed to -- like, a month before I agreed to leave, before we supposed to leave, I fell in love with this girl. And when I left, we made an agreement that if we would keep on writing letters, then it would be something, but if we didn't keep on writing letters, well then, it was nothing. And so, my father and I left for the United States. My father went to Springfield, Massachusetts. And I got a job, my first job, with -- we actually went both to my aunt and uncle, liv -- the aunt that my mother was supposed to go to. Aunt and uncle lived in Holyoke, Massachusetts. And from there, my father went to Springfield, and started teaching music, and my uncle got me a job in General Electric, in Schenectady, New York, as a toolmaker, and that's where I went. And so, the first year, my first year in the United States was spent in Schenectady. And I would call that the armpit of -- of New

York State, it was about the worst place. And I think that's where, maybe the first intimations of what had happened to me began to -- to be felt a little bit, because I had no one there. I was almost in the same situation when I was -- as I was on my first farm. I knew nobody. I lived in a -- the room I -- if somebody had said to me, "If you -- You need a room?" And I said yes. Oh, the man at General Electric, at the employment office there said -- personnel office, he said, "Why don't you go to the YMCA, they have an announcement board and people post rooms for rent sometimes." So I went there, and I found the McDuffys, or something like that, and -- on the street, and I rented a room from two older ladies. And they had some more rooms, there were other students, there were -- there were some Latin American students there.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is interview with Ed Lessing, this is tape two, side B. And you were just talking about coming to the United States.

A: Yeah, I rented this room from these two -- two Catholic ladies, and after a month, they said, "Ed, we're sorry, we -- we need the room for someone else." And I was out. And I thought it was a little strange. In the meantime, I had contacted -- I found out there was a Jewish Community Center, something I never knew about, and I went there, and I spoke with the director there, and I said, "You know, I had this room, and," -- he said, "Who was it?" I said, "Mr. and Mrs. McDuffy, on the," -- whatever, "Cedar Street," or

something. He said, “You rented from Catholic people?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Well, did they know you were Jewish?” I said, “Yeah, I told them, you know, I said I was a Zionist, and,” -- he said, “Of course y -- th-they didn’t want you in the house.” He said, “Wa -- You,” he said, “We have rooms here for rent with Jews,” he said. My first -- My first hit with anti-Semitism in the United States. I haven’t found any after that, I must say, you know, but it was a revelation. I thought, “Oh, my God. That’s still going on in this country?” And I thought, “I’m not going to take this. I had this for two and a half years.” And it began to dawn on me that I was different from -- from the regular -- what should I say? American -- American Jews, that I had -- I had a past. And I met -- Well, I got another room with a very old Jewish lady, who spoke mostly Yiddish, and she was very sweet, but I didn’t have any heat in my room, so I had to always leave the door opened. But she was very sweet, and was my first touch of Yiddish. I had never heard Yiddish before. And here was a lady who spoke mostly Yiddish.

Q: Y-You mentioned that that was when you started to feel that you were different from other Jews who hadn’t had that experience. In what way do you mean, like h-how did you start to feel different?

A: Well, it c -- it came about because I met -- through the people I met at the Jewish Community Center. I met a guy called Phil, forget his last name. He was the all American Jewish teenager, I guess. A little bit older. Yeah, he was pre-college, he was -- yeah, he was teenager, he was in -- probably in high school. And he and I made friends, somehow

another. And Phil, well, I realized, was a happy guy. He had a car, he did some -- he did some amateur -- no, not amateur, he did some photography for the local newspaper. You know, he would take -- go to a fire, or something like that. What they call it, a stringer, probably, right? Anyway, Phil -- Phil seemed to have -- was terribly unlike me. H-He wasn't serious about life. He wasn't worry about de -- worried about death. He -- He was -- Life was happy. He went to school dances, and to reunions of his class, and he invited me for New Year's Eve, "You want to spend New Year's Eve with me and my family?" I says, "Yeah, great." In Holland, on New Year's Eve, the whole family comes together, and you make special pastries and so. So I came to his house that evening, about nine o'clock, and I just bumped into his father and mother, who are on their way out. They said, "Hi, Ed, we're," -- I said, "Where you going?" "Oh, we're going to a party." Oh, oh, and so they left. Then his sister came out with her boyfriend. "Well, Ed, have a nice evening." I said, "Where are you going?" "Oh, we're going to celebrate somewhere, New Year's Eve, with friends." So it was Phil and me. I realized this is different. These people, they just have fun, they go out, they party. New Year's Eve was a serious business in Holland, you remembered, you know, life and death, and -- so Phil said, "What shall we do tonight?" I said, "I don't know, what do you do on New Year?" He says, "You want to cruise around with the car?" He had this big Chevy convertible. I don't know, we -- we cruised around through Schenectady until it was after 12, and then I went back to my little old Yiddish lady, and -- and I realized I'm different, this is -- then I

met someone else. A -- A man who seemed a little older than me, and he was from Czechoslovakia, and he -- I realized it years later, he was a Holocaust survivor. But I didn't know what a Holocaust survivor was. He said, "I have a car. You want it," -- somehow another, I guess he -- he said where were you, and I said I was in Holland, in hiding. And -- And he said, "Oh." He said, "I was in camps." And he -- who knows what camps he may have been in. Auschwitz for all I know. The name didn't -- if he had said Auschwitz, it wouldn't have rung a bell with me even then. And we spent a little time together, and he told me -- he was the man who said, "When I tried to go back to my village, and get to my father and mother's home, who had been killed in camps," he said, "they tried to kill me, and I ran off." And he was a butcher in the A&P. I think it's the first time that I met up with a camp survivor. I've always remembered him. So I realize there was a little bit of a kinship there. Anyway --

Q: And yet -- And yet, you didn't' talk about your experiences there? It was just something that was [indecipherable]

A: No, we did not talk at length about what had gone behind. Survivors didn't talk about what happened then. You were busy making your life. Anyway, let me see if I -- let me not forget anything. I worked for about a year at General Electric.

Q: What was your family doing at this point? When did you all

A: Well, my mother and -- no, my mother wasn't over yet, my mother and brothers were still in -- in Holland, and my father was in Springfield, Massachusetts, beginning to set up

a teaching schedule, and I was in Schenectady. And my girlfriend was in Holland, and I wrote letters like crazy. Man, did I write. And after a year, I -- I quit at General Electric, as my plan had been. I just had joined General Electric in order to learn the American system for measuring, and the tool names, and all that, the -- you know, the -- how -- we -- we di -- we had the metric system in Europe, and I wasn't used to the system they had here, and so -- so I took that year, and I learned, and I worked, and it was very interesting, I had a very good time, and working with -- with American men, and my boss was a great guy, I -- was totally unknown i-in Holland, something like -- first day I was there, he said, "Ed, call me George." I said, "That's my boss, I can't call -- call -- call him -- can't call him George." But he insisted, it -- it was like Jesus. When I left one of the -- an old man, Hank Kruger, old toolmaker, he said, "I've been here for 35 years. What are you leaving for?" I said, "Well, I want to go back to drafting, you know, become a drafts -- I was -- I was a draftsman when I left home." He said -- "I on -- I only took this j -- this job to learn about tools, and so on." He said, "You'll never get a job like this again. You can stay here forever," you know, and -- and I thought, "Gee, d-d-don't they fire people here?" He said, "Yeah, you got to commit a murder in order to fire someone," he said. "Beside, the union would -- union -- union wouldn't let the -- let you be fired." I was a member of a union, electrical workers. But I did quit, after a year, and my mother came over. I went to New York, and my mother, and my brothers came. We all went to Radio City Music Hall, saw Gene Kelly in "The Pirate." Grace -- Great days, and -- and I found

a job in Ossening, little bit up the river from -- you know, Ossening, New York. Which -- Life is very strange, I -- I had written down some names when I -- when I left Holland, of companies similar to the ones -- the one where I worked as a draftsman in Holland, a scientific instrument company. One of them was the Cambridge Instrument Company, and I called them, and I explained that I had worked for Kip and Sons in Holland. And oh, they said, "Oh, w-we make the same things here. We'd love to meet you, Mr. Lessing." And I said, "Where do I go?" And they said, "Well, our headquarters is in Grand Central Station, in New York, in the office building." And I traveled to Grand Central, and -- and oh, they were delighted with my resume, and -- as it was at that time. And they said, "Well, we'd gladly -- gladly h-have you," he said, "but all we want you to do is -- is do meet our -- our chief engineer, Mr. Digby, an Englishman." I said, "Okay." I said, "So, I'll take the train to Cambridge then." They said, "No, no, our -- our -- our factory is located in Ossening." I said, "Aren't you in Cambridge?" They said, "No." They said, "Why would you want to be in Cambridge?" I said, "Well, my parents live in Springfield, and I figured Cambridge near Boston, and -- and Springfield, it's an easy -- there's a train connection, and a -- you know, it's an hour," and -- "Oh, no," they said. I said, "Well, what's Cambridge Instrument Company then?" They said, "Oh yeah, well years ago, we used to be a sister company of Cambridge Instrument Company in England, but what -- what had nothing to do with us any more, we're now located in Ossening." And that's how I wound up in Ossening, and that's why I'm living here in

Westchester still. Anyway, I got the job there, and started working, and then my girl came over. And -- But before that, I should tell you another little incident with my mother. I lived on the houseboat, I -- When I got the job in Ossening, I lived on a houseboat in the river, on a dock in the river. It was a houseboat somebody else had lent me. He said, "Would you take care of the houseboat? You can have it for a year, with no rent." Okay. So I wrote all my letters from the houseboat in Ossening, and one day I got a letter from my mother, and said, "I want to send you here this little advertisement that I've cut out of the Jewish newspaper in Holland." And I plucked it out of there, and it said that Ed Lessing was engaged to Carla Hymons. And so I was engaged. My mother had decided that we were engaged, so -- it always makes a wonderful hit because at our 50th wedding anniversary, I told this story about our engagement. People -- Americans, they -- they look at you -- "You were -- your mother told you were engaged?" I said yeah. I didn't think it was strange. My mother had seen that we wrote a lot of letters, and she figures here's a nice girl, Ed, you're engaged. So we were engaged to get married, and so we married. She came over, and we got married in -- what is it, 1948, I think, in Chicopee, Massachusetts.

