

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Frederick Wohl
February 13, 2004
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Frederick Wohl, conducted by Margaret West on February 13, 2004 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Bethesda, Maryland and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

Interview with Frederick Wohl
February 13, 2004

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Frederick Wohl, conducted by Margaret West, on February the 13th, 2004, in Bethesda, Maryland. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Frederick Wohl on November the 22nd, 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A.

Answer: Oh no, this is yours, isn't it?

Q: Yes. Mr. Wohl, I wonder if you'd first of all just tell me on tape, we'll record, your -- your name and your place and date of birth.

A: This is Fred Wohl, actually Frederick Richard Wohl. I was born on June 7th, 1914 in Baden-Baden, Germany.

Q: And I'm also interested in knowing y -- your name, Wohl, is that a -- a German name, a Jewish name?

A: That's a -- a -- it -- it's an o-original. My family, far as I know, never changed their last name, and I know my grandfather -- really my great-grandfather supposed

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to have come from Hungary, but I don't know enough about that, only that they told my father that he's coming from Hungarian horse thieves, that's about all. My grandmother came from Poland. My -- that's on my father's side. On my mother's side, her grandfather, I think, had a flour mill in the German state of Hesse, and they were pretty well off. My grandmother became a widow before I was born, and she - - a -- a -- her brother-in-law, Joseph Berliner, took care of her affairs in various ways. And I remember him as a very, very stern man, who however, when it was needed, came through. My parents were married in 1908, and with the dowry that my mother got, my father bought the pharmacy in Baden-Baden. This was a Grand Duke's court pharmacy and one of the requirements was that the owner would visit the castle every year, in high hat and o-outfit, just as a courtesy, leave his card there, and to continue to be the pharmacist of the court. That even continued after the German revolution, as long as the Grand Duchess Louise was alive.

Q: So it ha -- it was a business with a great history to it.

A: Yeah. The pharmacy building was from the 15th century, and is still unchanged, mostly, from the outside at least. Although when my father decided to get central heating, they dug up underneath the store and found buckets of Roman coins and Roman cups and things, which he gave to the museum in Baden-Baden. He had kept one -- one glass, but that's -- was lost in the -- naturally, during the -- in the war. His name is no longer at the museum in Baden-Baden.

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Q: What was your father's full name and his date of birth?

A: His name is Julius Wohl, and his birth was the eighth of June, what's the -- must have been '89? Something like that, I'm not --

Q: A-And your mother's full name?

A: My mother's full name was Gisela Littman, and she was nine years younger than my father. Her birthday was August 24th.

Q: And --

A: I think my father's was '81, and hers was '89. 1881 and 1889, something like that.

Q: Mm-hm. And you were one of three children, two sisters --

A: [indecipherable] actually, my mother had five children and three survived. When -- that was a time when babies didn't have too much a chance of surviving. Even so, she had her children at a hospital in Baden-Baden. He -- ma -- she first had a son, who did not survive, and then after my youngest sister, she had another baby girl that was born dead, something like that.

Q: And what was the -- what were the names of your two sisters, and what was the birth order?

A: My older sister Ilsa, who became Mrs. Ilsa Burns was born f -- second of September, 1915, and Margaret was born the second of September -- no, she was 1915, Ilsa was 1912, the older one. And none of them are alive any more.

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Q: So you were the baby?

A: No, I was in between.

Q: Ah, so -- ah, 1914, of course, of course.

A: Yeah, yeah. And Ilsa died on the island of Majorca. She had cancer, never told us, but she had been smoking and drinking all her life. Not excessive drinking, but years ago, quite a bit. Her favorite was Uta, a-and she died. I don't remember the years of either one. Margaret got sick and she had to have a brain surgery, which she had in New Jersey, where she owned a little house, and unfortunately she never recovered properly and my daughters looked after her and took her to a place in Arizona, where they both lived. And she -- she died there. She died about five years ago, I would say. So I say, I'm -- I'm no good on these dates, but I remember that it happened, and that was pretty sad, but she didn't realize that, she was at a point where she was happy with her life. Even so, she wasn't all there. That's the family. And my first wife, Lillian Eisenberg, was born in March six. She was six years younger than I am, that must have been '20 - 1920. And we had two daughters. We had a good marriage, but then she got sick and she had to be on dialysis for two and a half years, after which she -- she died here in -- in Washington. And I was alone for a little while, then I got married to Evelyn Mitzner, on June 26, 11 years ago. We had known Evelyn and Ernie Mitzner for many years, and Ernie was a good friend of -- to me, and he died from -- what's it? Sugar. The --

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Q: Oh, diabetes?

A: Diabetes. The -- he was an amazing guy. He first lost one leg, then he wa -- lost another leg, and then he lost a couple of fingers, and finally he ha -- his heart give up. But he enjoyed life in spite of his disability. They had a nice house in Annapolis, and we went together on weekends. They had a weekend home in West Virginia, and we went on vacations together. And so, after a year and a few months of being alone, I married Evelyn and sold my house. And we are pretty happy to -- happy together, but in April 2003, she had unexpected bleeding in her brain, and she -- she had blain sur -- brain surgery, and she -- fortunately -- she is still in recovery actually, but she is doing br -- amazingly well, which makes me quite happy. One month after that, for no reason whatsoever, I got sick. In May, 2003. And at the Suburban Hospital they operated my -- my -- what is it? My belludder -- underbelly. I -- they told me afterwards it may have had to do with a hernia that I had been operated on about 40 years earlier. And they put things in order, but after they had closed me up, they had to open me up again to make sure everything was working. And this separ -- second opening damaged my heart. So I was pretty sick since May of 2003. I was then in and out of hospital and recovery places, and I'm now home with my wife, but we had to decide that this home is too big and too difficult to keep for us, and in the next two months, we'll be moving to the hired

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residence on Connecticut Avenue, where we have a two bedroom and two bath apartment. And that's it.

Q: Well, I'd like to go back to the beginning.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And -- and have you tell me more about your childhood in Baden-Baden. What do you remember about your extended family then?

A: Well, my -- my father and my mother were prominent citizens of Baden-Baden. He was naturally the owner of the [German] which is not a drugstore like here, it's a pharmacy. A-And he was a honorary commander of the first [indecipherable] organization. He was also member of the democratic party, and my mother liked to be the society woman. She -- they -- they went to theater and concerts regularly and especially as long as we lived in the city, she had tea hours after lunch with friends from the theater or from the concert. People like the general director of the orchestra would come and have a cup of coffee and actors with whom my mother got friendly. Let's see, one who would be prominent became Mrs. d'Albert, the composer d'Albert. She was his last of six or seven wives and he was a man who for each of his wives wrote an opera. And she was -- Hilda d'Albert was stubborn. She wouldn't get divorced, so there was no opera after the one he had written for her. And he died wa -- when I went to -- back to Germany the first time, d'Albert was -- she was living in a pensionne and I tried to see her, but without result. She

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had a headache. So it was quite a shock for my parents when the Nazis came. They were not known as Jews, because only my father had a little bit of religion, my mother didn't. And we children, we had a frau -- fräulein, and whenever the fräulein changed, they took us to their church, wa -- if they went to church Sundays, and in general we had no -- no religion. And only after the Nazi were her -- Nazis were here, I became definitely aware of what I was, and that both -- both my parents were Jewish, and I was trying to find a -- I had a membership card from the Jewish sports club, but I couldn't find it. I'm slow, but what can you do? Have to think. Now, what next?

Q: Did you have any extended family that were cl-close to you in Baden-Baden?

A: There was my father's brother lived there. He was a -- in a bank. And afterwards he was in the -- in a factory of [indecipherable] after works -- I worked. He was -- had an interesting story because when the Nazis took the Jews from Baden-Baden and brought them to south of France to a camp, I don't remember the name, but then towards the end of the war, he was packed on a train to get to the -- to the ovens. And he got sick on the train and they threw him off in Avignon, in France, where he, who had never learned two words of a foreign language, he acquired some French and worked there -- and English, I guess too -- worked there with the American -- the authorities who came up the Rhone Valley and eventually he made his way back to Baden-Baden, where they -- he became police chief and had a -- I

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think for 10 years he was that, and then he retired and everybody was happy with their Jewish police chief. But he had never been married before, so then he first got married to a lady who had a nice apartment, which was one of the attractions, but after they were married, the authorities came and said this apartment is too big for you, you have to divide it up. Do you want to keep the part with the kitchen, or the part with the bathroom? She selected the part with the kitchen, because there was a hotel nearby where my uncle was friendly with the owner, and where they could always go to take a bath. That lady died, and he remarried, a woman whom he had met a few years earlier on his vacations. He had the nice custom of going on a vacation alone. And he told us afterwards, yes, it was ca -- she was a nurse. He met her in -- on vacation, a la -- a woman with -- from Vienna who had three daughters, and I met her in Baden-Baden just before my uncle died and I visited her once afterwards, but I don't know whether she is still alive. She had a big disappointment because there's a regulation that younger women who marry an older person could not inherit his pension. They would have to be -- have been married for at least 10 years and they were not. My cousin, who lives in Essen, Germany, tried to help her but there was no -- no way. She had a nervous breakdown, but then it seems her daughters could take care of her. And I no -- not in touch with any of them.

