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**INTERVIEW WITH HELMUT BODENHEIM
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INTERVIEW WITH HELMUT BODENHEIM

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Helmut Bodenheim, fourteenth of February, 1994.

I'd like to start out by asking you your name, and date of birth, and where you were born.

HELMUT BODENHEIM: Helmut Bodenheim. I was born October 10, 1917 in Mannheim, Germany.

INT: And that was, your nationality was German.

HELMUT: German.

INT: But now you're American.

HELMUT: American, naturalized American citizen.

INT: Mannheim is where in Germany?

HELMUT: Mannheim is where the Neckar and the Rhine River meet. The state is Baden, B-a-d-e-n, Baden. It's not too far from France, it's not too far from Switzerland. It is the southwest end of Germany.

INT: Could you tell me a little bit what your educational level was before the war?

HELMUT: (pause) Do you want to know Jewish education, general education?

INT: General education. Did you finish high school?

HELMUT: You don't want to know Jewish education.

INT: Sure. What was your education like growing up?

HELMUT: Growing up. When I was five years old my father sent me to a Hebrew teacher to learn at least some Hebrew. He wasn't a very inspiring teacher. All he did is he taught me the first paragraph of Birchas haMazon and a little bit reading. At six years, a real Hebrew school, which was a Talmud Torah, started in the afternoon. It was one afternoon for two hours, and on Sunday morning. Let's say two hours. There was a real curriculum, and they had good teachers, who got us interested. It was mixed classes, boys and girls together. Not too many, but it was a typical Talmud Torah. Curriculum was Hebrew language, translation of a siddur, and then also a translation of the Chumash. Of course first we had to learn how to read properly, and so on, but quite a bit of it was modern Hebrew, and Dikduk. (grammar). At that time I went to public school. It was not a Jewish school. The school was six days a week. You were not permitted to stay

home on Shabbas. We didn't have to write. I told the teacher, "Today is my holiday, I don't want to write." I would bring the books there before the afternoon.

INT: How many Jewish students were in this school?
Well, in your class, say.

HELMUT: In my class? Maybe two.

INT: And you were both religious, so you would both say that about Shabbas?

HELMUT: No, I was religious and the others weren't. They definitely were not religious. But they had two classes, they had about forty students in one class. That was a German public school. But we were learning German language, and a little geography and so on. Very little history. And then simple arithmetic. The school itself was for eight classes. But people who wanted to go to high school, after four years, they can pass a test and get into a high school. After four years, most of the Jewish students did that. Almost all of them. We applied for high school.

INT: This was a public high school you were applying to?

HELMUT: No, no.

INT: Oh, Gymnasium?

HELMUT: A gymnasium. That was by the state of Baden, like State of New York. The teachers were paid by the state. This was the most difficult one, where I went to Gymnasium. I had to pass a test to be accepted. I must say, I didn't have any difficulties on that test. And then I was accepted, and then the work started.

INT: Did you complete four years of high school? Did you complete all four years of Gymnasium?

HELMUT: That's different. You talk about four years. In Germany, the real completion was nine years. But there was also a six year program. The six year program had some odd name. They called it the one year. They just called it the one year program. Because if someone went for six years to the high school, and he was drafted in the German army, instead of serving in a regular army for two years, only one year. That's why they called it, this was the one year. At that time they changed that term and they called it Maturity. But in order to go to the University, you had to go there for nine years.

INT: I see. Well, what I wanted to ask...

HELMUT: It was a difficult curriculum. It started off with Latin, six days a week, and every day at least one hour Latin, sometimes two hours Latin, and we also had geography, and then started out with simple arithmetic. That went on for two years, and

in the third year they added French. In the fourth year they added Greek. And in the third year and fourth year they added history and so on. Then later on in a fifth year or sixth year, I could take English on a voluntary basis. It was from 7:00 to 8:00 in the morning. School started at 8:00. I had to come twice a week between 7:00 and 8:00.

INT: Did you do that?

HELMUT: I did. Yes. In fact, it was a very difficult English course, I must say.

INT: Before we talk so much about your schooling, I just wanted to ask how many years you were able to finish before you left Germany.

HELMUT: Six years at this school, and then I was one year, I was in school while Hitler was in power, and it was impossible for students to go to a university, there was an entire trend to go out of these schools. It was no use if I were to leave Germany, so there was a trend among the youth to learn a trade. There were lawyers who became painters. There were doctors who became automobile mechanics. And people like in my category, they all tried to find some apprentice, a place where to serve an apprenticeship. So finally I found something. He was a glazier. He was putting in glass into windows. He also made mirrors and glass plates. And was grinding glass like these bevels.

INT: Beveled glass.

HELMUT: I learned for five, six months, probably. But the man I worked for he was not a real, they called it, a Master. He was not accredited. He just had a business. But he had somebody working with him who was a master, but he was making window frames. Different windows. Casement windows. Sliding windows. And he suggested that I better go to this man, because after three years, then you can be officially a journeyman.

INT: Okay, but before we get to the Hitler years and how you had to...

HELMUT: No, but since you asked about education. Now connected with the three years' apprenticeship, was a school. A trade school, everybody had to go there who was in this particular trade. It was twice a week, for five hours or more. They would teach drafting, bookkeeping, business correspondence, and some language and arithmetic and geometry. Shop, a lot of shop, arithmetic and geometry.

INT: And you picked what you wanted to do?

HELMUT: No, not picked. I had to, picked, in Germany you couldn't **pick** anything. I had to take this, that's all. Whatever they told me, so. That was right under the Hitler administration. I went there twice a week. I was the only Jew.

INT: Okay, but before we get to that, I want to talk a little bit about your family. So, well, let's finish education. You were, you went to school, you went all through grade

school through the equivalent of eighth grade, and then you went to Gymnasium afterwards...

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: ...for six years.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: And then you had to go, because of Hitler, you had to go to this trade school. And you went for like three years, or something like that.

HELMUT: Three years. As long as the apprenticeship was.

INT: Could you tell me, do you have any other siblings?

HELMUT: But I didn't tell you that after the trade school I went in order to learn the business part of woodworking into a lumberyard for five months, and **after that** I went to the Yeshiva Bais Hamedresh in Frankfurt to learn some Gemara. I was there for five months until I emigrated to the United States. That was Rabbi Breuer's yeshiva.

INT: Could you tell me a little bit about your family? What kind of family it was, what, how many siblings you had, what your parents were like?

HELMUT: The Bodenheim family was very well-established in that area, and highly respected. What I remember was there was Abraham Bodenheim, that was my great-grandfather. He didn't live in Mannheim, he lived in Biblis. I think he moved from Bodenheim on the Rhine River to Biblis.

INT: Could you spell that?

HELMUT: Biblis. B-i-b-l-i-s. It was a small town. And actually they didn't even work. They were landowners. They inspected the land. They had people working for them. And in the evening they got together to the city, and they learned Gemara. This Shas is from, the son of Abraham Bodenheim was Hertz Bodenheim. This Shas is from him. He lived in Biblis also as a landowner and so on. My father told me he had a carriage and a horse, and he was riding around. In the evening they had Minchah and Maariv, and then they learned Gemara together. They were, they knew quite a bit. But the Balebatim, from Biblis. But later on he decided he wants to move to Mannheim. Mannheim was a big city. He was probably tired of the small town. He knew very well about tobacco because they were growing tobacco. He established a tobacco business. Raw tobaccos. They bought tobaccos from the farmers, and sold it to cigarette manufacturers. Pipe tobacco and so on. And he bought a big warehouse with some machinery; at that time it was old-fashioned machinery. I mean, at that time it was usable. It did the job. And they had to have a big scale, and a truck would go so that it would load it on there and so on.

INT: So he changed his whole business.

HELMUT: He started a business. He knew about it. He got himself a foreman, his name was Gunder, and the tobacco had to be locked up. They had to get a custom clerk. They couldn't go in their own, they couldn't go in their own tobacco. They had a custom clerk who would lock it up in the evening. In the morning, open it up, and then the workers could work. This was a law, and so on. So he was a very highly respected...

INT: Was he well-to-do, your father?

HELMUT: That's not my father. That's my grandfather. Hertz Bodenheim.

INT: Was he well-to-do?

HELMUT: Yeah, he was well-to-do. He had six children. I can tell you how long he lived, I've got the charts there, but I don't know them by heart. And he had Talmidei Chachamim in his house. One of them was a rather outstanding man, you probably never heard of him, his name was Pinchus Kohn. He was one of the founders of the Agudah. And he was a tremendous Talmud Chacham. And he came as a teacher. So as a teacher he came to the house of my grandfather. I don't know whether it would interest you. He had such a general education which was unbelievable. My father was a boy going to Gymnasium. He had to write a composition about the bridge across the Rhine river. My father was not mechanically inclined at all. He didn't know the first thing about engineering. So he was desperate sitting there. So when he came to Mannheim on that afternoon, that teacher, Rabbi Pinchus Kohn, he asked my father, "What's the matter? You don't look so happy." He said, "Yeah, I have to write a composition about the..." So he said, "Okay, let's take a walk." So they walked to the bridge, and he looked at it, and then he wrote the most detailed, by looking at it, how many bolts and nuts it has, and what kind I-beams and so on.

INT: He was just a brilliant man.

HELMUT: Yeah, a brilliant...So my father had a composition pass with flying colors, which he had not written. But there was no one in the family but Pinchus Kohn was, later on, when I grew up, he came sometimes to Heidelberg, and we travelled from Mannheim to Heidelberg just to listen to a lecture. He was just brilliant. He always had something new. And he knew all, he knew Sanskrit, it's an old forgotten language. And everything. And was a great, tremendous Talmud Chacham.

INT: Could you tell me a little bit about your father?

HELMUT: So then later on when my grandfather passed away, my father had a brother, who was two years younger. They together took over the business. Bodenheim and Company. That was one of the most respected tobacco dealers in Baden. It was all raw tobacco in southern Germany. My father during the year, he didn't work much. He, in

fact, what I saw was that in the morning he went to the business. He ate lunch, and then he rested. And then he would go to a club there, and they would play chess, and then he would go back to the business to see if everything is all right, and then after supper he would go and they would play pinochle. So that's very often. And then very often he had friends invited and they would play pinochle on Motzei Shabbas. This was a rule among the German Jews. In Mannheim they didn't learn too much. It was a different generation. They went to shul and so on, on Shabbas and all this, but that's the way it was in Mannheim.

INT: So was your family Orthodox?

HELMUT: Yeah, sure, it was Orthodox. He was Orthodox. But they didn't learn too much. His brother was also Orthodox, but less Orthodox. He conducted the choir, his brother. The shul, Orthodox synagogues had choirs in Germany. He was just conducting. They had a music director rehearsing and writing the notes and all that, but he had a very good ear, and he was capable, so he conducted for many years, it was his hobby. Now the story with my father, he was not lazy, but he had to know... This kind of a business was more or less a business where you had to sit down and wait. In September and October and so on, my father got up 4:00 in the morning with the foreman, the son of the foreman who worked for my grandfather, they went out to the farms. They inspected tobacco. And the tobacco was brought to auctions to the nearest town. And they made some notes, and then they had already in their mind this tobacco is for this customer, for Brinkmann, for Jacoby, or so on, who is in Hamburg, and so on. So they would buy this tobacco, and there was a process of fermentation, they would move it from here to there, and so on. They knew how to treat it. So my father would go there, and talk to the men, and then, a lot was sold.

INT: So that was the busy time of year.

HELMUT: Yeah, that was a very busy. Four o'clock until late at night. That was very...

INT: But all the Chagim are around that time, also.

HELMUT: Well, a little bit later, yeah. They had ways of getting, they were always during the Yom Tovim they didn't do anything. But it was usually, I would say it was usually after the Yom Tovim. So this was the business.

INT: Could you tell me about your mother a little bit?

HELMUT: I can't tell you much. My mother died when I was a year old. My mother was from a very well-known family. If you hear about Walbrook, the German bankers, this was Hirschland, they were in Essen. Essen was Krupp, the arms manufacturer. Big arms manufacturer. There were two Hirschlands. There was one, he had a big bank. When you came to Essen, you saw a big building almost like a skyscraper. That was the big Hirschland bank. My grandfather, he had a smaller, they're cousins. And...my

grandmother, she was a very, she davened Shacharis, Minchah and Maariv. She was very, personally a very religious person.

INT: Your mother's mother.

HELMUT: Yeah. But my mother died one year after I was born. There was an epidemic of, it started out with flu, and then it was pneumonia. Within three days my mother was dead. They had no penicillin or nothing. It was impossible, nobody could help. And many young women, all in the city, in Mannheim, they died. So this was already a very catastrophic event for the whole family.

INT: Did you have other siblings?

HELMUT: I only had one sister, she was thirteen years older than I was. So she had to do with my education. Sometimes I didn't want to be educated by her, I didn't approve of everything but we always had a housekeeper.

INT: So wait, so you never knew your mother at all.

HELMUT: No. Not at all. I haven't seen her.

INT: Did your father remarry?

HELMUT: No, no. He was shocked by this whole thing, and never even thought of remarrying. No.

INT: So who raised you? Your sister?

HELMUT: My sister, but we had a housekeeper. Until I was five years old we had one, and she went later on, not Jewish, she went to the United States and married a Jew. That's one. And then came another one, and she was like you had in many Jewish families, the real housekeeper. They had one in Antwerp, I'm sure my wife talked about it, Corey. An uncle of mine had one, her name was, Emilie, also his wife had died. And so a Gentile housekeeper was practically...

INT: So you had no mother. I mean, could she replace your mother, I mean...Did you go to her when you hurt your leg, or you fell down?

HELMUT: Nobody...yeah, she was like a mother. She was, she...she was watching me left and right. I was her whole life. Her whole concern.

INT: She worried about you?

HELMUT: Oh, everything. Yeah.

INT: She cared about you.

HELMUT: Yeah. Everything. Yeah. She was, in fact, she always took my side. See, the way it is, my sister was much older and she, my sister knew how to get things from my father, what she wanted. I didn't ask for anything. So the housekeeper, she always (said), "Well, she's getting everything, what kind of a deal is this?" (laughs) So she spoke up for me.

INT: She stuck up for you.

HELMUT: I was also criticized. I was criticized. That went for many years. I still feel that today.

INT: How so?

HELMUT: My sister criticized me. She would say, "You see this friend? He is much smarter than you are." She had no idea about any feeling of psychology. She meant well, maybe, she had later on herself 27 grandchildren and four children and so on, you should dare to say anything against her grandchildren or children, that they did anything you don't like. But anyway, that's the way it was. But I was still on good terms with her, especially later on. And...

INT: But it sounds like growing up she wasn't exactly...

HELMUT: Yeah, she...She would speak to Hebrew teachers maybe, or so on. (pause)

INT: How old was she when she got married, or how old were you when she got married and she moved out?

HELMUT: It was before Hitler, when she got married, Hitler came to power the 30th of January. She got married in December, just a few months, a month or two just before.

INT: But how old were you then?

HELMUT: Seventeen. I was born in '17.

INT: Right, and Hitler came to power in...

HELMUT: No, it was not '35, it was '32. How much was that? Fifteen years. That's how old I was.

INT: So you were pretty much grown up by the time she left the house.

HELMUT: Yeah. And then she moved to Frankfurt, she married a doctor.

INT: What is your sister's name?

HELMUT: Hirsch. Elsa Hirsch. You heard about Samson Raphael Hirsch?

INT: Yes.

HELMUT: Samson Raphael Hirsch? My brother-in-law is a great-great-grandson of Hirsch. They were all a family of doctors. His father was a doctor, his grandfather was a doctor, and then came Samson Raphael Hirsch. It was a very...

INT: Yichusdik.

HELMUT: Prominent marriage. In fact, somebody like this from the Frankfurt Orthodoxy, marrying some girl from Mannheim. You see, Mannheim did not, this congregation did not go along with what they did there. The Hirsch congregation in Frankfurt. In Germany you had secession and you had not secession. Frankfurt was secession, they made their own Orthodox congregation. In the city of Mannheim, we were Orthodox, and we formed together in one congregation. So that had it's influence, and so on. But it was a very peaceful, nice congregation, closely knit congregation. And anyway, he married my sister just the same. And I was friendly, on good terms with my brother-in-law. He was a very fine man. I mean, he was older than I was. There were all kinds of complications. He wanted me to be, let's say, what he called more religious, or more to the right. And he thought he could influence me. So I rejected his influence. I didn't want. Because when Hitler came to power, or even before, we had youth groups. The youth in Germany, they found a way to cope with Hitler, and the way to cope with Hitler is to organize a youth group. There were the Zionists, there were the Hatzair, and people who believed in Martin Buber. Then there was Mizrachi, and then there was the Ezra, Agudah. We belonged to the Agudah. At that time it was Mizrachi, and the Agudah. And together, we had youth groups. There was a boys' group, and a girls' group. And they were run by the teachers. They teachers, they were idealists, on a voluntary basis. They were giving shiurim in their spare time. They were going on hikes with the youth, and so on. And they also influenced, those teachers were from very Orthodox backgrounds. One had been in the yeshiva in the East, I think the...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

HELMUT: I didn't need my brother-in-law to influence me, because whatever he told me I'd heard it a hundred times already. I preferred to hear it with people of my own age from a teacher who actually knew more than my brother-in-law, so I didn't want to listen to him. By the way, he started teaching me in the morning, "You've got to say the brachos." Before we were in these youth groups, we were not that particular about it. That was something new that you say in the morning and so on. But...

INT: So he sort of took it upon himself to be your...

HELMUT: Yeah, he felt he has to influence me. He wanted me to be a great tzaddik. So very often I resented it. I told my sister about it and so on. Whatever outcome I was, it didn't come from my brother(in-law), it came from the youth groups. Because the youth groups, they had a program. During the Hitler time. Decisions had to be made, even the young people. In Germany, the youth, they all wanted to go to Israel. United States, nobody wanted to go there. That was...the traifene medina. Everybody knew it was very difficult to keep Shabbas here. And that money means an awful lot in this country, and the youth somehow was idealistic, because money had been in Germany. Their parents, they all had money and what came out of it. The youth said, "Well, we don't need anymore. If Hitler tries to destroy us, we go to Israel. When something comes up, we can fight. At least we are over there, and we are now our own country." So people went on hachshara. Hachshara was preparation for Israel.

INT: Like farming?

HELMUT: Well, it could be either way. It could be go to a farm for six months or a year, or you could go into a shop and learn a trade. You could become a toolmaker or something. That was all considered hachshara. Preparation.

INT: That's what "hachshara" means? Preparation?

HELMUT: Yeah. They had them in different places. And the Nazis actually did not object to this, because this was expediting to get Jews, at that time, that was not the Wannsee Conference yet. Which the final solution. At that time they wanted to get rid of the Jews. There were other ways of going to Israel. Somebody I think had 5,000 pounds, he showed it to the British administration, they would let him into... The elderly people would do that. Many doctors went there and so on. So, but the Orthodox organizations like Agudah and Mizrachi, they didn't only want the people to be in farming or learn a trade, they want them to go to yeshiva, they should have some spiritual preparation, too. So they ask for at least five to six months in a yeshiva, or a center of learning.

INT: These boys that you were with in this Ezra movement, what kind of families did they come from? Were they similar to your background, or...

HELMUT: Similar background. Some of them were not from a background as wealthy as mine. We went on hikes. Sometimes we paid them that they should come along. We paid the train fare. We very often went on hikes. In the summertime we went on hikes to Switzerland. We could still get passports at that time to go to Switzerland. They had somebody there in Mannheim at the passport office. You put twenty marks in the passport, he would sign it, and we would go to Switzerland for a two week vacation climbing the Swiss Alps. We came back, we also read over there the Nazi, the literature against Germany. Many books had been written, what was really going on in a concentration camp. They had some camps already in Dachau and so on and Aranienburg. So I remember we once we went to Davos, that's the place where Arafat was the other day in Switzerland.

INT: Could you spell that?

HELMUT: D-a-v-o-s. And we were up in a hut. We stayed there overnight in the mountains. The man, he had all these books. I remember spending hours just reading these books.

INT: Anti-German books?

HELMUT: Well, not anti-German. Truth.

INT: The truth.

HELMUT: True reports.

INT: Was this news to you, you didn't know this before you saw those books?

HELMUT: No, you heard people went, were sent to concentration camps, and they sent the ashes back, to the people and said, "Killed while trying to escape." They sent an urn back. That was in the early Nazi times. But that was not the real extermination, Holocaust. That only started later with the Wannsee Conference, where they said, "Now it's time for the Final Solution, to exterminate all Jews."

INT: Before we get to the Hitler times, could you tell me a little bit about your childhood, what it was like growing up?

HELMUT: When I went to public school, my friends were not religious. I was religious.

INT: Did you have non-Jewish friends, too?

HELMUT: No.

INT: Even though you were in public school?

HELMUT: No. And also Gymnasium. Also no non-Jewish friends. They stayed among themselves, and we stayed among ourselves.

INT: Was there anti-Semitism then, or it was just Jews stuck with Jews?

HELMUT: In the schools? I can't say. The Gymnasium at that time, no.

INT: Well, why didn't you...

HELMUT: Let's say there was a social anti-Semitism. We didn't want them, they didn't want us. We were very friendly in the school, and so on. We would help each other, but

then to the homes...There was one, when I went to public school, there was one boy I remember I went there once to his house, he lived a block away, but it didn't mean anything.

INT: It was unusual to go to...

HELMUT: Later on I lost contact with him. He probably became a Nazi, who knows? I don't know, but that didn't interest me what happened to him. But, in this city where I lived, we kept together and later on, after I was thirteen years old, only Orthodox people, because I had no non-religious friends anymore. I have friends, with whom I still have contact, like in New York, a friend of mine, he's a bachelor. He comes here all the time for Yom Tov. And his brother, he went to a kibbutz, Orthodox kibbutz in Israel. Whenever we go there, we visit him. And there were other people. A dentist lived in our house. He had two sons. One became a very prominent man. I don't know whether you ever heard about Dr. Leo Levy. He has a lot to do, he writes about the calendar and so on. A physicist. He worked for Gyroscope here, and then he went to Israel. And his brother lives in Washington Heights. This is also one of the people from my congregation. Father was a dentist. But then we had people in that group, their fathers had come from Poland, and they went to the villages selling merchandise. Shirts, whatever it is.

INT: So your friends were from different economic backgrounds.

HELMUT: They were different. Not all of them were, the parents were rich. But we treated each other the same. There was no consideration that the parents were rich at all. I was not more respected because my father was rich, and so on. And other people, we took the people the way they were. That was one of the principles of the Ezra, and of the Youth Movement. Take the people for what they are.

INT: Sort of a communist kind of, or a socialist kind of a view of people, like everybody's equal?

HELMUT: No, there was nothing socialist. Maybe parents, some of them didn't like that, so they **called** it communist (laughs). Maybe some parents would have liked it maybe I should be friendly with the son of some rich manufacturer there.

INT: Did you enjoy the youth group?

HELMUT: Yeah, sure. That was our whole life. The social life. In other words, we went to school, and then during the week we had (phone interruption) shiurim, we had discussion group, and every Sunday we went on a hike. We had a difficult problem in school, the group leader would help me out and so on. So I could go on the hike. So that went on for quite a number of years. Until slowly people started leaving out of town, maybe for hachshara. Or they would go away to Israel, or to the United States. I don't recall anybody going there. I think I was about the only, and I put up a tremendous fight. I didn't want to...

INT: Before we get to that, I want to ask you about why you went to the United States, but I also wanted to ask you about your father and your relationship with your father. Did you have a close relationship with him growing up?

HELMUT: Yeah, I had. I had a close relationship. I could say so, yeah. Sometimes I had different views. I was interested in music and opera and symphonies and so on. Piano.

INT: Do you play an instrument?

HELMUT: Piano, yeah. When I was ten years old, I had some lessons, but the teacher could not inspire me, and then we went to the Gymnasium and I had so much work, then I stopped it. But when I was nineteen years old, I said to my father, "I want to have piano lessons again." So I went to a good teacher, he was a music director. And he was, he was actually the conductor of the synagogue choir. And I was very, he taught me quite a number of things.

INT: Your father was against this music?

HELMUT: No, he was not, no, he was not against it, but I was against card playing. I said, "You are wasting your time. Go and learn, or go to a shiur, or a discussion group."

INT: You said that to your father?

HELMUT: (laughs) Well, yes. All the boys said that to their parents. All right, not everybody was interested in music. People were not musical. But they had other interests. But we interchanged our views. We went to concerts together, to opera, and so on. This, with women's voices, this didn't exist, this such a thing. In Germany, it was unheard of.

INT: The restriction of not hearing women's voices.

HELMUT: I know all the Wagnerian operas by heart!

INT: Before you realized he was an anti-Semite.

HELMUT: Or whatever, yeah.

INT: Do you listen to Wagner now?

HELMUT: Sure, I listen. I listen to it. Nothing has changed with him. He didn't like music, and he wrote a stupid book. He didn't think that Jews had accomplished much in music. Which was actually true! We had no Bach and Beethoven. He's actually of Jewish descent himself. His father...But I'm not saying he was not an anti-Semite, but he

had Jews working for him. Quite a number. Levy was his conductor. Rubinstein was a pianist. He wrote...

INT: Anton Rubinstein?

HELMUT: No, no. Rubinstein.

INT: Arthur Rubinstein.

HELMUT: No, another one. Somebody else. He committed suicide later. But he transcribed the Parzifal for piano. But there were others. He had a lot of Jews working for him, Wagner, in the office, and...

INT: So you and your father disagreed on what was important.

HELMUT: No, my father in fact, he admired that I was interested in music, and he liked that I played piano. He thought it was a great thing. No. But he would have liked me to be more interested in business. The youth groups, they were not in favor of business. They said, "Somebody is a businessman, all he does is a middleman. He's not creative." They said, "We feel that a person should be creative. If you're a cabinetmaker, you make a cabinet, then you have created something. And just be a businessman, to buy a cabinet and sell it and add fifty marks to it and put it in your pocket..." somehow didn't appeal to... Today I feel almost different. I learned later, when I was here, I felt different about it. I found out if someone is creative, he is a slave here, very often.

INT: Because they don't make money?

HELMUT: To be a mechanic. I went for it, I became a mechanic, I know what it meant. In fact, I tried, later on I tried to get away from being a mechanic. But my father...

INT: What was he like, what was his personality like, your father?

HELMUT: Well, he was very much under the influence that my mother didn't live any more. He couldn't go to a funeral, he would start crying. So it was...but later on, he was very, later on I've seen him very happy, too. When my sister got married, and so on.

INT: So he was mourning for your mother for a long time.

HELMUT: Well, yeah.

INT: Did he talk to you about her at all?

HELMUT: No.

INT: No?

HELMUT: He never talked about my mother, no.

INT: So how do you know about your mother? Did anyone ever talk to you about her? What she was like?

HELMUT: I know that she was a very fine person. This I knew, because they had beggars coming, women, who were getting tzedakah. One came on Monday, and Tuesdays, one was a Monday woman, the Tuesday woman, the Wednesday...(laughs). And our housekeeper, she knew about it. So sometimes she gave me, I don't know, a quarter or what. She said, "Give it to her." So I gave it to her, she started lecturing me what a nice person my mother was.

INT: And how much more she would give. But that's the only way you knew about your mother.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Did your sister tell you about her at all?

HELMUT: (pause) She only told me one thing. That my mother got a phone call from her sister asking her how do you feel. She said, "I'm fine. I'm very fine. Excellent." And my sister said, shortly after that she was dead. She remembered she said to her, "You shouldn't talk like this. Don't exaggerate how you feel." That's about the only thing I remember. But otherwise, I don't, I know she was painting. I saw some paintings from her.

INT: Was she good? Was she a good artist?

HELMUT: Yeah. We had them hanging there. They were very nice. My grandmother I knew. Her mother I knew.

INT: She was the religious one.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Was your mother musical?

HELMUT: I think so. This piano, she got this from an uncle. (Points to a beautiful mahogany piano, in excellent condition.) I brought this over here, this piano.

INT: Oh, really?

HELMUT: Yeah, she got it from an uncle. It was made especially. We had a reception room. The entire room was mahogany, like this piano. So...later on when I was here, I

had this piano sent here. I had furniture sent here. This is a special situation. I don't know if you want to get into...

INT: Yeah, I do. I definitely do. But tell me a little bit more about your father. Just about his personality. He was mourning your mother a long time.

HELMUT: The whole thing had a very bad end. There was a family tragedy and so on. Everything was going fine, but I had to leave Germany. My brother-in-law was still there, but he had a brother in New York. The brother in New York, he had a millinery business. The name was John Fredericks. And he was very prosperous. And he was willing to give me an affidavit. In other words, he had to guarantee, an affidavit of support, he had to guarantee that I wouldn't be a public charge. I wouldn't take unemployment or anything. If I wouldn't have a job, then he would have to support me. He signed it, and then I went to the consul in Stuttgart and so on. He interviewed me, he said, okay. And let me go to the United States. Against my will. I wanted to go to Israel, but my father talked me into it. And his brother-in-law, he had a son, my cousin, who was a lawyer, but he was during most of the Hitler time in Switzerland. He also went to the United States. And my uncle, he went here to look around, and so on. And see what was. So he was very, very rich. His wife came from Switzerland. And while there was inflation in Germany, he bought real estate for pennies. So they were, I mean my father was not poor. He was wealthy. But this one was a millionaire. Unbelievable. So they talked into me, and said, "Look. Your brother-in-law is a doctor; he cannot go to Israel. They don't need doctors in Israel. They have. So better to go to United States. Later if you want to go to Israel, you can still go there. But go." So finally I gave in, after the yeshiva, took a boat.

INT: But why did you leave? Because things were getting bad?

HELMUT: Oh, of course. Well, you didn't ask me what was going on.

INT: We didn't get to that yet.

HELMUT: We're turning everything upside down.

INT: We are. We're a little upside down. Yeah. But let me just get back to your father, and then we'll have to come back. Did he decide...I wanted you to talk a little bit more about his personality. Did he decide for you that you should leave?

HELMUT: Yeah, he influenced me. He wrote to the brother of my brother-in-law sent us an affidavit. So he sent affidavit, and he sent me a list, and when you come to the United States, then buy this, get these kind of shirts, and get this and that, and so on. He was quite practical. He was not married.

INT: Why didn't your father go with you?