Q: What sort of things did you write in your letters? I mean --

A: Oh, desire, love, forever. I mean, I had three little black and white photographs of her, and they just drove me crazy. I could look -- look at them for hours. I -- I just crazy with love for this girl. Oh, it was endless letters about -- I told her about what I was doing, and

what -- you know, but each let -- I wrote at least -- at least four letters a week, and each one had a least eight, if not 12 pages. When the -- When it was all over, when they come -- I had a -- we filled a suitcase with -- and she would write back once in awhile also, but not that much. She would also write I love you. I wrote -- anyway --

Q: Was it important that you both had similar experiences during the war, that she was in hiding as well, or did that -- was that not even part of the conversation?

A: Of course, because that's how we met. We met in -- We met in the Zionist organizations. Both of us didn't want to live in Holland, both of us wanted to go to Palestine. I mean, all the girls, all the boys, nobody want to stay in Holland, although some did, but we all wanted to get -- get the hell out, and go to the -- many went to the United States, others went to -- to Palestine. Carla's brother went -- helped by the Jewish Brigade to get to Palestine illegally. It was the end. We didn't realize why it was the end, I think even. It's just strange, when I think back of it. We wanted to get out. None of us knew the numbers, by the way. None of us knew at that time that 75 percent of the Dutch Jewish population had been -- had been murdered. A lot of people went on those trains, and they -- yeah, well, you heard, I have an uncle, or somebody had -- that his father was killed, or -- but it didn't form a picture. Again, the Holocaust did not exist yet. The -- The scope of this -- of this horror, was this -- was unknown to us. It had been bad, and a lot of people got killed, it seemed, but what can I tell you? That's how I remember it, anyway.

Q: So what changed? When did people start to see it as this [indecipherable]

A: Well, I got to jump way ahead, but let me see. I better stay a little bit chronologically, otherwise it doesn't make any s -- we got married, and in 1950 we decided now was the time to go to -- to Israel. 1948, the state had been declared, in 1950 we left. We left on the LaGuardia, a ship of the American export line, and we had a marvelous trip across. We stopped in various places, Gibraltar, and Paraeus, and -- and we wound up in Haifa, and Carla's brother was there, and we went to where Carla's brother and sister-in-law lived in a kibbutz called Dovrat, in Israel. And there we lived for five years, as kibbutniks -- kibbutzniks. Idealists. You didn't make, you know, no money, and I started working at first as a blacksmith there, because I had some experience with metal working, of course, a-and later on I became a tractor driver, I had my own little tractor, and I spend most of my time spraying poisons on apples, and pears, and grapes, and -- and Carla worked in the children's houses, with -- with the babies, and with little children, and -- and our daughter was born in 1952, I guess, and we named her Noa, N-o-a, for figure out of the -- out of the Bible. And I wasn't very happy in the kibbutz. I had already tasted individual life, and it was very hard to adjust. I had been an independent guy. When I come to think of my whole life, I've been -- always been more or less a -- a lo -- a -- a -- a -- a guy who did better as a -- as a s -- as a loner. Not -- Not necessarily completely detached from life, but -- but as one who took care of himself. I took care of myself during the war, most of the time. I was not with anyone else, I was by myself, except for la -- at the end. Before

that, I had two brothers, but they were eight and 10 years younger. They were always together, like twins, and I was by myself out there, you know, 10 years older. So, I had worked in the States, I had worked in Holland, in my own profession, and here I was a tractor driver. So I wasn't too happy there. My daughter got sick, she got tuberculosis, which runs in the family, and almost died in the hospital. And strangely enough, we had not made any decision to go back to the United States, but it -- it happened through a bunch of strange coincidences. I had no family in Israel, none whatsoever, all my family was in the United States, and it was quite a -- quite a group by then. My two brothers, my father and mother, my cousins had come over, with wives, with their children. It grew here in the States, all around Springfield, and so on. And I was -- I was sitting out in -- i-in Israel, and everybody was poor, they didn't have money to travel to Israel to -- in those days everything was different, you know, you didn't say, "Oh well, we go, you know, spend a couple of weeks in Israel," you know, wh-what the hell, a couple of thousand bucks, so what? 20 dollars was a lot of money. So, I had actually no prospect of seeing my family again. Carla had her brother, and an uncle, and she had some family in Israel, I didn't. And my mother wants us -- when we -- when we left the United States to go to Israel, Carla and I, we had asked for a re-entry permit, which you needed in those days. You needed a re-entry permit if you wanted to come back into the States, as a non-citizens. We weren't citizens, you know? I had sent the money to Washington, but the re-entry permit never came. Oh, we said, so what. It was just -- It was like a -- a -- a safety

line in -- in case we wouldn't like it in -- in Israel, then we could always come back. But, you know, we liked it well enough, and five years went by, and then my mother wrote. She said, "Did you ever get that re-entry permit?" And I wrote back, "No, we didn't. We sent the money, but we didn't get it." She -- Well, my mother being well, my mother, immediately spoke with her senator. "What the hell's going on here? My son sent money to Washington for re-entry permit." "I'll look into it." Two weeks later a letter came from the embassy in Tel Aviv, that, "You are hereby requested to reapply for a visa to the United States," and I hadn't planned to apply for a visa -- send photographs. And we thought, well, my daughter hadn't been s -- been so sick, and almost died, and maybe we should go back for some time, and -- well, from there it rolled on and on and on and on. They needed photographs, you needed documents, you need to go to the local police to tell you that you were a good character. And one day a letter arrived in the kibbutz, and somebody in -- the letters in the kibbutz all come to the office, and then they get distributed. And somebody in the office said, "Hey, I'm going to open this letter." He opened our letters from the embassy, and said, "Hey, these people are applying to go back to the United States." Now, it's hard to imagine at this point in the history of Israel, but then, if you left the kibbutz, just leave it and go to the city, you were an outcast already, sort of. They would give you a table, and two chairs and a bed, and 20 bucks, and goodbye Charlie, that was nice of you to be in the kibbutz. We don't want to have further anything to do with you. To go back to the country where you came from, you

were yuradeem. There are two words in Israel, one it alleyah, which means going up, when you go to Israel, you make alleyah, you go to Israel, you go up. The word El Al comes from there, by the way, the airline. When you leave Israel, you yurate, you go down. We were yuradeem, people who go down. It was, again the word ashander, an-and it was a terrible thing. And in the general meeting, in the kibbutz, the members decided that we had no right to live there any more, even though we had worked for five years, our butts off, and all that, but -- and we had been bona fide members, they voted us out. But they didn't want to throw us out right away, first -- they would throw us out as soon as I found a job, some -- outside of the kibbutz. So I went, and I applied for a job, and I got a job as a draftsman, in an English company, the refineries, the oil refineries in Haifa. And I don't know any more what happened, but we didn't -- we decided that we wouldn't stay in Israel after all. However, we couldn't go to the United States either, because of my daughter's tuberculosis that she had had. They took x-rays, and they said, "You'll have to wait a year." In those days tuberculosis was like AIDS today. You had it, you didn't get into the States, and that was the worst. So, they said, "You'll have to wait a year." And I don't know, we decided, you know what, if we have to wait a year, let's go to Holland, and we'll wait a year there, and then we'll apply to the American embassy there. And so we got on a ship, and left Israel with our daughter, and went back to Holland, and we lived there for one year in 1956. I went back to the same place where I had worked before as a draftsman, found out about a new profession that I had never

heard about, and immediately decided that was the profession that I wanted to learn. It was called industrial design. I'd never heard of it. It was ideal for me. It was a combination of art, and technology. Industrial designers are the people who design cars on the outside, and telephones and refrigerators, and -- in other words, people who give shape to modern industrial products. Anyway, we spent a year in Holland, had a wonderful time. One of the best years of our lives, I don't know why, but it was just wonderful. My daughter, in quick succession, dropped her Hebrew, which she spoke fluently, and learned Dutch, and at the end of the year, when we went to the United States, she dropped her Dutch, and in three weeks spoke fluent English. So, went through three languages in no time at all. And so we got back to the United States.

Q: But let's just go back to Israel for a moment. Again, being identified as people who had survived the war, an-and what was t -- as you say, to later become the Holocaust, was there -- were people i-identified in different ways, [indecipherable] didn't feel like they were different [indecipherable]. Were there conversations about that?

A: It's g -- It's a good question you ask, because it brings me back to our five years in kibbutz. It's astounding. In the kibbutz, there was a group of youngsters who had come from Romania, they were all orphans, their parents had all been killed. They worked a half a day in the morning, and in the afternoon they learned, they had school lessons. I actually set up a little drafting course for some of them, for some of the boys that wanted to learn drafting. Do you know that it never occurred to me that they were Holocaust

survivors? That they had gone through hell? That these kids were -- I mean, that they couldn't even imagine what these children had gone through. They were just kids to us, yeah, and they were not such good kids either, because sometimes they would steal things. Sometimes, you -- you know, you were supposed to work with them. I had s -- a kid who were helping me on the tractor, and he wouldn't work very well, and I thought, "Oh, he's a rotten kid." When I think back of it now, I cannot even imagine that I didn't realize, that I didn't have the compassion. There were two ladies in the kibbutz, who were Holocaust survivors from camps. One, Margit, big woman, would scream at night in her dreams. And aft -- you know, when we heard it the first time, we'd say, "Who was this screaming last night, this awful screaming?" "Oh that's -- that's Margit, she's dreaming about the camps, oh yeah." That was it. And I think about that now, I can't even imagine that either, that it didn't ring a bell, it didn't do anything, it -- oh well, that was the Holocaust survi -- we had a father on a -- a father of one of the members of the kibbutz, an old man, he had been in the camps. Every meal, he would take from the communal dining room, he would take pieces of bread, and put them in his pocket, take them to his room and hide them. It was a big joke. Abba Bower. Abba Bower, who would take bread. You look back and you don't understand it. I guess we -- we were busy. We were busy working, we were busy building a family, we -- we were busy with our children, we were busy having fun sometimes. We were busy sitting on the lawn in the evening, and talking about the neighbors, and about Holland, and how much of what we did in our childhood,

and the fun we had, and -- and remembering old class songs, or stuff like that. Nobody mentioned a word about what had happened to us. And Carla's brother had gone through the Holocaust, he was in hiding with her, he was there.