Q: If I go back to your childhood, you would, as a boy, not think of yourself as Jewish at all, is that right?

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A: No, that's right. We didn't know it. My sisters didn't know it, and it came as a surprise.

Q: Mm-hm. Would there be any way in which you would observe Jewish holidays or any religious services at all?

A: No, my -- my father would go once a year to synagogue, and I don't remember whether I ever went with him. My first recollection actually of a Jewish services was when I lived on Cyprus and that was pretty late. But I made up for it to some extent by learning things, studying a little bit. When I -- when -- after I had lost my job in Germany, and stayed with my parents in Frankfurt for a few weeks, there was a man who was traveling around [indecipherable] a-around Germany collecting money for a rabbinical school he wanted to start in Lichtenst -- Lichtenstein. He was probably a crook, but was very interesting man. He traveled with a companion. He sa -- he said he was his cousin. And he got sick and I visited him in his pensionne -- hotel where I was -- I lived. And that is where I recall first to get the first impression of the Jewish religion. He taught me that in contrast to all other religions, Jews can talk directly to their God, and that the basis is -- of their religion really, 10 commandments. And I've never forgotten it, I should have -- I should be gr-grateful to him. [indecipherable]

Q: How --

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A: He left the country just before the Nazis tried to catch him, and a -- I -- I wished I had his name or anything, but I was never in touch with him again.

Q: How old were you when your life began to change as a result of the Nazis gaining power?

A: 19 -- I was 20, '14 [indecipherable] Nazis came. I was working the industry of -- in the office of [indecipherable], a company that made bicycle lamps and hydraulic lifts for automobiles, and electric switches, hot switches. I started working there in '32. '32 was a year of change for me anyhow --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Frederick Wohl. This is tape number one, side B. And we'll continue.

A: Yeah.

Q: You were telling me about the time when your life changed as the Nazis gained power.

A: Right. So --

Q: That apprenticeship you were doing in 1932, would that have been regarded by your parents as a compromise? Would they have wanted you to have been a pharmacist?

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A: No, no. But that's the only thing I could get. You see, I -- as I say, I go -- I matriculate -- I got the [indecipherable] in 30 -- March '32. I left the same day for Switzerland, where we had an exchange program [indecipherable] family, and we were due a few more weeks. So I stayed in Nyon, at town on the lake o-of [indecipherable] of Lake Lemman, and went around the neighborhood on bicycle with a friend who was a son of that family. We went, for example, through Geneva and listened to a session of the League of Nations Council, which for us was very interesting to wa -- to see these people in the -- some [indecipherable] there was a [indecipherable] the British prime minister, and Von Bulow was the German representative. And from France, I think it was Brionne, but I'm not sure. They had caricatures at that time, all over Geneva with the -- the caricatures of Chamberlain, Brionne and Straserman, who was a German foreign minister. I met in Geneva also, some acquaintances of my parents, just by chance, and told them that I had to go back to Germany soon, but I had no job and if there's anything they could think of to help me. So when my time was over with the Prin [indecipherable] P-r-i-n, I went by train back to Basel, where we also had friends, and there two boys and I, we did a bit of roaming around the mountains in Switzerland. Then just one day before I would have to come -- go back to Germany, I got an phone call that there was a farm in -- north of Revai on the Lake of Geneva, and the owner was ready to take me on as apprentice as -- to learn about farming, if I was interested. I exchanged my

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ticket, instead of going north, I went back south to the lake and that man's son f -- received me in Revai. The place where I spend, must have been about four months is a -- was call -- the farm was called Eau de ville and everybody spoke French, which was naturally the purpose, I should learn French. And it was at times difficult, but I had, in the early morning, to go and clean the pig sty. I had afterwards to clean the cow sty, or the cattle sty, and then the s -- [indecipherable] the couple of horses, after which we got breakfast that consisted of -- what's that Italian maize? Anyhow, it's something I had never eaten before, and very weak coffee with lot of milk. I also learned in that place to eat cheese. I never before had eaten cheese. And I worked hard. I also had to go up on trees for cherries and for peaches, I think it was. And during these few weeks on the farm, I grew about two and a half inches, and I became real -- taller. Before, I had been one of the shortest and weakest in my class at school.

Q: And that was your 18th year?

A: Yeah.

Q: And did you learn French?

A: I ha -- yes. I learned French, and after a few weeks the owner sent me on an [indecipherable] meadow with a shepherds and a dozen heads of cattle and one horse.

Q: This was to a mountain pasture?

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A: Yeah, and the mountain, I know -- I think it was called the Pleardes. There was a -- an electric rail going up there to a couple of hotels and a hut that belonged to the -- the owner of the -- of the farm, and who had to supply milk to these hotels, and who would ca -- have to carry it up on his back? Me. Was interesting because you had to be careful not to be chased by some steer, or -- even though the meadows were separated by -- thank you. These are things I don't think I -- I wrote if e-every -- anywhere. I -- I don't know whether it's right to go in all the detail with you.

Q: I think it is.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: In -- the Swiss national holiday, is 11th of August, and for this holiday we built a big stack of wood on the ar-arm -- on the meadow, and put fire to it in the evening. And all around the lake you could see fires from sta -- from these, that's how they celebrated the holiday. And after that I went to one of the hotels for --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- to eat and drink as much as you wanted. I -- then, shortly after that, my father found me a job as apprentice in that Schillay-Bruksela company. And I left, not before the owner of the one hotel had told me how much he appreciated the fact that when I was in the kitchen in the morning, bringing him -- them their milk, and he came in, I would stand up. And for that he gave me a pipe. I started smoking a pipe

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then. Also the owner of the farm gave me a very nice certificate. Something happened during that time also, that I wasn't aware of. The son of the owner had a girlfriend, and one day he told me, I think, two weeks they are getting married. I wrote my parents and send a telegram of congratulations and the day of the wedding I put a s-suit on after my work and waited to be called, to the meal or whatever there was. Nobody called. When I finally went down, they were just about finishing, and I realized what had happened -- [tape break]

Q: Yes, the -- the Swiss family's son's marriage.

A: Yeah. When I came down to dinner they were just about finished, and I realized what had happened. The bride was highly pregnant, and I found that it si -- was a kind of marriage where the father of the groom had to force him to get married. And father and son didn't get along too well. But as I left the farm, I got a very nice certificate from him, which I still have, it's in here somewhere, from the farm. I went right to a town, Hollenberg, in the Black Forest, where the Schillay-Bruksela company had their factory, and I became a apprentice in their office, starting with how to open letters without reading them, and go through all the departments of the office, within two years.

Q: I wanted to make sure I understood where that was in Germany. It's in the Black Forest --

A: Yes.

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Q: What is the nearest large city?

A: There is, on the one -- it's on the Black Forest, the railway, and on the one side is Offenburg in the Rhine -- on the side where the Rhine is. On the other side there is Constance, on the Lake of Constance. That's about in the middle -- in the middle of mountains. It's a nice pl -- located place, and I spent there first the two apprentice years, and then a year, I think, yeah, as employee until they were forced to let me go. During that time the -- that company advised me to the take the te -- the examination as commercial -- oh, what do you do, what would you call that? Commercial assistance, which was given by the Chamber of Commerce, of Freyburg. They had their letters come through hide -- to Offenburg there, and there was -- they're testing various things that had to do with the commercial, life, like adding and being able to multiply in your head, and you had to write a composition. I remember there was only of -- of five different titles, there was only one that had nothing to do with the Nazis that I could select, and on each -- for each kind of lesson, there were three people who examined you, and always one was a Nazi. But only one of the whole lot made a nasty remark to me. And well, couldn't be helped. But my -- I was lucky, because during that period, there had been some political upheaval, and nobody was allowed to wear his uniform. Otherwise I would have been the only civilian, I guess, and m-may not have been able to take that test. It

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was the most difficult examination I took ever, but it was useful. I -- I don't know whether I still have the certificate, I don't think so.