HELMUT: He had a business. He still had a business in Germany. And he thought of going later, but something happened which was very unpleasant. That my uncle, he went to the United States with his wife. He promised my father to come back, because certain things have to be straightened out in the business. He was getting money somehow from Germany, and it was very intricate. It was involved with the business. And so he promised my father. He said you should stay, and then later on he could come. They had sent some money out that was almost legal. They said they have a debt in Switzerland, by Mr. Rothschild, and the company paid that debt, but paid it to themselves. A few thousand dollars, and so on. They had some money outside. So I went to the United States. That was '38. And there was my uncle with his wife. They had an apartment on Riverside Drive, and they had a maid, and they lived like they had lived in Germany. Just the same. There was no immigration. They just moved. But they didn't have first papers yet. So then they said they are going on a trip somewhere, they told me. My father was writing letters. He said, "Your uncle promised to come back to get the business things straightened out. What's the matter?" But before I left, there were people who knew my uncle. I still remember, I went to music lessons, stopped me on the street and said, "How are you doing?" I said, "Fine." "Where's your uncle?" "In New York." He said, "What's going to be with him?" I said, "Oh, he will come back once they get their things straightened." He said, "Take it from me. He's not coming back." He said to me, "Just, I want you to know it. Tell your father." I told my father, my father said, "Oh, my brother's not going to cheat me," and so on. So what they did is, they went from New York to Cuba, immigrated to Cuba with a lawyer to the United States, got their first papers and stayed. But what they also did, they wrote to Germany, "We have emigrated from Mannheim to New York." You write this to the Nazi, and they come right away. So the next day already, they were in the business. My father went to Baden-Baden for recreation for a week at the time. There was a bookkeeper there, Mr. Ehrlich. Came there the Gestapo, and Mr. Ehrlich said, "Look, I can't help you. The partner is in Baden-Baden, maybe he will straighten things out for you." Because they said to the bookkeeper, "You were sending money for Theo Bodenheim out of Germany." That was...

INT: A big crime.

HELMUT: A tremendous crime. You could be killed for that. They went to Baden-Baden, they arrested my father and brought him to Mannheim, and they started searching through the whole apartment. My father had a steel safe. They went there and they found coupons from bonds. Must have been, I don't know, there were so little. So they asked my father, while the bookkeeper was there. My father turned white, and said, "I don't remember what it's all about," and so on. So they said to him, "Something looks fishy to us. But we don't have time, we'll be back tomorrow." And my father killed himself on that night.

INT: Oh, my gosh.

HELMUT: Well, he had no arrangements to leave Germany. The least thing they would have done to him was send him to a concentration camp. So he was stuck. So that's what, this was the end.

INT: Why did his brother do that? Why did your uncle...

HELMUT: He wanted somebody to get his money. The bookkeeper later on he still worked for him to do certain things. Then came the 10th of November, and he had a very fancy apartment. He had a whole house, an apartment. So the bookkeeper running away from the Nazis went into his apartment. So he heard about it. So he said, "Why would the bookkeeper, he has no right to go into my apartment!" I said to him, "Are you kidding?" I said, "The Nazis are persecuting..." So he said, "Is there no more decency in this world?" See, I was twenty years old. He said, "Even you go against me, and that man has no right to go, no matter what." So anyway...

INT: This is your father's younger brother?

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: The one that was the partner in the business.

HELMUT: Yeah, two years younger. His wife was also, were (shrewdies?) somehow. So this was already a disaster. Then my brother-in-law...

INT: How did you hear about that? You were in America. How did you hear about your father's death?

HELMUT: There was somebody who emigrated to the United States already in 1924. His name is Offenbacher, and he could travel back and forth from New York to Germany. They wouldn't do anything to him. He was an American citizen. He happened to be in Frankfurt. And at that time, I lived in the YMHA. He lived there. So they gave him a carpet and all, small carpet for me. So I should have it. From our house. From the furniture. So he brought it, he gave it to me. So I saw some documents which indicated that they were signed before my father died. I could see there was something fishy. So I asked him. I said, "How did my father die?" So he said, "To tell you the truth, he killed himself." He said, "Everybody over there says his brother, it was his brother's fault. His brother reported his emigration to the Nazis. And then after the brother, they arrested your father." So that was not the end yet, of the tragedy. My brother-in-law came, he was in Germany still on the 10th of November. He was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. The doctor.

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

INT: So they sent, they captured your brother-in-law, and they sent him to a camp.

HELMUT: Yeah, all right. He went to Buchenwald. Yeah. Like everybody at that time. When this Von Rath was killed. Kristal Night. Rabbi Breuer for instance, he was saved by a miracle. The Nazi who was in charge of it, he saw it and he said, "All the people over sixty step forward." So Rabbi Breuer was also among the people to be sent to Buchenwald. He didn't step forward. So he said, "What's the matter with you? You are over sixty. Step forward." So he said, "You step forward." So the ones that stepped forward, they sent them home. And then the others, all right, my brother-in-law, he was thirty-eight years old, they sent him to Buchenwald. But most of them came home. But a few of them were murdered, tortured, murdered.

INT: What year was this, when they sent them?

HELMUT: 10th of November, 1938. But then, shortly after that, he got papers to go to the United States. They had sent two children to Holland, and they met these two, they had three children at that time, and one girl went with them, and then they met the children, in I think Southampton, and so on, and then they went on that ship, they came to them on a ship, and then they went to the United States. And his brother, he paid him a salary. He let him study, become a doctor again, and so on. And later on they moved to Chicago, and one daughter, one girl was born in Atlantic City. Still, they have four children. So my sister had twenty-seven grandchildren, and I don't even know how many great-grandchildren, and so on. But when my brother-in-law came here, I asked him about the whole thing. So he said, "Yeah." He said, "This guy, he sold your father down the river. What we have to do now is, the least thing he can do is, if they sent money out of Germany we want to have a detailed account about that, and we want to know whether he knew something about these coupons," which were found in my father's safe. So my brother-in-law, we were there one evening, we ate supper there, and then, my brother-in-law he started asking him questions. So right away he got very upset. He said, "I took care of sending you money out, and you have no right to ask any questions." And so on. And his wife says, "Oh, let's forget about that. Don't get so excited." My brother-in-law, he had high blood pressure anyway, that's how he died later, but...he didn't go on, but then he went home, and then meantime we got a letter from our uncle. He said, "I'm keeping some money for you. If you want to have that money, please sign the attached statement." The statement said, "I hereby accept this amount, even if I am entitled to file additional claims, I will never do that." So my brother-in-law said, "How do you get a statement like this? You need a lawyer. So we took a lawyer, he was Dr. Kahn, he was a judge in Germany. I showed it to him. So he was laughing. He said, "What do you mean? The guy admits that he has money. So let's go and get the money and then we'll talk." My brother-in-law was so excited about the whole thing he couldn't go there. But I went there. So I got into an argument. They started, "Well, how does it come, you don't want to sign this? This legal process, everybody has to do this, and so on. Don't you trust us?" So I said, "Well, I couldn't very well **trust** you. My father couldn't trust you. Why should I trust you?"

INT: What did he say for himself about that?

HELMUT: I don't know. So he said to me, "If you don't sign it, I will never have anything to do with you anymore." So I said, "Okay, fine. If that's the way you feel, I can't help you." We took the money, and I never had anything to do with him anymore.

INT: You never saw him again?

HELMUT: I saw him once on the street. But he was talking. You heard about the Wurzweiler foundation? Well, Wurzweiler comes from my home town. Gustav Wurtzweiler. We knew him well. He was talking to him. I just passed by . I saw him. I didn't stop or anything like that. But he had a son, my cousin. So I had nothing to do with him, either, for 53 years. It was a year and a half ago I get a phone call from him. "This is Herbert Bodenheim." I said, "Herbert Bodenheim? You must be my cousin." He said, "Yeah, I'm your cousin." He said, "I think it's about time to bury the ax." I said, "You want to bury the ax, bury the ax." So he said, "I don't even know what happened there at that time." So I explained it to him. He was 83 years old. Or 82 years old. No, 83. I explained it to him. So he had been brainwashed. He was saying, "Everything was the fault of your brother-in-law." I said, "My brother-in-law?! Yeah, because he was in a concentration camp, that's his fault? He suffered in Germany and all this?" So then he said, "I'll tell you something. After you had nothing to do with my father anymore, he practically lost his mind. He was just sitting in a room and talking to himself. He was not himself anymore. And later on he got cancer of the lung and he died. He was completely finished. So.

INT: That's quite a story.

HELMUT: So, what should I say to that cousin, I'm going to fight you? After 53 years. So we're in touch. We call each other up every two weeks or so. He comes up with all kinds of, some information about family. Actually it's been useful to me. I had some paintings here. I wasn't sure whether, I got these when I was a soldier in Germany. They were supposed to be my great-grandparents'. That's what the housekeeper of my uncle said. And she said, "There is somebody in (?), and he has them." So anyway, we sent somebody there, and he got these paintings. So I've had it since. But I wasn't a hundred percent sure. So this cousin of mine, without knowing about it, he said to me, "Uncle Simon in Darmstadt, he had the paintings of our great-grandparents." So I said, "I have them now." So I know these are the great-(grandparents'), when he said that. Otherwise, he's not, we had the same congregational background. He's not, he belongs to a Reform congregation. He always ate traife, and he worked on Shabbas. Nothing. Absolutely no Yiddish(keit). He got married much later. He has one daughter. She's not married.

INT: I think we'll stop here.

HELMUT: Do you want to stop here? Okay.

(Pause)

INT: Okay, the last time we talked, we talked about your father a little bit. But do you have some, are there some adjectives you could use to describe him, what he was like? You have photographs here, and maybe you could explain a little bit about what he was like. What kind of person he was.

HELMUT: He was a wise person, whose intelligence was used by the congregation. For years he held an office. The congregation had something like the House of Representatives. They had a group of representatives, he was one of them. They went to meetings and they had to make suggestions and so forth, running the congregation itself.

INT: He looks like a very distinguished person. Very well dressed and...

HELMUT: He was. And this is my mother here.

INT: Oh, that's your mother?

HELMUT: Yeah, with my sister.

INT: Oh, with your sister. Was she wearing a sheitel, was she covering her hair?

HELMUT: No.

INT: No, that was her hair?

HELMUT: No, she didn't wear a sheitel. You didn't find too many people in my congregation wearing sheitels.

INT: No, not in those days.

HELMUT: Maybe the wife of the rabbi, the teacher, the shochet, and so forth.

INT: People went more to the right later on.

HELMUT: Not. Only in the United States later. Even at Breuer's, many, many people didn't wear sheitels. That came only later. That was on the influence of the immigration of the survivors of concentration camps, where there were quite a number of right wing Orthodox people. And they had an influence later on.

INT: Could you talk about your father a little bit? Describe him with a few adjectives?

HELMUT: He was the mastermind of the business. He learned the tobacco business from his father, and from the foreman of his father, and the son of the foreman worked with him later, to continue the business. He went on trips selling tobacco, and then early in the morning they got up, after, I mentioned that.

INT: Yeah, but as a person, his personality, not so much what he did.

HELMUT: So this was his activity in the business. As an individual he was, he was very popular. He was well-liked. In the family and in the community, by Jews and Gentiles, he was well-known as a very distinguished person. He spent his day in a way which here in this country is unheard of. German Jews, they were wealthy already for generations. So earning a living was not too much of a problem. Except, there were a few very bad years in that business. But what he did most of the time is he went to the office, and noontime, he came home, we had lunch, the big meal was lunchtime. He rested for an hour.

INT: Did he spend time with you, when you were a little kid?

HELMUT: Yeah, he spent time with me. He did spend time with me, and when I went to school, he had exactly the same education as I had. Gymnasium. To this particular point. And then he went into his father's business. He served apprenticeship I think, for a couple of years in another company, and then he went to his father's business.

INT: Well, when he would spend time with you, what would you do? Would he take you for walks, or...

HELMUT: Well, that was later that I went with him in summer vacations. But that was when I was, in the summer, it was understood that we would go away summer vacation. When I was younger, of course, I went with my father. So we'd go for walks. We'd meet all kinds of people there.

INT: Where would you go for vacation?

HELMUT: Vacation? We would go to Baden-Baden. Once I took a trip to different places. Not only to one place with my father. We started out with Baden-Baden, then Wolfbat. Wolfbat was already the favorite residence of my family. My grandfather liked Wolfbat very much, because it's very, very romantic. Baden-Baden is, it's full of politicians, and they had a castle there where the Grand Duke lived and so on. Baden-Baden was something outstanding. They came from all over the world to go to Baden-Baden. They did not go to Wolfbat. But Wolfbat, it was a little bit more rough there. In Baden-Baden, everything, the parks and everything were so well taken care of. In Wolfbat also, but it was different. It was, let's say, there was a river, it was like a river going through the park, the main park, which was where woods, and there was a walk along side, and it was really, everything was tight in there. While in Baden-Baden, everything was opened up and it was sunny and so on. And in Baden-Baden everybody looked what everybody else was doing. How they were dressed, and so on. In Wolfbat, it was a little bit more...

INT: Rustic?

HELMUT: Rustic, freedom, and so on.

INT: Would you go with your sister, too? Your father would take you and your sister and go away for the summer?

HELMUT: Yeah, sometimes, too. Yeah, sometimes with my sister, too. In fact even I remember, it's really hard to believe that I could remember when I was four years old. I was in Baden-Baden and we climbed a mountain. And the name of the mountain is Mercur. Also they have a car going up there. With a gear. We walked up there. But it was a whole group, and some of them were very distinguished people. There was a Professor Beer, a surgeon from Berlin, his daughters went along. I was four years old, so they took care of me. I was the youngest, they admired me that I could walk up there without complaining. But then my father, I was in Baden-Baden, we were in a hotel. So in the hotel I had to say, we were there for Pesach, so I had to say the Mah Nishtana. I still remember because I said the Mah Nishtana, the owner of the hotel gave me a beautiful present. It was something like a well. You could put water into it and let the water go out, and let a barrel go down. It was beautiful, very colorful. Because I said the Mah Nishtana. Of course, I couldn't read it off, I didn't know how to read, so I had to learn it by heart.

INT: You were very little.

HELMUT: Yeah, so I had to learn it by heart.

INT: Did you look forward to these vacations?

HELMUT: Oh, yeah, always. The only thing is, thirteen, fourteen years age, the group came in. The children didn't want to go away with their parents anymore. We went on our own.

INT: With the Ezra.

HELMUT: Because they were more adventurous. We climbed the Swiss Alps. We took a guide going on a glacier. Everybody paid, let's say, three marks, and we hired a guide to take us over a glacier. Of course you cannot go over a glacier without a guide, because...So several years I went, and then it came so far, and in the year 1936, my father said, "I'm going to St. Moritz. I want you to go along with me."

INT: That's in Switzerland, right?

HELMUT: Oh yeah, sure, that's the most fashionable place in the world, and so on. There is nothing like it in the whole world, than St. Moritz.

INT: Is it beautiful?

HELMUT: It's unbelievable. It's 1800 meters high, and it's surrounded by mountains, high mountains. They've got glaciers. Anything you want. Kosher dinner, kosher hotel,

of course. Edelweiss. So that was the greatest thing to go there. But my group, they were going to Alsace Lorraine, to the (?)Mountains. A group leader. Boys and girls.

INT: So you'd rather go there?

HELMUT: So my father said, "You go with me?" 1934. So I didn't say anything. But then I said, "Oh, I want to go with the group." So my brother-in-law, and my sister, they talked to me. They said, "Hey, wait a minute." They said, "Your father has been looking forward to this." They said, "Your mother does not live anymore, so go with him. You cannot say no." So okay, so I said all right. But then, when I was in a hotel there, it came to, I felt I was criticized. My father, he liked to conform. He was, no question, a conformist, he would like me to conform, too. So it was difficult for me in the hotel to meet other people. I wouldn't just go to people and talk to them. I wasn't the type. He was an introvert, and I was an introvert, so I never.

INT: Wait, how old were you then, about? How old were you, when this is happening?

HELMUT: Oh, fifteen. So my father started, and I was sitting in the lobby, I was reading a book about music history. So my father had some friends, and he went complaining about, "Look what a problem I have. My son sits there and he reads. He should go out and talk to the people and meet people," and all this. So they said, "Be glad that he reads something constructive." And so on. And then there were let's say, they were playing ping pong, and there was a girl, she was somehow related, and I had nothing to do with her, so my father said, "I can see that she feels very insulted that you don't play ping pong with her." All right, I went there I played ping pong with her. But I didn't like, so I didn't like, and furthermore, when I first got there, I got a terrible rash, that took me, that really was very unpleasant. But he had a friend there, he was a dentist, but was also a doctor, and he prescribed an ointment, and that ointment really did help me. And then I was back in shape again. But what developed then, after a couple of days, I wasn't the only one that had let's say, personality problems, or if you can call it. There were not personality...the people just didn't get together. There was a scientist from Strasburg, a Doctor Ping, he was much older than we were. He organized the group. He got the few boys and the girls together. He said, "Let's not sit in the hotel lobby there. That's not for us. Let's go up in the mountains. And then in the evening we can have a discussion group," and so on. So we went and explored some of the Alps, the mountains up there, and had all kinds of discussions. There was Hitler already coming, so we were discussing, what are you going, what are you going to do? And this and that.

INT: But if this man hadn't come along, you would have been sitting there reading the whole time and not interacting with the young people?

HELMUT: Well, it could have happened. Maybe, I don't know. I met somebody then, too. He was interested in music. Not only that, at that time he could play piano. And I discussed a lot of music, before I joined that group, he was also somehow a loner, but I heard he was a loner throughout his life. He became a social worker, but never got

married. He happened to live in a house later on of my aunt. So I happened to find out about him. But...

INT: Would you describe yourself as an introverted person? When you were a young boy, were you introverted? You had mentioned that your father was...

HELMUT: I was an active introvert. I was an introvert, but I was still active. I wasn't just like some of the salesmen are, who shoulder slapping everybody, "Hey Joe," and all this. I was a little reserved, and so on. I always was a little bit worried that I give too much of my honor away. So I...

INT: What do you mean by that?

HELMUT: I don't know. It's hard to describe, but (pause) I didn't want to be the one who gets started with people. I let them get started to talk with me.

INT: Was that a way to protect yourself?

HELMUT: I don't know. I wasn't aware. But that was my way. If you want me, then I'm happy to deal with you. If you don't want me, I can exist, too. That's somehow, that was my attitude. Still is.

INT: Well, can you talk a little bit about...

HELMUT: Then this man, this Dr. Ping, he got the boys and girls together, and all right, we had two very nice walks, had nice conversations, and so on. And then in the evening, he started a discussion group. Discussion group with parts of the Tanach, and maybe let's say about Rambam.

INT: So this was a religious group of people that was all together.

HELMUT: The hotel? Everybody was Orthodox.

INT: The whole hotel.

HELMUT: Everything was Orthodox, of course. Strictly. Behrmann, Edelweiss, that was the only one in St. Moritz. They had one in Switzerland. Lagano, and certain places. They're still there. I went back when I was in the army, I went back to Edelweiss.

INT: So your father would go with a group of people, he wouldn't just take you and go?

HELMUT: No, my father went his own way. But I went with a group, but he liked to see that. He enjoyed, he liked that I went to that Dr. Ping. He thought it was a very good.

INT: No, I mean when he took you to the St. Moritz.

HELMUT: That's St. **Moritz**, not St. Moritz.

INT: Oh, okay, it's a different place. He would go as a group, with a group of people, or he would just go with you and your sister?

HELMUT: No, the two of us. We were sitting in the train, discussing in the train Hitler. There were some Americans in the train. They made their comments about Hitler, it was interesting.

INT: Could you talk a little bit about those years, then, when Hitler started to come to power?

HELMUT: You don't want to know any more about my father?

INT: Well, I would if you want to talk about him.

HELMUT: Well, he was a very intelligent man, highly respected. But his day was to go to the office, and then ate, he rested for a while, and then he went to play pinochle.

INT: He liked to play cards.

HELMUT: Yeah, I said it before. But one of the ways to play pinochle was because they would make business connections there, too. That was like in a club.

INT: It was like work, also.

HELMUT: Yeah, like in a club. He was an outstanding pinochle player. Then later on he played chess. He was a champion in chess. He belonged to the chess club.

INT: Did he read a lot? Did he sit and learn?

HELMUT: No, he didn't learn.

INT: Did he read books?

HELMUT: He didn't read books, either. He read the newspaper. That was what the businessmen read. That was the Frankfurt newspaper. That was a business paper.

INT: So where did you get your interest in books? You always had your nose in a book.

HELMUT: I went to a Gymnasium, the Gymnasium makes you read books in Greek and in Latin, and in all this, and then later on we were in a group, we had shiurim, discussion groups. We were reading, that's how the whole thing started. One of the teachers on Friday night got all the boys together in the house. The houses were changed over. One night in this house, another night...that was right after Maariv on Friday night,

before supper. And we would go over the Sedrah. No, we learned Kitzur Shulchan Aruch. Halachos. And then after that we would read a book. Sholem Asch, I still remember we were reading. The Motherland by Sholem Asch, which I hated. But anyway we read it. And by Edmund Fleck, there's a book, "The Little Prophet." These were books...

INT: So these were secular books that you were reading along with...

HELMUT: Secular with Jewish content, and so on. And then, that was the beginning already of the group. And then we became a group, and he was a group leader, and then they had a girls' group, and so on.

INT: When did you, how old were you when you started with Ezra, with the Ezra?

HELMUT: Thirteen, thirteen and a half. It started that somebody came up with the idea, in the Bavarian Alps, there is a home, there is a camp by the Ezra, and my father said, if you work hard, I'll send you there. That's supposed to be a very interesting nice activity. So I still remember that was the greatest thing that my friend who still comes to us, and his brothers, and somebody else, they had to put us into a car on a Sunday, and see whether the car could take all of us to travel so far to the Bavarian Alps. So everything worked out, and after a week came the real thing. So he had a chauffeur, that was the father of my friend. He had the car, and he had a chauffeur. So he came along. He made it a business trip. He made a few stops. He was selling butcher equipment. So he visited a few customers, and then he went to a place, the name of it was Kaplan, it was at the foot of the mountains. I still remember they had a big celebration there of the fire department that evening, and we enjoyed it very much. We were in a hotel, we slept there, and in the morning we ate breakfast. We had no scruples about eating breakfast in a hotel there. I mean, rolls, and butter and coffee, we would take. There, at that time, there were no questions asked.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

HELMUT: ...Permissible to do all this, even the teacher who came with us, we went to the city of Urm, Urm had a big cathedral. This teacher was a Cohen, I still remember. He couldn't go in because they have graves in the cathedrals, but we went in. I still have the pictures of that.

INT: So it was your father's idea to go to the...

HELMUT: Yeah, all right, so we spent a few weeks there. And that's where I have my first taste of mountain climbing, which became very complicated. We had some group leader who didn't know what he was doing. He didn't know how to read a map. And we wanted to climb a mountain, the mountain here, and he took us there, and instead of going where the marks were, and where the path was, he took us off the path, and we

climbed straight up. When we were up there, we didn't know how to get down. We saw steep down on the other side. So it took us a long, long, long time, getting down. Step by step. We had to look for a place, you can always find something like a lawn, it's not a real lawn, but there are no rocks. But we had to work our way over the rocks. And it was a small area and rocks were falling down. Some people got rocks in their faces, they were bleeding. It was unreal. But we finally made it down. We went to a lake there and still went swimming.

INT: How many boys was it? About how big a group was it?

HELMUT: Oh, that was a whole camp. A good part of the camp above a certain age group. Thirty boys and twenty girls. It was a big group. Everybody was in everybody's way going up there and going down. It was unbelievable. The following week, in the meantime they had found out how to get to the real mountain. And then they did it. But I couldn't go along, I had a rash.

INT: Did you enjoy mountain climbing?

HELMUT: Yeah, from then on, every year I had to go to the mountains. These were the Bavarian Alps. The next year, a few of us only went. We went to the Austrian Alps. Also a beautiful place.

INT: What's your favorite? What are your favorite mountains? Of all those places, what was the most beautiful?

HELMUT: That's very hard to say. A few years ago, we were in Switzerland, we went to St. Mott. At St. Mott we didn't do that much climbing anymore. So we took a cable car up right opposite the Matterhorn. See, that's certainly my favorite mountain. I had the picture hanging there. Now we have others there, but...So the Matterhorn. Then the other, there's the Diaboletzar, that's a glacier, that's in the area of St. Moritz. There's a Petramgra, an awful lot. We went to the Austrian Alps. The Adler. People go skiing there in the summertime. Many of them. Mt. Blanc. We went past the Mt. Blanc already.

INT: Is there anything else you want to say about your father?

HELMUT: St. Bernard, where the monastery. Everything. All over. Every year someplace else, Hitler or no Hitler.

INT: Is there anything else you want to say about your father before we move on?

HELMUT: Later on he enjoyed when my sister got married. He made a big engagement party. And a big wedding. Not big compared to what they have here. It was mostly only family, but it was in a hotel. The whole family was for a whole weekend in the hotel. Only I wasn't there because I had to go to school. I came on Sunday for the wedding itself. But it was a beautiful wedding. Rabbi Breuer, he was Mesade Kiddushin,

and so on. It was nice. That's where I made then contact with people from Frankfurt. I never met them before. Because I was from a different city, Mannheim. But not far from there, but a different world.

INT: You said your father was sad a lot, that he missed your mother. And seemed sad a lot.

HELMUT: Well, yeah, but later on he had grandchildren. (showing a photo album). They don't look like this anymore.

INT: These are your sister's children?

HELMUT: Yeah, sure.

INT: Two boys and two girls.

HELMUT: This one has a beard like Santa Claus. This one doesn't have a beard, he's an accountant in Brooklyn. A well-known accountant. She married somebody. He's a fine man. And her husband, she was born later in Atlantic City, and her husband is a computer man, but he also has a beard and...

INT: Do you have another picture of your sister when she was older?

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Do you have a picture when she wasn't a baby?
(Pause) How do you come to have these pictures?

HELMUT: I took them along.

INT: You took them with you.

HELMUT: I took them with me. I have them. I have all the pictures, every picture. This is the housekeeper I was telling you about.

INT: This one? She's the one who raised you pretty much?

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: What was her name?

HELMUT: Her name (?) Widener. But I made up a name. I called her Widas, Widas. She was only known as Widas.

INT: She's the one with the silver, right? When you told me that story.

HELMUT: Yeah, right. Sure. (Pause, going through pictures). Here, this is my brother-in-law in Chicago. An ear, nose and throat specialist.

INT: And that's your sister.

HELMUT: Yeah, that's her shortly before her wedding.

INT: And her name was? I don't know if we got her name on the tape.

HELMUT: Elsa.

INT: Oh, Elsa.

HELMUT: She doesn't live anymore.

INT: Right. She passed away not long ago, was it?

HELMUT: No, a few years ago, Erev Rosh Hashana. But she has 27 grandchildren, the great-grandchildren, last week only two of them were born. I can't even count them. I don't know their names. It's unbelievable. Now what else should I say about my father? What I said about learning a trade. It was not in any opposition to my father, because I remember that my father, it happened that he once met another businessman and they were discussing Hitler and what the young people are going to do. So this man said to my father, "Look, we are businessmen. If they send us to another country, we are lost. They don't need your tobacco in the United States. They got all the big tobacco manufacturer, and they don't need me." He said, "If somebody knows to do something with his hands, no matter where he goes, at least somebody knows how to use a hammer and a saw and a plane, he can do something. He knows what to ask for." So he said, "I'll let my son learn a trade." That's what he said. My father was very much impressed with that. Anyway, that's where I ended up there.

INT: Because of Hitler.

HELMUT: Oh, only. Not because, I was going to Gymnasium, learning Greek and Latin.

INT: What would you have become, do you think?

HELMUT: Well, I had two choices: either go into the business of my father, or I could have become a doctor somehow. I had all the prerequisites.

INT: Did you want to go into the business of your father's business, or would you have rather been a doctor?

HELMUT: I was more intellectually-minded than business-minded at that time, but probably would have, maybe I would have ended up, who knows? It's very hard to say.

INT: So your father influenced you to learn a trade, then.

HELMUT: Yeah, he said, and I wanted to because I wanted to go to Israel. I would never have learned a trade to go to the United States. To go to United States, this was a country of the businessman. Maybe I would have done something different. But I was still preparing myself two ways: I learned modern Hebrew and I learned English. Went to a Berlitz school. But then finally I went to the yeshiva, and finally, but then the decision came, my father just said, "You are going to the United States. I have put in the papers for you. We are going to the consulate," and so on. So he made that decision because my sister, my brother-in-law has no place in Israel. They don't need doctors over there. Most of the doctors over there, they went to chicken farms and became painters and everything. Taxi drivers.

INT: Now was it the Ezra's influence that made you want to go to Israel? Is that what...

HELMUT: Oh yeah.

INT: It wasn't your Zionist, your father wasn't a big Zionist or...

HELMUT: No, no, in fact he once gave a lecture somewhere. Fifty years before against Zionism, because Zionism was not a Orthodox movement. He was Orthodox, so they turned it right down.

INT: But didn't he know there were some religious Zionist groups?

HELMUT: Yeah, he knew that, but we also knew that the religious Zionists were first Zionists, and they were also religious. So...But he welcomed that I learned a trade. Now, of course, what I learned and all this...it was something, but it was not practical, although later on I passed a test which any German journeyman would pass, to be a journeyman.

INT: What's a journeyman?

HELMUT: A journeyman? Somebody is an apprentice, and then he's finished with apprenticeship, he becomes a journeyman.

INT: In what? In any... You're a journeyman no matter if you're a carpenter or a glazier...

HELMUT: Carpenter, machinist, toolmaker, anything.

INT: It's the level above being an apprentice.

HELMUT: Yeah. But I encountered difficulties. I was aware of the fact that my ancestors had not been mechanics for generations, and I was competing against people who were workers and their parents were workers, and they can do things faster, and they

think different, and so on. I didn't do bad, I did all right, and so on, but it took me a lot of effort to do what the others would do. Right along, that went a long time like this. Through a good part of my career. I went later on to a lumberyard. My father wanted me to go there to learn the business part of it. Not only doing mechanical woodwork, but also knowing about lumber and bookkeeping and writing business letters. But there I felt very comfortable, and they liked me very much. The owner, he didn't know what was going on in the world. When I left, he offered me a big job in his company. I was only like an apprentice, and later on said no. He said, "I could use you, I'll give you a big job."

INT: He wasn't Jewish?

HELMUT: He was Jewish.

INT: Oh, he was Jewish.

HELMUT: But many Jews didn't know what was going on. A few months later, I don't know what happened to him. But many Jews didn't know what's going...he had a good business, a lumber business. The army needed lumber, he was supplying them with it. So...

INT: Before we get to the Hitler years, I wanted to just ask you, looking back on your childhood, would you say you had a happy childhood? An all right childhood, or...

HELMUT: It was a happy childhood. Sometimes there were things which I resented. That's because of the situation. Let's say my sister, she could sometimes say things which I did not like, and the fact that she would say that my friends are much more intelligent than I am, and that they know much more, she said, this is not a, she didn't know any better.

INT: You don't think she did it deliberately to hurt your feelings, or she...

HELMUT: Because of stupidity she did it. She didn't do it to her own children. Her own children, nobody was like her own children, but certain things sometimes annoyed me. That has happened. It happened that I had friends in my house, and a cousin was coming to visit us. She would tell my friends, "You have to go home now." In other words, instead of coming to me to tell me, "Maybe we can make some arrangements, you go in another room, or maybe you can say we'll get together tomorrow." But the time that somebody important comes, she would say, "Look, you'd better get out of here." The friends resented it. They always took it out on me, but they knew it was her.

INT: It sounds like she's a little bossy, or she was...