Q: Was it considered a weakness to dwell on that, or --

A: I think it probably was. There -- There are many -- I mean, this is in hindsight now, of course, and I've heard -- we all have heard now, the stories of -- that the Holocaust survivors weren't particularly welcome in Israel after the war, because they represented defeat, and what Israel was about was victory. And then there were these people who kept on talking about the horrors they had seen, and nobody wanted to hear this. Nobody wanted to hear the stories. And the hidden children -- that term by ca -- didn't exist, of course, but those who had been in hiding, we -- when you heard a story from a -- from a Holocaust survivor who had been in Auschwitz, you weren't going to talk about, hey, I was in a room for two and a half years. They would laugh. Nothing happened to you. You weren't in the camps, you didn't see anybody die, did you? No, but -- anyway. No, it -- I guess there was something like that, but I'm not sure that that influenced us at all. We lived with a little group of o-other Dutch kibbutznikim, some of who had also gone through hiding, and we worked hard, we got children, and we didn't talk about the war, talked about everything but the war. Talked about the crummy bastards in the kibbutz who were freeloading, on -- on us who were working so hard, and they talked about the -- the guy, the sadana witha the guy who puts you in work places every day, and he always

gave you the lousy jobs. And talked about tractors, that they weren't working right, or stuff like that. Years went -- went by talking about that.

Q: So you're -- After the war, you know, you -- you sort of welcome this, you know Zionism, and -- and identified in that way with -- did it feel like giving up a -- a dream, or was it the [indecipherable]

A: Wait a minute, I didn't get that. Say it -- Would you reformulate that?

Q: After the war you -- you were a Zionist, and you [indecipherable]

A: Yes.

Q: -- these groups. And so your experience in Israel, did that sort of -- [indecipherable]

A: Cure me of Zionism?

Q: or --

A: I guess I wasn't enough of an idealist to stick it out. Life in a kibbutz was hard. Carla would have liked to stay. I opted for leaving Israel. She said she would have stayed. As a matter of fact, she once said that someone in the kibbutz, and I never found out who it was, some man had said, "Why don't you stay with me? Let Ed go back to United States?" And she decided not to do that.

Q: Was that hard for both of you, that conversation about whether to go or stay?

A: Yeah, I'm not quite sure, you see, I'm not quite sure what happened there. I had this job --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: -- a continuation of the interview with Ed Lessing, and this is tape three, side A. So we were just -- you were just on your way back from Holland to the United States. Pick -- We can pick up there.

A: Yeah. We came back, and of course now we had a daughter, and I started looking around for a job, and an apartment, and we -- we found that in the next village where -- from where we are right now, in Dobb's Ferry. And I started a job with a -- with an instrument company. Let's see, a son -- we got a son. He was born here in the -- in here, in the area, and we moved from an apartment in Dobb's Ferry to this house in Hastings, 36 years ago. In the meantime, I started going to school at night. I went to Pratt Institute, and got a degree in Industrial design, and started working on Madison Avenue, and then got laid off there, because they ran out of work. This is just about the time Kennedy got assassinated. And then I sort of slid into doing free lance work for myself. And life went on, and Carla started going to school, and she graduated, and she -- she first went -- got a Bachelors, and then she got a Master's from Columbia, and she became a Social Worker. And was all -- that was a great accomplishment for us, because we had missed our education in a sense. So now I was free-lancing, and then -- and I got a studio in New York City for awhile, on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, in a prestigious building, and a -- we were very busy, and the kids were growing up, and so on and so forth. I thought that our life -- my life would be pretty well without surprises further on. I

looked at it -- I forget what birthday that was, but it'll be my 40th -- my 40th would have -- would have been in '66, right? Born in '26. Anyway, somewhere, one of these birthdays, I said, "Well, I think I've seen it about." You know? Sounds a little cynical, but I had a big birthday party, and at the end of the day I thought, probably it's going to go on until my death wi -- about the same way, you know? With working, and kids growing up and leaving the home, and so on and so forth, and -- and two things happened. Actually, three things happened, but -- but the first one happened in -- let me see, I think 19 -- 19 -- 1980. [inaudible] 1980? 1981. My wife got involved with a couple of other ladies in setting up a -- something that hadn't been done before, a special kind of meeting of people who had been in hiding. And now, she was always involved in reading Holocaust literature, and especially Dutch is -- tr -- poetry, and stories written by Holocaust survivors. I never touched it. My brother sent me the standard work in Holland, about the destruction of the Dutch Jewry, a two volume book, and it stood on the shelf. I once looked, there were a couple of photographs in it, I was horrified, I put it back on the shelf, never touched it. Anyway, in 1981, she started to organize this -- this business with -- but before that, there was an article in New York magazine, I'm sure she had -- she must have told you about all this -- was an article in New York magazine in which there was a -- a couple of stories, a bunch of stories of -- of hidden -- what they suddenly were called, hidden children, children who had been in hiding. It hit the -- It hit the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- the media, you know? In short order, CBS, NBC, ABC, the magazines, Time, I

don't know, Newsweek, everybody wanted to know -- a new buzz word there was, hidden children, who had ever heard of hidden children? Here we had been for 50 years surrounded -- now we -- we didn't think about it ourselves. Anyway, that's the time we got in -- we got asked to be interviewed by the Holocaust museum, I guess, and in short order we -- I got onto all kinds of television programs. I was on CNBC, we were -- the whole family was on ABC Good Morning America, and -- it was amazing -- amazing time. Anyway, the conference was in sight. It was on Memorial Day, 1981, I think. And Carla said to me, "Are you coming to this conference?" She had been very busy organizing this. I had heard the news, you know, and -- and -- and I -- I think my -- a- answer was -- is -- is a classic by now, I -- I said, "Ah no, why should I come? I mean, you will be busy, running around here -- there -- at the conference, and I'll just be hanging out, you know, waiting til it's over." "Well," she said, "you know, my brother is especially coming from Israel, and he'll be wandering around by himself. Couldn't you just come?" And I said, "All right, all right." I've been married for many years, you learn when to -- when to be acquiescent, you know? And so, there we gathered, on Memorial Day weekend, in -- on Times Square in the -- in the Marriott. And I think it was Friday night when the first registration was supposed to be on, and I -- Carla was busy up there on the seventh floor. They were -- They had the -- like, sort of places where you could register. And I positioned myself between those windows, where people stood behind them, had all these kits for they -- for those who had registered, and the elevators. Now

the elevators i-i-in -- in that hotel are made out of glass, sort of. They -- They -- They rise from -- from -- from the bottom on the -- in -- in an atrium. And then, when they come to the floor, they open up, and they disgorge their people. And I stood there, and I watched the elevators bringing up these people, these gray haired men and women, of all kinds of heights and sizes, and girth, and -- and then I saw them go to the -- to the windows there, where the volunteers of -- were standing, and they were getting their kits, and then they got the tags, and they put the tags on, and they wrote on there where -- who they were, and where they had been in hiding. And I can't -- to this day I cannot explain to you, but as they got -- started to crowd around on the floor, and I began to read their tags, sort of furtively, you know, I wasn't with anyone, and they began to form groups and talk, and I looked at the tags, and the tags said, I was hidden in Belgium, I was hidden in France, I was hidden in Holland. I came from Poland, I came from Romania. And this -- very strange, but I began to cry. I began to cry, and it was to me as if I always had believed that I was the only one who had been in hiding. Is a thing so strange, I mean, I knew, you know. I mean, my o -- my own brothers, and friends, and everybody had been -- but here they were, the hidden children, s -- 1600 of them. And they crowded around, and they talked, and I just stood and looked at them, and I cried. And they were suddenly like I had all these brothers and sisters, but of course, I had very little in common with most of them, sum -- you know. There was very little in common between somebody who has been in hi -- in hiding in Poland, and somebody who has been hi -- in hiding in -- in

France, let's say, or in Belgium. The situation w-were vastly different, but it didn't matter. And the conference started up, and Carla's brother came, and we sat in the conference, 1600 people, we listened to Abe Foxman, you know, of the Anti-Defamation League, who was a hidden child. And we listened to other people. And I cried, and everybody cried. I cried for three days. Something magical happened there. I, who had never read a book on the Holocaust, I suddenly was -- it was like, I don't know, like my mind opened up suddenly to something that I could -- you asked me, did you t -- earlier, did you talk about the war, either in New Yor -- in -- in the Zionist organization or in the kibbutz? Never a word. Carla and I didn't talk about the war with each other. And it happened there. It changed my life. I -- It went on for three days, and wherever I went, I talked with people, and they talked to me, and I got to tell you funny thing, that people never stopped talking, and they couldn't get enough of telling what happened to them, as if they had never -- as if -- as if they had never told it to anyone, you know. Or maybe they didn't. It was -- It was so bad, I stood in the men's room next to a guy -- next -- the -- the guy next to me in the urinal said to me, "So, where were you in hiding?" And I said in Holland. I said, "So where were you in hiding?" He said, "I was in Poland." And we talked while we peed. And even there, you didn't stop talking with -- and -- and [indecipherable] what happened to me, and then we zipped up, and then we talked some more outside. It was astounding. It was an astounding experience. And when it was over, three days later, we left, and it was as if I had suddenly acquired, you know, like 1600

sisters and brothers. I didn't want to leave. Nobody wanted to leave. There were people sitting downstairs in the lobby that -- that cried because it was over. When you ask people today, who were at that conference, they all remember it exactly. I was there. I experienced it. It was as if the door suddenly opened, after 50 years. It was as if we were suddenly allowed to remember. Anyway, I went home, it was very strange, as -- the car was in the garage downstairs, as I drove out, an enormous thunderstorm broke out over Manhattan. The sky was blue with lightning every second, and the rain poured down, and it thundered b-between those buildings, it sounded -- it was like hell had broken loose, it was like God himself sort of thundered out on -- on us for -- you know, it was very strange. Got home, started reading every -- every book, every pamphlet, every story I could lay my hands on. And my life changed. It -- It's never been the same. I became a speaker, became an interviewer for a -- Spielberg's Shoah Foundation. I -- I'm a-about the best speaker they have of the Hidden Child Foundation. I spoke last month at the commemoration at the Supreme Court of New York state, to the judges and the lawyers. It's -- All this happened after that day. So --

Q: Let me ask you, based on -- on what has happened since then, and that you've become so involved, do you look back on all those years of not talking about it, and wonder why you and man -- and many others didn't really discuss the story?