Q: When you mentioned the nasty remark being made --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- wa -- do you remember what was said?

A: No, he wa -- he was surprised that a Jew was allowed to take the examination.

Q: Would that be the first time you remember an anti-Semitic remark?

A: Not really, no. I mean it -- at the office already, you came in in the morning, you didn't say good morning, you said heil Hitler. And it was 1934, the Nazis had been in -- had -- they had been in power for a year, and Mr. Schillay, of Schillay-Bruksela complained about that remark afterwards, but it didn't help. You see, Bruksela is a Jewish partner, and Schillay was a -- my uncle's friend, so -- because they both were -- I had been in school with the Jewish partner's daughter, and so I was -- they accepted me as apprentice, but during '35, the Na-Nazi trade union insisted that I be dismissed. This is a payroll [indecipherable] in that place and they would tell -- t-tell them, if that Jews doesn't leave, you can't dismiss any other seasonal employees. So I was out, I got notice for the end of December, '35. But the beginning of December I went skiing in the Black Forest. I had been skiing and walking around by myself ever since the Nazis started, and I liked it. Naturally there came things, but I went to a lake up in the mountains of the Black Forest, where I

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used to swim after wi -- going up there, which was a few hours walk, I came there, there was a sign on the lake, no Jews allowed. Nobody there, but that sign. And then, to get back in the beginning of December '34, I went skiing and I fell and broke my thumb, here. Can still see it. And I couldn't write. So they let me go earlier and I -- I moved to Frankfurt with my parents, tried to find something to do there, which was impossible. I would have had a -- had to have a permit to work, and the authorities wouldn't give me one. So I decided to leave Germany and go to Athens, Greece, where my sister was already. I left -- I found somebody in the Frankfurt passport office who believed that I was an student of archaeology, going to Athens to study. I found out afterwards that if I went there, the police of -- for foreigners in Greece was already informed that this guy is not a student, he's a refugee.

Q: Do you remember having discussions a-around this time with your parents about family plans and what should be done, or would your parents --

A: No, no.

Q: -- not discussed it?

A: We -- my father was still working. After he had left -- had lost the pharmacy, he worked as -- in public relations for two factory -- pharmaceutical factories, where he went to the universities, and told the students about the products of these companies, they should prescribe it when they became doctors and so -- so he was

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reasonably happy, and nobody believed at that time that the Nazi power would last, see? So I left, and one year later we let my parents come.

Q: Were you aware of others leaving Germany? Did -- did other comparable, well-to-do families leave?

A: The y-younger people tried to leave. The older people didn't believe that it lasted, or they cook -- they took their money and went to what was then still Palestine and lived on their money as long as they could. After the war, probably went back. But -- and so I went to Athens, and I had a typewriter and I had a [indecipherable], and we -- I found work in Athens. I took my typewriter from one office to the other, made [indecipherable] correspondence in English, French and German. Sometimes people who didn't know either of these languages, or very little, they had to trust that I would write what they said, and it worked out all right for three years in Athens.

Q: Now, which of your sisters was in Athens?

A: Ilsa, the older one. My younger sister had gone on a farm. She had joined the Jewish organization to eventually go to Israel. And my mother's uncle, Joseph Berliner, helped her to get a -- a job, and she worked there until the -- that organization had to evacuate and they took the young people to Denmark. On the way from that farm to Denmark, my sister Margaret found herself a husband, Irwin.. What was his last name, darn it? Irwin -- and they got married. They were

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both in Denmark, and then the organization, the -- what was it [indecipherable] is that it, the name? And they took them to England, and the both of them worked on a farm in Devonshire, where my -- where they had a little boy. And they still had intended to go to Israel, but eventually his mother convinced them to come to the United States. But that was after the war. Now, in Athens, I had a lot of fun. I was at the age where I didn't think about tomorrow or the next day. I was able to have a good income, and I learned the Greek language in no time because I had learned ancient Greek at the -- at the high school. [indecipherable] tickets to the theater, and there was another one who had just come from Turkey, that was shortly -- actually only 10 years after the exchange of population between Turkey and Greece. And I fortunately could help him quite a bit. Then the important jobs I had there, one was only in a technical office, the engineer spoke well German and French and imported whole electrical works from Europe. Some parts from Germany, some from Switzerland. And I did the correspondence and kept the books for three years. We -- the owner was reasonably friendly, at a distance, and once he warned me -- I got too friendly with an associate of his who was in the same office, and when that associate separated himself, then I heard from my boss that I should watch out, not tell him anything, so on. That associate had been a officer in the -- in the Marine of the Greek fleet, and he at one time invited me, which was interesting, to his home for dinner. Which -- it was a big honor, because for one thing, the man was not

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married, he lived with his parents and his sister. And the father was a Greek priest. So, the men were eating on the table, and the women were serving the food. And after -- after dinner, they started singing and all si -- singing and dancing around the table. This was one thing -- something new for me. But the -- as I say, my boss was not happy about me being too friendly with the -- this one.

Q: And you were able to bring your parents to Greece?

A: One year after I arrived, my father lost his job. They made a law in Germany, where about five or six pe -- Jews were doing that kind of work, but that was no longer allowed, so my parents took a vacation to Italy, where my sister Ilsa met them, and they --

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Frederick Wohl, conducted by Margaret West, on February the 13th, 2004, in Bethesda, Maryland. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Frederick Wohl on November the 20 -- 22nd, 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number two, side A. We were talking about your parents and your bringing them to Athens.

A: Yeah. My father had been able to secure the representation of the [indecipherable] in Greece. They were pretty nice to him, realizing what was happening, and he had met friends there. So, for one year after leaving Germany, they paid him a salary, and we rented an apartment in the center of Athens, where my mother kept house, and my sister Ilsa and I lived there with my parents. Naturally, I only saw them for breakfast, because I worked late, and I, most days, went out after that. And my father went around trying to get some industrialists to undertake to work with that company who -- whom he represented, but nothing came of it. He was the only one in the family who actually got a permit to stay in

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Greece, and to work in Greece. My sister never got a work permit, and I never got a proper work permit, either.

Q: Why was your father granted the permit?

A: He was employed, see, by a foreign company, yet. I always had to be on the outlook for agents of the police department trying to catch me at work. Th-They did a couple of times and brought me into the police center, but friends, young lawyers already, usually found the soft spot and I was released, with the exception of the very last time. My work in Athens also encompassed long hours of work at a newspaper distributing agency where I went at about four or five o'clock in the afternoon and usually stayed til eight or nine. What had happened is that I was given the name of the owner of the empo -- of that agency. The name of the agency was Spiro Svengalis, and the general manager owner was Janus Anagnostopoulos. Anagnostopoulos saw me in his office and after asking who had recommended me - - was a -- the man who supplied them their paper stock, he was satisfied and took me, without anything further, to the basement. There was a big office, and we had to talk in French because Anagnostopoulos only knew a few words of French and I didn't know enough Greek at that time. Behind the desk in that office was sitting a young German with not one but two party signs on his jacket, and he told me, in French, that he had to leave for the Fatherland right away, and here is the book in the works, and good-bye. He never found out that I was German, and he took the

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German embassy all s -- all these years to realize who I was. The agency imported German newspapers as a sideline, and French and British and Czech and Swiss newspapers. That was a department of foreign press, which I was certainly in charge of. And I didn't change anything much, but a number of German residents in Athens were subscribing to German newspaper -- Nazi newspapers and after looking through the books, I sent a young man who was employed there to go and collect for the monthly rent, or three monthly rent, I don't remember. Anyhow, he came back and said every one of his guys had a receipt. So my British [indecipherable] had gone off with quite a bit of money. I figured out it was about a hundred thousand dollars. And I had to go to Anagnostopoulos after a few days working there and telling him look, there a hundred thousand dollars missing. And fortunately he took it all right, and advanced money to my department. And he was otherwise satisfied at that time. A few months later he called me at the engineering office, I had to come immediately. So I went over to -- to his office, and he was up - - very upset. The censor, the government censor had called and told him that the one German newspaper had publish -- had published an article about the Greek Crown Prince having an affair with a lady in Athens, and that naturally should not be distributed. But we had distributed said paper already. We only got 20 or 25 copies, was another import office for foreign newspaper, they got more -- got more offices. So what to do? I took a taxi and went from one newspaper kiosk to the