HELMUT: Yeah, she could be bossy, and she could do, there were crazy things. I still remember, I belonged to an athletic club. And they had a big festival. Now the uniform was blue shorts and white shirt. So I happened to have white shorts and white shirt. So I

told them, I said, ""This is no good, I'm out of uniform if I go there." So she said, "We should buy that?" They have all the money to buy all kinds of dresses for her, that was okay, but they didn't have the money to buy myself a new blue pair of pants. So these things, it was pure stupidity. When I think of it, I still get annoyed. Doing such things. But otherwise, I can't say, especially later on in the group we had very, very happy days, and everything was fine until we left. All the group, the people left. One was going here, the other one there, Germany. These years after thirteen, they were very happy.

INT: Once you got into that group, it sounds like...

HELMUT: Yeah, but the apprenticeship I did not like very much. For a few months I worked in that glass shop there. There were a lot of people in there. Later on to learn how to make window frames and doors and all.

INT: How old were you when you were doing that?

HELMUT: Fifteen and a half.

INT: Oh, that young?

HELMUT: Fifteen and a half, for three years. And there was only one guy, one master, and I. And he taught me everything. But he was a Bavarian. And he spoke with such a Bavarian accent, half of the time, I couldn't even understand what he was talking about.

INT: It was that different? The dialects?

HELMUT: Yeah. And he had very old-fashioned ideas about the trade. If you know Wagner, you know the Meistersinger. He makes fun of it, in there. About the old, the trade systems which cannot be changed, but giving no reason, saying that's the way. So in other words, I had to hold a saw. I was holding it the way it was comfortable for my hand. I didn't have a very big hand. He said, "You don't hold the saw right. You have to hold it this way." But I say, "But the cutting comes out still pretty good." He says, "That doesn't matter. You've got to hold it this way." So that was going on constantly. With him and...

INT: It wasn't very...

HELMUT: It was a real clash of personality. I didn't like him. I **hated** him. I couldn't **stand** him.

INT: And it was just you and him, all day?

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Nobody else?

HELMUT: Yeah, before I went there there was another Jewish young man there. He couldn't take it. He walked out. He said, "That guy's crazy. Number one, he wants to take advantage of me, number two, what he teaches me, he doesn't teach it right." But he was a master. He had been a foreman in a big company, and then later on he had a small shop by himself. It was a big deal then, because he took me. He lost orders by the city. That was a Nazi regulation. So he was crying, he came to my father: "I lost all the, because of you..."

INT: He lost what? I'm sorry.

HELMUT: Orders from the city. When the city had windows to be done for a building, he wasn't allowed to bid for it.

INT: Because he was Jewish.

HELMUT: He employed a Jewish apprentice.

INT: Oh. He wasn't Jewish, but because he employed you.

HELMUT: No! Certainly not Jewish, no.

INT: No, but because he employed you he didn't get the job.

HELMUT: Yeah, so they came to a settlement. Every month my father paid him a salary. And when he had no work, my father bought lumber so I could make windows just for practicing. So I didn't like, and when the first of the month came, he always said to me, "Bring me my money tomorrow!"

INT: He was a **lot** of fun! (laughs)

HELMUT: (laughs) Yeah, coming from a Gymnasium, and dealing with professors, not all of them were anti-Semites, that wasn't very, it was very bad. I learned something. I passed the test very well there, later, a journeyman test. After the apprenticeship.

INT: So you had to leave Gymnasium totally and go into this apprenticeship. You couldn't do both.

HELMUT: No, oh no. No, how could I?

INT: It was one or the other.

HELMUT: No, Jews couldn't go there. They couldn't continue there anymore. There was a Numerus Clausus. First they started with Numerus Clausus, in the universities, they only allow one Jew, and so on among a thousand Gentiles. And then later on, this was the same thing with these schools.

INT: Could you talk about that? How old were you when Hitler started to have influence in Germany? And what do you remember, your earliest memories?

HELMUT: I remember everything.

INT: Start from the earliest that you remember.

HELMUT: I know that there was a Hitler putsch, which he made, I think, in 1923, in Munich. Where he marched and then later on the police came and started shooting at him, and he was running away, while General Ludendorf, who had been with him, he walked right through the bullets. No bullet hit him, and so on. Goering, he was running away, I think, to...I have it all here in writing. If you read Shirer's book, Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.

INT: No, but what do **you** remember?

HELMUT: But I know, what I'm saying, I went to Munich later on, when I went to the camps, and so on, and I looked, there was a brown house. The country was democratic, but they still had that brown house, where they walked up and down with the guards. The SA. They didn't have the SS at that time. The SA. And so on. They walked up and down. So we went there. It was curiosity for us to see all these things. But I remember when Hitler, there was Bruening and there was Stresemann. They did actually pretty good jobs. Slowly to get France out of Germany. In the city where I lived, that was on the Rhine river, the critical points were still occupied by France. I still remember the guards going across Rhine bridge, and so on. And I still know that the son of the rabbi on Shabbas, he would not carry his identification, and he walked to Ludwig, that's from New York to Brooklyn, and he didn't have it, they threw him in jail, and he had to be bailed out. By the French, and so on. Where my grandmother was, that was Essen. They had a beautiful house. But I had a French colonel there. And I played with his son.

INT: The French colonel lived in your grandmother's house?

HELMUT: Yeah, well, that's the way the French operated. It was an occupied zone. They didn't live in tents, like the Americans do, or like we do.

INT: They took over the house?

HELMUT: No, they requisitioned so many rooms, and they belonged to us while we are occupying. So they lived in that house. Which had no better, you had to get along with them. My grandmother had maids, and this, they had maids.

INT: Was this near to Mannheim?

HELMUT: No, it was a four hour train ride away. It was Essen, that's where Krupp factory is. And that's where my grandfather had that bank. And the name of the bank was Hirschland. And I don't know whether I told you, but a few years ago, there was a

square in Essen, they called it Vienna Square. Because the Hirschland family had done so much for the city of Essen, they're calling it now "Hirschland Square." I saw pictures in the paper and all this. So anyway, that was the French occupation. But then Strasseman and so on, they negotiated...

INT: Wait a minute: Streseman?

HELMUT: Streseman. He was a German statesman, one of the greatest. And then there was another one, Bruening, he was a Catholic. Later on he came to the United States. He was a professor at Columbia University. Bruening. He was fighting the Nazis in the Parliament, but they became stronger and stronger. There was a propaganda minister, Goebbels, he had a big mouth, and...

INT: What year was this about, when Goebbels started his whole...

HELMUT: 1931, 32, and '33, the 30th of January, that was the revolution, they called it the National Revolution. That's when Hindenburg made Hitler the Chancellor. The president was still Hindenburg, who had been before, Hindenburg was a general in World War I. And...(pause) I remember this like it was yesterday. I went ice skating that afternoon.

INT: How old were you in 1931, when he became Chancellor?

HELMUT: I was born in '17, in '33...

INT: He became Chancellor in '33?

HELMUT: Yeah. January 30th, 1933. I was not quite sixteen. I was fifteen and a half. I was fifteen.

INT: So you can remember all this?

HELMUT: Oh, sure, everything. And before that, too, but I can't go into all that. It's of no interest.

INT: So once he became Chancellor, how did that effect the Jews?

HELMUT: Well, my experience, I always say that, I went ice skating, I came home. My father had been on a trip at the Riviera in France, in Nice, and I was, I was alone or something. And there I listened to the radio. And I hear that Hindenburg made Hitler the Chancellor of Germany. And had taken already over in Berlin. Everybody was ready to take over the power. I got a phone call. A friend of mine called up. He said, "You know what happened." I said, "Yeah." "You know what else happened? Bernard Kauffman, (he was a gabbai, he was giving out the aliyah in the shul) he got a heart attack and died. Right when he heard that."

INT: From hearing the news.

HELMUT: Yeah. This was the beginning.

INT: Before he became Chancellor, were the Jews afraid of him? What was he doing?

HELMUT: People read his book, Mein Kampf, was his book and so there were different opinions. The Jews, some of them were stupid. They didn't know any better. They had been there for generations. See, Polish Jews, they were chased from one place to the next. The German Jews have been sitting there for years and years. And they said, "It's impossible. He's going to be finished within six months, because economically he's not capable of running the country. Look at the summer resorts. Wiesbaden, and Baden-Baden. It's full of Jews. The Jews won't go there anymore, so where they going to take the money from and all that?" Well, the Jews didn't go there anymore. They put signs up there, "We don't want any Jews," and it was still there. So they made all kinds of wrong calculations. Some of them were, some people were pretty good. But that's when it started in the congregation. All of a sudden you heard, "Mr. So and So went over the border." "Mr. So and so went over the border to Switzerland." The other one, the border to Belgium. And that's the way it went.

INT: So people started to get out.

HELMUT: Yeah, some of them took their money along, too.

INT: They were the smart ones.

HELMUT: Yeah, right away, they got in touch with people who knew secret passage roads nobody knew.

INT: Was the country closed off, people couldn't get out?

HELMUT: Oh, of course, Hitler closed it up.

INT: In '33 already?

HELMUT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Shortly, after a couple of months. That didn't take very long. And also immediately a law, you cannot take money out of Germany.

INT: So if you had money in the bank, you couldn't take it out of the bank?

HELMUT: You could take it out of the bank...

INT: But you couldn't take it out of the country.

HELMUT: You're not allowed, they would shoot you if they catch you having it.

INT: These laws just are for Jews, or they're for everybody?

HELMUT: For everybody. But the others have no reason to leave. Why should they leave? It looked first like Hitler was doing a lot for the country, because he built highways, Autobahn, and so on. He came up with the Volkswagen, that everybody could just have a car. Many people had factories, and the factories were dilapidated. He ruled, he forced them to spend money to clean up the factories. And they had a new policy, the beauty of the work. It has to be, the work place has to be pleasant, and all this. He came with a lot of policies which were not bad. Of course the highways were built to get the army to the borders as quick as possible. And then the big thing came, they had that before, already, for the poor people, for the (?). So he made that very big, the Winder Aid, but it didn't go to the poor people. Every penny went to the army. That's how he started immediately mobilizing everything. Nobody knew where underground factories and so on.

INT: So people didn't think he was crazy? They just thought that he would be a good...

HELMUT: Crazy? No, no people. He was...

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

HELMUT: ...big songs, and so on. Everybody had a picture of Hitler in the house. In the school where I was, in the morning, I was still in the Gymnasium at that time. There was a regulation, before the class would start, we had to stand up with our arms out and say, "Heil, Hitler." So, there was a, I started a big problem, I said to the teacher, "You know, I'm Jewish. Am I supposed to do that? Can a Jew say, 'Heil Hitler?' Isn't that a disgrace for Hitler, if a Jew said?" So he said, "Oh, I'll have to ask. I don't know myself. I have to ask somebody." So he made a big shaalah. So the answer was, I should stand up, put out my hand, but I shouldn't say, "Heil Hitler."

INT: That was the compromise.

HELMUT: That was the way it was. These things started then.

INT: Were you afraid? Were you afraid when all this happened?

HELMUT: Actually, I wasn't too afraid. I was in direct contact with people, they were even wearing Nazi uniforms. I walked with them on the street. They walked with me, and...

INT: Friends of yours?

HELMUT: Not friends, no, but...

INT: People you knew.

HELMUT: We went to school with. But they didn't mind, or say anything. The only time it happened once. There was a man, a boy, he was sitting in front of me. He made a remark against Jews. It was the only time it ever happened to me. I was saying something, and he said something about Jews.

INT: Was this in school? This happened in school?

HELMUT: In the Gymnasium. After two days, it was found out that his grandmother was Jewish, and he was not at any better level than I was. He was the same thing.
(pause)

INT: But you weren't afraid at this point.

HELMUT: No, I was not. I cannot say. I wasn't afraid. Not only that, we went on hikes with the Ezra, with these groups. We went to the countryside. And somehow, for one reason or another, we never met a group of Hitler youth boys. We went there, I remember, every Christmas, for two days we went there. There was a Jewish inn up in the mountains. Past Heidelberg. So we went up there and spent the night there, and then went on a hike, and roaming around the countryside at night. We went on night hikes and all kinds of things. There was nobody there to bother us.

INT: There was no fear.

HELMUT: It was nothing at all. Only once it happened. We went on a bicycle hike for four days. We wanted to go to the grave of the Baal Shem Tov of Mittelstadt. There's a book written about him. We went there to Mittelstadt to another place. And we went to a small town, and there the SR was marching. And they were singing these songs, which I knew. But the end of the song they changed it. To say, "The Jew has to get out." So I didn't expect that. I thought they were singing that song, and then they end, "The Jew has to get out." So somehow I started smiling. And one of the SR men came out. "I see you're laughing." So I said, "What? I didn't laugh. You must be mistaken. Whom do you mean?" So his comrade said, "Get back into the line. We're marching." So he marched on. Otherwise, could have been a lot of trouble. But that was about all. Otherwise, there were general regulations. They were enough to do a lot to us. Wherever we went, we couldn't go into a restaurant because they had a sign there, "No Jews wanted." They had village, the small villages. Not in Heidelberg, they couldn't do it, because they had people from other countries. But the villages between Mannheim and Heidelberg, it was a sign, "No Jews wanted." So...

INT: Were the Nuremberg Laws passed yet? At this time?

HELMUT: 1936, yeah. That was...That's a different story. We had that housekeeper. So we were very much worried that she may not be able to stay with us. But the Nuremberg Laws only were for people below her age group. So she could stay with us

till the end. Otherwise I was doing during the Hitler time, whatever I could to prepare myself when I would leave. As I said, modern Hebrew and all this.

INT: So it was because of Hitler's rise to power that you started thinking about moving.

HELMUT: We knew we had to leave. We could not stay. We could not stay there. It was getting worse and worse. First it started with Hitler, that was that Shabbas. There was a boycott Shabbas. They put an SS man in front of, all SA men in front of all Jewish stores, so that people couldn't go in and buy. And then they also burnt books by Jewish authors. (?), and all these people. All these people. These writers, and so on. They were burned in public. They made a big fire. All over. All cities. And then...slowly things....

INT: Weren't you frightened at this time? You weren't frightened at this point?

HELMUT: I was still not, I was not frightened. I knew the city. Because I knew the city. I was familiar with the people. But then, I don't know whether I mentioned it to you. They had some kind of, it wasn't a beach, but it was an enclosure where you would go swimming. And they got Jews, they got a SA group from Nuremberg, brought it in, and they went in, they said, "All Jews out," so they chased all the Jews out. They had to go in their swimming trunks, some of them went on their bikes, they went in their swimming trunks, drove through the main street of the city, just to get out. After that time, nobody would go swimming anymore. That was the end of the swimming. We still would go, bike to the mountains, sometimes go rowing in the Necker River and so on. In the summertime we still went to Switzerland. We got passports. So I cannot say, I was not actually, none of us were officially attacked at that time. At that time it was the Nazi policy not to attack people. Only people who had been communists, and so on, they were taken to concentration camps, and many of them were killed and they sent an urn home to the people and say, "Shot while trying to escape." So there was a superintendent of an uncle of mine, he was not Jewish at all. He was a Socialist. He couldn't keep his mouth shut. Started yelling against Hitler and all this. He was sent to a concentration camp, and they got an urn back. But that was only the beginning. That was not the final extermination after the Wannsee Conference, which was the Final Solution. It was also not the 10th of November. But on the Sunday that I left Germany, that was in May, 1938.

INT: So it was before Kristallnacht.

HELMUT: Yeah, six months, five months before. I went, my father went with me, my brother-in-law, to take me to the boat, to Hamburg. So we went through Frankfurt, and there already they have painted all Jewish stores, black paint, "Get out Jew, go to Palestine," or all kinds of insulting things.

INT: So it was getting worse and worse.

HELMUT: Yeah, from then on, things were slowly getting worse.

INT: Now, why did you leave? What made you leave and go to America? Was it your father who told you...

HELMUT: Yeah, not on my own free will. I was told, "We have an affidavit for you. You go there." This brother of my brother-in-law, he signed papers for me, and they are ready, and I can go there. And also, of course, they were telling me all kinds of stories which were not true, just to...get me interested. That some people went there, and before they turned around, they were already foremen, big bosses in the business, that everybody was waiting for them. And I was told, to believe, just an incentive, what a beautiful country it is here. I was always a little bit skeptical about the United States. I didn't think it was so easy, and especially somebody who wants to keep Shabbas. This I had heard. I mean, I wasn't stupid, either. I got my own information together. I was told, if you can keep Shabbas (laughs) you're doing a big thing over there.

INT: Were all your friends going to Palestine?

HELMUT: Many of them went at that time to Palestine. I don't even, another friend, another friend came a year later, here. He came to the United States. All the others, I must say, they went to Israel.

INT: But everyone was leaving, all your friends were leaving, pretty much?

HELMUT: After I left. I was one of the first ones to really. One of them, he was already in Palestine in a kibbutz, in a Orthodox kibbutz, of Chofetz Chaim. The brother of my friend was here. The others, they left later, many of them left later. At that time, I still remember the last Shabbas afternoon. We went for a walk along the Rhine River. They were saying to me, these boys, "We don't envy you. Next week you will be at the Hudson River. Who knows what's going on over there? I don't think it will be so easy."

INT: Was it hard for you to say good-bye to your friends?

HELMUT: It wasn't hard anymore because I knew I was saving my life. I already had the feeling, better get out. Now there was a law in Germany, that even if you're Jewish, you have to register with the draft, for the army. And I had to register with the draft, and they gave me, of course all Jews were assigned, they call it "Replacement Reserve Number 2." So later a German colonel of the army, he said to me, "You know as a Jew we cannot take you into the army, but we are assigning you to Replacement Reserve Number 2." I knew that ahead of time already, so. He handed me a passport, an army passport. I took that along. And when I went to the United States with my papers, I took that along, too. But I came to Hamburg. I wanted to clear with the Germans. So the guy looks at my passport, he says, "Where's your army passport?" I said, "My army passport?" "That's already over in the American side in my suitcase." He said, "Get me that passport or you're not going to leave Germany." Regardless of whoever was standing there, 0000guards, anybody, I went right through, I saw the suitcase there, (laughs) went there to the pocket, took that passport, said, "Here it is." He says, "Go!"

INT: That was close!

HELMUT: It was a close call, yeah.

INT: Let's stop here.

(Pause)

INT: When we ended last time you were talking about leaving Germany, and that's where we ended. But you had some other things you wanted to add about what was going on in Germany before, during the Hitler times, before you left Germany. Could you talk about those?

HELMUT: I want to mention how different organizations and people reacted to the Hitler times. There was a Reform movement in Germany which was very strong. This Reform movement made it its policy, "the Rhine River is our Jordan, Berlin is our Jerusalem." Prayers which we say all the time, "...uvnei Yerushalayim" were cut out entirely out of the Reform prayers.

INT: So they were not Zionists at all. Okay.

HELMUT: Then Hitler came to power, before you knew, they all became Zionists. They all got the Zionist paper, Judische Hundshau, that was a Zionist paper. And they became big Zionists from one day to the next. They had no scruples or anything, that they had not done this before. And sometimes it was so, it looked like a joke, because the Zionist organization had the Keren Kayemes, and the Keren HaYesod. These people could never pronounce the word, HaYesod, they were always talking about Keren HaYesod (accent on the first syllable). So we had Orthodox speakers, they were always making fun of it. They said, they had people among them that cannot even pronounce real Jewish organizations, whether we like them or not. Orthodox didn't like the Keren HaYesod, because it was an anti-religious organization, but they would say "Keren HaYesod" and they all became very big Zionists. They joined the Zionist party, and so on. I just wanted it to be known. Of course they had street signs all over, and in restaurants: "No Jews wanted." Villagers had signs, maybe I mentioned that before. And then the "Sturmer" was put up on all street corners.

INT: But you said it started in the villages first?

HELMUT: Yeah, it started in the villages, but even in the city where I was, the restaurants had: "Jews are not wanted."

INT: What year? What year did they start putting those signs up in the cities?

HELMUT: '35. About '34, '35. Then in some of the villages they had a curve, whether it was a bad curve. So they would have a sign there, "Death curve. Jews permitted to go

100 kilometers per hour." Then they had signs, others, they were saying, "Do not trust the fox in the country, and don't trust a Jew when he gives you an oath."

INT: And these signs would just be up.

HELMUT: These were signs, yeah, up...

INT: But where, like where? On billboards?

HELMUT: On the highway. On the highway. You went between Philadelphia and Valley Forge. In Conshohocken they had a sign, they had one different places.

INT: Didn't that scare you when these signs started coming up? How did people feel about that? What did they do?

HELMUT: We were young boys, and we laughed at it. We thought it was a big joke. We laughed at it. They came up with all kinds of jokes. The boys said, it was raining outside. So one of them said, "That's German rain falling out there." They made all kinds of, they made fun of it.

INT: They made fun of it.

HELMUT: They made fun, of course, if the Nazis would have heard it, it could have been too bad, but...

INT: That was their response to the...

HELMUT: We stayed among ourselves, so we did what we wanted to do. Now the businesses already in 1934 or 5, they had to be "Aryanized." That means all works, had to employ twenty people and up, they had to belong to the German Labor Front. It was, it was not SR, SS, but it was a Nazi organization. I remember, I worked later for the War Crimes Commission, and somebody was in a Labor Front and had to fill out a questionnaire, he still was asked to check off whether he belonged. This was one, did you belong to the SS, to the SR, to the Labor Front was in there, too. And then the business had to be actually given over to an Aryan caretaker. It had to be an Aryan. The Jew could still run the business...

INT: But it didn't belong to him anymore, or...

HELMUT: Somehow it still belonged to him until it was sold. Sooner or later they would sell it. They had to leave Germany. The ones who didn't leave, the cities were treated different. This is a different story. I have a whole translation here, what they did in my area. After the war broke out and so on. You can read it. It's the grandfather of my daughter-in-law, he wrote the memoirs, they were sent to southern France. They got a big break. They were sent to southern France under Vichy camp, and the camp was in terrible living conditions, but they still exist. They only died of malaria and other things,

but it was not a real concentration camp yet. Until one day when they said the SS is going to surround the camp. Whoever couldn't get papers to go to the United States, they would be sent to Auschwitz. But I have that, if you want to read that, I can give it to you.

INT: So are you saying that these things were happening gradually, gradually signs, and...

HELMUT: Yeah. Now in the beginning, right in '33, there was the matter of doctors and lawyers. Doctors and lawyers who had not fought in World War I for Germany, they were not permitted to practice anymore, okay? '33 right away. My brother-in-law for instance, he had fought for Germany, he could still continue practicing for quite a while, until 19...until Kristallnacht. The Nuremberg Laws, in 1936, according to them, Jews could not have any more household help, unless the help was older than fifty years old. So the one we had, our housekeeper, she was permitted to stay. During the entire Hitler time, there were also people who put up some kind of opposition for instance. The musicians in orchestras, Jews were not permitted to continue their jobs. They were thrown out of their job. Like in Berlin, the Berlin Philharmonic, Furtwangler, Wilhelm Furtwangler was a conductor, so, he was told all Jews out. So the first violinist was a Mr. Goldman. So Furtwangler, in the newspaper, he put up a fight. He was telling, Goebbels was the minister of culture and propaganda. He said, "This man is an outstanding man. He is the backbone of the orchestra. How can you throw a man like this out? He is of tremendous value to me and to the..." So the answer of Goebbels was, "Apparently you are a great conductor, but you don't understand that Jews undermine culture. They are like...insects. And don't belong in any German institution. They all have to go out." So Furtwangler, and that was the end of it. In Munich, there was a Cardinal, his name was (?), he was a church, they called it (?), he made speeches which were printed. He spoke officially about the value of Judaism, about Jews, that they were the ones who did get the Torah and the Bible. There wouldn't have been any Christianity without Judaism, and in fact Fowlhaber, when he came to Frankfurt, he always used to go to a Gemara shiur of Rabbi Horowitz. He was very interested in Jewish matters. Later on they told him to be quiet. So he couldn't go on anymore. Then in the city where I lived we had Gustav Wurzweiler, who has the Wurzweiler School of Social Research, he gave a lot of money for Shaarei Tzedek hospital. At that time he was a banker, and he donated a yeshiva. He did go to a Reform synagogue. And when he came to the United States, he became Orthodox. He went to Ohr Tzedek. I davened with him myself. Ohr Tzedek synagogue. But he donated. And during the Hitler times he also donated a Sefer Torah. And I remember this was a tremendous hall, all boys and girls, and balebatim. Everybody was invited for the celebration of the Sefer, I mean, that was a beautiful celebration. I still remember it. There were some very good speeches. I must say the Reform rabbi, (laughs) he made a beautiful speech. He said, I still remember that speech. He said there is a new theory, which is of course, a Nazi theory, that the people who are honest go forward, they write from left to the right. But the people who are crooked, they write from the right to the left. So he said, let's be proud of our tradition, and keep writing the Torah from the right to the left. And this man, he only died a year ago in Newark, New Jersey. He took trips, and I want it on tape. He took trips to Israel, the United States, and

South Africa, and then got the people together, whoever was interested in emigration, would listen to him, reported about Israel.

INT: What year was this, when he was doing that, when he was going to those different countries?

HELMUT: 1934, '35.

INT: So he wanted to get the people out?

HELMUT: No, not out, he wanted to tell the people what they're getting into. He was talking about Israel. He mentioned the socialistic kibbutzim. He mentioned the Mizrachi kibbutzim and the Orthodox kibbutz. And everything. And the city, what is needed, what kind of people are needed over there. That doctors and scientists can't find jobs, they become painters and automobile mechanics, and on farms, and so on. Do manual labor. Like the president of the congregation in the city where I lived, he went to Israel. Until he was 90 years old he took care of a chicken coop in a kibbutz. A doctor.

INT: So was he discouraging...

HELMUT: No, he was just reporting. But he was an outstanding speaker, and his observations were outstanding, too. He would tell, he wrote about the United States. He said how difficult it is to keep Shabbas over there. He said you can keep Shabbas, but it is not easy. And they have a lot of crime there, and Chicago gangsters and all that. He was telling the people: Know what you are getting into. And he was talking about the sweatshops. Don't think it's so easy. It's much easier to work in Germany than come to the sweatshops of the Lower East Side in New York. Know what you are getting into. And at all these lectures, there had to be a Gestapo man listening to that, because...

INT: Why?

HELMUT: That he would not say anything against, as a Jew as against the German government. So they were watching. If he would have said one word, they would have arrested him, taken him to a concentration camp. So after he was finished, he told that to my father and me. He said, the Gestapo man came to him and said, "Dr. Grunwald, I enjoyed your speech so much, I'm going to try, when you make your next speech to be sent here again."

INT: Are there any other things you wanted to add?

HELMUT: Well, I was always interested in music, symphonic music. There came the matter should we go to concerts, opera, or not. The parents did not go anymore, because they had thrown Jews out. We did go because our musical education, there were certain concerts we wanted to listen...

INT: They would stop you at the door if you were Jewish?

HELMUT: No, they didn't know I was Jewish.

INT: Right. How would they know?

HELMUT: No, no. I could go there. It was just a matter to check against their system. The people who were interested in music, they still went. I know we went to the yeshiva in Frankfurt. A friend of mine, he lives in Washington Heights now, he still went every two weeks to the opera in Frankfurt. There was no other way for him to become familiar with the opera. So he went there and sometimes I went with him.

END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE

TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO

HELMUT: Now you can go ahead.

INT: Those were the things you wanted to talk about? Then you had a couple of stories that you had about your father, that you wanted to talk about.

HELMUT: Why he had white hair? Well, this was a story which was known in the family. The family always said my father is a very courageous man. What did happen, it had nothing to do with Hitler. That the company got a letter from somebody, and it said, "Wednesday next week, I'm going to blow up the company, the building. I have everything prepared. Unless you are going to meet me in the railroad yards which were not far from the business, and give me a package, and in the package were to be 10,000 marks." My grandfather was still alive, so my father said, "What are we going to do?" He called up the police department. They assigned two detectives to the case, and they said to my father, "You go there, take a package, and put some phony something in there, old newspapers, and we will get there much earlier and hide in one of the freight cars and watch you." So my father went there, the guy came, he gave him the package, the two detectives jumped out of the freight car and arrested him. But it turned out to be a former worker of the company. So my father, he got so excited about the whole thing, shortly after, he was 29 years old, his hair started turning white.

INT: Really.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: So he always looked older than he was.

HELMUT: Yeah. But people considered it courage, because the man could have been armed and...

INT: Sure, he could have been killed.

HELMUT: He was taking a tremendous chance, there.

INT: Were there any other stories about your father you'd like to talk about? Or about your relationship with him?

HELMUT: It was very good. Once I went on, I think I showed you the pictures. The summer vacation with him. We didn't stay in one place. We went to different, first Wolfbad, Baden-Baden, Badenweiler, and then from Badenweiler we took that trip to Switzerland where you saw that road into the rocks and so on. That's the first time I had seen Switzerland. Later on I went there and saw the real thing. This was not the real high mountains yet. But my father never gave me officially too much credit for what I was doing. Altogether I was more or less, more criticized than, that was apparently the way of educating people and so on. I didn't like. This was probably one of the reasons that later on I was just completely attached to the youth movement, to the group, where we didn't care what anybody said about us, and we just did what we had to do.

INT: So your father was critical like your sister, the way your sister was, or...

HELMUT: Not as critical. He was more tactful than my sister. My sister was not too...she was not too tactful. When I had to go into the apprenticeship for instance, I mean, I was always on good terms with her, but she thought she had to impress certain things upon me. She would tell me, "You've got to be very alert when you go and start apprenticeship. You can't dream. You have to watch, and you have to please everybody." And so on. This didn't impress me very much, because she, what did she know?

INT: About being an apprentice, yeah.

HELMUT: She was being taken care of by everyone.

INT: But how would your father criticize you? Could you give an example? Was it a constant kind of a thing?

HELMUT: No. (Pause) He didn't criticize me, but he could have pointed out things. He could say that he's impressed with certain things that I'm doing. He did it later, the last year, and so on. There he did it, so.

INT: Did he know you were leaving at that point?

HELMUT: Oh, yeah, sure. There he did it. He was saying that the people are much more interested in what I am doing than let's say what my cousin is doing. He was a son of very rich people, and he was very money-oriented, and so on. I was more culture-oriented and so on. He said, the people, they like that much better. That I start learning a trade to prepare myself for emigration and so on. I did other things, too. I went to concerts and I was afraid that maybe later on I will be sorry that I go to concerts and I can't play any classical music on the piano, so I took lessons. And taught me something.

When I came here, also later I took some lessons, so at least for my own enjoyment I can play some classical pieces. I can't play them as well as Artur Rubinstein or Horowitz, but I can, they sound halfway decent if I practice. But more or less, I had a lot of foresight in this respect. Someday, when I retire, I like to have a nice hobby. And I can practice piano, then later on, I'll study some music with a teacher, later I can review it later on when I'm retired. Which is happening.

INT: You're still playing now?

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: That's wonderful.

HELMUT: I don't have enough time with the dialysis. But I'm playing, sure. I'm playing the pieces. There are certain pieces which really takes me a while to read, which I used to play, to reconstruct them, to play them again. But I know how they have to sound, and the notes, so if I have enough patience. But I never was interested in playing for other people. For myself, and I have the ability to study some music.

INT: But your father was more supportive towards the end than he was in the beginning?