A: Yes, of course I have, and there's all sorts of theories about it. If you ask Carla, who is a Social Worker, and who psychologically knows much more than I do, you heard her

say earlier, when we were talking about it, briefly, about needing four decades to -- to be able to talk about it, but that -- that still doesn't -- I still don't understand. But th-the experience is -- I'm not the only one. There are so many who said -- I've interviewed people myself, not hidden children, but the camp survivors, who said, "Ah, Mr. Lessing, this is the first time that I will be speaking about it. I've never spoken about it like this with anyone else." What is it? I don't know. I -- I -- Really, I'm stupid, as far as that's concerned, I have -- I have no idea why it took 50 years for me, but it -- for me there was a definite epiphany, that -- that moment there, I could look, I could take you to the place on that floor in the Marriott Marquis on Times Square, and say, here's where I stood. Here is where suddenly everything changed. No, no, come back in another 10 years, maybe I'll have an answer. Maybe Carla had an answer, I'm not quite sure. Anyway, I became quite active, slowly, not -- not immediately, but Carla, of course, had the -- became vice-president of The Hidden Child Foundation, and I -- I began to -- and she formed a group here in Westchester, and I decided that my forte was maybe writing some things, I have written little pieces, and I began to write a newsletter, every month I write a newsletter, there's only two pages, but I love to write a little editorial for it, and I've written those, and -- and then later I started a newsletter, same thing, two page newsletter for The Hidden Child Foundation in New York, and that has a circulation of about 3,000 people, and that goes around, you know, the -- the whole New York region. That's my involvement, and the speaking -- the speaking involvement is much more intense. I spoke

to, I don't know, maybe 15 - 20 places this -- during the Holocaust commemoration season, you know, these -- these speech days come in seasons. Anyway, that was one -- one thing that changed my life. Now, I got to go to something very important. That was in 19 -- was that 1990, or 1991, the big [inaudible] 1991 -- 1981, I think. In 1982, there was a decision that in -- of the Dutch Jews, that they would hold a conference for hidden children in Amsterdam. And of course we were invited to come, and of course we decided, you know, we were hidden children from Holland, so Carla and I decided yes, we will go there. Okay, tickets, airline tickets and so on, so forth, and -- about two months before -- about two months er -- before the conference, I decided that -- are you comfortable? You could lean back, maybe, if that's easier for you.

Q: No, that's fine.

A: Are you okay?

Q: Yeah.

A: About a month and a half, or two months before conference in Amsterdam, I suddenly decided that I had actually never said enough -- given enough thanks to one man in Holland, who had helped me save my life. I don't know if you remember I talked to you about a police officer, Oskam, a great model of a naz -- Dutch Nazi, but he was really a wonderful guy. I thought, I wonder if Oskam is still li -- I didn't know his name. I wonder if that police officer is still alive. And I couldn't find his name in my mind. I asked my brother Fred, who did all the interviews, he said, "Yeah, something like

Boscamp, or something like that." Anyway, I sent a letter to the Bureau of War dec -- documentation in Amsterdam, and said -- described the hut where I had been, and described Oskam, and I sent a little picture, a little photograph of Oskam, his wife, and their son, who was then three and a half, four years old, and sent it off to war document -- and asked them, is Mr. Oskam -- Mr. Boscamp, or whatever his name is still alive, and I described him. And I got a letter back that said, "No, we're sorry, but that gentleman has died, and so -- his wife has also died. But his son, Oskam junior is still alive, and he's a retired plumber, and we sent your letter with the photograph, on to him." So I got a letter back from Oskam, junior. And he said, "Mr. Lessing, I don't know who you are, but I'm very grateful for the little photograph you sent me, I've never seen that photograph." Of course he hadn't, because I had taken it just before I left for the United States. And he said, "What can I do for you?" And I said to him, "I'm sorry your father died, but I would like to, when I come to Holland for the conference, I would like to get together with you, and talk about your father, he -- who saved my life, you know." And I got a letter back from him, it said, "Well listen, I was only four -- four, four and a half years old, and I don't know much. My father was a very closed man. I -- I don't know what to -- what I could tell you." And I said, "I don't really care, but I would like to find out a little bit about your father, who was he, what -- what background did he come from." Suddenly, I -- it had to do with the whole hidden children business, too. Suddenly I decided I must find out about what happened to me. I must find out what happened to all the Jews during

the Holocaust, and here was a chance. So I wrote to him, we're coming to Holland, and can we meet with you. And he said, "Yeah, okay. I don't know what I can do for you, but okay." We go on the plane, and we are 10 minutes away from Amsterdam airport Schiphol, and the captain comes on. As they always do, it's, "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for flying KLM, we'll be landing in 10 minutes in Schiphol, and don't forget any of your stuff," whatever, you know. And I burst out in crying -- crying, next to Carla. I'm sobbing sitting there. She said, "What happened, what's the matter?" I said, "This shit makes no sense at all, but when we land, when this plane land in Schiphol, I see at the end of the runway, there's a line of black trucks, with SS, waiting for me, and they will kill me." A direct remembrance of the morning of the raid in the woods. And she said, "Well, you know that that's not true." I said, "I know that's not true," but that's how I felt it. It was like -- It was like I was right back there, you know? Well, we wer -- We landed, of course, and my cousin was there with her little blue Honda, and of course the SS disappeared from my mind. Anyway, the next day we meet Oskams, junior. By this time I found out the name is Oskam, not Boscamp, and Oskam ju -- Oskam junior, who doesn't look at all like his father, but he looks like his mother, you know, have a round face, and round body, and very jolly guy, and he's a retired plumber, and then we meet him in this tiny little doll's house, like they have in Holland. The whole house fits about in this -- in this room, you know? And they have the coffee, and the cake, as always in Holland, you know, you have to eat coffee, and you know, and big cakes with great

almond paste in it, lovely. And we sitting down, and we meet his wife, and -- so he said, "What can I do for you?" I said, "Well I -- I didn't know who your father was, really, because it was all so secret." And he tells me a little bit about his father, and it comes out that Oskam came from a family of all Nazis, Dutch Nazis, and bad ones, anti-Semites. People who tried to discover where Jews were hidden, and found them, and -- and denounced them to the Germans. The worst. The whole family was one big heap of garbage, you know? He was the only good one. But because the whole family was so bad, his reputation was -- was bad -- for the Germans was excellent, because he came from this virulent Nazi family, they thought he was so too, and when -- when I show you a picture of him, he looks like it, like a Nazi in black uniform, and everything. He was a good man. Anyway, we're talking, and he tells me about this br -- his father, and then -- and then I said, "Listen, did you know there was a hut in the woods not far from here?" And he said, "Yes, I -- I knew that, my father told me that." I said, "Did you know who was in the hut?" He said, "No, I don't know. My father didn't tell me too much about it." I said, "You didn't know that I was in there?" He said, "No, I -- I don't." He said to me, "Why are you asking me these questions?" I said, "Well, I had this crazy idea," -- all this comes after the revelations in 1991, the conference. I -- I had to find out everything now. I said, "I thought if maybe there were a group of men in there, and I probably saw them for the last time when they were alive. And I thought maybe a brother or a sister, or maybe even a father or a mother might still be alive, and I could tell them at least, for that

last morning, when we ran into the hut and warned them, and," -- and he's listening to me, and he says to me, "But Mr. Lessing, I just want to tell you something wrong with your story." I s -- And I thought, "What the hell does he know? He was four years old at the time." I-I -- I said, "What do you mean there's something wrong with my story?" He said, "Well, I don't know much what happened there," he said, "but I know one thing. Nobody was arrested that morning. They all escaped." Now, you've got to realize, for 50 years I have lived with the idea, on and off, not every day, not every week, but at least once a month, I would think about the morning of the raid on the hut, and how we stormed in, my buddy and I, and warned the men, and pulled the blankets off them, and shouted, "It's a raid, it's the SS, get up, the Germans are here." And then, when we saw that they were all up and out and awake, we fled. And always the question came up, we should have stayed, maybe. We should have stayed with them, helped them more. But then it went in my mind, then, not the seven that were there, but we would have been caught, too, and we'd have been killed. This way, there were seven killed, at least two escaped. And that went on through the years, this feeling of guilt that we -- I didn't stay long enough. I should have spent more time there. I -- I -- So what? I might have been killed with them, but -- but then that didn't make any sense. We did warn them, and you know, and we did our best, and so we couldn't help it, you know, this kind of stuff. And here this man tells me they all escaped. So instead of being guilty of maybe not doing enough, it now comes out, I've actually saved their lives, or helped save their lives. So, I

come out of that conference with this man -- this man, and my cousin is there, and she says, “So, how was it?” I said, “You can’t -- I can’t believe this. The men whom I thought were killed, all survived.” “God,” she says, “that’s amazing. Who were they?” I said, “He didn’t know. I don’t know either.” By the way, I should backtrack for one second. At the beginning of the conference of my talk -- it is not a conference, but a talk with -- with Oskam junior, he said, “Mr. Lessing, I went into the basement to see if there’s anything I could find on my father, and you know, there were thousands of paper my father had gathered through the years. They were all the old tickets that he had given to people,” you know, where you don’t have a -- you don’t have a na -- an a -- license plate in the back of your car, or people didn’t have a l -- a light on the front of their bicycle, and there were thousands of those tickets, or copies of tickets. And he said, “I threw all those away. I saved a few things,” and he came up with a picture. “But,” he says, “I have something here, and it had -- was sent to my father by your mother.” I said, “My mother? From where?” He says, “I don’t know. It looks like from Africa someplace. Algiers?” He fishes out -- now this is 1992 I’m talking about, so it’s seven years ago, he digs out of there a postcard sent by my mother, to his father, saying that she came out of Bergen-Belsen, she doesn’t know what’s the mat -- what -- what happened to her husband and s -- and her -- and her three sons. She wonder if they’re still alive. Would he know something more? And he hands me this postcard, it was like a postcard you get after somebody dies, and it reaches you. It wasn’t addressed to me, but it was my

mother's, she had written it, you know? She had typed it on the office typewriter there. I have it here. That's how it started out already. He says, "This something that interests you?" I said, "What do you mean it interests me? This is from my mother. She sent it after she came out of Bergen-Belsen, she," -- I don't know, it's amazing, anyway. You see, life was full of surprises, and -- so anyway, as I said, my cousin said, "Do you know who was in the c -- in -- in that hut?" I said no. She said to me, "You know, there's a radio program on here, comes on once a week, on Friday morning, it's called Address Unknown, goes on the Catholic radio station, and they interview people, there's a guy who interviews people, and -- who are sic -- looking for people they have lost years ago." I said, "Yeah, well, you know, I lost people 50 years ago. Sh -- Who the hell would know?" And she said, "Oh, you could try." So I call up the radio station, and I got a -- got the producer on the phone, and -- very nice lady, and she said -- I told -- I told her a little bit about this story, and she said, "That's a fascinating story, Mr. Lessing. Are you going to be here next month?" I said, "No, I -- I'm here just for a conference, I'm -- got to go back to the United States." And, she said, "Ah, that's too bad, because it takes us about a month to put program together, you know. We have already," and so on, so forth. You probably know all about this, and -- okay, we went to the conference -- there's something else I didn't tell you, and I should tell you about it. I don't --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the interview with Ed Lessing. This is tape three, side B. You were just talking about going back to Holland.