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other, and bought 25 copies of that particular newspaper, I cut the top off, and could
s -- prove that well, we had not distributed it, and we were in the clear. The owner
of the other office ended up on an island for a few months, and I had from then on
the additional job to look through the various papers and make sure that nothing
was written about the Greek royal family. Anagnostopoulos had the idea to start an
illustrated weekly in Athens ak -- on the type of paper that was [indecipherable]
very nice weeklies that the newspapers had on Sundays in Europe. He got lists and
he ordered the machinery. Money was no problem with him, but the instructions
were in German, which he didn't understand and I didn't know enough Greek
mechanical words to put it in Greek, so I translated it into French. When the
machinery came, and was put in the free harbor before import. When -- when we
left Greece it was still there, I don't know whether -- what ever happened to it. But
at the end of '40 -- of '39 --

Q: When you --

A: -- things in Greece went bad for us. It seems the German embassy found out who
was working there, and who -- who was sent -- looking through the papers, and
Anagnostopoulos couldn't do anything any more to keep me. So the police told us,
you have to leave Greece, or we take you back to Germany. So then, t-to show them
how serious they were, they put me not in jail, but -- but into a police office, where
I stayed three or four days, after which we could make them realize that while my

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father and my sister were working to find where to go, I should be doing that too, and not stay in the police wh -- thing. We went from one consulate and embassy to another, and nothing happened til the consul of Paraguay said yes, he could -- we could go to Paraguay. But when we inquired at the American Express about traveling there, they told us that country doesn't have the power to give you a visa. You have to go to Italy, to the general consul, and forget it.

Q: Now, you were able to use your mother's connection with a former foreign secretary of the --

A: Yeah, now --

Q: -- Weimar Republic.

A: -- during that time, when things got real bad, we were trying other kinds of visits and this and such. Now, my father had been a Mason for all these years. In Athens he went to attend Masonic meetings of a Freemason's Lodge that [indecipherable] in German. And at a big dinner there that was given in honor of a British duke, he happened to sit next to a young fellow who -- with whom he started talking and he - - that fellow was a secretary to the British ambassador. They got friendly and that young fellow, he took my daughter skiing, and --

Q: This is --

A: -- that was before -- before things got so bad.

Q: That was your sister.

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A: But when -- when things got real bad, my father got to him and asked for help, one -- one Mason to another. And the man got him an audience with the ambassador, the ki -- British ambassador, who listened to the story and immediately started investigating the family. Now, my mother had a third or fourth cousin whose name was --

Q: I think it was R-Rathenow, right?

A: Rathenow, Walter Rathenow. And he had been German foreign minister in the first Republican government after the first World War. And he had been murdered in 1920 th -- two or '23. His -- his brother, Emile Rathenow was a big industrialist in Germany, but that Walter Rathenow, there was some connection to my mother, and the British f -- office for -- that investigated people found that out and the ambassador told my father, well you -- you can go wherever you want in the British area, but we had no money.

Q: What -- what was the reason that the -- that connection would --

A: That we were -- we were --

Q: -- you know, persuade the British to give support?

A: They were -- we were pressured to get out.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And we tried everybody and everything, and this was about the last, because you couldn't just go into the British embassy.

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Q: Yeah. It would be because as members of that family --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you were in opposition to the Nazis.

A: We were as -- we were certainly British protected persons, all four, and he asked us, well where -- what did you go -- where would you go to? The closest place to Greece was the island of Cyprus, which was British, and we thought we make arrangements and go there. But the governor of Cyprus wanted each person to show 1,000 pounds sterling. 4,000 pounds sterling we didn't have. So the British ambassador, again, he managed to get this fee on th -- this guarantee reduced to 1,000 pounds for the whole family, but we didn't have 1,000 pounds. So I talked to anapel -- Anagnostopoulos in the newspaper distributing office and asked him for help. And he said well, he would lend me 500 pounds, provided I could get the other 500 from somebody else. And he even talked to the engineer, the engineering office, got him to also lend me wa -- 500 pounds. So see we -- we are -- were all right to go to Cyprus, and after six months, I send them their money back.

Q: Now were you welcomed on the island of Cyprus?

A: Not really, but we were refugees, like there were a few hundred other refugees there, and --

Q: And there was a Jewish community that had been there from 1905.

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A: Well, they -- it was not really a community, was a couple of families, who lived all over the island, who had come together for the high holidays. [indecipherable] with one family who had big orange and grapefruit groves in Famagusta. There was a physician who was the center of the Jewish community, actually, who owned a Torah, and where they had their high holiday services, and where I went with my father to services.

Q: What was your -- your own, and your family's state of mind at this time? Were you becoming more despondent?

A: We were -- we were very nervous til we were in Cyprus, and my -- we first had very little money to get established, but my sister got an -- a job in an attorney's office from two brothers, and I got an correspondent thing in an import office, for one pound sterling a week. So we got along and on the day Italy entered the war, there was a note on my typewriter, we do not employ enemy aliens, good-bye. My next job was with two refugees from Vienna who had had some money invested in a sausage factory in Cyprus, where they made good sausages, even after the earlier owners, this man, had left, he had showed them how to do it, but none of these two knew the right languages. So I came -- I was useful to them, selling their sausages in a little store.

Q: Now your parents, I think, were embarrassed by your work, selling sausages.

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A: Yeah, we had rented a small house on the outskirts of Nicosia. Nicosia is the capital of Cyprus. They didn't -- they never came in to the sausage factory, the sausage store, but they liked the sausage when I brought it home. I met through this, naturally, quite a few people, refugees in Cyprus, and was able to make myself useful here and there.

Q: Now, it would seem that you, from the time you were 18 and worked on the farm in Switzerland, that you were being forced to assume adult responsibilities --

A: To [indecipherable]

Q: Well, much m -- at a much younger age --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- than would have been the case were it not for the Nazi power. But at what stage do you think you were becoming the leader and decision maker, as compared to your father?

A: Yeah, we did that together, but there was no way out. See, we were thrown into Greece, we were thrown into Cyprus, and from Cyprus we were thrown into East Africa eventually. There was not much choice. The same I came here, I happened to get into an insurance office as a bookkeeper. I learned the insurance business, and that was it, I didn't have any choice, but I came to like it. I decided that if I sell anyone insurance, once he has it he was better off than he had been before I sold it to him. And so I came to like my work.

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Q: Did you -- did you consider other options in terms of a country where you would build your life? I mean, did you think of --

A: I --

Q: -- Israel, or returning to Germany after the war?

A: No, I -- no, I did not. And my parents were not Zionists. And the only thing I -- I wanted to become a CPA, but at that time the rules were so strict in the district -- I think they still are, that a young man had to become apprenticed to another CPA and wouldn't make any money during that time. On the contrary, some of [indecipherable] required a payment. So that was out. So I went to the university to eventually get a degree -- not that I needed it by that time, but I just wanted to get it and I le -- learned the insurance business, and started selling.

Q: Mm-hm. Let me go back. We -- we are jumping --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- from Cyprus to United States, but in fact your -- your time spent in --

A: In Cyprus?

Q: -- in East Africa is covered in your --

A: Which [indecipherable]

Q: -- is covered in the earlier videotaped interview done in 1989.

A: Yeah.

Q: But when the war ended in -- the second World War ended in 1945 --

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A: Yeah.

Q: How -- what did you do immediately after the war, and what --

A: I --

Q: -- what arrangements had to be made for coming to the States?

A: I tried to get another affidavit. You see, a very distant relative again, named Edgar Berliner lived in Canada and afterwards in California, and he, when the Nazis came, made arrangements for a group of young people to come to Canada to start a farm of some kind. He -- he was pretty wealthy and to his surprise, by the time he was developing that plan, I was the only one left to go. And naturally that -- that plan was out. We kept corresponding, and he was helpful to me. He sometimes sent me small amounts of money. Very small. He -- I only learned that he was a millionaire -- I -- I learned -- learned that later. And he -- when I was in Athens he gave me an affidavit to come here, but by the time these papers arrived, we were already thrown out of Greece, and they sent the papers on to Cyprus -- no, to Jerusalem. And there were quite a few refugees in Cyprus in the same situation, that they had the papers, but the American consul was in Cairo and he wasn't anxious to have any Jews come to America. He didn't -- even if a couple of hundred people ready to come, he wouldn't come to Cyprus to see them and interview them. So that was out and my affidavit eventually was -- was out of -- it wa -- had a limit, a time limit.