HELMUT: Yeah, and then later on, he liked that I was able to play piano, and my uncle, he was a choir conductor in an Orthodox synagogue. Once I played something for him by Richard Strauss, he was very much impressed. He said, "If you go to the United States, and you play this for somebody, he will give you a good job!" He thought more or less that I would play piano as a social aid. Which I never did. And I don't think I was good enough for that.

INT: Are you uncomfortable playing in front of people?

HELMUT: Yeah, I make mistakes.

INT: You get nervous.

HELMUT: I make mistakes when I...

INT: Me, too. It's hard to play in front of people.

HELMUT: In front of people, except there were some people, we had a cousin in Switzerland, we haven't spoken about him yet, who's very musical. The one who made the wedding for us, and all this. He helped musicians, he helped modern music and so on. So he was here visiting. So he said, "You've got to play something for me." So I played for him, and there I was not, I don't know, I didn't feel embarrassed. I think I played very well for him, and so he liked it, he enjoyed that very much. Especially since

I played some Mozart for him which he had never heard before. He said that he couldn't believe that this is Mozart.

INT: Okay, so when we left last time we were talking about your father and your brother-in-law taking you to the boat and seeing you off. How was that? Was that difficult?

HELMUT: No, we went to Hamburg. Hamburg was not too anti-Semitic. What they had in other parts of Germany, further inland. They did not have in Hamburg, because they had ships from the United States and sailors coming. They were worried they were getting, it would give them too bad an impression. In fact we went sight-seeing. The boat didn't leave the next day. So we had about two days in a hotel. We went to a kosher restaurant there. Still had a pretty nice time. But my father was, I heard later, was very desperate after I left. He felt that he was really left alone. My sister was in Frankfurt, he was alone. In Mannheim, I wasn't there anymore. So for him apparently it was like something had been taken away from him.

INT: But he wanted you to go, right? He was pushing for you to go.

HELMUT: Well, it was a matter already of life and death, so, you couldn't play games. I didn't want to go to the United States. I didn't like what I heard about the country. And I was a hundred per cent right. But I experienced, especially during the first two years, worse in accordance to the unpleasant things I had heard.

INT: Were there any, did your father tell you anything before you left? Was there anything that he, did he sit down and talk to you before you left about, you know, did he give you any good-bye advice or anything, or was it just...

HELMUT: No. Well, he said that he had some money put outside of Germany, and if I need money, I should ask my cousin, and he will give it to me. Which he did at that time. But he also said that his brother is going to come back and they're going to straighten out all the things. But this was then later on...

INT: And then he was going to come to America, your father.

HELMUT: He would, yeah. He thought, that's why they had brought out the money. So, this is the next step in this whole thing, what we are talking about. This is now the immigration and emigration. Do you want to start with that?

INT: Well, we can stop there, or we can continue if you'd like.

HELMUT: I can go on, I'm not that tired. Do you want to leave?

INT: Now I'd like to talk more about, can you talk about the trip to America?

HELMUT: Yeah, the trip to America. All right, I said good-bye to my father and to my brother-in-law and so on. My father said to me, "Watch out for the brother of my brother-in-law." He said, "I've heard that sometimes he talks big and doesn't do much." But I must say he didn't talk big, he did a lot. But I can see what he did for my sister. My brother-in-law. There were very few people who did that much. He was not married, but anyway. And he did it not only for my sister, but he did it for another brother-in-law, too. He sent out quite a few affidavits and so on. For me he didn't do anything. He figured I'm a young man. What else do I need. He gave me some advice. All right, I don't want to go into that. Not yet. You want to know about the trip.

INT: Yeah. And what you were feeling on that trip. Were you afraid? Were you scared about going to America? How did you feel about leaving Germany and going to America? Were you very unhappy, or...

HELMUT: I didn't want to go to the United States. I would have liked to go to Israel, let's say because it's a better element. The people who were intellectual, they went to Israel. They did not go to the United States. To the United States went the people who were really materialistic. Until later. Until later, then after Kristallnacht. But later Rabbi Breuer went, and all kinds of, but I didn't want to go. But it had been prepared in a certain way. That cousin of mine, the son of this uncle, he went to Rabbi Young. Rabbi Young, his father was a teacher of my father. There was some kind of a connection. And I asked him whether I'd done some good work. So Rabbi Young wrote a very nice letter back. I'm in a very good position, I have a trade, I can get a job and I can even save money. He knew, he didn't know the first thing about it, but he wrote nice...

INT: Flowery letters about it.

HELMUT: Yeah. In Germany I got letters of recommendation, where people in New York, or so on, they gave me a letter saying, "Mr. Helmut Bodenheim is emigrating from Germany to go to New York. If you can be of any help, I would appreciate it." So I went to some people who were most of the time were not the right people. All they had to say is, "Oh, you have a trade? By all means, stick to that trade." That was always the advice. Somehow, subconsciously I always had a feeling the trade was a little bit too heavy, too hard for me. I wasn't built for that, for being, let's say I had to go into at that time, all right, anyway. I wanted to talk about this later. This immigration into the United States. But I was in a ship. I was in a cabin with people from Germany. Many of them came from villages and so on. Completely different type. Very materialistic. I was brought up in a Gymnasium and all this. They were playing cards, they were talking about all kinds of things which I had never heard before.

INT: Not religious.

HELMUT: Not religious at all. They couldn't understand that I'm religious. Do you do this and that, do you keep Shabbas...

INT: So there was no minyan on the boat, or anything like that.

HELMUT: There was a minyan.

INT: There was?

HELMUT: Yeah. In fact I did go over with somebody, I'm still friendly with him, at Breuer's, he came from Nuremberg, and I met him there. We sat at the same table. There was a problem with the food. We had a mashgiach, a kosher mashgiach, so the mashgiach said, "Everything is okay, if it's in the kitchen. If it's going out of the kitchen, you cannot guarantee." So he said, "I advise you to take your own silverware along." So I did that. The plates we used, and the silverware I used my own. We ate, but we could have kosher food. It was good, it was good food. And this young man, he was a little bit older than I was. A nice fellow. We were friends. Later on we were always friends. There were other, there was a family there they were going to Kansas City. Also Orthodox. They were, but in the cabin where I was, these people, they were not Orthodox. So I could have been under a very bad influence, but I just didn't listen to them. When they came with their talk and so on, I went to sleep. (laughs). Sometimes they didn't like it, they tried to make fun, but...

INT: So you had a lot of strength back then in your religion, in your religious feeling?

HELMUT: Yeah. I knew already that I needed a lot of strength, and that started right away, it started right on the boat. They were not bad people, but they were not the greatest. If you would talk to one at a time, then they would actually think I'm right. They would think I am right. They were also going into a country where they didn't know anything about. I met some people, Americans, they had come, they went to Germany and went back again. So I asked them questions about the United States and so on. So they were telling me, "You like fruit? You will get the best fruit there. This is one thing, not expensive, and so on." They told me a few good things. About finding a job, they said, It's the Depression. It's not that easy.

INT: Now you were going to stay with your sister and brother-in-law?

HELMUT: No, they were not there yet. They were in Frankfurt, and then came the tenth of November. And not only that, that was in May.

INT: What year was this that you left Germany? '38.

HELMUT: '38.

INT: So before Kristallnacht.

HELMUT: Yeah, yeah, six months before Kristallnacht. And then I was getting letters, I lived with some relatives, they made arrangements for me to live at the YMHA, 92nd Street in New York. The room was actually not so cheap. They said it's good for me to be in some kind of surroundings where I'm protected. Which was not a bad idea. I had a

room for myself. It was friendly, and since that time I was always very particular about living nicely. In a nice neighborhood. I would rather eat less and do other things less, but I wanted to...we always lived well. In nice living conditions. When we were married, and when I was single, always with nice. That...and there it was nice. They had all kinds of activities. They had a music school. They had swimming, and so on.

INT: So how long did you stay there? At the YMHA?

HELMUT: For two years.

INT: For two years.

HELMUT: Yeah, but it was customary then, among German immigrants, to stay with a family. It came out cheaper. I had to buy my own food, this was always a big bother. So what happened later on. My case was a particular case. My father, he was constantly writing letters, "Your uncle is not coming. He promised me," and this, until finally the catastrophe came. I was twenty and a half years old. And the bookkeeper of my father, and my uncle, there was an estate in Germany. No matter what, Hitler or no Hitler, was still to be liquidated. So this bookkeeper, he got himself a judge. The judge was a Nazi outside but not inside. And he wrote me a letter. He said, "Let me get some furniture and things there. Let me know what you want. I'll treat you as a German citizen who left Germany and lives in New York. Forget about being Jewish." So I said, "Get me the piano, get me this, get me this table, get me the desk upstairs." We had the chairs, some paintings. All china, all silverware. Silver, and so on. Silver coffee set which is worth a fortune. I said, in other words, as much as can be put into one room. And then I, after two years, I looked for an unfurnished room with an Orthodox family on the West Side. The Orthodox people, the young people had moved to the West Side. Some were already in Washington Heights. Rabbi Breuer. So I lived there. Family Wallerstein. Was quite nice.

INT: So you moved out of the YMHA and you moved in with a family.

HELMUT: I lived there.

INT: Well, what were you doing for a job before you moved?

HELMUT: All right, I'll tell you what happened.

INT: Did you come with money? Your father gave you a lot of money? I mean, how...

HELMUT: No.

INT: There was an affidavit, or something.

HELMUT: No, there was some money here which the company had sent here, which this uncle was taking care of, but the son, he had it. So when I asked him, I took as little as possible.

INT: He would just give you money weekly, or monthly.

HELMUT: Not monthly, no, when I needed it. I'd say, "Give me three hundred dollars, or so." So I arrived, well, of course, since I was here, I had a positive attitude. I didn't say anymore, No, I want to go to Israel, and this is no good. And within....

INT: Why did you have a positive attitude? What made you...

HELMUT: Survival. I had to have, I said, I'm here now...

INT: Did you speak the language, did you know English?

HELMUT: Well, I had studied languages in the Gymnasium, among them also English. And during the waiting period I went to a Berlitz school, where they had foreign teachers. So I knew quite a bit of English. The spelling I knew quite well and so on. I didn't know it well enough, but...

INT: You could get by.

HELMUT: Oh, I could say, "I'm a German refugee, I'm looking for a job." This I knew. And I knew the answer, too. Most of the time. And I still remember I arrived on a Friday, and within an hour already I knew the crosstown bus, and the Madison Avenue bus and the Park Avenue. And so on. Somebody told me. I was so anxious, that it was a matter of survival.

INT: Was there someone to meet you there?

HELMUT: Yeah. The brother of my brother-in-law. The one who gave me the affidavit, and his brother.

INT: He met you at the dock, and...

HELMUT: And they put me into that YMHA. And I had enough money to pay the rent. Six dollars a week for a room.

INT: Did you look for a job right away? What did you do?

HELMUT: Of course. I had letters of recommendation. So the brother of my brother-in-law, he was a doctor. He had been in Israel and had money in Israel, and he took the money. They used to say, first he had the money, and the other people had the experience, the Israeli. Later on the Israeli had his money, and he had the experience. So he was to discuss it, and his brother, this rich brother, the hat manufacturer, had to go to

Israel, pick him up and bring him to New York. So he said to me, "I'll make a deal with you. You looking for a job? I'll go around with you. And you got these letters of recommendation? Let's go to these people, see what they have to say." So we went around to him, so he did most of the talking. I thought it was very stupid.

(Pause) And he didn't get me a job, either. He just got me the advice. I said, Go to the library and look where they need your skill. There's a public library over there. One even went with me to that library to show me. He thought he had done a big thing.

INT: But you weren't getting a job. Nobody was hiring you.

HELMUT: No, sure I was getting. Then after a few days I said, Well, this is not getting me a job. I'm going to take the yellow pages and go to woodworking shops. First to glazier. I was putting in glass into windows, too. So I went to some guy, he said, well, maybe I can get you into the union. So he tried to get me into the union. The union said, we ourselves have so many unemployed people, we cannot take somebody who comes from the boat. First he has to go into a non-union shop. And these were the worst shops you could find. And then when it's been unionized, then go into the union. I went around, I went to other glass shops. There was a guy, he said, "I can give you a job. But I don't pay by the hour. I pay piecework. In other words, if you put in a window, I'll give you fifty cents for a glass." He took me on the twentieth floor somewhere, and I wanted to take that window inside. He said, "No, not that way we do it! You've got to sit outside."

INT: On the twentieth floor.

HELMUT: I started even doing that, but I really was shaky. I said, "I'm sorry, I'm not going to do. You want that glass in?" So of course it took much longer, so I worked for this fifty cents for two hours.

INT: But it was safer!

HELMUT: But I didn't make money. So after a day and a half. I said, "It's very nice that you're going to give me a job, but I cannot handle it." Then I came to a woodworking place, the guy said, "You can sit around my shop. When I get work, I'll give you, I'll pay you two dollars a day." Then he sent me to a shop there, they were making windows, but and doors and so on, but where I had served apprenticeship in Germany, I was really not up to production. These people had been doing this for years and years. When I came in I should do the same thing. By the way they told me, they don't talk to these people, the mechanics. So I found out, they were anti-Semites. In New York. In New York, they lived in Yorkville, and so on. So when I wanted to know something on the job, they were telling me, "I'm not going to tell you. Everybody here works by himself. You just go ahead."

INT: But they would help a Gentile person.

HELMUT: They didn't help me. Then they took me out to a building. They said, "Install a cabinet." I've never done this. "You see this guy? He has it up already, you didn't even get started."

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

HELMUT: ...I said, that's all I know. He said, No, we don't teach anybody here. So this was...

INT: So weren't you depressed, I mean, you're coming from...

HELMUT: I was depressed. Of course, I was depressed.

INT: Did anybody warn you there was anti-Semitism here, too, or nobody told you?

HELMUT: No. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. But I got into worse anti-Semitism. This wasn't the worst yet. But anyway, I had some recommendations that came from Hirschland, and there was a man, he worked for the Federation. So I went there, so he said, Yeah, maybe I can help you. I told him I keep Shabbas. So he said, "Oh, for such a thing I have no understanding whatsoever. What do you think, you are running the world?"

INT: He was a Jew?

HELMUT: Of course! In fact, related. His name was Grunerbaum. His mother was a Hirschland. So...

INT: So if you needed a job, you couldn't take a job because you had to work on Shabbas.

HELMUT: So he says, I'll tell you something. "I'll still give you a job. Go to this shop." I went to a shop. I found out that the guy was actually broke. He had a lot of German Jews working there. And he was as nervous as anything. He went around, and he said, "Oh, you don't know how to hold a hammer!" And the next guy, it was just terrible. So, I worked there for a week, and the guy went into bankruptcy, he had to close his shop. The man was too nervous, and he didn't know enough about the business, either. So, that was one job. Then I worked in a building, putting in picture frames, molding, and things. The guy also, I got this through the Young Israel, they had an employment agency. But they had the worst jobs. But later on I found out the guy was writing out bad checks. But not to me. He gave me good checks. Because it didn't pay for, I was working for two and a half dollars a day, so it didn't pay to...

INT: Write a check.

HELMUT: Write a bad check. But he also, things didn't work out.

INT: Now, did you have friends there, or did you have a chevrah or something?

HELMUT: No. This is a very good question.

INT: You're on your own.

HELMUT: When you have a whole group of people immigrating to New York, number one, I had friends. And very often I was eating in a private dining room, and there everybody met. Everybody knew if somebody has a job, whether he was getting two dollars a week more raise and this and that. If this man has a job. When I got there, it was, "Oh, you still don't have a job?" That's the way they talked. Sometimes they tried to help, too, but...

INT: It wasn't supportive. They weren't supporting you.

HELMUT: No, they were nice. These were my friends, actually. These were my friends, but there were some people there, they had been in the United States already since 1924. And they, more or less, they were watching what the other people were doing, and they were criticizing people. They meant well, too. They themselves were not doing so hot, either. They were to be admired that they kept Shabbas for so long, all these years that they...one was a tombstone (?), the other one was an upholsterer. He employed people, and whoever worked for him was sorry he every worked for him. He was a nervous guy.

INT: But this group of people were religious people?

HELMUT: Yeah, they were all. This is a new chapter. For immigrants, religious immigrants, there was a organization in New York, it was called Shomrei Hadas. They were connected to the Young Israel, and they also had that employment agency, and they had many social get-togethers. Like in Germany, I wasn't the only one who was in a youth group, they had them all over, and they carried that right into the United States. They had hikes on Sundays. We went sometimes away on vacation. We went to Lake George. There was somebody who had a car, so we paid him the car expenses. The Fourth of July we went to Lake George and took some nice, so I had a nice group of friends.

INT: Was it hard to keep kosher or keep Shabbat when you first came?

HELMUT: It was very, very difficult. You could only get the worst jobs.

INT: Because of Shabbas.

HELMUT: They worked half a day. Unless there were people, they had connections from Germany, and they were given, some of them, respectable jobs with more pay.

They were in business of a relative, there were quite a number of them. There were some of them. Of course, this was not easy to take. But this irregularity went on for six months. And then finally I had a recommendation to somebody by the name Bendheim. In the meantime, she turned out to be a second cousin of my wife. We are very friendly. She was helpful with that sefer. But that came much later. At that time, to the old Mr. Bendheim, I had a recommendation, so on yontif, he lived on the fourteenth floor, I walked up to the fourteenth floor. The man was very much impressed. So he said to me, "Look, you have any problems, see me in my office." When things got pretty bad, I went to his office. He said to me, "I can send you to a cousin of mine, he has a machinery factory. I think he can give you a job." I went there, it was a Mr. Stern. He asked me what I know, and so on. So he said, we pay twelve dollars a week, but if you want to learn something, I'll send you into a special department, woodworking department. You want to learn something, I'll send you there. He sent me there. I found out in that factory, all the foremen, they were Germans. German anti-Semites, but they knew the business. The machinist foreman, he knew machining. In the pattern shop, he knew pattern-making. He was a...So I was there and right away he came, "Make this here, do this." So I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Oh, I thought you were an experienced man. You know pattern-making." I said, "I never heard of pattern-making." "Okay, all you can do is you can paint the patterns. I'll show you how to do it. It's got to be black and it's got to be red, and so on. And then you got to sweep the floor at 3:30 so that the real mechanics over there, they were from planing, and so on, making sawdust, you have to sweep it, and the shop has to be nice and clean. And then once in a while maybe, because you know woodworking, I'll let you make a box."

INT: But this was a full-time job, and you could depend on it.

HELMUT: Full-time job, twelve dollars a week. But I had a job every day. That this was a beginning, and I held onto it.

INT: We should stop there.

(Pause)

INT: This is a continuation of an interview with Helmut Bodenheim.

The last time we were talking about your arrival in America, and your search for work, and some of the anti-Semitism that you encountered in America. And that's pretty much where we left, last time.

(Pause while he goes through his notes)

HELMUT: To find a job not working on Shabbas was very difficult. What had been predicted to me in Germany was 100 per cent true. I made contact, for instance, with an employment committee of the Federation. It was at that time the National Council of Jewish Women. In fact, I had an introduction through my mother's side. They were bankers and they were influential, and I had a letter of recommendation to one of the

officers there. So I went there and discussed with him. I said, "Can you get me a job?" But I told him, "By the way, I don't work on Shabbas." So he spent most of his time trying to convince me to work on Shabbas. That I would be old-fashioned if I do this. So after telling me all this, he said, "I don't want to be bad in any way, so here is a piece of paper. This man has a job opening." He was a cabinet maker. I went there. Only new arrivals working there. Some of them knew a little bit about woodworking, others didn't. The man was a nervous wreck. He bothered everybody. All he was doing was making the rounds and bothering everybody, telling everybody that he doesn't know anything, and so on. And I worked there for about two weeks. After two weeks he was out of business. Now I mentioned my, in that lecture last week, the German Jews in New York, most of them were in New York. Only the ones who had connections with relatives out of town, they were outside of New York. Otherwise everybody was, at that time mostly in midtown. Rabbi Breuer wasn't there yet. There was a organization created by the German Jews themselves, supported by well-settled American balebatim, mostly businessmen. And that was called "Shomrei Hadas." They also had an employment agency. The Young Israel had an employment agency, and Shomrei Hadas. They worked together. They sent a representative there, a Mrs. Blumenthal at that time, and she tried to give people jobs. The jobs were also not very good. But they tried. I got one job through them. It also happened after a couple of weeks, always some bankrupt builder. I worked for him for a few weeks, and then he started issuing checks which were no good, and so on. Because these business, it was very bad. It was difficult to find a job, even for very experienced people. Somebody like I, I cannot say if I served three years' apprenticeship in Germany, that I was the most experienced person. Especially the shop where I worked, they had no machines. That meant, when you wanted to do work, you had to go to another shop to do machine work. And I was not permitted to handle the machines, he told other people. It was impossible. So when I came here, and got into a shop with people who had been doing the same work for years and operate these machines, I found it difficult. I had to find my way. And that only happened later on. So I worked in a building, and I was hanging doors in the building, putting locks in the doors. And then later on, there was no more work. Then there was a painter, the painter needed some help. I was painting ceilings, giving a hand to a painter and so on.

INT: So you were piecing together different jobs.

HELMUT: In other words, that's about what I was doing, until I approached a man, to whom, Mr. Bendheim, I had a recommendation, and he also invited me on Shabbas, so he made a remark, he said, "If you ever need any help, see me in my office." That was Phillip Brothers, it was a well-known company. Shomer Shabbas. He was the owner. Bendheim. Phillip. He came, they had been in England before. So he said, "Yeah, I can get you a job. I have a cousin, his name is Stern, and he has a machinery factory. I think he can give you a job." He went to the phone, the man said okay, you can send me over there. So he interviewed me, and so he said, "I see you have worked with wood. If you want to learn something, I'll put you into a department where you can learn something. But we don't pay much. We pay ten or twelve dollars a week."

INT: So did you have friends at this time? Did you have friends at the time?

HELMUT: Yeah, many friends. What should I talk about, the job, or the friends?

INT: Well, let's talk about the friends a little bit now.

HELMUT: Anyway, I got a job. I got a job there. And this was considered, I still want to say, a steady job. The company didn't have a real benefit, they had a life insurance and so on. For overtime, we had to work straight time. Social Security was just about to start. In '38, that's when Roosevelt started the Social Security. But it was a job where I knew that on Friday afternoon I would have a job on Monday morning. And I could go home at 3:00 Shabbas, that Friday afternoon.

INT: That's very unusual. That must have been unusual to find. Hard to find.

HELMUT: Yeah, it was full of, they called us refugees. Some of them didn't know anything at all. They were helpers, they were carrying heavy parts, they were moving them with a crane.

INT: All German Jews?

HELMUT: All from the villages, all kinds. Everything. They spoke all German dialects there. But there were German Gentiles there, too. They were the foremen, and the big anti-Semites and Nazis, and they were not afraid to make anti-Semitic remarks. The owner had nothing to say. He needed them. They knew the business and so on. The owner was more or less the organizer and salesman, and so on.

INT: So were Hitler's ideas sort of filtering to America through the Germans?

HELMUT: Hitler wanted to infiltrate the whole world. And he did that.

INT: But America, how did he...

HELMUT: Oh, he did that. In Jersey factories went up into the air by explosions. They had in Yorkville there was Fritz Kuhn, the whole group, they were wearing Nazi uniforms, right in the beginning of the war, and marching, singing Hitler's songs.

INT: Really?

HELMUT: Sure, in Yorkville.

INT: These are German people, German immigrants.

HELMUT: German immigrants. German Nazis. And they had very strong Nazi. Not only that, they had German submarines landing in Far Rockaway. You heard about that. They were arrested, and Roosevelt killed them. He had them executed, and so on. They did infiltrate. And I can say, I'm saying ahead of time, even when I was in the army, in

my platoon there were two Germans, they were real Nazis. They always said, "We don't want to be here. We don't want to fight against my Fatherland." And they, but later on, when it came to us to be prepared for going overseas, they disappeared.

INT: They went AWOL, or something?

HELMUT: Not AWOL, they were probably sent to some detention camp. In fact I remember that they always had on, when we went on a march, they always said, "Oh, we can't march anymore, I'm tired." And the lieutenant was yelling at them and so on. But more or less, I think with the intelligence and all that, I inquired, and they got rid of them. These two people, I still remember them. Personally, they were quite nice to me. I got along with them. But they were strictly against the war. Of course. The war, why should they fight against Germany. They didn't want it. And this was a free country. Things were not so controlled yet. All this. But you talk about friends, this was a Shomrei Hadas. That was well organized. They had lectures, get togethers, they had once a year a boat ride, once a year the Chanukah party, the Purim party, and so on. They also had shiurim. Most of the shiurim were actually in the Agudah, but many people from the Agudah belonged to the Shomrei Hadas, and Shomrei Hadas to the Agudah. It was mixed, boys and girls together, and they met each other, and I know many people, they met their wives there. They went...and we were also a group of friends. The friends I had, they did not come from the area of Germany where I was, most of them from Berlin, and so on. In fact, they always made fun of my dialect from southern Germany, and so on. So we were always, we always got together. And then, what we had in Germany, these youth groups, and so on, everybody still had the spirit. So what did we do when there came, was it the first time, was Christmas? We got together, four of us. There was one car. Somebody had some kind of laundry service, and he had a car, so we paid him all the gas and the expenses. We wanted to explore the Catskill mountains in the wintertime. So we met. That was Xmas eve, and we went to Port Jervis, and in Port Jervis we stayed overnight, and then the next day took a long trip through the mountains. It was ice and snow, and so on, but we saw the Catskill Mountains. Finally, it was getting dark, so they said, "It's about time to find a place where to stay." So we ended up in Phoenicia. Phoenicia, we went to the hotel and stayed there overnight. At that time, I must say, most of the people, they ate certain things in these hotels. Like rye bread, they didn't ask too many questions. We ate the rye bread. And had coffee, and so on. And boiled egg, and so on. I still remember we went to the movies, we saw Dickens, that winter story, that story there about Xmas. I still remember we saw that. And then the next day, we were in the middle of the Catskill Mountains, we had to start right away going home. So it was a 48-hour excursion. But it was very nice. And then the next excursion, that was Decoration Day. Decoration Day we went further, and there were more people. We had a station wagon. We went to Lake George.

INT: So you tried to recreate the youth group, in a way, in America.

HELMUT: Certain things. The learning, everybody attended some kind of shiur. In midtown there were some shiurim. And hiking, exploring, seeing nature. We enjoyed

that. Not just to sit there. We didn't sit around the table and played cards, only. We enjoyed that.

INT: So by this time, how did you feel about America, about being in America? And did you know what was going on in Germany? Were you following what was going on in Germany?

HELMUT: Well, when Kristallnacht came, everybody was running, in the New York area, all German Jews, trying to get affidavits of support. They had been doing that before already, but nobody knew that it was getting that serious. It came overnight. There were people like Governor Lehman. I don't know how many hundreds of affidavits of support he signed.

INT: The Governor?

HELMUT: The Governor.

INT: Of New York?

HELMUT: Oh, yeah. There were other people. Some people did not sign. But then later on I had a job, it was a...

INT: Just one minute. How did you feel being in America, when everything was happening in Germany? Did you feel like, you would rather be there? You were worried about what's going on?

HELMUT: I'm sorry to say I...I knew that the German administration was full of criminals, and nothing good was to be expected from them. Now as far as I was concerned, they didn't bother me that much. I cannot say there were too many incidents where really I was affected personally. They didn't attack me on the street. I was here, I saw that the machinists union, they didn't want any Jews, the banks didn't want any Jews. In Jersey, the villagers had signs: Christian. "Christian" meant, no Jews wanted.

INT: Really?

HELMUT: Of course.

INT: In New Jersey?

HELMUT: Certainly. Like for instance, like Lake (?), later on they established a Jewish congregation for a number of (Pause while he shuts the window)...but we were there one time as a group, and a number of people turned us down. It was not easy to find a village where they didn't have "Christian." And even where we stayed overnight, they actually didn't want it.

INT: So you were coming from one anti-Semitic situation to another.

HELMUT: Well, that's the way I felt. Same thing with the company where I worked. The foremen were anti-Semites. And then I happened to be in Washington, just for a short trip, short sightseeing trip. There I saw streetcars where they said, "Colored people are requested to go to the last three seats of this car." So I was not very much impressed with all this. And my analysis of the country, was that it is a very difficult. Very difficult to make a living. What I was always told, my family, they wanted me to go to the United States. I was always told, "Go there, and first maybe you'll sell newspapers, and maybe somebody, he has a big company, he will pick you up, he will say, "You look like you have some intelligence. I can give you a job in my company." That's the way they were telling, these were the stories they were telling that happened to other people. The only thing is, it never happened to me. So I didn't see so many other people, either. Some people, they had rich relatives or so on. They were offered a job a little bit better than what I had. But I found that it was a very difficult country. And they took advantage of the refugees.

INT: How would they take advantage of you?

HELMUT: With the pay. The pay was not twelve dollars a week at that time. An American worker at that time was getting maybe thirty dollars a week.

INT: So you were getting a lot less.

HELMUT: Yeah, sure. Twenty-five, thirty dollars. Yeah, it was for two years. I didn't talk yet about the later years.

INT: Well, can we get to that?

HELMUT: Now, as far as friends are concerned, did I tell you enough? That's what you wanted to know? We were a group, a whole group of friends. In the Shomrei Hadas, you would always meet new people, people you had known. There was no shortage of friends.

INT: Were you dating at this time?

HELMUT: At that time, number one, my father died, during that year I certainly didn't. There, very little. Later on.

INT: How old were you when he passed away?

HELMUT: Twenty and a half when I arrived. I was born 1917, so I arrived '38. But it wasn't the end of '38. It was May '38. That made it twenty and a half. But I was not very experienced. I had to get my experience first. For a while, my sister arrived, but it didn't take too long, because they moved to Chicago. My brother-in-law was a doctor.

INT: So they got an affidavit after you, to come.

HELMUT: Well, they're the cause of the affidavit, because the man who gave the affidavit, is the brother of my brother-in-law, and he brought over the whole family. He let his brother study, paid for the entire livelihood, and all this. But then in-between, there were some arguments with my part of the family. Well, we ended up, each one of us, with a few thousand dollars, and then after, it comes to after two years. I left that company. I had learned enough about patternmaking. That is a highly skilled trade, even more skilled than toolmaking. You make a pattern out of a piece of wood. Let's say a steering wheel of a car. It had to be made according to a shrinkage, because it depends on the metal, you had to know about metals. You had to know about foundry practice and everything. Each mechanic, all he would get is a blueprint and from this he would create something. The next mechanic would do something else. It's not like in a carpenter shop where a few people work on one project, and all this. So I got initial training...

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

HELMUT: Well, after two years I felt, now, maybe I can look around a little bit. But there was the war going on already. What can I really get. What do people offer me. So after I looked in the newspaper, they had at that time, the Journal American, that was a good paper for mechanics, they were asking for patternmakers. So I saw one Arrow pattern, so after work I went there. So they were still working there. So the owner, he called the foreman. The foreman was also a German. He was a very fine man, and he asked me a few questions. So he said to me, "I think we have some work for you. You start with some small patterns and later on we break you in." He said, "We can use you. Bring your tools in, and so on."

INT: How was your English at this time? Were you taking classes in English, or you were just learning from being in America?