A: I said, "No, I have to go back to the United States." And we went to the conference. We went to visit a lady in Brussels who was -- played a part in a friend of mine's life, and -- which I haven't told you about, and I sort of should backtrack on that later, because it's an important part also, what happened to me. Anyway, we go to the conference, we come back to my cousin again, who lives in the center of Holland. She lives, by the way, very close to where I had been in hiding in the -- in the hut, and where Oskam junior lives, that's all around Utrecht, the area they're in now. So, she says, "Call the radio station, they've been calling here all -- all -- all the time." So I call them up, I get the producer upon the phone. "Yeah, Mr. Lessing, we -- we -- we decided that your story is so fascinating. Could you come next Friday morning?" I said, "Sure." So, Friday morning very early, Carla and I went to the radio station, and my cousin went also with us, and -- and I said to my -- said, "Carla," I said, "this is a waste of time," sit -- sitting there talking about something that happened 50 years ago, who the hell would remember an obscure hut in an obscure piece of wood somewhere in an obscure little village?" You're going to get that on. So -- But we were there, and there's a guy, he was sort of like -- you could say a little bit like, oh, the Letterman of the -- of the Dutch air waves, a very popular man. Hans Frombilihamber, Hans Frombilihamber, should put his name in here. And Hans seats me there, sits me down, and this is an hour program. They make a break after

the half hour, and then they gave our telephone number, and then people can call in if they have any -- have any [indecipherable]. Anyway, he interviews me, and I tell him the story about the hiding in the woods, and the -- the raid, and I tell him about finding Oskam junior back, and about the terrible surprise, or the wonderful surprise, to find out that I didn't -- what say -- did do enough, that I helped those people -- to save seven people, to save their lives, and -- and -- and he makes a break, and they play some music, and then the program goes on, and at the end, he says, "Well, thank you very much," and he -- "I'll show you where we have the telephone." So we go back to a room, and they have a dozen telephones there, and they have six people. And they do this every week, by the way, it's been going on for years. There's six people, they take the telephone calls, and they write on slips whatever call comes in. And so, I come there, and these dozen phones are ringing off the hook. And they've got a little stack of slips already this big. And they ask me, you know, as it goes on, as they're writing it, "Is this something?" And they hold it in front of me. And there was very strange things. There's a -- "Yes, my -- my sister was in there, in the hut with a dog," You know, I -- there's all kinds of stupid things. But, there was one -- th-there were several that were very interesting, one -- once -- one was -- said, "My brother was with you in the hut, but he is -- doesn't live here any more in Holland, he i -- lives now in Indonesia, and he -- I'm sure he would love to hear from you." His name on -- Herman Mueninghof. Okay, I don't know Herman Mueninghof, you know, but might be true. And a little later, another message comes in, it

says, “I was with you in the hut, and I’m listening to this broadcast, and I live right around the corner from the radio station. Please come and visit me afterwards.” Lou Fontichilin. I don’t know Lou Fontichilin, but it says he was there. So anyway, we got -- the phone keeps on ringing, and finla -- finally it dies down, and -- and I got this big stack of p-pieces of paper, and they -- not only -- that -- that’s not where it stops for them, any messages that are important, they research, no matter where they are. They go all over the world, find these people, and make contact with them. Okay, so it was wonderful. We get into my cousin’s little blue Honda, and we go around the corner, and I ring the door of an apartment house, and this huge woman comes out, and throws her arms around me, and says, “Eddie, I didn’t think you would make it.” I said, “Who are you?” She said, “Don’t you remember me?” I said, “No.” She says, “My name was Perk.” Her secret name was Perk during the war, “But,” she says, “I kept it. Cut me -- Call me Perk Fontichilar. And I remember you very well,” she says. “I used to be courier for the underground.” Vaguely I began to remember something. She says, “Come, Lou wants to meet you.” Leads me into the living room, and there’s an old man sitting, with white hair, but I immediately recognized him as one of the men I had left behind that morning. Ah, we cried, and we hugged, and we did, and -- I tell you, it was like -- couldn’t believe it, that all this was happening. Well, finally we settled down, and his wife brought some coffee, of course, and -- and we talked about the morning, and he said he ran away in his pajamas, and -- and without shoes, and everyone managed to get out. I said, “Lou, who were the people

who were in the hut?" And he said, "Well, I have some photographs that I took in the hut." I said, "You do?" He said, "Yes, I'll show you." And he -- his wife brought out a box of photographs, and there was photographs with all the men in the hut, and not only that, but also the Canadian, and the Englishman, the flyers from the RAF on there. But I wasn't on there. And he said, "But I also have a picture of you." I says, "You do?" And yes, and he came out with a photograph of -- of me standing in the hut, cynical young man.

Q: Can you describe it for me?

A: Well, what you're seeing here is -- looking at the bunk beds, the upright posts are made from pine trees that were cut by the men, and you can see there's an upper bunk, somebody's si-sitting on there eating a sandwich, and there's a lower bunk, where somebody's eating an apple, or something like that, and I'm leaning against one of the posts of the bed, in shorts, and a woolen jacket, and I'm looking directly into the camera. I'm the -- this man that I was talking with, had taken this photograph. It was taken in the fall of 1943, before the hut was raided. Now, I said to Lou -- and he described all the men, and their names. So now I knew who had been in the hut. And then I ask him the final question, I said, "Lou, everything is revealed except one thing. Who was my buddy, who was my partner that morning, who stood guard with me that morning, who escaped? Who was the man who my mother gave her bicycle to, and -- and the flashlight?" And he said, "I don't know, don't you know?" I said, "No." He said, "Don't you remember

anything of him?" I said, "I seem to remember a man who was a shoemaker in the regular life." And he said, "Oh, well, he wasn't a shoemaker, his father was a shoemaker, and his name was," -- I said, "What was his name?" He says, "His name was Jan Carman, Jan Carman." So now I knew who had been my buddy. I said, "Where is he, what happened to him?" He said, "Ed, I don't think you're -- it can be, because Jan Carman was with me that morning. We fled together." I said, "Lou, it can't be, he was with me. I think your memory must be mixed up." He said, "Well, maybe it is, you know, it's years ago, and I'm old, and," -- I said, "What happened to Jan Carman?" He said, "He was with me three weeks later, we were raided in -- in unrelated raid on a house with Jews, and he was -- he was taken, and he was executed in the dunes. And he is buried in the cemetery for the martyrs, the -- of the Resistance, in Holland." So the picture changed again. The man who were de -- who I thought were dead, were -- had -- had lived, the two who had escaped, one -- one had been caught, and was -- was executed. So, with that, I went one more -- once more back with -- with Oskam junior, to the place where the hut had been. And then I knew 50 years had gone by, because where there had been an impenetrable wood of young pine trees, now there was a forest you could look right through, with tall pine trees, and you could walk right through it. It poured that morning. It rained cats and dogs. I had a yellow slicker, and one of these plastic coats over me, and it poured, it was a dismal day. And we went to where the hut had been, and the only thing there was was a slight depression in the ground. I tried to find a splinter of wood, a little piece of glass,

something to take back, and there was nothing. And then finally he took me to the edge of the wood, where I stood that morning and watched the Germans come, and I stood there in the rain, and they distanced themselve a little bit -- there was some more people there. There were people from the -- the -- the nursing home next door. Anyway -- and I stood there, at the same place where I had stood that -- you know. And you know, it's weird, and it sound very dramatic, but it -- I stood there, and it was almost as if I could hear tires coming up again, up on the road. It was scary, it was scary being there. Must have been a little bit like Holocaust survivors going back to Auschwitz, you know? Anyway, there is -- there's too much to tell, because it's all in little details, there -- the ones who had given us food during the days when we were in the hut, were the nuns next door. Next to the wood was a fence, and then next to that, there was a -- what do they call that, where nuns live?

Q: A convent.

A: The convent. And the sisters at the convent, every day put food next to the fence, and we had cut a hole in it, and I would -- was one of the persons who was designated to bring the food to the hut. In the meantime, it had been converted from a convent to a nursing home for older nuns, and for other Catholics, and these people had heard the broadcast. They had never known what had happened next door to them. And so, I was invited to come to there, and we did that, and then I met some people who had been -- that same day had been incarcerated by the SS, who had just been caught hanging around.