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End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Frederick Wohl. This is tape number two, side B.

A: -- refugees to come. It was expressed after the conference of Evia, and the only family I know who came to America at that time was the personal physician of the Crown Prince of Greece, a Dr. Miller, I think, with whom my father afterwards was in touch in the States.

Q: When you came to the United States -- you've told me a little about your decision, but I wonder if you'd tell me more about the -- about your parents and their discussions about where they would go after the war.

A: My parents did not know where to go after the war. After I had left Tanganyika, they made arrangements to be taken back to Cyprus. And since my father could not find any employment on Cyprus, they insisted to come to the States. And my sister and I signed affidavits for them, they came over and we had a tough time to make ends meet. At that time my parents stayed in the States first in Mount Vernon, New York, and then here in Washington, but nothing worked out for my father, and they returned in 1950 to Tanganyika, where my father got a job as -- at the pharmacy of an Indian in -- I think in Yoringa, I don't remember the [indecipherable] where they

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stayed until my father's health deteriorated, and the doctor told him he had to get out of the tropics. [indecipherable]

Q: I want to -- I -- please tell me about your voyage to the United States when you came, and what it was like on board ship.

A: Yes. I s -- I still have the ticket from the British shipping line, I thi -- from Dar Es Salaam to the first port in the United States. The trip took about two months, and was very interesting. The only limit for me was that I didn't have any money to enjoy the stops at the various places. The boat arrived in Dar Es Salaam while I was in bed with a malaria attack. I looked out of the window of the hotel and when I saw the boat coming in, I really got well very fast and packed up and got aboard. It was a Kaiser ship that allowed about 20 passengers to come on board, and the cabins and so were not very luxurious, but I was glad to be on my way. The boat stopped first in Durban, South Africa, where one of the passengers had acquaintances and they took us to one of the South African National Parks, which was an interesting experience, and while we were looking over the mountains and had left the windows of the car open, a bunch of monkeys got in the car, and ate the fruits that we had brought for our lunch. The other memory I have of Durban is that I called my mother's great-uncle, Joseph Wilde, in Johannesburg and told him that the boat was slow and I could come and visit him, but he was not interested. He sent me some money instead and I have never been in touch with him again. I tried to

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obtain his address afterwards, even through the Jewish congrega -- Jewish organizations in Johannesburg, without result. The next stop of the boat was Cape Town where we stopped a few days also, and I inspected the town. The weather was not good enough to go up the Cape Town mountain, the cape mountain, which was unfortunate, and actually th-the only memory of Cape Town I have is that when you went in the mo -- to the movies there, the ticket included an ice cream or a cookie, or a piece of cake, which they offered to you during the running of the movie, through a salesperson. From Cape Town, the boat went to -- hold it a moment.

Q: We'll ignore the name.

A: Yeah. The next stop was a harbor in what is now Namibia, southwest Africa, which was a real godforsaken place, all sand, with the exception of a couple of breweries and the railroad station. In this place they had a crew of workers who did nothing else but keep the railroad -- the rails clean of desert sand, because there was a constant wind, and there was nothing to keep the sand away from the rails. We stopped there only for a short while and from then on, went across the ocean to Trinidad. In Trinidad the boat could not -- we -- we could not go ashore because they had a general strike, and after a couple of days the boat went on to Bermuda. In Bermuda I had my last bad malaria attack, on the second day there. I had to take to bed, and for the rest of the stop in Bermuda, I was in bed. What I remember of Bermuda is the fact that the lunch in the restaurants there cost as much as a whole

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day in a hotel in Dar Es Salaam, which made a difference to my pocket. The boat then went onto New Brunswick, to Saint John. And we stopped then after a couple of days, the shipping line decided that they were going to stay there much longer than anticipated, and we should make our arrangements to get to the States by all else. I took my last money for a ticket to New York, and took off. I was -- til then, actually always on my -- I had in mind that coming from where I came from, and going across the frontiers, somebody would stop me and have a ser -- and search, whether I brought any diamonds with me. But I didn't. Maybe I wasn't smart enough, but I was anxious to get to the States without any trouble, and met my sister Margaret and her husband at the -- what's the station in New York? At the railroad station in New York.

Q: Grand Central?

A: No, the other one.

Q: Penn.

A: Hm?

Q: Penn.

A: Penn Station, yeah.

Q: Penn Station.

A: I had never met my brother-in-law, it was interesting fellow with whom, however, I did not get too well acquainted over the short time that I saw th -- him.

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My sister and her husband at that time were working as a couple in an old age place in Mount Vernon, New York, where the owner lady made room for me for a couple of days. I was surprised at the kind of work they did, but got used to the fact that any work here in the States was okay.

Q: I have lots of questions.

A: Yes?

Q: I want you to tell me more about the meeting with your sister. It must have been very emotional. Did she know you? Did you know her at once? Had she changed?

A: She know -- yes, we knew -- we know each other, but there was no time to be emotional, anything. Was a crowd of people and we got from one train to the other and then to -- took the train to Mount Vernon, sat there looking at each other and realized that we were not as young as we used to be, but there's nothing exciting otherwise.

Q: Mm-hm. And what luggage did you have with you that you'd been carrying then? You'd presumably brought a -- a few personal possessions?

A: I -- I don't re -- don't really recall. It couldn't have been much.

Q: No diamonds.

A: It couldn't have been much. I didn't even have a winter coat, and it was December, or no, the end of November.

Q: And I assume that the malaria meant you were really in very poor health?

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A: No, it wasn't too bad. A-As I say, ma -- that was my last malaria attack, in Bermuda, and after that I took two -- twice I went through the medications for malaria. I should remember the name, it sta -- it started with A, but I don't. In Mount Vernon I -- I didn't sit around long. I went to New York and got scared by the traffic. I got -- couple of times I got marooned in the middle of a street, and I had to learn to dodge automobiles. I hadn't seen so many automobiles in a lifetime. And I spent time in the big stores, just lo-lookng what was going on there. And decided to visit Washington. I, at that time, was of the opinion that the man who had given me the affidavit, and who lived in Hollywood wanted me to come over there, but I got a letter telling me more or less that if I found something to do in the east, we would meet early enough. I had never met the man, his name was Edgar Berliner. So the day I got that letter, I took the train to Washington, where I had an address of an attorney, I found out he's quite a prominent attorney, to -- with whom to get in contact. He was -- his wife was the sister of the man who had given me the affidavit. And this was a time where Washington was crowded with people working on the war effort, and if it hadn't been for that recommendation, I would never have been able to get a room in a hotel. But they were nice to me, I had dinner there, and the lady, Louise King, took me around Washington by car and to Mount Vernon and to the cemet -- cemetery, and to a concert, and showed me the -- where the museums were, and I was on my own for a couple of days, during which I found an

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employment agency, and applied for jobs. The man sent me immediately to two places where -- where peoples were -- were asked for and in both places I evidently made a good enough impression that he afterwards told me I could select which one. And I did not. I went that evening to have dinner with the Kings, and told them what had been happening. When -- Milton went to the phone and came back and he said his brother's insurance agency al-also needed a bookkeeper or accountant, and gave me the address, I should go there the next day. Naturally, that was a place to go. Even so the pay, as I afterwards found out, was very low for American purposes. But being recommended, I went. I found a room on 16th Street, 1827 16th Street, and I rented it, then went back to New York and got my stuff and started working a f -- a few days in December. It was an insurance agency and there were -- it was interesting for me because the bookkeeper, an old lady, had kept her records for the past couple of years at least, on pieces of paper and I had to put it together to be accepted by an -- a CPA. I forgot to mention that before being accepted by these people as employee, they sent me to their CPA for an interview, and I ga -- I was friendly with this CPA for quite a number of years. He was a -- an older man who was the head of the CPA organization in Washington. Not only that, he was a director of the Franklin Accounting School, where both his sons -- is -- both his son-in-laws had been put through accounting before they could marry his daughters.

Q: At that time you would be planning or hoping to train as a CPA?

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A: Yeah. I had no intention to do something else but accounting and naturally to write -- to find out how to become a CPA, especially after the experience in Africa, where I was unable to stay, to some extent also, because they wanted a -- what they in England called a chartered accountant for the diamond mine. I also registered in the university in Washington. It took a -- I went from one university to the other because this was a time where all of the students were studying under the -- what they call the war. They didn't pay there. I was the only paying student in American University and that university was favorable for me because the man who took care of foreign students was a former German and he was helpful to me in my studies for the years I was at the university.