HELMUT: I was learning English in Germany. First in school, although English was in a voluntary basis. You see, we learned Greek, Latin, French. Between 7:00 and 8:00 in the morning, twice a week. We could study English. So it was on a voluntary basis. But considering the situation, I wanted to be sure to, I learned modern Hebrew. I learned English, too. But it wasn't enough. Later on, while I served apprenticeship, I went to Berlitz school. Berlitz school is all teachers, they were foreign teachers, and they didn't speak German, so they were teaching everything in English, so I wasn't that bad. When I came here, I could have a conversation.

INT: Oh, so you were in good shape anyway.

HELMUT: Yeah. And for a while I went to some language school, it was from some synagogue. It was okay, but I...I had some idea which maybe sounds foolish, but I was interested in music in Germany already, and had taken piano for not too long. But I had in my mind, as soon as I have an opportunity, I want to put in some more piano. I said, if

I learn piano, they talk to me in English. So this teaches me English already. So I did that for a while. I did it until I couldn't handle it anymore, because I had to take courses for my occupation. I had to know about wood turning, which I didn't know, and more about blueprints. So I had to go to school at night, and after a year, year and a half I couldn't continue piano lessons anymore. But I did learn some English there, and then later on, the courses, I went to Peter Stuyvesant High School and took first drafting, and I took wood turning. I was pretty good in my English. That was no problem. Anyway, I had a new job, and I immediately got more money. Right away, four dollars more, and then after two months, another four dollars, and so on. It worked out good for two years. Later on, there was a problem coming up with the army. I was ready to go into the army. So in order not to go into the army, you had to be deferred. The classification to go into the army was 1A, that was mine. But the owner of the company could go to a draft board and would say, "I need this man," and if they wanted to, they could make me 2B, that is essential for defense. So when I spoke to the owner he gave me some excuse. I saw he didn't want to do it. So I was friendly with the foreman, so the foreman said to me, "Look, I'd like you to work here, everything is fine. But you know very well, if nothing happens, you're going into the army. If you leave here, you have a chance finding somebody who will go to the draft board." And I did find a place. They kept me out of the army for quite a while.

INT: I see. So you left that job in order to find another job where they'd let you out of the army.

HELMUT: Well, I said to myself, I had enough. I went already through Hitler Germany. I'm not going to run after another adventure, to be shipped back there, and so on, especially as a German Jew. I didn't know what the arrangements were. They could shoot me right away if they would catch me fighting against them and all that. It went for a while, later on it couldn't be done anymore.

INT: But America hadn't gone into the war yet, right?

HELMUT: They went in the war already, then, yeah.

INT: It was 1941?

HELMUT: No, after Pearl Harbor.

INT: After Pearl Harbor, that was '41.

HELMUT: Was in '41, right? Well, before it was only land lease. They were sending equipment over there, then they went sure with Pearl Harbor. Well, not only that. Germany declared war against the United States. Most foolish thing. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and Germany declared war. They should be glad to be left alone. Hitler was that crazy. I don't know why, he could have saved himself by not declaring war. This country was not prepared at all. They had no equipment. But they were doing

tremendous job. Kaiser was building ships, one ship a day. It was unbelievable. It was like a fairy tale, the way this country started the production and so on.

INT: So you got deferred, then, from this...

HELMUT: Yeah, until August '43, I finally was drafted into the army. I was first sent to camp, Camp (?), to the induction center, and from there to Fort (?), combat engineers' training. Five months. We had very good training. I must say, in my platoon, about 60 per cent were German Jews, too.

INT: Did you get to choose that, company, combat engineers, or that was just where they put you?

HELMUT: No, there was no...

INT: There was no choice.

HELMUT: As an Orthodox Jew, I cannot go ahead and say, "I volunteer to work on Shabbas, or to eat things which are..." I just did what they did to me. That was the halacha. That's what the Chofetz Chaim said. They called it dina demalchuta dina, established by Ezra when the Jews went to Babel, that you should follow the law of the country. I don't have to volunteer for anything, but when they get me, then I do the best. As long as I'm on duty, I'm okay, I do what I'm told. They tell me to shoot a rifle on Shabbas, I do it. When I'm back in the barracks, I don't have to start smoking, or turning on lights. There is Shabbas back again, the way it was before. In fact, that's the way it worked very often. On Yom Kippur everybody, no it was Rosh Hashana. Everybody went away for Rosh Hashana, but it involved travel on yontif and so on, so I explained it to the officers there. I cannot do that. I said, I cannot travel. I have to stay here. So, they respected that, and when Yom Kippur came, they said to me, "You want to have a pass? You want to go to New York? You have Friday, I'll give you Friday, you can travel." Yom Kippur was on Shabbas, and then you come back Sunday, Monday. They were quite nice.

INT: Were there a lot of Orthodox Jews with you? The German Jews that were with you, were they also Orthodox?

HELMUT: They were not in my platoon. There were in that camp. I met some. There you can be surprised, some people, they give in very quickly to these things. I was never eating really the meat and so on. I was not eating spinach because they put meat into the spinach. The bread I ate bread, and I ate fish, and I ate eggs, when it was just boiled eggs. But I've met quite a number of Orthodox Jews from congregations I knew. They took advantage. They said, "We are in the army now, so we do what's good for our health." I was surprised, quite a few people made it easy for themselves.

INT: So it must have been very difficult to stay Orthodox. It must have been very, very difficult.

HELMUT: It was very difficult.

INT: How did you daven? Did they have a minyan?

HELMUT: Minyan? No. You do not need, I daven here without a minyan, too. Tomorrow morning I will go to dialysis, I have no minyan.

INT: Right, I understand that. But I mean, I guess in the army now, if you have enough Jews, they would have a minyan.

HELMUT: In the morning? No. I davened. I put on tallis and tefillin. I had an electric razor, shaver and so on.

INT: Did they make any comments to you about tallis and tefillin?

HELMUT: No.

INT: They left you alone?

HELMUT: They left me alone. They were quite nice. I must say, there they were quite nice. I always acted like a normal person. I was always, what had to be done, I did. They told me, I made these knots and the whole thing. When they were building bridges, I didn't get out of it. I did what I was supposed to do. They had absolutely nothing against it. In fact, later on we went on maneuvers, and...there was, there was electricity. So many people didn't shave. It was okay in the maneuvers. Others shaved, of course. How could you shave? Only with a straight razor. But somebody had gotten me four dry cell batteries, to be connected and I connect the 8 volt shaver in the tent there, and I started shaving there, (laughs), the whole unit came to watch, to watch it, because they went on maneuvers. So the talk was always, "Engineers, I want to see ingenuity in the maneuvers." So they said, "Here you have the ingenuity here." They didn't know this was for religious reasons. But anyway they admired it and that's one way how to get away with it.

INT: So you didn't encounter much anti-Semitism in the army when you were there?

HELMUT: Once, overseas, all right I'm jumping the gun already. That was after the Normandy Invasion, we were building camps. We were in Rouen, and there we had some kind of a mess hall with a radio. So I, I don't like that American jazz music and all that, so there was hardly anybody in the mess hall, so I turned on Beethoven and so on. There was one guy who was a little bit vicious. He came to me and he said, "In this place, we listen to American music." But I must say later on he apologized. That was six weeks later he apologized. So I cannot say that, I really would have to look for incidents. Against me, no matter where I went I always put on tallis and tefillin and...

INT: There was no problem?

HELMUT: Even overseas I was able to shave, use a battery of a weapons carrier. The mess sergeant had a weapons carrier. So I asked him "Can I use your battery for shaving?" Later on we had a generator and we had 110 volts, so I could plug into it.

INT: So when did you get sent overseas?

HELMUT: It's true, there was one sergeant we had. He didn't really make anti-Semitic remarks, but more or less, he tried to write me, whenever something had to be done, he called my name. "Do this, do that," and so on. It went on for a while, then we went overseas. But I'm jumping the gun. We were taking out mines, and this man, he was cutting hair. He was scared to death to go into a mine field. So his superior was a staff sergeant. Happened to be from Philadelphia. I met him later in the Navy Yard. Mr. (?), was a nice fellow, and I was on very good terms with him. I said, "I want to talk to you. You see Harris? You see that he's constantly riding me, calling my name here and there?" He said, "I've seen it and I've talked to the Lieutenant about it, and I don't like it. He said, "I'm going to change that duty. I'll tell you something. Next week we will be getting prisoners of war. We will be building parking areas for tanks. We have a stockade for the prisoners, and you will be in charge." So he said, "You will never have anything to do with that man anymore." So this was the truth.

INT: So they listened...

HELMUT: Later on, he went home early, the man. Some of these people, they had been on the Ascension Islands before Eisenhower's invasion and the Normandy Invasion. And they had been working in the sun for many years and they all had malaria. And the guy was actually a nervous wreck, and they sent him home before. He also tried to apologize later. He asked me, I should play chess with him. But this, I call this, a moderate anti-Semitism. But it annoyed me. I let it go for a while, but then when I had a real case, then I went, and I won that case with flying colors.

INT: So when you went overseas, where did you go? When you were shipped overseas, where did you go?

HELMUT: When I was shipped overseas, first we landed in Scotland, and then we went by train in the area of Birmingham. There we had to sit around for about a week until they would find units for us. After a week they assigned us to a unit, and I was assigned at that time to the 38 Engineers. So, then we had to go to work. We had to build huts. We didn't like it very much. We were building huts for the British. They would sleep in the huts, and we had to do the hard work, and it was not easy for me, I must say, to carry this. They had pre-fabricated walls and sections, and so on. They were put on a truck, and then they had to come down, I had to put them up, we had to bolt them together. It was hard work. And it was cold. We lived in tents. It wasn't great. We had no hot water. It wasn't the greatest. But when...

INT: What time of the year was this?

HELMUT: February, January. February and March. In England the most miserable times. But then they notified us, they said, "We are going to move now. We are going for a specialized beach training to another part of England, because we're going to be in the Normandy Invasion. Most probably in the beginning," he said, "we don't expect too many losses, but unfortunately there will be losses, and you better learn how to handle things, otherwise you will get hurt with your own equipment, and so on."

INT: Were you scared?

HELMUT: I wasn't scared, because I had an excellent training from Fort (?), from the United States. The others, they had come, they were a labor battalion in the Ascension Islands there, building airports and so on. They were doing nothing but that. It was a southern, mostly southerners. Some of them, they couldn't read and write. So there were still a few of us from the original group, from Fort (?), but no matter what it was, we had training. When it came to figure out how much TNT to use, we knew the formula, and we knew how to use it. They never heard what a formula was.

INT: So you were much better trained than these people.

HELMUT: Much better trained. And even some of the officers, they were not very well trained. And some of them were not so intelligent. I remember one officer, he hurt himself by going with his face right to some explosive. He was lucky he didn't lose an eye. They sent him to the hospital for a few months. But I wasn't afraid, I was not afraid of anything.

INT: Why?

HELMUT: I don't know. Well, of course as an Orthodox Jew, you're not supposed to be afraid. You gotta have bitachon. That's where I am.

INT: And you had that then.

HELMUT: Yeah, sure, and I hope it will work out.

INT: How did you feel about being back in Europe? Did you know what was happening to the Jews then?

HELMUT: We had an idea, I mean a pretty good idea. In the United States already, there was a German Jewish paper there, I mean, I still get it. They call it the Aufbau, they were talking about Auschwitz and Birkenau. Oh yeah, we knew that 50 Bais Yaakov girls committed suicide over there. We knew already. We knew already quite a bit. But then we had that training. It was a lot of it was mines. Booby traps. They call it torpedo. That is a pipe which is filled with explosives, and they put it into barbed wire, and it blows up a barbed wire fence, and then when you blow that up, you breach the fence and you can go right through, against the enemy. So we learned all this.

INT: But taking apart mines, that's very, very dangerous.

HELMUT: Yeah, but what we learned there was actually not the real thing. They didn't teach us about mines. The real mines we found in Normandy, that was, they didn't even know what kind of mines the Germans had. They were not, somehow the intelligence was not well prepared. They showed us how to take out American mines. American mines, not German. They had mines something like this. A booby trap you put under a beer glass, and things like this. I remember completely different mines. What we encountered in Normandy in the beach head later, it was a new story. Nobody knew about that already. We had to explore. So what happened in the end, we went on quite a number of marches, too. We had to be trained. We marched up the mountains in the countryside. It was Cornwall, we were near a place they called it St. Austell. It was a place they had never seen a Jew before. I remember I once got lost in the evening when I had a pass, and then I walked around the countryside. Number one, I saw, further back in the area of Plymouth, the Germans were bombing, and there came Englishmen. So I said, "I'm in a camp around here." I gave them about the location. I said, "Maybe I'm lost. Maybe you can show me the road." It was pitch dark. He said, "Oh, of course, we are cousins." And so on. I let him talk. It was a nice man. A typical, like a nobleman. And thought a lot of himself and of the country and so on. We have to work together. I didn't want to tell him, "You're not exactly **my** cousin, but in general the Americans are cousins of the British." Yeah, so anyway he showed me and I found my way back. These hikes, and whatever exercise we did, I enjoyed tremendously. I had been in Switzerland.

INT: Sure, you loved it.

HELMUT: Yeah, for me it was...

INT: Baby stuff! (laughs)

HELMUT: All the officers and everybody, for me these were walks. But it was a beautiful countryside.

INT: Cornwall's beautiful.

HELMUT: The rocks. Those rocky mountains there, and so on. Then we had beach training. I think I mentioned it last week, also. There was more dangerous than we were aware, because there was one company. In the evening one day we heard that a German submarine came up and saw them training at the beach and opened fire and killed quite a few of them, yeah.

INT: So it was getting scary.

HELMUT: Yeah, well anyway, then it was the end of the training. The population there, I wasn't able to make contact with them. They were different people. The others,

the Gentiles, they found homes. They had a similar mentality. But I didn't want to be too friendly with them. What am I going to do with them? I went when there was time off, to a Red Cross club. Sometimes I met some people I knew, and so on. I had some books I could read. I could play ping pong. And then we were told we were moving, we are going to Winchester. So Shavuos at that time, 1944, we were in Winchester. We were outside. That was an area where the trucks had to be waterproofed. We knew already we were going into the invasion, so the trucks, they have to be waterproofed. The trucks don't go right on land. They first have to go through some water there along the beach, so they had to install certain things. So we had to wait. We did our calisthenics in the morning. In the afternoon went into Winchester. It was beautiful. In fact, in Winchester there was a seminary for priests, for ministers.

INT: I've been there. It's beautiful. The church there.

HELMUT: Yeah. And I met some Jewish soldier. But he had a better job. He was with the weather department, predicting weather for the army. Somehow it was better than I was. A combat engineer was about the worst you could find. But anyway, we took some walks around there and so on. Then we found out there is a Jewish family, Gordon, and that's where the Jewish soldiers were supposed to meet. I went there, that was Shavuos, there was no services or anything, but in the afternoon we went there. There was a shochet. They told us, come in. There was a living room full of soldiers. So they asked me, "Where are you located?" I told him the location. What is your job? Combat engineer. He said, "Oh, you know what you're in for? I hope you will come out alive." That was going around among the, the Jews are good at that. And there was that Mrs. Gordon, and she was crying, "Oh, how did you get yourself into, couldn't you get into another outfit, and so on, you had no connections, maybe you should have known some officer or somebody to get you out of it."

INT: So they're painting a pretty bleak picture.

HELMUT: A bleak picture. And so the camp was a couple of miles away, so I (laughed) walked home.

INT: So much for that party!

HELMUT: I said never again. I didn't mean to come for that. The next step was marshalling the area. Everybody behind barbed wire into an area. Big signs. "Court martial offense to discuss any military movements. Discuss matters of general nature. There is enough reading literature for you up in the mess hall. Don't talk too much." Signs wherever you go. Then came the briefing. The captain called the people together and said, we heard already the planes, loads and loads of planes flying over us. We knew already there was a military movement going on. Squadrons and squadrons of this B37 or something. I forgot the name of these big transport planes. That noise was going day and night and constantly flying.

INT: Where were they going? To France?

HELMUT: Yeah, and Germany. They had been bombing Germany already. Germany was being bombed flat. Completely. That's what I wanted when I left the city. But they were really doing it. And then the captain said, "Tomorrow night we are going in the boat, that will be the invasion boat. You go with the fleet, don't be surprised, you will have blimps on top of you. The blimps are there to prevent strafing of German planes. That they can't shoot their machine guns and so on. And you will see a lot of ships, and so on. And when you get to the beach, and the beach, the front is going to open up, and you have a life raft, press the valve, and hold your rifle up, and you jump into the water. The water will not be too deep, it will be just right. Maybe, dependent on, but anyway. We had to jump into the water and then go to the beaches.

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

HELMUT: They couldn't hit anybody on the ship and so on. Then we had to go into that ship, and it was very, very crowded. So I had to sleep there at night. Spend the night on the ship. I slept under the table. And I was very comfortable. And they were playing classical music. I'll never forget, they were playing the Brahms Variations by a Theme of Haydn. I enjoyed that. So anyway, in the morning, we had to get onto another ship. This was a pretty big ship. And a smaller one. This one opened up in the front. Then somebody told us to jump into the water. We jumped into the water. In one hand I had my pack with equipment and so on. We had also medical equipment, we had sulfur and so on, that we could give ourselves injection in case of an injury, or whatever it was. On the other hand I had the rifle. And the rifle could not get wet, otherwise it's useless.

INT: So you're going to the beach now.

HELMUT: Yeah. We were landing in gas-proof clothing, because Hitler was expected to use gas.

INT: Oh. Did you have a gas mask and everything?

HELMUT: Everything. And blister gas underwear, which I hated.

INT: What was that?

HELMUT: It's coated with something. It's long underwear, but it's coated. I got used to them after a while. We also had fatigues. Also everything was coated. We were completely prepared for blister gases and whatever would come. Then we were at the beach. What did I see? I saw Germans in a stockade there. There was a stockade already. There were two. There was Omaha beach, and Utah. Omaha was a bloody beach. The Germans were right there. Utah beach, they were inland.

INT: How do you spell that second beach?

HELMUT: Utah. Like the state of Utah. Utah. Now that beach head was well-organized. They had big markers. The markers were higher than this room. That meant that for one company, we had been told to go between the green and the red marker. Anywhere, go on land. And then go inland, and you will be directed to go to your area. Got on land, but some of us, we didn't get together with our own unit. There was such a confusion on that beach head, of course. One was going here and there, and so on. The unit was not together anymore. The captain was leading a group, and apparently he didn't know how to read a map, and he took a group and was leading, and they were not supposed to go to the front lines. It was the job of the infantry. Right within the range of machine gun fire of the Germans. And then they were told to get out, you go back, you're not supposed to be here. But I went with another group from another company, and I followed them. I got into the area where I was supposed to be. But it was already dangerous, we couldn't take chances. I started digging a foxhole. As I dug that fox hole, about four hours later the rest of my company was coming with all the officers. They asked me, "What happened to you? We went all over, we saw the Germans, they were fighting." So I said, "Well, that's not your job." So they started arranging the platoons. So my platoon was someplace else. So I had dug a foxhole. So the supply sergeant, he came, he said, "Thank you for digging me a foxhole." So I didn't feel too good, I had to go to another area and start digging again. That's where we stayed for a while. We dug in. They had some boards, they brought them in somehow, put them across, and put sand and leaves on there, that they couldn't see us. So we went just in in the front, and just like, this was the foxhole, this was covered, so you went in here, and here you would sleep. So we went around, there was no supervision, nothing at all. So we walked around, a few friends, I mean, soldiers, I was friendly with quite a number of them. All of a sudden we saw people, they were shooting at us. So there were already snipers in our lines. And then came the German 88's, the big, they had these big 88 guns. They had them on the railroad cars, and they moved around, they knew where we were, and they kept on shooting. Usually started in the afternoon. Then I went to sleep. I was sound asleep. In the morning they asked me, "Did you see the German airplane there? It was strafing here." I said, "I didn't hear anything." I said, "I was sound asleep." Next few days, we went exploring. The beach head had been taken. There were the pillboxes, we went into the pillboxes to see what was doing.

INT: What's a pillbox?

HELMUT: A pillbox? A gun and placement, I have pictures somewhere. I didn't show it to you? I'll show it to you. A pillbox is, first along the western wall, which Hitler built, there was a heavy concrete wall, but then every so often, there was, it's like a house, with a gun sticking out.

INT: Oh, okay. Like a bunker.

HELMUT: Yeah, like a bunker. We went into the bunkers, there were dead Germans. There was still soda glass and soda bottles on the table. And letters. I read the letters, I said, "This guy, he's not a German, the way he writes." So they had a lot of Poles, Poles,

Latvians, all kinds of people. But they had some German girlfriends, so they wrote in German, but it was a very bad German. I looked through it whether there was something of interest. So in fact, we were not eating meat and all these things. I found some cans. In these cans there was bread, the Germans, they called it Kneckebrød. I could eat that. And some friends of mine, they brought me that, too. Later on, as the food was concerned, they had trucks, they called these rations, I mean, C rations, K rations. C rations are cans, they are beans, with ham in it. K rations are different. They are crackers, and then you can get real cheese, or cheese mixed with ham. I was able to exchange. But then there is another one that is 10 in 1 ration. That is a box like this. They have everything in there. They have from salmon, to beans, to carrots, and so on. So there were trucks going further down where the infantry was fighting. So at that time, everybody was a friend. To be called up. They would throw a box down. They threw it down to us. So everybody got himself one box of this. We kept it in the foxhole. There were vitamins in there. And this was a tremendous help. We had to wait around for a while.

INT: On the beach.

HELMUT: Yeah, we could not work yet, because they would shoot, the Germans were shooting. There was no use clearing the beach head. But then they came and said, now we have to go to work. Our job is, there were always big signs, German, "Achtung" means be careful, it's mined. So we knew that that was waiting for us. So he said, "You go in there, and you pull out all these mines."

INT: But you didn't know how to pull these apart yet, right?

HELMUT: These, no. Yeah, but the problem, we had a mine detector, but the mine detector was sensitive to metal. Now they had been shooting in that area. There were always pieces of shrapnel there. So ten times, twenty times, thirty times, you had pieces of shrapnel, until we found a mine. So what we did, we got together in group of three. One operate the mine detector. The second one, he was probing with the bayonet. Is there something, what is there. And they dug around. Okay, after the mine detector sounded off, it was useless. It's like a plate, a stick with a plate, so you go like this. So all of a sudden you hear a sound.

INT: Yeah, but doesn't it blow up the mine, when you do that?

HELMUT: No, it doesn't blow up the mine, no. We kept it about ten inches away. No, it gives a sound. But one thing you know: there is a piece of metal there. Whether the metal is a mine or a piece of metal, this we didn't know. So we started digging around. Found a piece of shrapnel, we put it somewhere in a bag. We didn't want to see this again. And then finally, very often when we came to the mine, there was a lot of metal in these mines. It sounded, it was very powerful. So somebody said, Hey this could be a mine. I remember the first one. We dug around, and then we saw it was, they call it, the mine looked something like this here (pause while he draws a picture)

INT: Looks like a square.

HELMUT: No, this here is the sand, or the grass. The sand, whatever it is. This is the ground. They dug around here, and put the mine here. This here would set off the mine. There was a big pipe and a small pipe, and there was a pin here. And when they deactivate the mine, they pull out these pins. Then this can go down here, and in here, here is dynamite, and here and here, and then there are balls, like in a ball bearing, in here. And when anybody would step on here, the mine would go up that high, and throw the balls in a diagonal direction of 75 yards. And anybody could be injured, killed, anything. So when we saw, the way we worked it out, and when we saw this mine, we put a, we had markers, put a marker around the mine. Nothing else.

INT: You didn't do anything to it yet.

HELMUT: Not yet, no. Went to the next one. After a while, we found the Germans, to their own protection, they had certain patterns. There was a mine here, there was one here, and so we had, after working there for a few days, we knew already where to expect one.

INT: There was a pattern.

HELMUT: Yeah, they made a pattern. For their own protection, and so on. Then there came another team. What they would do is they would dig around the mine, and put, they had nails, they put a nail, a pin in here. So anyone stepping on the mine, the mine was not active anymore. Then they dug around the mine. When they got four or five of them together, they took a rope, put a rope around the mine. Went to the next one. Got about four or five of them together. It was a long rope. Then they went behind some cover. Because what the Germans very often did is they put a booby trap underneath here. So when you would pull out the mine, it would spring up. Like under a beer glass. So they pulled four or five of them out. Then we marked off the area: this area has been cleared. So we worked in these mine fields for at least ten hours a day. It was very, very nerve-wracking. And people were killed, too.

INT: I was going to ask you.

HELMUT: People were killed, were injured, and so on. But as time went on there were less losses.

INT: You got better at it.

HELMUT: Got better at it, and so on. Then there was another mine. There were highways around. They called it the terror mines. You could walk over a terror mine, it wouldn't do anything. But when a truck or a tank, the pressure would blow it up.

INT: Like a roadside bomb.

HELMUT: We had a few trucks blown up by these things. After a while we also, that was another group, and so on. They took out the terror mines. And once, area after area had to be cleared, because we had to land equipment to fight the war. You need more ammunition and everything. We had no place where to land it. You're stuck, you can't put it on the highway, because they needed trucks. So this was our job for six weeks. After six weeks, there wasn't that much shooting anymore, because the beach heads had been moved inward. There was the Battle of St. Lowe, the Germans were chased out of St. Lowe, Sherbourg, St. Mer Eclise, all these places. They were all chased out. The Americans overpowered them. And they were running. Especially the American dive bombers. The P37 they came, and they were killing them by the hundreds, because they were much better dive bombers than what the Germans had, and so on. They couldn't see them. The prisoners told us, this was the worst of the whole war. They couldn't see. Before they knew, they were down there and strafing. They said it was just terrible. Then we had a new assignment, which wasn't very pleasant, either. We had to repair roads. They told us we had to work for twelve hours on the roads. We got to take some grass or mud, and wherever we see a hole, or something, we had to fill it in.

INT: But it wasn't dangerous work.

HELMUT: No, it wasn't dangerous, but it was nerve-wracking. Then the next assignment was there were ships, they had to be unloaded. So we had to go out. We called them ducks. Ducks are like a car which is also a boat. So with these we went to the ships which were out in the ocean. We had to go up a rope ladder and then work on the ship. But the weather was very bad. It was so bad that one of our ships, the anchor broke and the ship went right back to England. They thought they had it made, going back to England. They stayed in England for seven minutes. They put them onto another ship, and shipped them back to Normandy.

INT: No shore leave or anything.

HELMUT: Yeah. This was, then came, I must say, that was a new period. That was, we had to get into the area of Rouen. It was planned to build tanks. The tanks, the ships would land in Le Havre, and we were up on the mountain, and there we would build areas. Tanks have to be, they have to be parked on the hard ground. On rocks, we couldn't make any concrete floor, so we had a lot of two and a half ton trucks, and we had German prisoners. They opened up the German prisoner stockade of 300 prisoners, they had been selected, they volunteered to do work. For this they got three meals a day and PX rations. Not as much as we would get, but they got the two packages of cigarettes a week, and they got soap, and a number of things. Chocolate bar, one or two bars of chocolate, it was worth it to them. They were volunteers. So they lived in that stockade, with barbed wire around, and machine guns, it was guarded constantly. But two of us were in charge, I, because I spoke German. Whatever had to be told to them, I could tell them what we want. What's to be done. The other one, he was a lawyer from Boston. He did some administrative work, whatever it was. We were sitting there in the office, during the day. So they had to go on trucks, say two, three, four of them. The truck went into Rouen. Rouen had been destroyed completely. Picked up rocks, load them on the

trucks, and the trucks went back to that camp area. It was a dump truck. They opened up and so on. And then there was another group of prisoners, they would smooth it out, and so on. That was going day and night. We lived in tents. And there was a fire going day and night. It was in the snow. Completely was on top of the mountain. Was always snow up there. But it was nice and warm in the tent. So I went, I had breakfast in the morning, I went to that stockade, worked there for eight hours or so, and went home, and this was it. On Shabbas I was able to make arrangements that I wouldn't work on Shabbas, and his name was Fortunato, he wouldn't work on Sunday. So there I could keep Shabbas in the army, too. This went on for quite a while. It was in the French countryside. Outside, about ten miles outside of Rouen. When Christmas came, they told us, there's a battle of the Bulge going on and they need us. They gave us ammunition and everything. When we were just ready to go, they sent a message, it said, they don't need us anymore. The battle is under control. I think Patton showed up. (laughter)

INT: That was good.

HELMUT: And then it went on, and then the eighth of May, Germany surrendered. We were up there in the French village. The French celebrated for exactly one week. There was no stop from their celebrations. Day and night the music. They were dancing. For a whole week.

INT: How did you feel when the war was over?

HELMUT: I felt when the war was over? I felt very good that Germany had been defeated. Of course I felt good. But there was still a war, I didn't feel **that** good, because there was a war going on with Japan. So I was afraid that they might, a company like this might be sent to the Pacific. That after we're finished here. So I wrote a letter (pause) in fact it happened a little bit different. Anyway, the pact with Germany was signed by two people: General Sputz (?) and the other was (?) Smith. Later became president of the Chase Manhattan Bank. But the German general was Yodel(?). It was a nerve-wracking job. They were the representatives of Eisenhower. Eisenhower didn't go there. They sent them. They were good enough. They needed some relaxation, some rest. So they decided that these two generals, for their relaxation, they gave a week in Dieppe(?). Dieppe was a well-known place. It was on the Atlantic, and the British had tried before to make an invasion, and they failed, and they were taken prisoners by the Germans. It was a very picturesque place. There was a chateau with a beautiful garden, and that's where the two generals were for their relaxation. Now they needed people to help out, work in the garden. They knew I knew language, I knew German, and I knew French, my French wasn't that good, but enough to make myself understood after having been in France, I learned French in school. They sent me there in case something has to be explained. I was sitting around, I was not doing very much. Sometimes I helped out in the kitchen a little bit, just to make the time pass by. I was sitting in the garden reading, and so on. So I happened to meet these two generals. Later on, they made a speech and thanked us for taking such good care of them and so on, and then we went back to our units. And I asked for a pass to go to England. I had been in England for a long time

before the invasion. I never had a chance to visit my aunt and my cousins. I said I wanted to visit my cousins.

INT: Where were they living in England?

HELMUT: They were in London. So they gave me a pass. We had to go to a place, it was (?), they gave us complete uniforms, dress uniforms, everything. And there I put on tefillin in the morning, and somebody said, "Are you a Jew?" I said, "Yeah, sure." He said, "That's nice you're putting on tefillin. What unit are you with?" I said, "Combat engineers." He said, "I'll tell you something, for a Jew to be in the combat engineers, I think you've had enough of this. You deserve better. I'll tell you something, what to do. I'm in a counter-intelligence crew, and I know that in Germany now, the occupation, they need people like you who speak German." He says, "Write a letter through channels to your commanding officer that you feel you can be of good use to the army, because you speak German and know the geography. If they send you to Germany with the army of occupation, you can be of great help." I meant to say, and not to Japan to finish the war.

INT: Who was this guy? Who was this guy who told you this?

HELMUT: He was a nice Jewish man. A fine man. A Jew who had been already in the intelligence.