The gardener, for instance, of the grounds of the convent had been -- he had come to see what was going on, he was thrown in jail. The Mother Superior, they had knocked on the door of the convent, and when she opened the door, they said, "We want to come in," and -- the SS said, and she had said, "You have nothing to li -- look for here," and they slapped her in the face, and she fell on the ground, and they walked right over her, and threw her in jail for three months, also. And Oskam, the policeman, was found walking around with a gun, which he was allowed to have, but in civilian clothes, because he had heard about the raid. And they took him in for awhile, he came back three weeks later, emaciated, and beaten up, and all this stuff was coming out of what had happened that day. Anyway, it was time to go back to the United States. I came -- I had -- I had a bunch of photographs from Lou, and I had made a whole slew of new friends from the radio station, and -- and from, you know, the people, and it was all wonderful. And so Carla and I went back, and I settled down here, in this room, and I'm sitting right here working, in December, 1992, I get a call. "Hi, this is Hans Frontikel in Holland, from the radio station, remember me, I'm -- I interviewed you?" I said, "Yeah, how you doing, Hans?" "Fine. I wonder if you could come to Holland, I have a TV program, and we're going to do a half an hour on the -- the Dutch Resistance, and also about the Jewish persecution, and I thought you, being involved in both, maybe I could interview you again, but now on television." I said, "Yeah, well that's very nice, but I don't have a budget to go for 20 minutes to Amsterdam." "Oh no," he said, "we pay your flight, and we pay your hotels

and everything." I said, "I'll be there." And so all of a sudden I found myself back in s -- in December, and this is what happened. H-Hans, my interviewer send his -- wh-what is it called, his -- the guy you -- an -- an editor. Tall guy, and he said, "Ed, I would like to go over the story once more with you, just quickly, for the interview, the day after tomorrow." I said, "Okay." I said, "First of all," -- no, I -- I -- I -- I said, "Okay, but," I said, "you know the story." "Yeah, we sed -- like to -- tell me a little bit shortly, again." And so I said, "Well," [indecipherable], it was in the camp, and [indecipherable] you know, and we got raided, and I was -- was out with a buddy, and" -- and he said, "Do you know who your buddy was?" I said, "Well, I didn't know in August, but now I've heard that it was a cert -- a -- a certain Jan Carman." And they said, "What happened to him?" And he said -- I -- I -- I s -- I said, "He was shot in the dunes. He is buried, and," I said, "I visited his grave yesterday." I had in the mean time, gone to the graveyard of the Resistance people, and there I cried over Jan's grave, and -- and -- Tong was his name, Tong, the editor. He said, "Okay," he said, "now, the day after tomorrow, I'll come and pick you up, and first we'll go to the museum of the Dutch Resistance." I said, "Oh." "Oh," he said, "well, I want to show you a film there, and," -- okay. So, we went there, and I sat there, and this was in the former synagogue, and so I sat there, and I watched this film, which seemed like an old film, it didn't seem -- I said, "Why are you showing me this?" "Well," he said, "I was told to do this," and I couldn't figure it out, you know? Anyway, when it was over, we went to the TV studio, and there on the set was a nice

thick couch, and on the end of the couch was a little Christmas tree, cause the program was going to be aired on -- on Christmas day. And it was a live audience. Oskam junior and his wife was there, and my cousin with her husband were there, and as -- my second cousin from -- from The Hague come over. And I was alone, Carla hadn't come with me ya -- you know. So, the lights went on, and there was Hans with a nice Christmas tie, and me, in little -- nice little Jewish boy, sitting next to a Christmas tree. So, by then I had been on TV a couple of times, and I had some idea, you know, I was here on channel 13, and I've been there with CNBC, and a couple other places, and -- and so I sort of knew what the routine was, you know, and the interviewer asks the questions, and you give the right answers, you know, and don't embarrass anybody, and you don't be idiot, you know. So, he said, "Mr. Lessing, many will remember you from this summer, when I interviewed you on radio, but now here you are again, and I want to ask you a few questions." And so he asked me where I was during the war. I said I was in hiding. And where were you in hiding? I -- Well, I was, among other places, was in this hut. And what happened? Well, we were raided. And -- And the interview went along fine, you know, standardized. By then I got a little bit, shall I say, blasé about the whole thing, you know? But it was fun to be there, and -- and he said, "So, Mr. Lessing, what happened?" I said, "Well, we stood guard, a buddy of mine, and -- and -- and I, and we happened to see the Germans coming, and we went back and warned the others, and," -- he said, "Do you know who your buddy was?" I said, "Well yes, he is Jan Carman, and he -- I visited his

grave yesterday, and he got executed by the Germans, near the dunes in Holland." And then he said something that did not fit in the thing, and he said, "Mr. Lessing, I want to tell you that we have received a part of a diary of the man -- your buddy, your partner who stood guard with you that morning, describing that morning, the raid, and everything, just like you tell it." And I thought for a second, and I thought, he is wrong, that can't be. Cause Jan Carman's date on his grave says he was -- he was executed in February, 1945 -- 1944, and we were raided on the 29th of December, 1943. There had only been a couple of weeks in between, and he was on the run all the time, I knew that from Lou. So I thought this -- something -- something is screwed up here, and -- but, you know, live audience, you're not going to -- so I said, "Oh." And then he said something that really chilled me to the bone. He said, "Mr. Lessing, I want to tell you that the man who was with you that morning, who stood guard with you then, was here -- is here to talk with you." And I became ice cold, and I thought, I just visited his grave, and the dead don't rise from the grave, and -- and he is so fucked up here, you know with this, I'm sorry, excuse my language, but I didn't know what to think. And a light went on on the far end of the stage, and this man walks out, tall man, who I'd seen in the photographs, who was described to me as the man who lived in Indonesia. And out walks this man, Herman Mueninghof. And he walks over to me, and he grabs my hand, and he said, "Eddie, I'm so glad you're alive." And I said, "Herman, it's wonderful." I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "The TV people brought me here." I said, "All the way

from Indonesia?" I said, "What do you do there?" He said, "I'm a Catholic bishop, and I live in New Guinea." I said, "But why are you here?" He said, "They wanted me to meet you." I said, "That's wonderful," I said. He said, "You don't seem to remember that -- how we stood guard together that morning. You don't -- don't you remember how we -- how your mother saved our lives? How your mother, that night, gave me her bicycle, and the flashlight?" And all of a sudden I realized I was wrong. It -- It wasn't the other man, it was this man, this bishop, this Catholic bishop, Herman Mueninghof. And again the picture changed. The -- Again we -- the two of -- two of us had survived, and the others had survived also, the only one who had not survived was this poor Jan Carman, who had been in the hut, who I had remembered vaguely. And we talked, and we cried, and this just -- I said -- he said to me, "Your mother saved -- saved our lives." I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "No, you don't." I said, "What do you mean I don't?" He said, "Do you remember how your mother gave me her bike, and a little flashlight?" I said, "Yes, I do remember. You went out, you -- you pedaled away in -- in the darkness." He said, "I hadn't gone more than two minutes away when a German sprang out in the middle of -- of the road -- the path, and said, halt, get off the bike, stand against the wall." There was a little pumphouse there. He said, "And I stood against the wall, with my face to the wall, and he frisked me from top to bottom, to feel if I had any weapons. If your mother hadn't told us to bury the weapons that we had, our -- our nine millimeter Mausers," he said, "they would have shot me, probably, on -- on the spot." I said, "What happened then?"

He said, “I don’t know where I got the guts, but I said, what are you doing? Why are you stopping me like this?” And the German said, “I know you’re one of these -- these terrorists from the hut.” And Herman said, “What hut? I don’t know any hut. What are you talking about?” And he said, “Yes, don’t deny it, you’re one of the terrorists from the hut. We have orders to arrest you all, and we’ll get you.” He said, “I have no idea what y,” -- he said, “I come from night school.” He says, “You come from night school, what? Where night school?” He says, “I come from night school in Zeist, and,” -- he said, “What are you studying there?” He said, “I’m studying to be a Notary Public,” which was true, Herman was studying to be a Notary Public. And he said -- and he said, “I felt that the guy, what he really wanted, was the little flashlight.” Now this wasn’t an ordinary flashlight, it was something that was worth gold in the last -- in -- during the war. It was made by Philips. It was a little hand generator, you squeezed it, and it made light. And in a time that there were absolutely no batteries any more, these things were worth gold. People would buy -- pay hundreds of gilders to get one. And the guy wanted this, you know, it was worth something to him. And Herman was very smart, he says, “I thought that if he arrested me, he would have to hand everything over to his superior officer, but if he let me go, he could keep the flashlight. So he -- I said to him, give me the bike, the bike is no good to you, it’s solid tires.” He said, “What I -- M-My mother is waiting with dinner, you know.” And he said, “I could see the guy thinking, and then he said, “Nah, alza gazie, go.” And he said, “I got on the bike, and I pedaled away. And if it hadn’t been

for your mother telling us to drop the weapons and bury them," he says, "I wouldn't be here." Another surprise. There was no end to the -- to the surprises.

Q: Let me ask you some general questions, because it's interesting how you talk about the picture changing, and even over the last 10 years, all this information that you've now learned from, you know, about ha -- what happened 50 years ago, can you just talk just generally about what it's been like for the last decade, to revisit the history, and have it all change, you know, fill in all those holes.

A: Wh-What about it?

Q: Just what that experience is like, to -- to now, all this time later, be learning the history of what you went through?

A: It's a little bit like being hungry, and never really having enough to eat. It's a weird thing to say, I guess. I am daily still trying to find out what happened, not exactly to me, but what happened to -- to the Dutch Jews. I read articles, I -- my cousin send -- the same cousin with her little blue Honda, sends me, almost weekly, articles from the Dutch newspapers describing the things that had happened in Holland. The money that's missing, the paintings that were stolen. The -- The archive of -- of -- of -- of name cards that was found recently, abandoned by the Dutch government, somewhere in -- in it -- on the third floor. All these things still are filling out my picture of what happened in Holland, to the Dutch Jews. Every new book that comes out, I immediately buy, and they send me from Holland, in Dutch, or whatever. That story seems to never be completely

complete. There's always new -- seem to be new little things coming out. Because it's impossible to remember two and a half years, every minute of it. So, I found out some of the things, and -- and -- but there's still the desire to find out exactly where was I, what did I think, what happened? It's an ongoing thing, it will go on til the end of my life now, because the -- the -- the clarific -- it -- it's like -- it's like troubled water that slowly becomes clarified, more and more and more and more, who we were then, what we were, what we did, why did I do this, why did I? So, that's the best that I can tell you, it -- it is a need to find out, still. And it all started in that God damn moment there, on that seventh floor of that hotel. It all started there. It's very strange. It was time to go home. I got on the plane, very, very tired, because so much has been revealed to me now again. And I got back to JFK, to the JFK airport in New York, and Carla was waiting for me there. And she said, "Well, how did it go?" I said, "I got to tell you something. It's very strange, but for a Jewish boy like me, has now ha -- I have a friend who is a Catholic bishop in New Guinea, in Indonesia." I subsequently asked Herman to send me the complete diary, and when I got it there were pages missing. And I send him a letter, and I said -- I call him Herman, I don't -- don't call him Your Holiness, or Your Worship, or whatever. Or bishop. And I said, "Herman, where are the pa -- missing pages, again?" He said, "There were things in there that were not so nice." I said, "I don't care. I want -- would like to know." And he send me the pages. There were remarks made by the members of the Resistance in the hut, about Jews not being reliable enough, you couldn't trust them with

your life. I mean, this is -- this is ironic. They had this 17 year old Jewish kid, he was not in the Resistance, he was just in hiding. They didn't really want him in the hut, but Oskam, who was very influence -- influential in that area for the Resistance, and he was pivotal for them, had asked them to take in this Jewish kid, and so they had to take him in. But it wasn't -- there were several members who said, "Well, we ca -- we can't really trust him, you know?" What is so superiorally ironic is that I later on saved the God damn lives of these men. I mean, it's interesting how things evolve. Let me see. You don't want to go forever with this -- with this -- are you running out of tape?