Q: So every local college was -- university was full of G.I. bills?

A: G.I. [indecipherable]. I mean, they were not interested in a paying student, but this man, Professor Correlle, was happy to help me.

Q: And that was at American University?

A: At American University. At that time the university had classes in some half fallen down buildings on F Street in northwest Washington. And I naturally registered for evening classes, where they had interesting lecturers who came to the most part from government and really knew their -- knew what they had to teach. Especially interesting was one course on income tax, which was a course more or less on income tax avoiding.

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Q: How f -- yeah?

A: But that took awhile -- took awhile to get to that. The other thing I did after arriving and getting settled, I registered at Arthur Murray's, because I didn't know anybody and thought well, at least I could dance, I might meet some people there and at least get a little bit more social. Because all I knew to talk about was my stay in Africa, and who was interested in that? People were only interested in the news with Walter Winchell. The other thing I did, after a few days I found that the Jewish Center was only a couple of blocks from my room, and I went there and found a few other young men who had come from Germany, and got introduced to them, and we had a -- had a circle of friends from there, with whom we got together. We had a poker round and I attended some social functions at the Jewish Center on 16th Street. Through the friends, I got into a Jewish thr -- a circle of young women of marriageable age, who were ready to party. We had hayrides, and every few months a wedding, which was new to me all, and I realized that I had to be careful, because it was time to keep a distance from these young ladies, until I -- unless I would be serious. Having nothing but a job, naturally to think of getting settled down in a marriage was tough. In 1948, I attended a dance in, I'd say, a Jewish Community Center, and met my future wife. It was [indecipherable] my friends were all there and after the dance I took Lillian to a bar just to talk and have a drink and afterwards walked her home, which took hours, because she lived in a women's

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building on the other side of the Potomac. And naturally, we walked there, and afterwards I walked back at night, for hours again, to 16 Street. And I dated this young lady every -- whenever I could. She made sure that I on our dates, spend whatever money I had so that I couldn't date anybody else.

Q: Was it love at first sight, do you think? Do you remem --

A: What?

Q: I wondered if you were taken with her as soon as you saw her, or --

A: Yeah.

End of Tape Two, Side B

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Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Frederick Wohl, conducted by Margaret West, on February the 17th, 2004, in Bethesda, Maryland. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Frederick Wohl on November the 22nd, 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number three, side A.

A: -- to go back to my work, I walked every morning from my residence to the office, stopped for a cup of -- for breakfast at a little Greek restaurant and it was tough to make ends meet with the pay I received at that time, which was originally quoted as 50 dollars a week, but m -- no, it was quoted as 200 a month, 200 dollars a month. Now -- no, was 50 dollars a week, but when it came to payday, I was corrected, it was less because of Social Security and health insurance, and as I say, I -- after a few months, asked for a raise. I got a small raise, as far as I remember. But they mainly said, why don't you go and sell insurance? And I took a course in insurance that was given by the Aetna Insurance Company, a correspondence course, and got a license to sell insurance in the District of Columbia. I remember the first insurance I sold was on [indecipherable] a lady in the rooming house where

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I stayed had been given by one of her admirers. I was rather timid at that time -- time. I couldn't talk about anything interesting to people, because -- as I say again, who was interested in -- in Africa, or in Cyprus? I had nothing much to say about America, only that I was glad to be there and it was interesting and I was going to stay.

Q: What about your bond with Lillian?

A: That we -- I -- we continued to date and in 1948, October 31st, my friend Bernie Friedberg got married to his wife Charlotte. And that night, on the -- on the way home to her place, I popped the question and got accepted, which got me so excited that after I had left her, on my home, I got violently seasick.

Q: On your long walk? On your long walk back?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Ho-How old were you both then?

A: I was about 35 -- 30 -- yeah, 34 and a half, and she was six years younger. I remember she had given me her age, I think wa -- one year younger than she actually was. I met, during the -- that time, her sister and brother-in-law, who lived in Washington, and who were very hospitable, and as I assumed, they were glad that Lillian had a boyfriend.

Q: Tell me about her family and background and religion and so on.

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A: And they were -- they were Jewish, not -- not too religious, and the m-mother lived in New York, the father just died about that time, I never met him. And it took awhile til I met her mother, who lived in a -- a suburb of New York, west New York, in a small apartment. It was all, naturally, a new experience for me, even the driving in somebody el -- with somebody else to -- to New York, at a time when there was n-no superhighway. And it took nearly a day to get where we wanted to go. My parents, in the meantime, had arrived in the States, and they were not very happy with my getting engaged. My parents, to some extent I think, had expected I - I would make a good living in America and that I would be able to take care of them. Seeing that that was not going to be the case, our relationship after my marriage was a little bit estranged, and they made arrangements to go back to Africa. My sister and her husband were still in Tanganyika, and they indicated that there was work for my father and they would be standing by them. They left New York a few weeks after the birth of my first daughter, that was Jackie.

Q: Tell me the full name of -- well, this is a good time to tell me the full name of both of your daughters and their dates of birth.

A: It's Jacqueline Diane Wohl, who is by now Tinney, but she uses her maiden name professionally, she's an attorney with her own office. My younger daughter is Valerie Ann Wohl, who is single after a very short marriage. And who also uses her maiden name. She is a physician. Both my daughters live in Tucson, Arizona.

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Q: And what was the -- what -- what were their birthdates, or approximately?

A: What's your birthdate, Jackie? It's 1950.

A2: June 26th.

A: Hm?

A2: June 26.

A: June 26, and June 27 is when m-my second wedding. And Valerie's birthday is March 19?

A2: May --

A: Hm?

A2: May 17th, 1952.

A: May 17th, yeah, '52. Going back to the time of the engagement, I found that not only was I not making much money at that time, but also Lillian, who worked for the Navy as an clerk, had not much of an income, but also had some debt, which she kept secret from me and paid off during the first month of our marriage. We see how --

Q: So how did you find out about it?

A: Afterwards. I think that that was mainly her bridal outfit.

Q: I wondered to what extent you shared values in life and whether that was part of the reason for your getting along well together?

A: Getting who?

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Q: Well, I'm interested in knowing whether you had shared values in the way you approached life, and --

A: No. I had, during my travels always fallen into some kind of existence which was interesting and where I enjoyed life to -- naturally to a limited extent, whatever, but I don't recall that I was ever, let's say, unhappy with what I was doing. And getting into the accounting and insurance in Washington was no exception.

Q: You sound resilient and optimistic.

A: Oh yeah, I -- I did a study about insurance, but I took a first life insurance course with the -- an agent of the Penn Life, and even sold a couple of life insurance policies. I don't know whether they're still in force, because at that time a commission was only continued by the company for 10 years, and the commission was paid to the office I wait -- I worked for. I learned a few [indecipherable] if -- if my selling insurance is concerned, and had let a -- Bill had [indecipherable] with my name and made sure that whatever insurance I sold was going to be my business. It can't be done any more today. I found that out by experience, but I eventually built up a nice book of business in spite of the fact that I just could not go and do any cold calls, as they called, for -- to buy -- to sell insurance, unless I had a recommendation or referral. I was not courageous enough to get in and talk, besides the fact that I didn't need any -- didn't know enough insurance -- of insurance, in the beginning.

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Q: But you -- you enjoyed it.

A: Yeah. I had developed the kind of philosophy that if I sell you insurance, when I leave you're better off than you were when I came in, and that kept me going.

Q: Where did you live after your marriage?

A: My brother-in-law managed to get us an apartment in Arlington at North Taft Street. It was a small apartment without air conditioning, so if we wanted, we kept doors and windows open, not only for our apartment, but the other apartment on the same floor. We'd got friendly with these people, which was a good thing because they had a car, we didn't. I took the bus every morning from Arlington Boulevard into town. And Washington suburbs at that time were still such a friendly surrounding that sometimes even people would stop and pick me up, gave me a ride into the city. You couldn't do that any more.

Q: And that's where the girls would go to school, in Arlington?

A: Oh no. [indecipherable] we lived not too long in Arlington. Oh, let me go back to our wedding.

Q: Oh.