INT: So he gave you a good etzeh.

HELMUT: Yeah. Sometimes you meet these people in life. I met other people like that. They're malachim. So I went to England and then I came back, and so on, and that was when we were, when we got news, I was a supply sergeant at that time, they told us, we are leaving. We are going to Belgium. Under very short notice. Everything has to go on trucks, the supplies and all this. I organized the supply, and some of the people they went back to the United States. They had come up for discharge, they had a point system, and they had spent enough time in the army. They went back, and they shipped us outside of Brussels, the name of it was Vivorld.

INT: How do you spell that?

HELMUT: Something like V-i-v-o-r-l-d. Vivorld. But when we entered Brussels, that was a tremendous celebration. People were waving to us. I remember sitting on top of a truck. They were overjoyed that we were coming to Belgium.

INT: The Belgians were big Resistance people, right?

HELMUT: Yeah. It was like a victory parade when we were coming from France, from Rouen, it was a long way. But anyway, it made us all feel very good. They gave us a tremendous reception. So we went to Vivorld. They sent the prisoners along too, to do the work. They had also the area, and so on. And there I was supply sergeant. I was in charge of the supplies. Gave me a very nice office, and a place where to sleep, and some

people who helped me. One morning they said, they gave me ten minutes' notice, I should make a speech about supplies. So anyway, I could make it as far as anybody else. I had sent a letter to the commanding general about this, that I think I would be better off to serve the army in Germany, than any other combat theater around the world. Now I received a letter, I mentioned it last week, from a friend of mine. A friend of mine, his name is Werner Strauss, we grew up together in Germany, and he also worked in New York for that company where I worked, SSS Corrugated. He was drafted to the army before. He was in the medics, and later on he was in the railroad, the railroad battalion issuing tickets to people, and he was on the outskirts of the Himalayan Mountains somewhere in India. I forgot the name of the place.

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

HELMUT: I wrote to him I probably will go to Belgium, so he wrote me a letter, he said, "When you come to Belgium, please look for my parents. I haven't heard from my parents for years. The last place where they were supposed to have lived was Rembrandtstrasse Number 25. They also have relatives, name of one is Shwerner, and the other is Schnabel, and they live on (?) straat in Antwerp. So and so, and see that you can find out what happened to my parents. And whether these relatives, these cousins are still there. What's going on."

(Discussion of whether to continue interview or not)

So I was in Vivorld, and then it was a nice afternoon. I figured now it's time to look for the parents. Took a train to Antwerp. So it's about ten minutes from that railroad station in Antwerp. I rang the bell. So Hansi opened the door.

INT: Your wife opened the door.

HELMUT: Yeah, it was a beautiful house. One of these houses with a tremendous white door. It was completely white, but an old-fashioned door. Very, very, very heavy. And so I explained what I wanted, so they asked me to come in, and they said, her relatives were there, I found some people whom I had known from Frankfurt, because they were a Mrs. Breuer, who was a second cousin of my brother-in-law, who was in Chicago, in the United States. And she knew who I was. Anyway, the house belonged to Prinz. The house had been preserved by a housekeeper. Was a Catholic, and she said during the German occupation that she owns the house, and I understand some Germans lived there, but she was bossing everybody around, which she did all her life, so anyway. So they explained to me, they said, "It's true. All these people, Shwerner, Schnabel, they all lived at one time in this house, to hide, and so on." Also the parents. But they don't know anything. My wife didn't know anything about it. They know that Shwerners and Schnabel, they live in that street over there, that the only thing to do is go over there and ask them what is going on. So I went out and then the cousin of my wife, he called, and he said, "Look, you come back, you're going to eat supper with us." I said, "Fine, thank

you." I went over to these people, Shwerner and Schnabel. Of course, they felt very happy. They were surprised to see me. They told me, they said they're all, they don't live anymore.

INT: They were killed by the Nazis?

HELMUT: Yes. Well, the story is they were captured in two groups. First Mr. Strauss. He went with his older son. The Strausses had four sons. One is my friend Strauss, the other, his brother, was also my friend, but he was already in Kibbutz Chofetz Chaim in Israel in 1937. He went right there on hachshara and this was it. But then there were two others, the two younger ones. So one son went with the father, and they were shipped by the Nazis to a famous camp, to Goss. Goss was in southern France run by the Vichy people. I have a translation here I made here for a relative. A grandfather of my daughter-in-law. They were also, from Germany where I was, in Mannheim, in that state of Baden, they were all shipped down there. And many Jews from France also were sent down there. It was a Vichy French camp. It was not a...

INT: It wasn't a concentration camp.

HELMUT: Not exactly, but the living conditions were so bad that many people died of malaria and there was no food, and then they could get a leave or so on. So what happened with these two, they were shipped down there. The father got a leave, but not the son. So the father said, "Oh, I won't leave my son alone there." He went back to the camp. The following weekend, the camp was surrounded by Nazis, by the SS, and they were all shipped to Auschwitz. The father was killed right away. The son survived Auschwitz for four years. And then on a march away from Auschwitz, he got appendicitis, and did he die, or was he shot. Somehow he didn't make it. The mother, the younger son, they were captured also in Antwerp, tricks they didn't know, how to hide or anything, they didn't have that much money anymore either, to bribe people, so they ran right into the hands of the SS, shipped over and killed. So four people were killed.

INT: So you had to come back and tell your friend this.

HELMUT: Yeah. I wrote it to him. And there were still some items there, like a menorah and so on, and they also had some relatives in Strasbourg, they kept a few things for them. So when I went back to the United (States later on, I took certain things along, to give to him.) [the words in parentheses were inadvertently deleted from the tape.]

INT: This is a continuation of an interview with Helmut Bodenheim, April 18, 1994.

The last time we were talking, where we ended last time, was when you were looking for the family of your friend Werner Strauss, and you were in Belgium, in Antwerp, and you had just met Mrs. Bodenheim. (Pause)

HELMUT: I met my wife because she opened the door at Rembrandtstrasse Number 25, where my friend Werner Strauss claimed his parents had been last. I asked for his

parents. They said, they don't live here anymore. If I want additional information, see the family, there's a family Shwerner, Schnabel, Schnabel, she's a sister of Mr. Strauss. So I want to go away, but the cousin of my wife invited me for supper. He told me I should come back. In fact, I was already on my way out, so he called me back. I found other people whom I had known there, too, in that house. Like Mrs. Breuer from Germany, from Frankfurt. She's related to the second cousin of my brother-in-law. I had met them when I went to the yeshiva in Frankfurt. I met Schwerners and Schnabels. They were very, very happy to see me. They told me they managed to survive with all kinds of tricks, with trap doors, and constantly being on the run, but knowing the people, they're better at all this. But the Strauss family, it was impossible. They also had a very German mentality. They were not as good in hiding and running away from the Nazis.

INT: How does that have to do with the German mentality? Could you explain that a little bit?

HELMUT: The German Jews very often were very, very straightforward, and did not always know how to do illegal things. Like the parents of my wife and so on, I understand they also had maybe opportunities to cross the border in an illegal way, and they didn't want to, and many other people, too. Others, they were very good at it, which does not always mean something. People went to Belgium and thought they had it made, and before they knew, they were in the hands of the Germans again, and...I can say in my own family, I mean, I'm deviating a little bit, but my brother-in-law, before he went to the United States, he sent his two sons to Holland, to a cousin. They were well settled in Holland, and when they went to the United States, the two boys, they went on a ship. They went with the New Amsterdam Dutch line, and they put the two boys on the ship, after they had been in Holland for about a year. They hardly knew their parents anymore. There was a family Raschner. They did a tremendous mitzvah, these people. But not one of them survived the war. Every one of them later on was captured by the Germans and sent to extermination camp.

INT: Sneaking out illegally didn't necessarily...

HELMUT: They had no opportunity.

INT: So the Strauss family was...

HELMUT: The Strauss family was only two people left. The one, Shmuel Strauss in Kibbutz Chofetz Chaim in Israel, and I think he has five children and many grandchildren, and my friend, who's not married, he lives in Washington Heights.

INT: And he survived the war because he was in India or something.

HELMUT: Yeah, he was in India, near New Delhi during the war.

INT: In what army?

HELMUT: Well, which army do you think he was in? The American army. He was here in the United States. I got him a job in the same company where I worked, and he was drafted a long time before I was, but he was not a defense worker, so his work was not critical for defense. No, it was only, Jews could only fight in one army. I mean, there were Jews in the British army, but he was in the United States. Many people were drafted.

INT: So when you had to send him back his, that must have been difficult to have to write to him and tell him that his family was all killed. His parents, and his brothers.

HELMUT: I don't remember anymore how I felt at that time.

INT: You had to write him a letter.

HELMUT: I wrote back, I did not find. That's what you...I don't know anymore did I write this, or did his relatives. Maybe I gave his relatives his address and they wrote it. This I don't know. I really don't know all the details. I went back to Rembrandtstrasse for supper, and I asked my wife to go out with me. We went out.

INT: That quickly? Wait a minute.

HELMUT: Yeah, it was that quick. It was quickly, yeah, already.

INT: Right away you liked each other and it was...

HELMUT: Yeah, I already talked about going with me to the United States.

INT: Really? (Laughing) Just over dinner?

HELMUT: There was no time. I was stationed in the army, in Vivorld, in a suburb of Brussels, for supper, and I took the next train back. I had to be back.

INT: But you had just met her. So how did you know you wanted to marry her?

HELMUT: I don't know. It was intuition.

INT: It was bashert.

HELMUT: It was just, I thought...Then we went out once more, but in the meantime already, I don't know whether I mentioned that before. In the army, I was afraid that my unit, after the war had been won with Germany, would be shipped to the Pacific. The war with Japan was not won yet.

INT: And that's when the malach came and told you to try to get a job in Germany, right?

HELMUT: Yeah, it was a nice Jewish man.

INT: I wanted to ask you. When you went back to dinner at Rembrandtstrasse, so what was it like? What was Mrs. Bodenheim like at that time? Was she talkative?

HELMUT: Very nice. She also took very good care of her uncle, was an old man. Mr. Prinz, and so it impressed me very much. And she was like one of the people in our house who lived there. She had, in Antwerp she had two cousins, actually three. Mrs. Breuer. Mrs. Breuer lived in that house, and then that house actually it was being run by Mr. Willi Prinz. With him I could make contact immediately, because he was interested in music, and I was interested in music. Before we knew, we were discussing music, classical music.

INT: So you had a lot in common with these people.

HELMUT: Him, music. Although he was a very educated person, and he was a businessman, and I did not have his life's experience. He was twenty years older than I was already.

INT: Can you describe Mrs. Bodenheim a little bit, and what she was like when you met her?

HELMUT: She was not much different than she is today. She smiled and talked, and we discussed what had happened to her, what had happened to me, and people in common. Part of the family lived in New York. The family Hirsch, where she had been when she came from Germany was sent from her parents, were very, in Belgium they were very rich people. When they came to New York, for one reason or another all the money was gone, and this man really had it tough to put up with conditions in New York. He was not, he owned a copper company in Germany, one of the biggest. In Germany, was lucky to get a job in some machinery factory to work on a machine. And he could not take it. This ruined him completely. It was actually the cousin of my wife.

INT: So you sat and talked with her for a while?

HELMUT: We talked about them because that man's mother lived in the same place in New York where I lived. First I lived in the YMHA and then I took room and board like many people. And it was less expensive, and I got better food, I didn't have to worry where my next meal was coming from. All I had to do was pay. But she lived there, too. But they were financially not in good circumstances anymore, and that old lady, she, all day long she talked about nothing else but how much money they used to have, and what they lost, and the whole family, it was terrible.

INT: Did you ask her what she went through, or did she just volunteer the information? What she had gone through. Did she just...was it easy to talk?

HELMUT: Yeah, we talked. She was telling me everything about Auschwitz.

INT: Did you know that these things had happened? I mean, you knew that this happened to the Jews, or...

HELMUT: In Auschwitz?

INT: Yeah. Did you know, you knew...

HELMUT: I knew it before I went into the army, because it was written in the Aufbau. I can show you copies, I'm still getting it. A German Jewish paper. They had articles in there.

INT: But did they say what they were doing in Auschwitz?

HELMUT: Yeah. They were saying, they were saying what they were doing. We knew. That was number one. Number two, I was running the PW stockade, in France. Now they had miserable people, SS, and good people in there.

INT: But did those people talk about...

HELMUT: So the good people, there were some, and I was sitting in the office, and one of the prisoners was sitting with me. We were talking, and so he said to me, "If you knew what all these guys over there you see have done to your people, you would shoot every one of them right away."

INT: Really.

HELMUT: Yeah. Because we had to treat them fair. We could not just go ahead and shoot the prisoner. That just couldn't, that was the Geneva Convention. I wouldn't have my job anymore. It wouldn't do me any good, anyway.

INT: Did you want to do that? How did you feel about these people?

HELMUT: Well, I had no evidence or facts. Supposing this guy says it, that's only one man. But he gave me a pretty good idea what was going on over there.

INT: Was Mrs. Bodenheim the first person that you had spoken to who had been through it?

HELMUT: We got to Brussels, right, I didn't just go to Antwerp before, there was a Jewish, a clock where all the Jews would meet. They had many of the Israeli, from the Jewish Brigade there, and Americans. They also had survivors from concentration camps there. Belgium was liberated very early. Talked to them. Furthermore, when I got to Brussels, the first thing is I look up a friend of mine, a group leader, who was also a friend of my wife. His name was (?) Brunner. I'd known him, and I just, he was just, when I met him, he was just giving a shiur. He had a group of people. So I learned along

with him, and then later on I questioned him and so on. So they told me a little bit about it. Then I found somebody from my hometown. That was the first thing. I looked up some people and I found them, and they told me also about it, so I was quite well informed about it.

INT: But I can't imagine what that must have been like, to, you're a soldier in the army, and the war's over, and you find out that the Jewish people has been wiped out. I can't imagine what that...did that come to you gradually, did the numbers start coming out after that, or...it was so incredible.

HELMUT: Yeah, but...slowly I got more and more information. Of course, then later when I went to Germany itself, there I got, I'm not talking about the War Crimes, but making contact with survivors, the city of Munich had 30,000 Jews, and there were many survivors, and it wasn't hard to make contact with them. When they saw somebody on the street, a soldier who looked Jewish, they used to say, "Amcha, amcha," (your people). That was the sign that he's Jewish and I'm Jewish. Started talking, and so on. Where were you, what happened, and so on. I said, I hope you know what all these guys did here. That was going repetitious. Hundred and a hundred times. And especially when I came to Dachau, I made contact with a Jewish community. Most of them were witnesses for our war crimes trials. It was a whole group of people there. But anyway, we went out once, and the second time already I had orders, it was right before Rosh Hashana, to go to Germany. Because my request was approved. I went to one of the adjutants there, ask them can that still be changed? He said, no. Once they cut these orders I have to go.

INT: You didn't want to be in Germany now.

HELMUT: But anyway, I said, I see I'm going to come back. So around Rosh Hashana I went to Germany and then later, after yontif, so I was transferred to Munich. The outskirts of Munich. And strange as it was, I wrote him that letter, because I speak German. I think I can be of help to the American government by speaking German. But in Brussels I had been a supply sergeant. So when I came, it was not one step, in other words. They gave me papers and I had to take a train to Luxembourg, and Luxembourg we had to stay overnight.

INT: But how long were you going to be in Germany? What did you say to Mrs. Bodenheim? Were you engaged at this time?

HELMUT: No, we are not engaged. Not at all. No, the travel was not like you think you take a train and get there. From Brussels I had to go to Luxembourg. At Luxembourg, they said everybody out of the train. Put us on trucks, shipped us to a place to stay overnight. A place where soldiers, pretty good conditions, breakfast and everything. And then next morning I said, Okay, 10:00 you're taking the next train tomorrow morning. The next train which goes down to Strasbourg. It was all the way down in France opposite Germany. Freiburg, and so on. Went there, so we had to wait for maybe six hours for the next train. So I walked around in Strasbourg, and had to kill some time. I don't know exactly what I did there, I don't know anymore. Got on the next

train, now the next train went north. So they said, you have to go to Bad Hamburg. Bad Hamburg is a recreation place not far from Frankfurt. So the train was going past Mannheim where I was. I think I was able to skip a train and look around a little bit. I stayed there for a while, at least an hour I had to look around a little bit. But there I didn't see too much. And then late at night, about 1:00 at night I got finally to Bad Hamburg. First to Frankfurt, then at Frankfurt they had buses, and they took me by a small bus with hardly anybody else going there, to Bad Hamburg, into it was a nice family, like a one-family house. They gave me a room there. Said breakfast is eight o'clock tomorrow morning, and lunch is then, and so on.

INT: Okay, so this was...

HELMUT: So I was sitting there. From there, the idea was, they had to assign us. This was already a part of the military government. They would assign people to different, they knew where they needed people. And there I could take some trips. I went to Mannheim, I looked up the foreman of my father. And some people there, the ones who gave me that book. I went to a Jewish congregation.

INT: Was there a Jewish kehillah left?

HELMUT: Yeah, that was in a house somewhere. It had been an orphanage, and they used it. The Orthodox synagogue actually was not destroyed 100 per cent. They only destroyed the benches, and then in front, there were meeting rooms. The British bombs destroyed that. The Reform synagogue, they did not do it on the 10th of November. It was too dangerous to do it. It would have affected the other buildings. It was too close. The other, the Reform synagogue was flat.

INT: What did that feel like, to be back in Mannheim after the war?

HELMUT: I don't know. I cannot say that I felt I'm home now. I didn't have any feeling like this. But I met some people, I said, "Who's the mayor of this city?" So somebody said that "Heimrich," Heimrich was a social democrat who had been persecuted by the Nazis. I think he survived the concentration camp. He was a fine man. Apparently he was a mayor.

INT: Was he Jewish?

HELMUT: No, he was not Jewish, no.

INT: He was persecuted because he was a political...

HELMUT: He was a social democrat. It didn't take much to be persecuted over there. So I took from there until I was assigned, a few trips to the neighborhood. I could get on any train, I didn't have to pay. And not any street cars. But then after a week, they told me I'm being assigned, and they sent us to Augsburg. And Augsburg, it was Erev Yom Kippur. We had nothing to do anyway, so I went to a synagogue. It was actually, it

wasn't an Orthodox synagogue, but the davening was Orthodox. I don't think there were many women there, and so on. So there was an Israeli, and he invited me later to eat with him after the fasting, and so on. He was telling me, he said, "You see all these people here, these survivors? None of them is any good." He told me this one is this and that. He said it's not a high quality of people around here, he said. What you meet there. Anyway, I had a conversation with him, and then stayed a little longer, a few more days, and then they shipped me to my final assignment, outside of Munich. Name was (?) it was a chateau. Beautiful chateau on the outskirts, surrounded with a park. It belonged to a German family, they had a chemical factory, and they had a garage back there somewhere, and...

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

INT: (Discussion of the tape and whether it's working or not)

I'm sorry, so you were at Augsburg, where they sent you.

HELMUT: They're finished with Augsburg, they told me I'm going near Munich, and they provided transportation, sent me there and there was a headquarter detachment of the military government, they lived in a mansion. Really luxurious, very comfortable and everything. They had maids serving the food, and my problem was, what am I going to do with the davening. The strange people and all this. Every morning I went outside in the snow, put on my tefillin. Let them think I'm taking a walk in the morning. Said, "Oh, you take a walk every morning." But there were some nice people. The supply, I was the, they had found out that I was in supply, they needed supply sergeants, and the supply sergeant there was ready to go back to the United States. The staff sergeant Wertheimer, and when I got there, he said, "You're going to take over the supply." I had applied for a job where they need German, not supply, but since I had been supply, and they needed people in supply, they made me supply sergeant, they even promoted me shortly after, made me staff sergeant. Other places, to become a staff sergeant it's a big deal. But, one, two, three. When he went home, together with a lieutenant who was in charge with the detachment, his name was McDonough, very fine people, and then I could go with the supply, and the lieutenant, first lieutenant Ellis took over. He was from Frankfurt, Kentucky, he was a very fine man. So you sit around the table and everybody talks about his problems. So I say, "I'm considering to get engaged in Belgium, in Antwerp." After a couple of weeks he said, "I have a good idea for you. We have to get liquor from Antwerp that's being delivered to Antwerp. I'll send you along as a driver." But I didn't know how to drive these two and a half ton trucks. "Just go along, let them do the driving." Went along, but there was a captain in charge of it. They took me along. And the people, the drivers were very nice, but this captain was very, very nasty. Was an anti-Semite, a real anti-Semite. He thought that because I had lived in Germany, I must know all roads in Germany. "Well, you lead us to Antwerp." So sometimes it was questionable which was the better road. So, "Oh, I thought you know. You're a sergeant, you should know." He was very miserable. Well, I got there to Antwerp and we got

engaged. And of course, the next problem was, to get married we need approval of the commanding general. The headquarters were in Frankfurt in the I.G. Farben building. So I had to apply. We went back. I've never seen that captain anymore. But the drivers and all the people said to me they did not like the way the man was talking to me. They said he was a miserable character and so on. But they were very nice to me. They knew I didn't know how to drive these trucks and...I didn't go actually, it wasn't so easy, I had to travel on Shabbas. But I said the army, if I stay in Munich, I have to work on Shabbas there, too. Anyway we got engaged, and we had a very nice engagement party with a delicious supper. Corey, she put a lot of energy into it. And Hansi's cousin, Mrs. Prinz, and all of them, it was a very nice. I remember that dinner. It was beautiful. But then, the next day, I had to go back to Munich. The next thing is, I applied for the papers. I applied for them. In the meantime, I was working in the supply. I had quite a few people helping, working for me and so on. And I did a pretty good job. They once had an Inspector General coming. He came without any announcement. Usually an Inspector General when he comes somewhere, sends a notice to the man, whoever is in command, saying, I want to inspect your building, your facilities, your supply. They had trucks going all over Bavaria, and jeeps. Supplying Bavaria. They had military detachment running the country. That's the way the country was run. They had an American mayor, and an American whatever it is, and a small group. They supervised the Germans. All the villages and all the, but they needed liquor. They needed food and clothing, and I was the one to provide all that, because that was the headquarters. So this man came in. All of a sudden, the man walks into the supply. Said, "Name," "Bodenheim." "How are you, Sergeant Bodenheim? I'm the Inspector General." (laughs) "Glad to meet you." Started talking about books, bookkeeping and so on. "How do you keep your books? What kind of records do you have? Where do you get your records from?" I said, "I got my records from Sergeant Wertheimer and I just continue his work, and here is the transaction." So he said, "Where do you keep your ammunition?" I said I keep that here. "Where do you keep your clothing," and so on. So he said to me, "I've never seen a supply like this." So he wrote in the paper after the military government, a citation for the supply. That was the best supply, he came unannounced, and he said the other supply sergeants should learn from us, how to run their plant. That put me up very high in that place. So the officers would do anything for me they could. So I sent these papers in. First I went with these papers, I had to go see the colonel, and I also went to a chaplain there, a Jewish chaplain. That chaplain was of no help at all. He said, "Well, what's the nationality. Let me see the passport of your wife." It says German, our enemy. So he said, "You can't get married to Germans." So I said, "But she's Jewish." "That doesn't matter. She's German, so you can't get married," he said to me.

INT: Big help.

HELMUT: The colonel was nice about it. He said, "It's unfortunate. I know what the story is. Your wife was in the concentration camp and suffered because she was Jewish, and the matter is discretionary, but I'm going to send it in." The chaplain put an endorsement on there: "According to information received, Mrs. Bodenheim doesn't seem to be an enemy alien." Miss Bondi. A very stupid remark to put on. But after a month it came back, it was not approved.

INT: Not approved?

HELMUT: No, it was turned down.

INT: Why?

HELMUT: The answer was, we have just fought a war against Germany, and the time has not come yet that our soldiers should get married to German girls.

INT: But she was in concentration camp. That's incredible.

HELMUT: Miss Bodenheim, according to her papers, is a German, and therefore we have to deny your application. If Miss Bondi would show that she is no longer a German, but she is stateless, we will reconsider this application. That, they left me a door open. So we had to get stateless passport. So I was coming up for discharge. I had enough time in the army, we had so many points, so they could ship me back to the United States. I told the commanding officer, "Don't send me back to the United States. I want to get everything straightened out." But I knew I needed time. He said, "Oh, you can stay in the army. You'll get a good job. I can get you a job somewhere in the army. A Master Sergeant, this and that." And then that evening I happen to go to one of these Red Cross Clubs in Munich. There were some nice people, they were talking. I sat with them at the table, had a cup of coffee, and they were talking about War Department jobs available in the area. So one of them said, "I was at a place they practically begged me to work for them." So I said, "Begged you to work for them?" Yeah, good pay. I said, "It's a tremendous opportunity." So I said to him, that was the Judge advocate section. I said, "Can you give me the address where to go?" He said, "Go over there, it's not far from here, see Captain So and So." The next day I went to see Captain So and So. He was very nice. He said, "Do you speak German?" I said, "Do you know German slangs, do you know German geography?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, we need you. You have to come to Dachau. We have the trials going on, and we need people like you." So I said, "How much will I earn there?" He said, "You will be earning more than I am earning now." Which was not a very conclusive answer. Anyway, I had to go to (?), that was about 60 miles away from there. That was a summer resort in the Alps, and there was the headquarters of the third army, and the personnel office, and they processed my papers to be discharged from the army to start overseas employment with the War Department. With the Judge Advocate section as interpreter, pre-trial interpreter.

(Voices change due to quality of recording)

INT: So you were out of the army now, and you were...

HELMUT: No, they issued orders, and then on that date I was discharged, and Pesach, I still, I had to be discharged in Heidelberg, that was right near Mannheim where I was, and I spent Pesach there. They had arranged a very good Seder. There was somebody from Washington Heights. Anyway, the Seder, and then I went to Dachau, and there I

started working. In the meantime, my wife had to start working getting a stateless passport. I gave her enough cigarettes. That's what you need to get these things over there.

INT: Bribery.

HELMUT: Yeah, sure. But anyway, she met there some kind of an official who was quite nice to her, and got her the paper. Stateless passport. I put all the papers together again, and sent them through the judge advocate section there, to the headquarters, application for marriage. In the meantime I worked for the War Crimes Commission. First, for a while a court interpreter. It wasn't the right thing for me. Pre-trial interpreter, and then what I did most of the time was interrogator. I was writing reports. Interrogation reports. I interrogated people. They were charged, like say, like Waldheim. Waldheim, he was, we had, a book, so we called it the Bible. They called it CROWCASS. That's "Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects." CROWCASS is the abbreviation. There the people in alphabetical order, what their crime was, where it was, which unit we belonged to, when it was committed, and a few other things, and then we interrogated them.

INT: This was the United States War department that was doing this? It was international?

HELMUT: No, no, no, the United States. International was a different story. Where I worked, later on that was interrogation section, but they also had an Extradition section. They had liaison officers from different countries. From Poland, from Belgium. They were working in our office right along.

INT: To get them extradited back to their own countries?

HELMUT: Yeah, they would come to me and say, "There is somebody I'm interested in. Would you please interrogate him? Find out where he was and so on." So I would give him a report. I had to, the American had to interrogate him first. So I did that for quite a while.

INT: Who were these people you were interrogating? They were SS people, they were...

HELMUT: No, they were employees, the same as I was. Number one, they were War Department employees like I was.

INT: No, no, who were the people that you were interrogating?

HELMUT: Oh, I didn't describe Dachau. Dachau, that was a former concentration camp. Outside were the SS barracks, where the SS lived. We lived in there. The Americans lived there. They had maids, they had everything. In the meantime they built, put up a building in the camp. This was a War Crimes court, full of court rooms and offices and everything. They had photographers, they had everything in there. The

dining room and so on, all kinds of facilities. That was built for a few years. The people I was interrogating were the prisoners, suspects to be war criminals. There were, I forgot how many thousand. At least ten thousand of them. They were in a place where the Nazis kept their prisoners. They called it the bunker. In charge of the bunker was a Jewish man. He had been liberated. Dr. Dorthheimer. And when somebody had to be interrogated, he would get the request, and he would send him to the guard. The guards at that time they were all Poles, Polish soldiers. Americans, they used Americans for other things. There were Poles who were...

(Tape quality continues to get worse)

INT: So these prisoners were not people who just worked in Dachau concentration camp, but the prisoners were from all over Germany?

HELMUT: Yeah, in other words, when the war was over, American intelligence started picking up all the suspects of war crimes. Now usually military police would pick them up. They had a piece of paper, "Pick up Mr. Miller." They came to a village, there were about twenty Millers. So the military police picked up twenty of them, shipped them all to Dachau, and they were all in jail. So this didn't make sense. Only one of them was a war criminal, so we had to interrogate, figure out, where were you. So the man said, "I was in an office working someplace," so he was not a suspect. Right away we would make recommendation for release.

INT: Did you have to back up his story with anybody? Didn't he have to have somebody corroborate his story, so that you knew that really was working where he said he was working, or...

HELMUT: No, the story is, everybody had a file. In the file there were all kinds of papers. Letters. They brought letters, too, and they were put into the file. So first before I spoke to him, I was sitting there for an hour, studying the file. And then there's something else. When you sit here, and you are the big American interrogator, and there sits the little war criminal, or whatever he is, he does not know what I know about him. He doesn't know. So he has, usually they're very careful before they start lying, because very often it doesn't go too far. They're liable, the second's going to cost you. We had something on him.

INT: Did they try to lie?

HELMUT: I can show you some, I've got some of the reports here. I put them out here. Now, in Dachau there were trials going on, and they just started it. Shortly before I came, I don't know whether I mentioned to you, there was this guy who is in Schindler's List, Amon Goeth.

(Tape impossible to understand from this point on. Go to second side for continuation of interview.)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

HELMUT: ...people together for the trials, let's say for the Mauthausen trial. The defendants, most of them were taken from that enclosure. Then there were these liaison officers. They were sitting in the office. There was a Belgian, French, Polish, Yugoslavian, and so on. In fact, I knew all these people, and we worked hand in hand with them. They said, "We are interested in this person. Would you please interrogate him, whether this is the man?" So we looked him up. We had a book, I don't know whether I mentioned it before. It was like our Bible. The CROWCASS. So we checked the CROWCASS. So we'd ask the man, "What was your unit? Why were you in the army, Waffen SS, political SS? Where were you fighting? On the Russian front?" And so on. The man could tell me, "I was just drafted near the end of the war, and they shipped me somewhere to the Normandy, and I was in the army of General Elster." So when I heard that word Elster, I knew that it was a German general, in the Normandy. When he saw the military superiority of the Allies, he surrendered completely with the whole army. They all threw their arms down, and this was the end of it. And then there were prisoners, we had to feed them, and give them cigarettes, and soap.

INT: Well, what was that like? How did you feel, dealing with those people?

HELMUT: With whom?

INT: With the prisoners.