Q: This -- This tape is about to end [indecipherable]

A: Okay, then let's -- this is a good --

Q: Let's stop for a second.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is the continuation of an interview with Ed -- with Ed Lessing, and this is tape four, side A. And we were just going to talk in general, sort of, thinking about how you're a different person than you might have been without the experiences you went through during the war. Let's first start in terms of religion, cause you had mentioned during -- during the war that you had made that promise to continue -- you made a promise to God to continue with religion, I wonder if you'd talk about that, a-and how that didn't work out.

A: They say that in the -- in the first World War, I guess, that in the trenches, every -- every soldier becomes religious, and prays. And in a sense that's, I guess, what happened to me. And my mother would have certainly approved of it when I s -- when I said that -- I promised God that I would try to keep his -- the laws he had given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and in the desert, that I would follow them all my life, if he would just spare my family. And they survived. And I held on for years afterward, in this country, I would -- I had my own kind of Jewish religion. On Yom Kippur, I would take a prayer book -- no, I wouldn't -- not -- not a prayer book, I would take the Old Testament, and I would go out to the Hudson river, and I'd sit there all day long, and I'd fast, and I read. I read about the Jews, and their history, and the battles, and King David, and King Solomon, and all the wonderful stories of the Old Testament, and of my people. But at -- again, as I began to find out what the Holocaust really had -- had been, it all seemed -- religion seemed like a

farce. God had taken his own people, and murdered one and a half -- let the Germans murder one and a half million of his own children, little children, innocents. It didn't make any sense. Like so many other Holocaust survivors, I guess, there was no thinking of God after Auschwitz. And so I slowly, slowly left it all. I became -- I read more, and more, and more, and none -- none of it pointed to the existence of -- of God. It all pointed out to the -- to the terrible things that human beings can do. So, religion became not important any more to me. What did become more and more important, though, is the fate of the Jewish people. I am very fervent in my defense of the j -- of the Jewish people, as a most marvelous, marvelous people. Difficult people. Moses knew that already, goes up for a couple of days on the mountains, come back, and they already screwed it up, they made a golden calf. There's a lesson there. I mean, the J-Jews are difficult, and they are impossible, but they're also genius, they are the salt of the earth. And to me, the Jewish people in Israel, they're -- our country, I mean, this is all miraculous, after 2,000 years. Jews have waited for this, and we've got a country. And I thank God. We have worked -- We have gone there for five years at least, and given our lives to it. It was well worth it. So, religion is sort of evolved into a fervent nationalism, and -- and a defense of the Jewish people. I will accept no blame whatsoever to Israel, what they do, or whatever they do. It's -- I'm like the old fashioned English -- Englishman, you know? My country -- Or maybe it was an American, I don't know. I think it was an Englishman who said, my country right or wrong. To me, the -- the security of the Jewish people is uppermost, and

it sounds horrendous, but if it would be necessary to throw every Arab out of -- out of Israel in order to secure it's -- it's -- the safety of it's people, I'd say, don't hesitate, do it. We have suffered for 2,000 years, murder and mayhem. I mean hangings, burnings, it's horrible, the whole Jewish history is -- is one of -- of -- of suffering. Enough. Now it's our time. And so, I guess, my religion became really my love for -- for my people. And it's difficult sometimes you know? I -- We had to -- Carla has two grand -- had a grandnephew here, very nice young man who worked for the Israeli embassy here, and he came with his girlfriend, and they stayed here for three months upstairs in a little room. And we had this -- we had this conversation, and they said, "Oh, we don't -- we don't give a damn for politics in Israel, it's horrible. We don't want to know anything about politics, and we don't want to -- and I think we should give the land back to the -- to the -- to the Palestinians, or whoever, and th-the Syrians, and -- and we don't want to be involved in this." And I -- These were the people I admire, these are the sabbers, the people who are born there, and I said, "Let me tell you something. Let me give you at least a view of a Holocaust survivor. We had no country, we had nowhere to go. There was no way out, they murdered us by the millions." I said, "The Jewish people suffered unbelievably, [indecipherable]. Now there's a country, and you are our hope." I said, "The first thing for us as -- as survivors, is a security, a safe haven, where Jews can go, where Jews can be defended. So don't say that you're not interested, please." And they understood. So, I don't know if that's an answer for your question, but that's as close as I

can come. Religion is no longer of an -- any importance to me at this point, but the fate of my people is, very much so.

Q: Let me ask you about the -- the interviews that your brother Fred did with -- with the family. First of all, when did -- when did that happen, did that start to begin this process of being interested in [indecipherable] this --

A: With my brother? It -- Can you hold on a second? I'll get the book --

Q: Sure.

A: -- and show you the dates, and --

Q: Oh, so tell me what this is?

A: This is a box, which is about -- as you can see, about 12 to 15 inches long, and it holds audio tapes that my brother did with the whole family. Underdark means diving under, going into hiding. The family's recollection of the Holocaust years, and there are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 tapes, and everybody that I know is like -- Carla, my wife, and Hans, my cousin, Carla -- Fred, my brother. Aba is my brother Art, who changed his name to Aba at some point. Me, Ed, Lene, my mother. Lene and Art is my father and -- my mother and father, and my father. And --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Transcription. No, it doesn't give -- has a wonderful preface, by the way, and the first interview, I think was probably 1979.

Q: So, these interviews began long before your process of realizing that this was important to go back, and --

A: Well, not so -- not so long, a couple of years before, yes. We had -- The first interview, with my mother is really -- I would love to write a play around it, a one act play, maybe. It is an interview that is at the same time serious, I've quoted some of it to you, and it's also hilarious, because everybody is sitting around a round table, and it's not just the -- it started out as a regular interview with my mother, but it finally -- everybody threw in their two cents worth, there are interruptions, and -- and -- and my father says I -- should I bring the dog to the vet tomorrow? And it's like -- it's a wonderful interview, I would love to see it on stage, as a beginning of my mother's story. So, the other dates, I -- I -- I don't know if you want to know them all, but [indecipherable] has -- he transcribed this, by the way, with his son Ben, who doesn't know any Dutch, and half of my mother's story is in Dutch. [indecipherable] I'll just give you another date. Oh, this is even earlier, 1985. He interviewed my father at 1985. And he interviewed me, I'll do the last one, okay? He interviewed me in 1983, and my -- my other brother even later, I think. Did I answer your question, or did I digress again?

Q: [indecipherable] Another question I would ask, from the -- your interview, you talked a lot about going back to therapy, and sort of looking back at that time, and I wanted to sort of ask, not a specific question, but how that process has sort of changed your other views, too?

A: The therapy? Oh, night and day. About 25 years ago, I had ulcer symptoms, and I went to my mem -- my -- my house doctor, and -- that's a typical Dutch translation, isn't it, my house doctor? I don't know what they call it [indecipherable]

Q: Family doctor?

A: Yeah, family doctor. In Holland they say your house doctor. Every once in awhile I catch myself with these Dutch translations. And he said, "Well, you know you -- you have to get an -- undergo a G.I. series, you -- you have like ulcer symptoms, you may have an ulcer. Anyway, it came out I didn't have an ulcer yet, but I was very close, and he said -- he recommended that I go to a clinic in a hospital nearby, where it -- for very cheap, and you could get therapy, you know, but -- and it was -- c-could be seen by a -- so I contacted a -- a doctor there, and he said -- and when he found out that I was a Holocaust survivor -- that was just sort of be -- people began to be aware that there was something special with people who have come through that, and -- and I started going every -- once a week to this -- to this clinic. Unfortunately, after awhile, that doctor couldn't see me any more, but he recommended me to another doctor, Doctor Hillel Swiller, and I went to him for about -- one of the first sessions I had with him, I said, "Look, I want to tell you something doctor," I said, "I am not one of these guys who believes in going for years and years and years into psychotherapy. I see it more or less, exactly the way, if I break a leg, I go to a doctor, and he puts a cast around it, and then like a month later, or you know, whenever, two months later, the cast comes off, and

that's the end of it, you know?" Well, that was 23 years ago, and -- and I don't go now any more, I -- but he totally changed me, because I was a very angry person. I can still get very angry, but at least I -- I calm down again. I was very depressed, skies were gray all the time, and I was very angry. I was not a very good father, I'm afraid, with my children, I got very angry sometimes, I would throw things against walls, and ooh, when I think back of it, it's almost unbelievable that I was like that, but I -- I was. Had no insight in myself. That is all changed, you know, you begin to -- maybe just age, but also, again, finding out about what happened to us then, has clarified my own personality a lot, you know? I can see myself now as -- as that -- the little boy, who -- how he grew up, and how he -- the 1929 episode in -- in the United States was a terrible one. My mother had to farm me out. She farmed me out to a young woman who -- I don't know if she beat me, but she was very bad for me. I remember crying, and doing -- and finally my mother found out, and she took me away from there, and farmed me out to old people, grandma, grandpa they were called, and they were lovely for me. But that first -- first experience, being separated from my mother, who had to go to work because my father was in the hospital then, and being alone, and being mistreated, when the war came, and the whole thing started all over again, the loneliness, and the danger and the fear, I think it all accumulated. And then we had, what, 25 years of doing nothing, and then you wind up with a psychiatrist. It's -- You know, it's funny. One of the last sessions -- recently I had to go back to him for just the one session, because I have interviewed a man nearby here,