A: This is -- is -- somewhere I have a picture of the wedding party, which was my mother-in-law, a nephew of hers who was a policeman in Washington, my sister-in-law and brother-in-law and their little daughter Andrea, and Margo was -- I think Margo was there, yes. My parents and my brother-in-law, with their little boy, and a

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girlfriend of Lillian's and how I met who was the second rabbi I had talked to about getting married. The first rabbi, whose name I won't mention, was too business-like for me at the interview, and Rabbi Metz was very understanding of the fact that I was not very religious, neither was, actually, Lillian. And we -- we got married in his study, in his home. And I was so little knowledge about, at that time, that without thinking of anything I invited the rabbi for dinner, for the wedding dinner, and naturally he didn't come. Another guest at the dinner was cousin Joe. That was a distant relative, and if I -- I should remember his full name, because he was important.

Q: Sanders?

A: Hm?

Q: Sanders? Joe Sanders?

A: Yeah, Joe Sanders. Joe Sanders was also married into the Berliner family, and was an important man in that family. You see, there was one Berliner who invented the Gramophone record and he was not a poor man. His brother, Joseph, started the Gramophone company in Germany, and he had been helpful to us after the Nazis had started. And when Emile Berliner, the inventor died, his widow kept an apar -- had an apartment in the hote -- in a hotel here, and kept the family together. It was a b -- a big family because they had brought over about 90 people from Europe and I was not one of them.

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Q: When did those people come?

A: Well --

Q: Was it early in the 1930's?

A: Yeah, in 1935 - 19 thir -- see, the Nazis started in '33, and whoever had foresight -- and very few had, actually, would get out, or whoever had relatives, and I met quite a few of these fellow relatives, but they all [indecipherable] clear for me, that I was not one of that group.

Q: Why?

A: Because they were a very jealous crowd of each other. They are jealous of each other, see, and I was an outsider who had arrived later, after the war. And even so, I had arrived with the help of the -- of one of the Berliners. The rest were very -- were very nice, but distant. Only the ones who were about my age, the young -- young, we were friendly to each other.

Q: Well, you had some family help, but it sounds very much as if you built your own life here.

A: Oh yeah, yeah. I -- I didn't ask. Once I had found out that I had to ask for a raise, and that without being pushed, nobody in America would think to increase your pay, and I wasn't used to that. But I kept going and we had, as I say, we had a nice wedding, with a limited number of people, and moved to an apartment in Maryland.

Q: How do you -- how do you --

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A: After [indecipherable] moved, we lived in Virginia for awhile, and after Jackie was born, we moved to Maryland, to Kaywood Garden. Was a small apartment and when the second girl arrived, we had a -- we got a bigger apartment. And we stayed quite a few years in Kaywood. From there also I took the bus into town to my work.

Q: I wanted to ask --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- and interrupt to ask, you had done all that traveling --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- which you did out of necessity, Greece, Cyprus --

A: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Q: -- Dar Es Salaam.

A: Yes [indecipherable]

Q: But how do you look back on those early years of marriage? It sounds as if your wedding was very joyful, and that must have been a very happy stage in your life.

A: Well that, yes, it was, with exception of the strained relations to my parents.

Q: But did that --

A: But that --

Q: -- did that feel --

A: -- we had a good -- pardon?

Q: -- and -- did that relationship heal with time?

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A: Oh yeah. Wonderf -- when my parents decided to go back to Africa, because my sister and her husband promised to more or less take care of them there, things improved. And so later on there were times when we had to support not only my parents, but also my mother-in-law. And living in Kaywood was not very luxurious, but the children had decent schools. Did they have schools? Yeah. And we made ends meet and actually enjoyed life as well as we could. We joined the Jewish community there, and they -- they fa -- more or less fished me out to become active, first as a secretary of a men's club, then as president of the men's club, and then as president of the congregation 1959 and '60. During that time this group built a synagogue and sold the synagogue because p-people moved in other directions. They built a second synagogue and I stayed member there, now about 55 years that I've been a member of that congregation. But we have to go back to the start. There came one day when I asked for a raise, and they just said, well, sell insurance, you'll make commissions. And I went back -- no, I had met a man who was working for the Group Health association in their office, and he needed -- he was working as chief accountant for Group Health association, which was starting at that time in downtown Washington, and he had an opening. But they -- the only way I could get in there was through an employment agency. I went back to the agency I knew, and through them got an appointment to Group Health, and I told my employer s-sorry, I can make more money there, and I did. But I kept my

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insurance business, which was tiny, with the people who had been working, and kept in touch with it, so that way I worked for -- as assistant chief accountant for Group Health, for a little bit over a year. Was interesting work because we had -- I -- I found that the physicians had to be idealists, who started Group Health. I saw it from the paychecks, which were -- which I had to make out. And on the other hand, the treasurer was a man from Trinidad who, after seeing my history, for months wouldn't talk to me, because I had been heading a black workforce, and he was black. But eventually he got over it and we got quite friendly. He is -- became a CPA in Arlington afterwards. After about one year, the accountant for Wolfe and Cohen, the Insurance agency where I had been, called me and asked why I had left. I told him, it's just a matter of finances, and that I had been married, and --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: -- continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Frederick Wohl. This is tape number three, side B.

A: He asked me to come to his office, the accountant of the insurance agency, and we were talking. I had been friendly with him while I was working there, and he asked me under what conditions I would go back there. I was surprised, even though I'd kept friendly with the owners, I had been to their offices to attend to my

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insurance business every now and then. I asked for a quite healthy salary and for time to build up my own business, and to my surprise, they accepted it. And I went back, and I had some good years there. I learned more about the insurance business and I got registered as agent in Maryland, which was an interesting experience, because the person who ti -- who supervised the examination in Baltimore had what you would call an open hand, and was disappointed when I just shook his hand when I left. But I got my Maryland license, and worked pretty hard. We lived in Kaywood, on the lookout for eventually finding a house. And I had during that time been in contact with an attorney who took care of claims to the German government. This is -- this was of great help to me because the first payment I got for them was used when -- to seriously look after a house. And we lived from, I guess it must have been '42 - '43 - '53, in Silver Spring [indecipherable]

Q: Mr. Wohl, tell me what it would have been for. Would it have been for your pharmacy business, the reparations?

A: No, that reparations had only to do with me personally. It was my interruption of studies, it was my unable to be -- to find work, and it was afterwards a kind of German Social Security. The -- ma-many refugees got payment from Germany, and nobody would talk about it til it was an actual fact, because there was the mentality that if I tell somebody else and he does the same kind of application that I have done, maybe it would influence my a-application. But I found out that I did no

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worse and no better than other refugees, and I got a -- a rent from age -- I think it was age 65, from Germany, which helped us quite a bit.

Q: And what -- what percentage of refugees do you think received this support?

A: Whoever could get it an-and found the right channels. You see, I -- I happened to get to a -- through some people i-in the States, through an attorney in Frankfurt who was pretty active in that, and who afterwards received the first nine months of my pension, which was his contract. And I didn't mind. I was an optimist. I thought, I'll live longer than all these people, and I'm s -- I'm still surprised that this actually happened.

Q: As a f -- as parents, did you think it was important to give your daughters any kind of religious upbringing?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you go to -- oh, tell me.

A: You see, we belonged to the -- in Mount Rainier to the congregation. My wife was that religious and I got that way, too, that we attended Friday night services, and sometimes Saturday. We went to the high holidays, and as I said I took office in the congregation, and enjoyed it. I was not very knowledgeable in religious things, but I had the help of our first permanent rabbi -- oh no, the second permanent rabbi, who was brought in from Europe. He was from Vienna and he had been a rabbi for the British army in Frankfurt before they brou -- took him here. He and his wife

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were very great friends, and I was the one who had to interview this rabbi for his job, and we stayed friends even after he had left Washington, and he was kind of a father figure for me. Rabbi Weinberg.

Q: Did you observe -- did you -- any dietary rules in your home --

A: No --

Q: -- o-or would it just be going to --

A: -- on the high holidays. My wife family had kept a kosher home, so we started out with that in mind, but we are quite liberal by now.

Q: And what about your daughters, in turn?

A: My daughters went to relig -- to the religious school, and to the congregation and were confirmed, and they have much more religion than I ever had. Jackie and her family, even though her husband is not Jewish, b-belong to a congregation in Arizona, in Tucson, where on the high holidays, she usually plays the violin at the services. And my younger daughter, also re -- at l -- goes at least to high holiday services. But they know where they come from and where they belong, to a much greater extent than I did. And my late wife would have been very happy to see how her grandchildren got a real Jewish upbringing. They ma -- Jackie has two daughters, my other daughter is alone. Well, where were we?