HELMUT: (Pause) It's a difficult question, but if you have to do it, you deal with them. It's like everything else in the army. The army, when you're told to do something, whether you like it or not, for a while I was supply sergeant. That was after we had the prisoners. The prisoners, later on there were changes, they had to be turned over to a special prisoners' unit, and we didn't have them anymore, and so on, so they made me a supply sergeant. So one morning they said to me, "You have to give a speech about supply." I was not prepared, nothing. I gave the speech. I did it. You asked me how I felt. All right, it has to be done. The same thing with the prisoners. It was a job, and I did it. Everything worked out fine. I didn't have much competition, I must say.

INT: You had mentioned in the tape about Amon Goeth. He had been in the camp? In Dachau?

HELMUT: In other words, I accepted that War Department job in Dachau. And I started there on the 18th of April, 1946. And when I got there, the War Crimes Department was full of witnesses. It was the Jewish survivors, and so on. They could see who was a Jew. So right away they came to me, and talked to me. I asked them, "Where were you? Where are you testifying? Was he Buchenwald, or Mauthausen?" They said, "You missed something." They said, "Two days ago Amon Goeth was here." They say, "You know who Amon Goeth was? He was one of the worst war criminals they ever had. He was shooting people just after breakfast. Just to kill people." They said, "You should have seen all the survivors, they surrounded him, and they beat him up.

The MPs tried to keep them away, but they couldn't. And finally they got him into a railroad car and shipped him out. He was on his way to Poland. In Poland, the Polish would try him, if they would try him. It wasn't much of a trial. They all knew him. And they hanged him. But the story was, that when I started working in a war crimes enclosure, I worked in the translation section first. A pool of people, they had many, many German typists and so on. In fact, I had to get used to work with German in a peaceful way, and all this. They were my secretaries. They would type whatever I would translate. They were also translating everything. It was the same work as I did, for less pay, and so on. So the first thing I got was, at that time there was a Sergeant Crawford. He was in charge of the organization. He said to me, "I have the first job for you. Here is a little booklet by a Dr. Hauptman from Munich about Amon Goeth and his two helpers." I forgot. He said, "Would you please translate that for us?" I translated it. That was already, that was a good introduction into war crimes, because what I read in there, the cruelty what this man did, was unbelievable.

INT: So it wasn't an exaggeration in the movie, Schindler's List.

HELMUT: Oh, no. I haven't seen that movie. I don't want to see the movie. I don't have to see it.

INT: You don't have to.

HELMUT: I have it in there in writing, the whole thing. Later on he was turned in. This article said his two girlfriends, they turned him in.

INT: And what about Ilsa Koch? She also was there. Was she there when you were there?

HELMUT: Later, that was Buchenwald, that started later, the Buchenwald trial. Well, with him, that was only, a man was picked up somewhere in Germany, and they had to bring him somewhere, so they brought him to Dachau, and then there was a crime committed in Poland, out, got to go to Poland, the Poles have to try him. Ilsa Koch was a different story. The crime was committed in Germany. The Buchenwald trial, they started much later. They had to get all the people together. There was the last commander of Buchenwald, his name was Pister. The one before was Koch. Ilsa Koch's husband, who was shot by the SS for embezzlement. And she was, she, in fact she was expecting a child. That helped her that she wouldn't get a death sentence, and so on. She had a good attorney, defense attorney, Jewish, Captain Lewis. In fact, I was davening with him Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, in Dachau.

INT: And he was defending her?

HELMUT: He did a very good job. I think they only gave her twenty years, or somehow. But she was sent to jail, and she spent a lot of time in jail, but then they let her out and the Germans picked her up and gave her a trial, gave her another seven years. And then they let her go out, and she, what I read in the papers, I think she went out, took

an apartment somewhere, I think it was in Ulm, and nobody would deal with her. Nobody, even the Germans. They didn't want to have anything to do with her. A woman who makes lampshades out of human skin? Everybody knows that? They didn't look at her. She committed suicide. That was the end of her.

INT: What was happening with Mrs. Bodenheim during this time that you were at Dachau? She was still, she couldn't get out of...you weren't married yet.

HELMUT: All right. We were not married yet, no. I took the job. The purpose of it was to get the papers straightened out. The army denied. They said my wife is a German, and in order to be considered, she has to bring a stateless passport, and you don't get that overnight.

INT: So you had to wait around.

HELMUT: No, I actually, my classification would come up for release. I could go back to the States and be discharged from the army, but I didn't want to do that. My wife, my fiancée was in Belgium. So that was not advisable. To be separated. At that time that was really a separation. There was no communication. After the war Germany was a big desert. I mean, there was not a house where there wasn't a dead person. It was unbelievable. It was real chaos. So I think I mentioned that before. I felt if I can, I'll take a job. Did I mention that?

INT: Yes.

HELMUT: That I was in some Red Cross club, and then people were talking about it, and they advised me to see a certain captain, and he got me the job. And I was employed there. I was a War Department employee, same as I later on worked for the navy, and Brooklyn, here and so on. That was the War Department. I was wearing uniforms. We were in occupied territory. We were under military law. We couldn't just do what we wanted. We had to wear uniforms. Officers uniforms. We were wearing our insignia. I had decorations from the Normandy invasion, and all this. I was wearing them, it could help me.

INT: But meanwhile she got her stateless passport.

HELMUT: In April '46 I start employment there. After a couple of months, the stateless passport came through. My fiancée sent it to me, and I reapplied for permission to get married. I didn't hear anything for a long time. Did I mention that before? So I saw the commander, the colonel of the War Crimes Commission. I said, "I took this job just to get the marriage papers straightened out, now I am applying through your personnel office, and I just don't hear anything. What do you suggest?" So he called up the personnel office, they hardly knew anything about it. So he said, "If you sent it in, go to the headquarters. I'll give you a pass to go to Frankfurt, I.G. Farben building, the War Bride section, the marriage section, see somebody there, take the copies of your," -- I always had copies of my application, and the passport and all this. Go there and find

somebody. So I did that. I walked into, it said "Marriage Section," so I walked in. There was a colonel sitting. He saw my insignia, the sea horse, and the anchor. He knew right away the unit. So he said, "Sit down. I understand you were in amphibious engineers. Where were you?" I said, "Normandy." So he asked, "What did you do?" I said, "I operated a mine detector, we were clearing the mine fields over there and then did some demolition work." He asked me a lot of questions about it for half an hour and then he said, "May I know what you're here for?" (Laughs) So I said, "See these papers here? I applied to get married. My wife was in a concentration camp. She was liberated, and she came back to her relatives in Antwerp, and we met there, and want to get married. I know the family from Germany. She lived in Mainz, I lived in Mannheim. So I sent the papers in. Do you have them? Do you have the original papers?" So he looked through his files. He said, "No, we have nothing. We don't have anything." I said, "Can I make a suggestion? If you believe that I'm telling you the truth, accept my copies as the originals, and give me the permission." He said, "It's a good idea, but I cannot do that alone, I have to see a few more people." So he sent me to some other officers, colonels, and explained it to them. They said it's okay, but stay overnight here in Frankfurt. Which was not easy. Frankfurt was overcrowded with military personnel. They only had a few hotels, but they got me a nice hotel room. I still have one place to go to tomorrow morning. So I went there. When I came to that place, there was a phone call. Everything is approved, and so on. We got your papers. Took the papers, went back to Dachau, and when I was in Dachau, then they had found my application, which was sitting on the desk of some clerk who just did not...

INT: Bother.

HELMUT: Did not bother. That was about August. Then it was a matter of scheduling the wedding. So we got married on the 22nd of October, 1946, in Antwerp. In the Eisenmann shul. The dinner was in the house of Prinz.

INT: What was the wedding like?

HELMUT: In the morning we had the official wedding, the English wedding.

INT: Oh, you had to have a civil wedding, too?

HELMUT: Yeah, civil. To city hall. And then at one o'clock, we went to the shul.

INT: And had the real thing.

HELMUT: Yeah, that was the Jewish wedding, which was very nice.

INT: So who came? Did any, I guess none of your relatives came, because...

HELMUT: Yeah, I invited, I had a cousin in Amsterdam, for him it was not so difficult to take a train, for him and his wife. These were my relatives, but there were a few

people from Mannheim whom I had known, who went to Brussels, and they survived. We invited them.

INT: Did your friend Werner Strauss come to the wedding?

HELMUT: From India? From New Delhi?

INT: Oh, he was still in India. I guess not.

HELMUT: He was a soldier in New Delhi. Things were not normal yet. Although in Brussels, in Belgium, that was liberated a long time before, it seemed to be quite normal. The Belgium was okay. But then when you went further to other countries, it was a lot of destruction. It was a beautiful wedding. It was wonderful. We enjoyed it. I had to make, Hansi's cousin said I have to make a speech, it's customary. It's not like here they let the Chassan make a speech and interrupt him. They didn't interrupt me.

INT: They didn't interrupt you.

HELMUT: So the night before, I had to sit down and take the seforim and prepare something. I spoke in English, so many of them didn't understand. (Laughs)

INT: They couldn't comment on it! (laughs) What language did you speak to Mrs. Bodenheim in? German?

HELMUT: Yeah, always. Always German. English had actually not entered the picture yet. She spoke English and all this. In Germany you study many languages.

INT: But you were most comfortable speaking the German language together, since it was your mother tongue.

HELMUT: Somehow it was our mother tongue. So for a long time, but when we lived later on in the military community, of course we were speaking more English. The main thing was later with the children. Then we spoke English all the time.

INT: So after...

HELMUT: So that was in October. But then it took until after Pesach, before Pesach my wife could come from Antwerp into Germany.

INT: How come it took so long?

HELMUT: Ask the army. You apply for something. We had to apply for permission, first permission of dependents to move into the occupied zone of Germany. Number two, permission for a visit of dependents. So that was when we said, first let's get that visit straightened out, and who knows how long the other thing will take? So then the visit was approved first, and then she could come. Shortly before Pesach, it was only two

weeks' approval. She stayed for a whole month, nobody questioned it at all. She just took a train back to Antwerp. Nobody would dare. But then when she got back to Antwerp, then after Pesach the other papers had arrived, and the next week she came right back.

INT: She could join you in Dachau.

HELMUT: And from then on we were not separated anymore. Never.

INT: So what was it like there in Dachau, living there with your wife? You had a little apartment there?

HELMUT: Well, the way Dachau was, it was an enclosure. It was a concentration (camp). But then it was a War Crimes enclosure. They had everything, they had a dispensary, an entire military establishment, with war crimes courts, war crimes buildings. They had a museum there. They showed the ovens where the people were cremated, the gas chambers.

INT: Oh, they made a museum out of Dachau.

HELMUT: Well, they let it stay there, and then, what they did usually, when this was all over, they took the inhabitants, the people who lived around it right there, see what happened in your area. Outside of this enclosure there was a street, they called it SS Street. There were houses. And we lived in these houses. The SS had lived there before. Gray houses, and we had an apartment. We could have had a mansion in Munich, but then every morning I would have to take a bus for three quarters of an hour to go to work, and three quarters of an hour back and my wife would sit alone, so we got permission just to take one of these apartments.

INT: Well, how did your wife feel about coming back to Germany, and especially coming back to Germany and living in a concentration camp, what used to have been?

HELMUT: The story was, coming back to Germany, as a wife of an American, or even as a Jew. We were so superior to the Germans. The Germans were practically a nothing. The Germans, they were in street cars, if they wouldn't behave when there were Jews in there, they would throw them out of the street car. They were very, the Jews were very, very arrogant after the war. When they walked on the street, they wouldn't go to the side, they would let the Germans go out of the way, and so on.

INT: So things were totally changed around.

HELMUT: It was completely changed around, and the Germans knew that, at that time. At that time, I mean it's not like it is today.

INT: Now they're back to...

HELMUT: Well, it's a different story.

INT: So, do you think that helped her and you, to be living there after the war? The fact that the Germans were so down now, and...

HELMUT: No I don't think.

INT: Was it difficult?

HELMUT: I don't think it was so difficult, because she lived in an American community. She was getting things that she never had before. Ice cream soda, and malted milk, and all these things. And we bought in the commissary cornflakes, and all this. And then, the other people, they were quite nice. There were Jews and Gentiles. People who were employed there.

INT: The Americans.

HELMUT: Yeah, Americans. They were nice. Sometimes they made parties and invited us to a party, and so on.

INT: Was there an Orthodox community?

HELMUT: The Orthodox community was in the village of Dachau. That was a tremendous help to us. There was a rabbi, Rabbi Kuten. Rabbi Kuten, his wife was from Silesia, she spoke very good German, and he was from Russia, but when the war came, they lived in Poland, and they were running away from the Germans into Russia. The Russians did to these people what they wanted. They didn't treat them too nicely, either. They sent the whole family, the three children, to Siberia. And in Siberia they suspected him of being a rabbi, because he was suspected of being a rabbi, he was sentenced to six years in jail. But the man who wrote it, the sentence, some of them are illiterate over there, he wrote, "six months." So he was in six months in jail. But the way he told it, they were better off in jail than outside, because outside, they didn't have much to eat, but in jail they were handling bread and flour, so they put flour into their pockets, and the wife had visiting rights, she would visit him, and then he would take all the flour, wherever you could get it, give it to his wife, she could bake challahs and make bread, and then it supported the family. Later on, they were sent from Siberia, when he was out of jail they sent him to Ural. From Ural then came the big thing, they were sent to Samarkand, to Uzbekistan. Still today a big Jewish congregation there. They always talked a lot about them, about the people in Uzbekistan. The Russians that were over there were anti-Semites. But there were so many Jews.

INT: So he was your Rav, when you...

HELMUT: Yeah. He went through all this, then they went back to Poland. Now the old story again, which you have heard. When the Polish Jews came back to where they had lived, the Poles they wanted to kill them.

INT: Or they did.

HELMUT: Some of them they killed, and when they saw what was flying, they didn't even bother much, went right over to Austria, and went over the Austrian border. They didn't tell them their real nationality, this is still funny. When they went from the Austrian border into Germany, the border guards, they asked them questions, they talked to each other, they said, "Ashrei, yoshvei beisechah," and started davening to each other. So they didn't know what it is. So they said, "Go, good-bye." (laughter) Glad to get rid of them. They sent them into the American zone. They were in the American zone, they worked their way to Munich. In Munich, he knew Rabbi Leizerowski, and Rabbi Leizerowski suggested they needed a rabbi in Dachau, a small community of five hundred people, he should build up a community, until everything and everybody goes to Israel or the United States. The area of Munich at that time had 30,000 Jews.

INT: Surviving.

HELMUT: Yeah, they lived there. They were very powerful over there. They had a big black market in back of the shul. They would buy things, get things from the Germans, for a few cigarettes. They got Leikas, gold watches, or whatever, and then they traded among themselves. There was also a kosher restaurant there. And it was quite a real Jewish life. They had camps around Munich, they called them the DPs, Displaced Persons Camp. For instance, there was one, Fuhrenwald. Fuhrenwald is near Wolfrachtshausen. Wolfrachtshausen, I was there once when I was ten years old, in a children's home. But they had there a camp. They say, "camp" but it was not a camp. It was an area with one-family houses, and everybody had his house. They lived very nicely there. They just went into Munich to do their trading and so on, and then they came back again. They had a shul, and all institutions in these camps. They had these all over Germany. Deggendorf, near Mannheim, where I was, they also had a camp like this.

INT: Did they have DP camps outside Germany? Like in Poland, or...

HELMUT: No. Only in the American Zone.

INT: So that's just Germany.

HELMUT: They were taken care of by the UNRA. That was the organization.

INT: And the Joint.

HELMUT: Joint Distribution and all this. They were well-taken. But the thing is, the people did not want to stay in Germany. Most of them. The ones who stayed, for them it was very rewarding. They made good money in Germany there. Germany was always a country where it was easy to make money. You didn't work as hard as you work here in the United States, punching clocks. Well-educated people sometimes working in factories and all this. You didn't have this over there. And especially after the war. No Jew would work in a factory. What was done usually was that the Germans stole

industrial organizations from the Jews. So the American authorities, they handed them over to Jews, made them trustees. So most of them were trustees, of a shoe factory, of a watch factory, and so on, and they made good money.

INT: So if they stayed, it was worth their while.

HELMUT: They accumulated a lot of money to prepare themselves for emigration. Of course, some people didn't make it, but they did very well over there.

INT: So you had a community.

HELMUT: You asked me about Dachau. There was a Dachauer Rav, Rabbi Kuten. And sometimes there were arguments among Jews, he would settle them. When people wanted to get married, he was Mesader Kiddushin. He had a very nice minyan there, Shacharis, Minchah and Maariv.

INT: Did you have friends there? Who were your friends, while you were there?

HELMUT: Mostly Kutens. Kutens and the Americans, they were not exactly my friends, I couldn't say that.

INT: What about Mrs. Bodenheim? Did she have any friends there?

HELMUT: Yeah, there were mostly survivors.

INT: Her age, or?

HELMUT: All right, some survivors. We had a butcher in Munich, we got some meat from him. Schwartzberg, we invited him sometimes. And Kuten, the family, and their children, we were quite friendly. They're all here now, one family is Yaroslawitz, they're very big in (?) business, another one of the Kuten's, one worked for the post office, and...

INT: So they came here.

HELMUT: Yeah, they came here, and Rabbi Kuten later...

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SEVEN)

HELMUT: Mrs. Kuten, she's still alive, she lives in Boro Park. And their children, they married, we had friends in Washington Heights. They intermarried. One of our friends in Washington Heights married the granddaughter of Mrs. Kuten. That's just a pure coincidence.

INT: So how long did you live in Dachau? With your wife?

HELMUT: I said she came to Dachau around April...'47. Well, I was there before. Then we got married. The winter we were still separated, although we were married. Only once, I went once for two weeks vacation there, to Belgium. And a short vacation, also. From let's say April...'47 until March '48. At that time everything was liquidated. There was an order to liquidate the entire War Crimes organization.

INT: They had finished all the people they needed to try?

HELMUT: No, they had not finished. They had not finished. They were to be turned over to the Germans. Whatever was not finished, the Germans, they had trials too, so it was handed over to them. The entire politics had changed. In 1946 when I came to the War Crimes Commission, the Germans were our enemies, and we had to try war criminals. Later on, they were not so interested, the Americans, in trying war criminals anymore, because there was a threat with Russia. They thought Russia is going to start a war with the United States. And they needed the Germans as a buffer, to be on our side. So if they would try their war criminals, they wouldn't like us, and they wouldn't help us maybe. So they let everything go. And people we knew, we could see in the file what crimes they had committed, they let them go. They sent them to German authorities, and so on.

INT: They just slipped through the cracks.

HELMUT: Yeah, the whole thing, they had to be liquidated. On such a date the doors had to be closed.

INT: So that was the end of your job.

HELMUT: There was an Eisenhower law. The Eisenhower law, it was a secret law, that people who are in a conflict should no longer be employed in the American Zone. So who are the people who are in a conflict? German Jews. German Jews. Of course they don't love the Germans after they took all of their money away, killed a good part of their family, and so on. How can they be? They knew that. So when, actually according to civil service regulations, when an installation closes, they're supposed to try to get us other jobs. They put on an act and then they said, I'm sorry, but you don't seem to be qualified for this. You are not qualified here, and we are not qualified there. They all went back, every one of them, was shipped back to the United States. We didn't mind. It was enough time spent in Germany. And it was then in March, '48 that we went back to the United States.

INT: What was Mrs. Bodenheim like during this time? Was she depressed, or was she...

HELMUT: She was not depressed at all. She was just like she is today. She was very cheerful, she was sociable. She got along with all the people.

INT: So it hadn't affected her, that you could see?

HELMUT: Not at all, no.

INT: Did she talk about it a lot, or...

HELMUT: If I wanted to talk about it, she would talk about it. I didn't want to talk about it, she wouldn't talk about it.

INT: Oh, but she wouldn't bring it up. She wouldn't bring it up. You would.

HELMUT: Yeah, she would bring it up, too. She would say, it's like it was, she would see somebody, a Jew, she would say, "I know exactly how this man was behaving in a concentration camp."

INT: What do you mean by that? And what did she mean?

HELMUT: Well, some of our Jewish people did not behave very nicely towards other Jews.

INT: And she could tell from the person.

HELMUT: She can tell them from the way they would grab when they were giving out food. They had to get two portions, eating somebody else's portion away, and all this.

INT: It was their personality.

HELMUT: Yeah, she would say it. But otherwise, we had a very good time over there. Munich is near the Alps, so on a Sunday afternoon we could go to Garmishpatenkirchen, go all the way up to Zugspitze, the highest mountain of Germany. That's beautiful. Then we took trips. We went to Switzerland, to St. Moritz for a few days. And our currency, whatever it was, dollars, traveler's checks, they were of such good use that we liked changing them. We only paid a third of the real cost. The railroad in Germany didn't cost us much. Then we took a trip to Rome. We missed a train, so we had to spend a Shabbas in...Barzano. It was Italy. Sometimes it was Austria, sometimes it was Italy. It was Italy at that time. There were Germans, they had it as good as anybody could have it. It seems that they had not felt the war at all. Very prosperous, and they thought they were ruling the war. Very arrogant. So we had to spend a Shabbas there, because there was only one train going to Rome, from Munich to Rome. We missed it somehow. So we had to take that train on a Friday. That the train would arrive in Rome at 7:00 at night. So we stopped there in Italy, and spent a Shabbas, went to a hotel and spent a Shabbas there. It worked out. Then Sunday we took the train to Rome.

INT: So it seemed like you were enjoying life a lot.

HELMUT: Oh sure, it was beautiful. Of course. We also could put a lot of money, I mean the money I earned. We didn't spend much money, so we could put the money

away. The only thing is, most of it later on was used for paying income tax. They didn't take off the income tax, so when I came here, I was faced with paying the income tax. There wasn't too much of it left. We bought some silver, some china, like Rosenthal figurines. Silver plates, and chinaware.

INT: So you were having a good time. You were travelling around, you were shopping...

HELMUT: Yeah. One Shabbas we went to (?), that's where Hitler lived. We went then on Sunday we could go up and see Hitler's place up there. His Eagle's Nest, and so on. They had busses going up.

INT: It was like his getaway, or something?

HELMUT: He would make his speeches. Receptions, like Mussolini.

INT: What was that like?

HELMUT: Well, it was destroyed. But we could see still his tremendous living room there, where he could pace up and down and tell Mussolini what he had to do and so on.

INT: Didn't that bother your wife to go there?

HELMUT: No, it didn't bother anybody. I cannot say that.

INT: So the time came for you to go to America.

HELMUT: "Yeah, there was a time when we actually didn't do any more work. We just had to wait a couple of weeks doing nothing, until the papers were processed. They would tell us, take the train to Hamburg. Went to Hamburg, and then we went on a very modern ship, an army transport. We went on there, and it took us to New York, to Staten Island, and from there on we were on our own. We took a hotel room in midtown Manhattan first. I knew midtown Manhattan well, and there were quite a number of hotels.

INT: Well, what were you going to do for a job? Were you still with the government?

HELMUT: Well, first I had to get back.

INT: But you were out of the government at this time.

HELMUT: I was out of the government, completely on my own. So we lived in Midtown, was 76th Street, it was quite a number of shuls there. That was just for Shabbas, and then most of our friends, they lived in Washington Heights, so we went to Washington Heights also to some apartment hotel. We just had about a room with a kitchenette.

INT: How did you both feel about being in America at this point? It was a new country for your wife.

HELMUT: A new country for my wife. For me it was the old country, but I must say it was already full of worries. All my friends, years ago when somebody went into the army to fight for the country, they were the heroes. In this war, the people who stayed home and didn't go into the army, started good businesses. They were the heroes, because they had nothing to worry about at the end. All the veterans coming home, many of them, including us, had a tough time to get started.

INT: They didn't have the GI bill then, or anything?

HELMUT: They had the GI bill.

INT: They did?

HELMUT: So what is the GI bill? To give us twenty dollars a week if we didn't work. The 50/20 Club, they called it. For 50 weeks, twenty dollars a week. Yeah, but somehow of course, for a while I didn't do anything. I just looked around, because we had to live somewhere. We can't stay in an apartment hotel. So we looked around. We went to, we discussed it with friends in Washington Heights. At that time getting an apartment in Washington Heights was very, very difficult, and costly. You had to put money under the table. There was a friend of mine, he also got married, he was not in the army, he had a good business, he got a three room apartment, and he paid three thousand dollars. It was a lot of money at that time. Just to get the key to the apartment.

INT: So you wanted to live in Washington Heights because there was a big German Jewish community there?

HELMUT: Rabbi Breuer was my Rav, and when we lived in that apartment, we could daven there at Breuer's. We met all our friends. They invited us for supper. And so on. Happy to see you. But they were settled, and I was not. I discussed things with them. Asked me, what are you going to do? So, help, you can't say that they did help me too much. If I had to make a decision, they would tell me what they thought of it. Probably what I thought about it was as good as what they would. The man who is affected always knows best to make the right decision. But anyway, it was a different situation. Many of them, one had a printing business, the other had army surplus. Other people had jobs. There was a company Phillip Brothers, they took some people in. But the first thing is to find an apartment where to live, and then look for a job. Not from a room. We decided that we cannot afford to move to Washington Heights, to pay all this money. First you had to know where there was an apartment, it wasn't easy, and then you had to pay it. So I went to these government offices and so on, so they said to me, Well, in your situation, they are building a garden apartment outside Astoria, right near the East River, a nice apartment, so instead of you putting down a few thousand dollars, just pay more rent. If you put down a few thousand dollars, the rent would be 55, 65 dollars. My rent was 88

dollars. But that's all. Nobody lived in that apartment before. I rented it with a blueprint, a floorplan. So I went there with an agent. He said, "Yeah, I can rent you an apartment. We like people like you." So we got a beautiful apartment. Super modern, nice kitchen and everything. If we looked out of the window we could see the East River, and boats.

INT: It sounds nice.

HELMUT: That was nice.

INT: Was there a Jewish community around there?

HELMUT: There were four Orthodox synagogues and one Conservative. So we went to one. Small groups. In other words, the way that worked was during the year, there were maybe twenty people Orthodox. And Rosh Hashana Yom Kippur there were 400. They were not Shomer Shabbas. They just came Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. In the meantime the congregation would still function with the twenty people.

INT: So did you have a hard time settling into that community?

HELMUT: It wasn't so bad. We got used to it. We met also some German Jews there. They were very nice to us. A car we didn't have, we couldn't afford one. They had one, they needed for business. They took us to the beach, to Far Rockaway and so on. They were nice. And the other people were quite nice, too. We had a very nice rabbi there.

INT: Did you have any children at this point? Was Mrs. Bodenheim pregnant yet?

HELMUT: We signed the lease in June, '48. So our oldest son was born October '48. 17th of October, '48. It was Allen. There was a big court, and he could play. He played with Jewish children, with Gentile. The people there were very friendly among each other. Later on, the whole thing deteriorated a little bit. You know how that is. They lived together, and then one talks about the other, and then it comes back to them, and then...

INT: Then it's not fun anymore.

HELMUT: And the interesting thing was they had quite a number of Jews living there. Now this entire garden apartment was in a community was German, Greek, Italian. They had beautiful homes nearby, beautiful gardens to take care of them. The Jews were the owners of the stores on the main street. And they lived there, too. They were prosperous. Not so religious, but a few were religious. The butcher, two butchers they were religious. And a few others. Many of them were not religious. But after we lived there for a year or two years, the Jewish people who lived in this garden apartment, they said, "We're not going to stay here. We want to move away. So I asked them, "Why do you want to move away?" "We want to move into the Jewish neighborhood." They were not religious. They were as traif, as non-religious as anybody could find. But they

wanted to live in a Jewish neighborhood. Most of them moved out to Kew Garden Hills. They all had something similar, and there they ran into the same thing. We visited some of them later on, with whom we were still friendly. Their children had always played with each other.

INT: That wasn't a problem for you? You weren't worried about the children? Were you worried about the children staying religious?

HELMUT: Well, there was only one child, there was only one child. He had to grow up, right?

INT: But when you were talking before about when you first came to America when you were twenty or whatever. That you had heard stories, it was very hard to stay religious, it was difficult to be a religious Jew in America, and because the work situation was so difficult, you had to work on Shabbas, and in general, it was difficult to lead an Orthodox life here. Did you find that when you came back the second time?

HELMUT: No, it wasn't so, that wasn't so difficult then. The country was not in such a depression anymore. It was more prosperous. Just, I had been a patternmaker before. Before I went into the army. It was a highly paid trade. Highly specialized, nice clean work. But it is good when new inventions, and new work, like defense work. When the war was over, they didn't need orders anymore. So the patternmaker, to find a job as a patternmaker was very, very difficult. So I had belonged to the union, the union then got me a job with a company engineering. I ended up getting a job in there as a cabinetmaker. They had a man who was doing display work. The company had to advertise, to go to different hotels and display certain things. It involved woodworking, so he was experienced, and I was his helper. As a patternmaker I was quite skilled for that, too, and we worked together. And I worked out okay until the company went on a strike. This was for me a new experience. I had to live off my own money. I was in danger deserting the place. Didn't know what they would do to me. I had to walk pickets and all this. Anyway the strike was later on settled, and they got a few cents an hour more, and it would take five years to make up what I lost. So for me it was not victory. It was a victory for the people who would get new jobs. They always told me, this is, you don't want strike for yourself. I go for future generations. So it was my pocket. So I didn't go for it. I had an idea, I got to get away from such a thing. I don't want to be caught there anymore. I had an idea I want to go into something more commercial. As a salesman. I know lumber and so on. Furniture. I got a job with a lumber company, but it was a lousy deal, because they had already their customers, and they sent me to sell something, which they couldn't sell. It was hard to sell, and it was not a good deal. And then I went to another company. They had a television starting, so I was selling television tables. It was also very hard.

INT: So it was difficult, and you had a child at home at this point, right?

HELMUT: It was, it was very difficult. Then the next step was there was a paper, an ad in the paper for cabinetmakers again. And I think I wrote or called them up. They called

me back. The foreman said, "Come here, I think I can use..". I went there, they were making equipment for bowling alleys, pool tables and so on. So he offered me a job, and I decided then, under the GI bill, also to go to school. I figure if I am a cabinetmaker, the next higher thing is drafting and design. So I may just as well, it didn't cost me anything, went to school for several years. While I worked there. I worked there, and in the evening I went to school. And I worked there overtime. I was working very, very hard. But still, the income was not bad altogether. It was still reasonable. I worked there for two years until the Korean War started. They were not getting lumber anymore for luxury purposes like bowling alleys. So a friend of mine, he was in the jewelry business, colored stones. He said, "What do you have to work so hard for and so on? And carry all that lumber? Work for me, I can offer you a job. I'll break you into colored stone business, you can sell colored stones for me." I thought it over and discussed it with, he had a brother, he was selling precious stones. This guy was selling precious stones. His brother semi-precious. His brother was a little bit skeptical. This man is your friend, don't offer him a job, because business is very bad, he won't be able to sell. To whom do you want him to sell? He said, Oh, you can go to this. You send him to bad credit risk. So my friend says, "Don't listen to him. I'll take care of you." I was foolish enough, the minute I started working for this friend of mine, I found out that in business he was not as nice as he was outside. He belonged to the same shul, he was Orthodox, but...it was not that easy. He had to break me in. I didn't know anything about these stones. He could make a fool out of me. "Oh, don't you know this?" and so on. All right, he broke me in there for almost two months. Pay was very low, it cost me my own money, too. And then I went out selling. But...I wanted to sell, Oh, this guy is a poor credit risk. I'm not going to sell to him, and so on. So he had his old customers. They were jewelers, and his merchandise was all custom made for them. He gave me some star sapphires. I went to those jewelers, they said, "You can leave it here." They give me the signature, it's there, and then they try to sell it and get a commission and so on. But it doesn't happen very often, that something was sold, I must say.