who had been in Auschwitz with his brother, and the story was so terrible that I had nightmares overnight, wh-what happened to him, happened to me during the night, and the next morning I was crazy, I -- I couldn't clear my head, and I -- my wife said, "You've got to go see -- see a shrink because, you know, this has been too much of a thing." And I went back to him, and we tal -- and he helped me immediately, and we talked about it, and he -- he explained to me why it upset me so much, because it was -- this man had been with his brother in Auschwitz, and it brought all my war stories back, the danger, and the fear with my little brothers, and -- and I said, "You know, I never talked about the Holocaust with you, did I?" And he began to laugh, he said, "You did nothing else." He says, "You did -- you did all the time," he said. I said, "I can't remember that, did I talk about? I thought I only talked about sex, and -- and -- and women, and," -- he said, "You crazy." He said, "You," -- no, he didn't say I was crazy. He said, "Ed," he said, "every session you talked about the Holocaust." "Oh, I did? All right." So, I don't know where we started with this question, I lost myself in the answer, but -- oh, did th -- did therapy change me, how did it change me? It made me into a more wise person, I think. More livable person. I don't think our marriage would have lasted if I hadn't, was pretty impossible, you know? Carla is very even person, is like -- the whole family, her mother was like that, her brother is like that, they're wonderful people. They -- They're not -- don't have great emotional outbursts on the up side, but also not on the

down side. They're very, very stable, and I was very unstable. So, I am more stable now, let's put it that way.

Q: In -- In terms of what's made you and Carla so involved now, recently, the last 10 years, where maybe other people, other survivors, they've withdrawn more, what's made you do -- choose that path, and also how is it -- how has that changed you?

A: You know, I -- I've thought about it, and I've come up with an answer that may not be the right one, but when you deal with Holocaust survivors, as you do now, and as I have done in interviews, you realize there's an enormous range of suffering. Those people -- and I've interviewed people who were lying in a hole in the ground in the woods for nine months, frozen practically to death. That is not comparable to what I -- what happened to me. They saw th -- I've interviewed people where, first their fa -- their mother, then their father was killed, then the brothers, a -- a woman had seven brothers, she wound up with one after the war. One by one they were killed in Polish forests where they were in hiding. One by one, she saw them being slaughtered. That woman is probably -- it is probably impossible for her to go out and do interviews -- interview other Holocaust survivors. I come from a family that survived complete. An oddity in Holland, by the way. Holland has a -- has a -- I don't know if you're familiar with the statistics of Holland. Holland is the worst country after Poland and Greece, and certainly by far the -- the worst country for survivors in -- in the -- in -- west of Europe, western Europe. So, my k -- my family survived. I came out with a father, I came out with a mother, I came

out with two brothers. I came out with cousins, I came with uncles, aunts, a whole family. I think that because of that, it is possible for me to go and interview other people, and not go completely to pieces. I think if I had been like the woman who saw her family slaughtered one by one in the Polish forest, I don't think I could be like -- sitting here, talking with you like this. So -- Then there is something else, this is usually not talked about. There is an intellectual range in Holocaust survivors, as well as non-Holocaust survivors, course. It makes a big difference what -- where you come from, intellectually. If you come from a Polish farming family, a Jewish family, somewhere in a shtetl, where the father was a shoemaker, and the mother did the household, and -- and life was fairly primitive, but wonderful, but then, that's not my background either. I come from a family, my father was an artist. My mother was a telegraph operator when she -- when -- when no women were practically working. I come from a family that loved music, loved literature, loved all the kinds of things. I come from a family where I have one -- two brothers who were college professors, one -- one has changed in the meantime, to be an -- a psych -- a psychotherapist. You know, this makes a big difference. I-It's possible for -- for Carla and me, come from a little different group, little different level, to help others. When -- When we go to national conferences, and I see the others, they're not that many that -- I cried when I saw them the first time, the 1600 hidden children, and I still feel, you know, love for them, but -- but I realize now that not all Holocaust survivors are people that -- that I can -- that I can feel at home with, you know? And it's interesting in

many of the interviews that I've done, the interviewee said, "Ed, we got to get together afterwards, you know. Let's go out, you and my -- my wife, and -- a-a-and I, and you and your wife, and we're going to have dinner together." And I thought, "I can't do this, not with you." I mean, very primitive people sometimes. Lovely people, but primitive, I couldn't -- you know, I couldn't. There was nothing we had in common, except that I interviewed them. So -- Let's see, what was the qu -- what was the question? Oh, why do we -- why can we do this, and others cannot? I think it had to do with our background, the fact that we're not too damaged, and the fact that we came from backgrounds where reading, and -- and -- and culture was of -- of importance. And you'll find this all over, if you look at the people who, let's say, are important in -- in the Holocaust community, they're most -- mostly people who were not that terribly damaged, and who -- who can write, and read, and understand, and so -- or a psychologist, or whatever. I don't kn -- I -- I think -- that is my view of it.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to --

A: Yeah. I forgot something. And I think he deserves a place, and I don't think he is in the original interview, because he couldn't be. After the conference, in 1981, of the Hidden Children, a letter arrived at my -- my wife's desk in New York, of the Hidden Children, from a man in Yonkers, his name was Eddie Strauss, have you heard of him? No. Eddie Strauss wrote a letter, and it said, "I'm so sorry, I'm a hidden child from Belgium, and I'm so terribly sorry I couldn't come to the conference, because I was in the

hospital, but I would like to take up contact with you." And Carla came home with this letter, and she handed it to me, and said, "Listen, I'm very busy, and this man writes, and he lives right nearby here, about 10 minutes away, in Yonkers. Maybe you can contact him." Okay. So one day I call -- called up this man, and I got him on the phone, and I -- and I said, "Ah, Mr. Strauss?" "Yes?" I said, "My wife handed me this letter, could I come and say hello to you?" You know. "Yeah, I heard you -- you were sorry you couldn't come to the conference." "Yes," he said. So I went down, straight down Broadway, same Broadway you have in New York, and entered a dark apartment, climbed five stairs, five steps up from street level, and entered a dark apartment, and there in the far -- far end of the dark apartment sat a man in a wheelchair, with one leg. I hadn't expected this. He was overweight, and I shook his hand, and I said, "So, tell me about yourself." And out comes this story that he was -- he lived in Antwerp, in Belgium, and he was play -- out playing one day, and he stayed out too late, and when he came back, a neighbor grabbed him from the street, and said, "You can't go home." And he found out later that his mother, his grandmother, his three year old sister, and his one year old baby brother had been snatched away from the house that day by -- by the Germans, put in a truck. They were sent to Auschwitz, and the day that they arrived, they were all gassed, all murdered. That was Eddie's background, and his family. He wound up in an orphan home in -- Belgium had six or seven orphan homes that were set up by the -- by the Judenrat, and with help of the Belgian Queen Mother, and the Germans knew about it.

So these children were really, I say, hostages of the Germans. But they were cared for, and taken care of, and Eddie had been one of them. He had, after the war, he had come to the United States. He -- He went to an uncle of his in Manhattan, and -- and his grandfather lived there, and it didn't work out. They were German Jews, and they couldn't understand this boy who had, at one time, been found in the street, totally full of lice, and -- and full of wounds, and -- so Eddie was placed somewhere in New Jersey, with people who were very good for him, and he went to -- he went to college, and he graduated, very smart. Joined the American army -- was drafted into the American army, and of all places was sent to Germany, because he knew fluent German, and he knew French fluently, and English. And he worked for the adjutant general, or something like that, in -- in -- in -- in Munchen, or so-someplace, interviewing Germans to see if they were Nazis, and so on. He came back, and he invented a story about himself, he made an artificial life. The people didn't know that he was Jewish. He st -- He said that when people asked about his parents, he said they had died in a car accident in Texas, and he had had -- he had a sister somewhere, but also in Texas, and he hadn't seen her in years, and so on. He told me all this. His name was Eddie, like mine. Our birthdates happened to be the same, the eighth of May. And somehow another, I decided that I would adopt this man. And I began to do what in Jewish we call mitzvahs, good deeds. I got him -- first of all, I got him money. I helped him with everything he needed, as much as I could, and he became like a brother to me, and I was his brother, you know, I'm the brother that

had died. And I took care of him as much as I could, for years. He went -- He had only one leg, he had diabetes, and about a year after I met him, his other leg had to be amputated, so now he had no legs at all, and he wanted to commit suicide, he had tried once to commit suicide. Ha -- But he got a new apartment, a nice, clean apartment, and he had electric wheelchair, which made him very happy. And I gi -- brought him gifts, and I brought him books, and I talked with him, and -- and I took him to Hidden Child meetings in New York, on Purim, or you know. And he was here, we sat in this room with him for Passover, to the seder, we invited him, and brought him with. Lot of trouble, always, getting him with the wheelchair to there -- places. And we took him to Washington, I took him to Washington when the Hidden Children, our group from Westchester, went to the Holocaust museum, he wanted to go there, and you can't imagine what we went through, took Eddie in the wheelchair to -- to Washington. And February, 1997, he died in front of the computer I had gotten him. He wanted to learn the computer, and he learned, and then he was suddenly dead, and he was gone. And it fell to me to take care of his stuff, little stuff that he had. And it fell to me, about a year ago, to put a -- to take care of his funeral, and then later to put a stone on -- on his grave. And I decided that there was more to him than just -- more to his grave, and there should be more to that grave, and I had a gra -- on the gravestone, I had a stonemason chisel that -- something like, in this place -- let this place remember not only Eddie Strauss, whose name was really Abraham Katz, but also his mother, with her name, and his father, and

his sister Esther, and his little one year old brother. I put all their names on there, with the dates, all killed in Auschwitz. So that gravestone is nearby here, and I'm very proud of that, that at least that's the last thing I could do for Eddie. And I wanted to put that in, it was also a part of my development after the war, as a -- an aware Jew, let me put it that way.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Conclusion of Interview