A: Well, how was it that both of them have settled in Arizona?

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Q: Well, Jackie got friendly with a young man eventually, who was working in a government committee in Washington and who came from Phoenix. They decided to get married and moved to Tucson, where he went back to university. And Jackie got her law degree here from the American University, and she passed the necessary examinations in Arizona, and that was it. Why my younger daughter, for her practical year in the medical study, went to where her sister lived, and stayed there afterwards. Fortunately they are friendly with each other, and my younger -- younger daughter enjoys her nieces, which is good. So they are both on their own, and after end of their studies, did not need any support from us. So we could live a little bit more comfortable. And we had the nice circle of friends from the old -- friends from the po -- poker round. There are only two brothers left -- no, two brothers and one more, yeah, there are three of the-them left with whom I am in contact, and the one on whose wedding we got engaged, is still a very dear friend, even with my second wife. My business went all right til it got too big for the agency I was working with, and they were unhappy. I had an assistant in their accounting department and now automation came in and I helped them to get automated to some extent, and they -- we had long discussions about computers, because it was too -- too difficult and while I was on my first visit to my parents in Germany, they decided on a computer system. When I came, I naturally had to agree with it, and [indecipherable] it to some extent, so that I could live, that I could

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continue. But they then refused to give me help in the work, because the computers did the work, and as a result, I didn't have enough time for my own insurance business, and I had to consider leaving. I left and went with a life insurance agency who looked to it that I got a decent up -- decent education in life insurance, which was important to me, it was important for them because it -- life insurance company then paid part of my salary, for the first couple of years. I, from then on, put more emphasis in life insurance, which was difficult for me, cause I did not have the right connections, and eventually only -- only sold life insurance. But I kept --

Q: Mm-hm. What do you mean you didn't have the right connections? Other people would come to the business with some [indecipherable] connection --

A: I si -- I see where big companies have their insurance agents who not only do their life insurance nowadays, but also take care of -- in -- advise on investments, which I tried to do at one time, but that year the stock market went down and I gave up on that type of advice.

Q: You chose the wrong time.

A: Yeah. I see today from my stepson, who is in the life insurance business, how the agents go on -- go after big accounts, not small homeowners. The homeowners have to look out for themselves to find an agent, unless somebody just happens to call them. And that helped me, to a certain extent, that couple of attorneys who were in the real estate settlement business, would call me whenever somebody bought a

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house and did not bring an insurance connection to the settlement. They would pick up the phone and give me the name and address, and say oh, I had a customer. That were -- they were very good friends and without them I would not have made a success the way I did. Naturally, after selling these people their fire insurance for their new home, I would at least try to sell them life insurance also, to cover their mortgage, or automobile insurance, or whatever. And I had over 400 accounts, and I had my own little office in Silver Spring, which also has a story because after leaving Wolfe and Cohen, I went to that life agency, and doing their accounts, I found that they were drawing too much money from the business, and I had warned them, but they continued. And after three years, I think, they were unable to keep me because they didn't have money for my salary, and I had to look around what to do. One of the lawyers with whom I was friendly, had to have an office in Silver Spring, because for settlements in Montgomery county, there had to be an office in Silver Spring. So he -- he and an associate had rented an office in the Perpetual Building, which was very seldom used. They would come there for an hour for a settlement and then -- otherwise that place was empty, and I got it, as a helper, I paid -- I -- I worked there, first without paying a penny rent, or t -- even telephone. It cost -- it was no additional charge for them, but afterwards I insisted, and my business grew that I had to take a part time help, and when that was -- when it was too much for this, I associated with an agency in Washington, who were well

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known, and where I had a contract for 10 years, which was satisfactory, but the owner of that agency was not a very stable character, as I found out after years, and in my -- at the end of the eighth year of my contract, he went out of business, and I had to take my accounts somewhere else. I associated with another agency in Silver spr -- no, here in Rockville, and got a three year contract. I was older at that time, and I didn't think any further. After three years, they took my general insurance business over, and I was left with the life insurance alone, which was fine with me. And I worked til the beginning of ninet -- of 2003, in the later years from home. In two -- when my wife got sick in April 2003, I stopped, and that was the end of my professional life.

Q: You know, I'd like to have you comment -- and I don't know what your thoughts are, but on the impact you think there was on your life and thinking of your wartime experiences. Obviously there was a profound impact on career, and --

A: My -- my first wife actually was not too much interested in it. She was interested in the children's education. She realized I had to go out in the evenings, visiting customers. And thank God she made a good job of the education of my daughters. We got along well, naturally had our little differences now and then, but we were married for 42 years. She became sick, she had to go on dialysis for two and a half years, and died, unexpected, but naturally on dial -- dialysis people -- you have -- you have to expect something. But two and a half years was not expected. There are

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people who are on dialysis much longer. It was a sad time, because i -- the two of us, after the daughters were married, had been able to trav -- do quite a bit of traveling, and even when she was on dialysis, we traveled to Germany, we traveled to Bermuda, we traveled to Aruba, where she could get treatment. You had to make arrangements for the treatment, but we enjoyed life as well as we could, and we had a lot of pleasure, actually, from our daughters, whom we visited at least once a year, right?

Q: Did you get involved in politics?

A: From the beginning of living in the Kaywood Garden in Mount Rainier, I joined the democratic party, which helped me in business, and I became in Silver Spring, precinct chairman and did as much or as little as I could for -- i-in party work, but at least I was connected, and met people. I kept busy with that, and with the congrega -- the Jewish congregation and with B'nai B'rith, and especially with the Masonic Lodge. My father had helped me to get into the lodge here in Washington and I've been there now 55 years, at least.

Q: With -- with Freemasons, what are the -- are there people of every religious faith there?

A: The Masonic Lodge is open to everybody who has some kind of religion, but the Catholic church is unfriendly, let's say. There were Catholics in there. There are lodge -- lodges -- by now, I belong to two Masonic Lodges, one in the district and

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one in Maryland. And there are lodges who are [indecipherable] Jewish, but in general anybody who is accepted, and you have to go through ritual and examinations, is acceptable.

Q: Mm-hm. My question about politics was really -- I was wondering whether you felt that there was a link between your wish to be involved and your experience in Nazi Germany.

A: I -- I remember having a written -- a little article in Germany that was published in a [indecipherable] as a -- a letter from -- where I told them that oh, Nazis may be big in the cities, but the general population was quite democratic. Naturally I was wrong, but I remember that. And I wasn't active politically in Germany, no, because before leaving, I was part of a Jewish sports club in Frankfurt for the few d -- short time I was in Frankfurt, but that was about all. The --

End of Tape Three, Side B

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Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Frederick Wohl, conducted by Margaret West, on February the 17th, 2004, in Bethesda, Maryland. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Frederick Wohl on November the 22nd, 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number four, side A.

A: What do you mean, family history? We -- we lived a -- a pretty quiet life. [indecipherable] after we had moved to Silver Spring, where one of the aims was to give the children the best possible schools, and to live in a neighborhood where they could make friends, which was successful. There naturally was always the fact that I had to go and visit customers and my wife was left to educate the children, or to -- to direct their lives. There are many things that happened in my professional career that might be funny or interesting, but I don't think they have any room here. Just now like the time when my mother-in-law was hospitalized in Washington, and walking outside her room I met a man whom I knew, and who was there after a slight heart attack, and who wanted to buy some life insurance. Immediately I had to explain to him that that wasn't quite the way to do it. Or the adventures we had

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with automobiles. Our first car was a Nash that we bought from a man who worked in the NIH, and it was all right. At that time you had to have your car inspected every six months in Virginia, and after moving to Maryland, they were maryli -- more liberal in that respect. The man who sold her the car was sitting in a coffee shop in Athens when we visited Greece some time later -- later. Which was a surprise. You meet people all over the place, and you have to be pretty careful. Others -- things -- the accident I had or avoided on Jackie's 16th birthday, going out to buy -- to buy a birthday cake and also to pick up my younger daughter from music school, we had an accident with a small Citroen car that I had bought some months earlier and that suddenly lost brakes. Fortunately, we could stop by running into the car in front, and nobody got hurt. But the interesting thing was the policeman who came, first thing he did, he wanted to smell my breath. And well, that car had had it, at that time. We later on got a second car -- [crashing sound]

Q: Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn! [tape break]. At this point, Mrs. Evelyn Wohl tripped and fell over in an adjoining room. We therefore, somewhat abruptly, concluded the interview with Frederick Wohl.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Conclusion of Interview