INT: So you were really struggling.

HELMUT: Yeah, I was going to school at night. In a drafting school. But there I was doing pretty good. I took these courses. In front of me there was a foreman, a carpenter foreman, from the navy yard sitting, and I see he was struggling with his plans. He started asking me questions. So I told him, I could, I was pretty good at it. And then he asked me, "Where do you live?" "In Astoria." "Okay, I can take you pretty far home, you can take the subway." He appreciated. He asked me, "What are you doing for a living?" I said, "I don't have a good job. I work for somebody in colored stones." He said, "That's not your business. What you know here, you don't know that from colored stones." He said, "What is your real (trade)?" I said, "I served apprenticeship in Germany, and then I was a patternmaker for many years." And he said, "And you work for this guy?" He said, "I know something much better for you. Go to the navy yard where I work. Go to the personnel office and ask them, do you have an opening for patternmaker? If they don't have openings for patternmakers, I know they have openings for cabinetmakers." I went there. He said, "Sure, we need patternmakers. You just have to pass a test, a physical, and so on, but they will be happy to have you." So they sent me

there to that job, and I met people with whom I had worked before the war. They were helpful. With the test, too. I passed that test with flying colors. So the foreman said, "Yeah, we need you. We want to hire you, and so on. Go back to the personnel office." So anyway, I had to go through a physical. I had something like a hernia, but it was a hernia for the navy, but not for civilian life. So the officer said, "I'll tell you something. Go to a store down here, buy yourself a truss, and show it to me, and I'll give you the job." So I started working there, and from then on...

INT: That was your job?

HELMUT: Well, I started a career. I was only temporary when I started. The people who worked there, they said to me, "You will be out in six months. You only have a temporary job." But I must say later on it happened that they were out and I was still there because I worked myself into the highest category, a permanent veteran. And then later on I was eligible for federal pension.

INT: How long did you work there?

HELMUT: Well, let me put it this way. Federal service, including army and war department, I retired with 41 and a half years. That's what counts towards my retirement. But there were many incidents. They had the patternmakers there. They were highly respected, they had their own building. And they had a master and so on.

INT: Did you like this work? Did you like this kind of work?

HELMUT: I liked it. It was all right. I was never overwhelmed with working with my hands. My family, they never had anybody working with his hands.

INT: They were business people.

HELMUT: They were business people for generations and generations. So it was always a little bit of an effort for me to, let's say, maybe intelligence or whatever I used.

(END TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SEVEN, SIDE TWO)

HELMUT: To go to the design division. Because I had to make models for them. So they would throw a whole pile of blueprints at me, and I'd have to study all of them. I had people working for me. I said, we have a ship model to build. First we all worked on the body, and then say, you do the life rafts, and you do this and that, and so on. Actually, before somebody else was in charge. But he went to another department, and then later on for quite a while, I was in charge. Then they had mock-ups. For instance, a room with appliances, had to construct the whole room, the walls, and put all these appliance and wood, so they would see how much space they take. So they gave me an outstanding award, and money. So I was doing quite well.

INT: How did you feel about America at this point? Were you happy to be living there? It was okay, or...

HELMUT: I was happy. But then the first problem came. Allen. He was five years old. He had to go to school. So in Astoria where we lived, there was no yeshiva. We want to send him to yeshiva. There was only one option. Dov Revel yeshiva, in Forest Hills, or Breuer. So we knew we had to move, either move there or there. Take transportation every day, we said it's no good. And we said wherever we get an apartment first has eased a little bit. So one day this friend where I worked in a jewelry business -- I was still friendly with him after I left -- called me up and said, "I think we have an apartment for you." They got us an apartment in Bennett Avenue.

INT: In Washington Heights?

HELMUT: In Washington Heights, only a block away from the shul. And he went to the yeshiva there. This was the beginning of the Jewish education of our children. In the meantime I went along in the shipyard.

INT: This was a better neighborhood for you? Not just for the school?

HELMUT: No, it was more city than where I was before. Where I was before was country. It was very nice. Garden apartments. There, six story apartment buildings, and so on.

INT: But more German Jews, or more people from your background.

HELMUT: Yeah, full of German Jews. Mostly German Jews. But former friends of mine from Germany. I was in the yeshiva in Frankfurt with some of my...I had been in a yeshiva. When we came there that first Shabbas was a big reception. One sent flowers, the other one cake. And so on. "Happy you're living in Bennett Avenue." We didn't expect anything like this. Then Sammy was born. Sammy was still born in Astoria. As far as the job was concerned, later on it happened that that pattern job of fifty people was reduced to ten, and they sent us to another building. But I was among those ten, because I was a veteran, and so on. So it was a sad story. They got rid of many people. Many people were eligible for pension. But anyway, that's the way it worked.

INT: How was your wife through all this period? There was a financial struggle, it sounds like, in the beginning and the children coming...

HELMUT: Well, the story is that at that time also, Germany started with restitution and I spent a lot of my spare time recovering property. My sister had lost her husband, and she needed, and I had been with the War Crimes Commission, I knew very well how to fill out papers and deal with lawyers, so in Dachau I got myself a lawyer. He was recommended. He was not a Nazi. I had worked with him in the beginning while I was in Dachau. When I came here everything was ...so I was always getting additional...

INT: So he helped you with the restitution on the German end?

HELMUT: That was a tremendous loss. The restitution law. The business of my father...

INT: Well, how could they possibly repay what they had taken away? I mean they didn't give you dollar for dollar....

HELMUT: At that time it was very little. They called it "Sperrmark," the mark was only worth one tenth. But it was still money. If we would have waited another five years, it would have been worth ten times more than what we got. But there was a war going on with Korea and so we didn't know what the Russians would do. So the lawyers all said, "Take what you can get."

INT: So it was a one time thing? You had to take it all then?

HELMUT: No. There were different. That was going over fifteen years. In fact, we put in a claim only six months ago for something. But most of the restitution is complete. The business of my father. The building. The good will. The family had lots in the area. And they had to be resold, sold again. Came back to us, and then we sold it. But the thing is, I was not the only heir. And there was an uncle of mine. I was in Germany, I had my connections. So I handled it for the whole family.

INT: And then you divided it up. But did you get what it was worth? Or did they just give you a percentage of it?

HELMUT: It was worth at that time what it would be sold for. How can you pay for, let's say good will. They gave us something for good will. How can you get the right thing for good will? If I had a business there and I get every month a very high income from the business. It's not the same thing as just getting some kind of a sum which the court decides.

INT: But that was helpful, probably.

HELMUT: Then I handled my wife's claim. Then my wife was in a concentration camp, and she hurt herself. We filed another claim, they turned it down about three, four times until they approved it. But I laid the groundwork for whatever I'm living off now. But the story was, the expenses were tremendous, because sending children to a Jewish school. Unless you want to cheat. Many people did that. I was in the tuition committee. I knew what was going on. We had to close our eyes. The rabbis were very lenient. They said, "Even if a guy lies to you, it's not the child who's lying. The parents."

INT: So don't make the child suffer.

HELMUT: They made a big wedding in Florida and so on, and then they say they can't pay tuition. Other yeshivas, they threw the children out. Torah Academy wouldn't stand for it. And I know. But over there they were very lenient. They had, the president of the shul was a Dr. Miller, and any one of the Board of Directors would come and be tough on the parents. He would tell them, "You have a bad memory. Don't you remember when you came here, how little money you had, and now you give these people a hard," and they wouldn't dare to say a word anymore.

INT: But even though it was a struggle, you still wanted your children to go to a day school.

HELMUT: Sure, but a lot of that money went into, number one, the day school. Yeshiva Samson Raphael Hirsch, for our children. Then we had three children. And COSBI, that was already quite expensive. For somebody who works with his hands, you can get the best job working with your hands, but tuitions are sky high. And then came something else. You live in Washington Heights, right, in these apartments. Five room apartments. Summer comes along. What are you going to do with the children? So I don't know whether my wife mentioned that, but a few people there, they discovered a bungalow colony, and they really talked us into it. They said, "You must see it. We'll take you there on a Sunday. Look at it," and so on. Finally, we decided to go there for one month, and that was heaven on earth, for the children.

INT: You're out of the city.

HELMUT: Then one month we were stranded. We had to do something with the children. Go to Far Rockaway, go here and there. It wasn't good. We were still in the hot city. From then on, ten years, every year, we went up to that colony. We had a counselor there, he was teaching the children. They went on hikes. They had sports activities. Sunday morning the adults had a baseball game going. We had a Sefer Torah there. Once a week when the baker would come, he was well organized. Of course, the men had to go into the city to work. The women they were sitting around the circle, talking. They were all friendly with each other. Still friendly today. We're still calling up the people. Although many of them are not there anymore. The husbands passed away. But it was, then they planted. Children had a chance to plant tomatoes. By Columbus Day, somebody went up there to pick up the tomatoes, and bring it to everybody. When you would speak to our children, that was the greatest thing. You could see in their face. All you had to say, and they would be smiling. Unbelievable. And it was a very simple thing. The bungalows were not fancy. Nothing was fancy. It was nice. It was built on a hill, on the back you had the Schwanga Mountains. On the other side, you had a beautiful hotel, Lake Mohonk. It's unbelievable, if you haven't seen this, you wouldn't think this is in the United States. It's a complete reservation. There was a time they didn't want any Jews in there. It's built in a Japanese style. They have a lake, and they have lookout points around the lake. They have a mountain there, with a ranger, and a rangers's tower. You can see five states from there. It was only four miles from there. So very often on Sundays you could go up there.

INT: It sounds very nice.

HELMUT: Beautiful rose gardens around. So there was really a lot to be seen.

INT: But that was probably expensive also, to go to the bungalow colony every summer.

HELMUT: That's what I'm saying.

INT: And pay tuition.

HELMUT: Yeah, all that money, working in the navy yard as a highest paid mechanic, you cannot pay a private school, and go in the summertime, so that money, her money was used for that. Somehow, I don't know, always before summer, some sum came in from Germany.

INT: Just in time.

HELMUT: It cost money, too, to go back and forth to the mountains.

INT: And you had to travel back and forth.

HELMUT: And I was keeping double household. I had to eat too.

INT: So would you come on Shabbas?

HELMUT: No, that was even the nicer thing. Working for the federal government, you can take a leave whenever you want. So I decided I'd take off Fridays. So Thursday night after work, I didn't go home, I took a bus, and went right....

INT: Oh, that's nice. So you had Friday, Shabbas and Sunday.

HELMUT: So when the children were there, with the owner of the colony, to pick me up. Then they would tell me the news, what they did, what kind of animals they saw.

INT: You loved nature also.

HELMUT: In fact, some people, they got married up there. They met their wives up there, too. And Allen, my oldest son, his best friend is from up there.

INT: Did you find parenting difficult? Did you find it difficult to be a father? Or did it come...

HELMUT: No, it wasn't difficult. It was natural. It was nice.

INT: Did you play with your children?

HELMUT: We had difficult times. Allen once had a difficult operation. But it was all settled. It was fine. I could help them up there sometimes with the bicycles. They were going on bicycle trips up there. They all had their bikes up there. And of course when something broke, I had to run around after work finding parts. And then they had to be installed up there. That was all a part of the game. But then of course, after ten years, people wanted something different for their children. We had a counselor, we all thought he was very good, but there were some parents, they think the teacher for their children has to be Einstein, and then they needed a better counselor, and then the owner didn't like it. People went away, they went to other colonies.

INT: So it sort of broke up.

HELMUT: And then the owner sold the whole thing. He was getting older, too, couldn't handle it anymore.

INT: But for ten years you went there.

HELMUT: Actually eleven years. Even from here we went up there.

INT: I think we'll stop here.

(END TAPE SEVEN, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE EIGHT, SIDE ONE)

INT: The last time we were talking, we were speaking about, a little bit about life in America with you and the children, your life with your wife. But we didn't talk that much about it, and I was wondering if you could describe what your early married life was like, if you could describe a little bit what your relationship was like with Mrs. Bodenheim, and also what, we really didn't talk much about what attracted you to her in the first place. What attracted you to her in the first place when you met her. What was it about her personality, or whatever, that made you want to marry her.

HELMUT: Well, number one, the looks. I cannot deny that. Number two, her midos. She had, Mr. Prinz was an old man. She was in that house, and I could see how she dealt with him in such a nice way. He had to take care of himself, had to wash himself, and he was so old anymore, didn't want to do it, she told him in such a nice way. So I was very much impressed.

INT: She was a kind person.

HELMUT: Yeah. That's number one. And furthermore, she had been through so many things, so she was well, let's say, seasoned. For anything which would come along. Whatever would come along, wouldn't be that prosperous, at least she would have more to eat than she had during all these years in France or wherever it was. So she would not

be, let's say, as demanding as American girls. They were the most demanding ones here. Many marriages between German Jews and American girls didn't work out.

INT: Why?

HELMUT: They expected too much very often.

INT: Financially you mean?

HELMUT: Yeah, they could not, many people could not deliver what they expected. When they went out, don't take it personal in any way, but they all were saying, "If you go out with an American girl, you got to come with a flashy car and so on." You want to be impressed with all these things. Number two, then German girls would come on immigration. Let's say in 1935 to '40, and so on, but they had become maybe a little bit more prosperous, too. They were also demanding, but of course those girls in New York, many of them never would have been too happy if I would marry them. (laughs) This I know. And some mothers they did not feel so good that I married somebody overseas. My wife told me that she heard that some people were saying, I had to go marry a girl overseas? I couldn't have married any of these many girls in New York?

INT: So you were more comfortable with a German girl than you would have been with an American girl.

HELMUT: I think so. Or European, at least European.

INT: Because of the culture?

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Were you also looking for religious...

HELMUT: Of course religious. Religious, or somebody who could be easily influenced to become more religious.

INT: Was she very young when you met her, Mrs. Bodenheim?

HELMUT: Yeah, she was very young. She was fourteen when she left home. Traveling for years around Belgium and hiding, and be a governess in a children's home, working in a factory, posing as a Catholic among farmers and all this. Finally be caught and before she went to Auschwitz, they went to that camp in Malin, and she knew a number of people, and they were shot. One of them, he was executed, some guy, he made a mistake. It was a tough thing to take for a young girl.

INT: Did she speak easily about those experiences to you, in the beginning?

HELMUT: Yeah, she spoke right in the beginning. She was telling me that she walked over dead bodies, and that death was always facing them over there. It was nothing special.

INT: Did she tell you how she thought she got through that? How do you think she survived all that?

HELMUT: She survived because she had bitachon, what we say in Hebrew. She believed in Hashem, and that Hashem is going to guide her. If He wants, she will survive. That's how she acted.

INT: Do you think she had any special strengths also that could have helped her to get through the situation?

HELMUT: Which special strengths?

INT: I don't know...

HELMUT: She had no special strength. She was undernourished. They called them musselmen, these people.

INT: Not physical strength so much as inner strength.

HELMUT: She did have, well, you come from such a family of outstanding rabbis and personalities, that there's a certain strength. She has that today, too. I don't know where she gets it from, but right now, I'm missing it myself. When I'm on dialysis, when I want to do many things, I can't do them. With the kidneys not functioning, or being artificial, I don't have that energy, I do what I can do, but sometimes disappointing. But she does everything. It's unbelievable what she does here. What she has done already for the congregation, for Young Israel, it's unbelievable.

INT: What she does at Purim time, when she makes all those baskets.

HELMUT: Yeah, but first when we came here, she said there's not enough cultural activity in Young Israel. We have to, the women should have, get together once a week and have speakers. And she started that, and she got speakers. Every week there was a speaker speaking about a different Jewish subject. She was, most of it she was doing, but she got some help, too. She was very effective.

INT: So, she has a lot of energy, even now.

HELMUT: Oh yes, she has a lot of energy. How she prepares for all these people. Last year we had 22 people sitting around the table for one week. COSBI, from Israel with six children, and everybody was there. Except Sammy. It's an awful lot of people. How she could handle it. I mean, the daughter-in-laws are pretty good, too. But she had to do the major preparations. Daughter-in-laws are not here. They come just a half a day before.

INT: She had to do all that.

HELMUT: She had to do it all by herself.

INT: So in those early years, did you find her to be depressed or sad about what she had been through?

HELMUT: No, not at all, never. In fact I never found her depressed or sad.

INT: She never cried about her parents?

HELMUT: No. She had nightmares sometimes. We were sleeping, she would start maybe talking or yelling in the middle of her sleep. But other people do that too, probably.

INT: Was it particularly frequent, or?

HELMUT: No.

INT: Did she ever tell you about her dreams?

HELMUT: No. Not at all. But she was, I would say she was more normal than other people. Where we lived in Astoria, in the garden apartments lived many American Jews. They had constant problems, they were getting into fights among each other. They were accusing that, "Your child did this to my child," and so on, and she kept out of all this. So she...she was very diplomatic.

INT: Did it take her a while to build up her strength, physical strength, after the war, or was she, when you met her was she...

HELMUT: When I met her, she didn't look like she had been in a concentration camp. She had actually built up already. They must have fed her very well there in her cousin's house.

INT: How long was it after the war that you met her?

HELMUT: Well, that's very simple to, the war with Germany was over May 8, 1945. My unit was transferred to Brussels the end of July, and there I met her.

INT: And already she was...

HELMUT: She looked very good. Good enough for me. That's all I can say.

INT: What about when the children came along? How was that? Was that a happy time?

HELMUT: Sure, it was very nice, yeah. There were difficulties. Allen was born on Succos and the bris had to be on Shemini Atzeres. And we lived in a suburb, in Astoria on the other side of the East River, was a big bridge going across. The bris has to be on the eighth day. We didn't even know that. We thought we could just postpone the bris. (laughter) So I had friends, one was a mohel and the other one, I had learned with him. Also a prominent person. Well-learned. They said to me, "You can't just, you can violate the Shabbas even to have a bris on the eighth day. You have to discuss a way to have it." We discussed having the bris in the hospital, but she didn't want it. Under no circumstances did she want. She wanted a bris in her house, and wanted it to be nice, and so on. What happened then is, the mohel was actually a friend of mine from before. And his brother-in-law, he lived in Brooklyn. The brother-in-law lived in Manhattan. From Manhattan you can walk to Astoria. Could just go across Triboro Bridge. And the mohel spent the Shabbas with his brother-in-law in West End Avenue, in New York, in Manhattan. And Shemini Atzeres came, it was raining, they walked across the bridge, and they performed the bris, and we invited some people from the family, an uncle and an aunt. They spent the Yom tovim with us. And the congregation was not small, but the Orthodox part was small, but they all came, and it was a very nice bris. With cake, and whiskey. So it worked out fine.

INT: Were there any difficult times with the kids? Stressful times as they were growing up? Anything in particular? You had mentioned that one of your children had an operation.

HELMUT: Allen.

INT: That was Allen, also?

HELMUT: That was Allen. Well, he was always a trouble child. Not later on, but he had all kinds, tonsillitis, and mononucleosis. He was once in a medical center, under the care of a special pediatrician from Park Avenue, Dr. Metcalf, he was one of the best doctors, and he treated him very well. And he got out of that mononucleosis. But then later on he had stomach aches. And then one day it got so bad we had to call the doctor on Shabbas, and he came. He said, "I'll give him something. But if this does not work, then something drastic has to be done. The hospital." Or whatever it was. So the brother of my brother-in-law, he was a doctor in the Queens General Hospital. We called him up and we said, well, bring him to our hospital. He was taken to the Queens General Hospital, and they looked at him and they had a whole conference of doctors. They said, "He has to be operated. We think it's appendicitis. They open up for appendicitis, so it was a very young surgeon in charge of that surgical party. They opened up, the appendix was perfect. But they looked further over to the bowels, they could see the bowels were twisted, so they didn't have to do any cutting, because he was on that operating table for two hours. All they had to do is straighten out the bowels and so on. He went back to his home, and already after a few days he was much better. He was already saying, you see, the brother of my brother-in-law, he could visit him every day. He called him Uncle

Allen. He was also Allen. So he told me he was saying, "Get me my clothes. I want to get out."

INT: How old was he?

HELMUT: Three years. They let him go out after ten days. But he was practically healed. Shortly after that, the La Guardia airport was not far from where we were. Maybe a half hours' walk or so. On a Shabbas afternoon he could already walk with me to the La Guardia Airport where we would see the planes landing. So...

INT: So he recovered quickly.

HELMUT: He recovered very quickly. Since that time, he never had any more stomach problems.

INT: But while that happened, that must have been very frightening.

HELMUT: It was very frightening. It was very, very frightening. No question about that.

INT: Could you describe your children? What they're like? What they were like back then, and then what they're like now.

HELMUT: Well, Allen was...he went to school. He took it very serious, his schoolwork. He was very ambitious. If things didn't work out, he got very upset, and so on. But he also had other activities. We had a playroom, and there he started all kinds of clubs. He started a woodworking club. We have a bookcase upstairs, they made it out of crates. We still have it here. He was, he had to be the boss, so I had been woodworking myself, so I gave him different things what he needed, and they put it together, they sanded it. He had a half a dozen boys working on it.

INT: But he was the leader.

HELMUT: He was the leader. Then he had a stamp club. When we were in the bungalow colony they had a nature club. He liked to be a leader in these clubs. Well, later on, that's a different story. When we had to move to Philadelphia, things got more serious. He only needed six more months to finish his high school. So actually we didn't know what to do with him. So the rabbi in the yeshiva, he said, "I'm going to solve your problem. You can't do anything else than what I tell you." He said, "He cannot go to the Philadelphia yeshiva. You spoiled him. He is not up to the Philadelphia yeshiva, that is a different way of learning. He has to stay right here, finish his high school here," and we had neighbors, we were friendly with them, they took Allen in. And then he stayed there and stayed there for another year or so, and then later on he went to Bais HaMedresh during the day. And to college, City College, in the evening. And there we took a room for him and he stayed with somebody.

INT: So he never came to live with you in Philadelphia.

HELMUT: Never. This was one of the financial burdens which were actually nightmares for us. I mean, somebody is a wage earner and has to pay tuitions, college, for four children, three, four children, these were tremendous expenses which took practically all our capital at that time. In spite of money received from Germany, which was quite a bit.

INT: Tuition eats it up pretty quickly.

HELMUT: Yeah, but he also needed room and board. He had to eat, and he had to pay the laundry.

INT: A separate household, practically.

HELMUT: Yeah, a separate household.

INT: What's his personality like, Allen?

HELMUT: He is serious. He enjoys nature and he enjoys travel. He's very active in the community. He's given a lot of money to build a shul there in Monsey. A fortune, he has given. Very few people give that much money here, for anything.

INT: He's successful?

HELMUT: When he got married, he worked for Blue Cross, he had a job there. But he married. His wife was from a wealthy family, they had a very good business, making lighting fixtures, in Quincy, Massachusetts. My daughter-in-law's from Boston. So his father-in-law pressured him, he said, "Work in my company and you could be making more money." But for a while he didn't want to do it. He said it's not good working for family. It could cause friction. After a while he decided anyway. He quit the job, and worked for his father-in-law. He's still working there. The only thing is now practically, he's almost in charge, because his father-in-law isn't young anymore. Now he's getting older.

INT: So he commutes?

HELMUT: Sundays he flies to Boston. Thursday night he flies back to Monsey.

INT: Every week?

HELMUT: Every week.

INT: So he lives there during the week and then he comes home for the weekend?

HELMUT: Yeah, he stays with his in-laws.

INT: That's not hard on his wife, and the kids? How many kids does he have?

HELMUT: Four. It is hard, but that's the way he earns a living.

INT: And they're religious.

HELMUT: Oh yeah, everybody's religious. They go to a yeshiva. In fact one of their youngest ones, I mean, the third one, the youngest one is a girl, he's coming to this yeshiva in August. So he must be pretty good in learning. Also English.

INT: Will he be staying with you? Living with you?

HELMUT: No. The yeshiva would not permit that.

INT: Oh, really?

HELMUT: In the dormitory, no. He doesn't want to stay with me. He wants to stay with the boys.

INT: That's understandable. And the next child is Sammy, right? He's a couple of years younger than Allen?

HELMUT: Three years younger. He was always interested in rabbis. Who is the greatest rabbi? Is this rabbi a greater rabbi than this rabbi? He was interested always in seforim, old seforim. Hebrew. English he was pretty good. In math he was always very good. Math and science he was really good. He didn't have it easy, he doesn't have such an easy personality, making friends quick, and so on. After he was finished here, he went to Baltimore to Ner Yisrael, and there he met many people from New York whom he had known, and there he felt more comfortable in Baltimore than here. They he also laid the groundwork for what he's doing now, as a sofer.

INT: What's his personality like?

HELMUT: He's a real introvert. He says what he wants to say, and the rest he keeps for himself. He doesn't have an easy personality, but he has improved a lot. He seems to be still very good with people, otherwise they wouldn't deal with him. He is, he's very well-liked. He has like a contract with a shul in mid-town Manhattan where he checks the sefer Torah every week. and the secretary there is an old friend of mine. He can't get over it, what a nice person Sammy is.

INT: He's married?

HELMUT: He's married and has six children.

INT: Where does he live?

HELMUT: Washington Heights. He is strictly Washington Heights oriented. The greatest man for him at all times was Rabbi Breuer.

INT: Your rabbi. That was your Rav.

HELMUT: Yeah, but he was not afraid to contact him, and he was constantly in his house, talking to him, discussing things. Rabbi Breuer gave him a letter that he's qualified to be a sofer. Although he was against him being a sofer. He said it doesn't make enough money. He was against it, but anyway...

INT: But Sammy wanted to do that even though it wouldn't make any money?

HELMUT: He's good for that. That doesn't mean that he doesn't make any money. There were other rabbis like Rabbi Friedler, he said, Rabbi Breuer's wrong. A sofer is not anymore what it used to be. It's not true that a sofer doesn't make any money. They get paid quite well. But I must say, it could be better. He's looking around for other things, too, to do in connection with it. In the meantime, his wife is working. That's probably saving the situation. She has a good job as a secretary in City College. Secretary of Dr. Olivar. He's the president of the Breuer congregation. He's a math professor, head of the math department. He's a brilliant man, and she's the secretary there.

INT: So she works with the six children, also?

HELMUT: Yeah, she always worked. She has all these benefits. They have very good benefits. Hospitalization, whatever it is. She can take off.

INT: So they live in Washington Heights.

HELMUT: They live in Washington Heights. They have two apartments. He broke through the wall of one. So things are not that desperate if he can break through a wall. He's paying the rent for two apartments.

INT: And your next son is...

HELMUT: Is COSBI.

INT: No, don't you have, there's four sons? Allen and Sammy we talked about.

HELMUT: Yeah, and then COSBI and David.

INT: Oh, David, right. So COSBI's next.

HELMUT: COSBI was a very cute child, a real nice, friendly child. He had peculiar things. He didn't want to sleep in his bed in his room. He always climbed out of crib.

Until we found out what he wanted was a youth bed. So we got him a youth bed, this solved the problem.

INT: He wanted to be a big guy.

HELMUT: But anyway, he also didn't want to go to school.

INT: Why not?

HELMUT: It was inconvenient. (laughter) We lived only two blocks away. The principal, Mr. Breuer, constantly threatened he's going to pick him up, he's going to get him, and so on. But he went there anyway. But later on, he didn't want to go home from school. After school, they had steps there, he was always sitting on the steps. There was a street, enjoyed himself looking around for a long time instead of going home, doing his homework. So when we wanted him to come home, somebody had to go there to the steps and pick him up.

INT: This was in grade school.

HELMUT: Yeah. But then, Sammy, he suffered a lot from moving here from New York. He didn't like it. COSBI, the same thing. He didn't want to move at all.

INT: Because they had to leave their friends?

HELMUT: Altogether they were uprooted. They had friends, they had everything they needed. They had a social life, we had a social life. Everything was there. But the job was gone. Would be gone. Was never gone, the job. That's the advantage. I was never, in my life I was never a day out of work. But the army, we knew that the shipyard would close, so some decision had to be made.

INT: We didn't talk about that. Let's talk about that a little.

HELMUT: I'm just saying about how children being affected by this, because that was a very difficult thing for them.

INT: For all of you it sounds like.

HELMUT: For us. And COSBI, too, he suffered. He had to go there, that's what I'm getting at. When we came here, he had to go to Beth Jacob. They rented the building there in Germantown. In the morning he had to take two buses to get there.

INT: By himself?

HELMUT: Yeah, I think some other boys went along, too. I know when he went to the class, he ate peanuts. He was hungry, he didn't have time to eat breakfast, so the teacher

complained, he's eating peanuts. All kinds of things. But he was not stupid. If he wanted to...

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

HELMUT: His independence. But the principals, usually, they liked him. They say, he's a good-looking boy, he's a nice boy, he can talk to people. Don't listen to anybody. He will make his way. So that's what happened later on. He, after he graduated, he went to this yeshiva here, and he graduated, and my children were no material to go to the Bais Hamedresh.

INT: What do you mean by that?

HELMUT: Well, you can go to high school here, and then comes Bais Hamedresh where they only learn Gemara, Talmud.

INT: And your boys couldn't do that, you're saying?

HELMUT: They didn't want to do it because, see, we have a different ideology. German Orthodoxy, they called it. Like Torah and Derech Eretz. Torah and secular culture. So we don't believe in sitting and just learning and sitting in Lakewood.

INT: Because you need a job.

HELMUT: We believe that the husband should go to work and provide for the family, and of course he should know how to learn. Everybody has to learn, but that doesn't mean that everybody has to do nothing else but learn and let the wife or some father-in-law worry about how they are going to live. So that is not our way of life. And my children, they really, it never occurred to them to do such a thing.

INT: Did Sammy also go to college?

HELMUT: For a while in Baltimore he went there.

INT: And COSBI went to college?

HELMUT: Well, COSBI ended up on the Dean's List of Bernard Baruch College.

INT: So he liked school in the end.

HELMUT: Yeah, he got a master's, the only one who had a master's degree. (laughter)

INT: So he went higher than anyone else, this kid who skipped school. This is the child who skipped school. That's funny.

HELMUT: Yeah. But you don't want to go any further than the school with the children, so then comes the next one.

INT: Well, no, and COSBI got married and...

HELMUT: Well, COSBI got married. He went to, the first thing. He didn't go to Washington Heights. He went to Far Rockaway, through a friend, he found out that there was a good opportunity to connect learning with college in Far Rockaway. In Washington Heights they did not have a proper dormitory for boys from out of town. At Breuer's they were just not prepared for that. So where should he live? He goes to Washington Heights. In Far Rockaway they had a dormitory. It was a primitive one, the food was not the greatest, but there were another group of boys, they were willing to sit together and go through the whole thing, with a lot of idealism and be pioneers for the yeshiva of Far Rockaway. Derech Eisen and Rabbi Pearl. He is Rosh Yeshiva, and this turned out to be one of the best yeshivas. Today it's a yeshiva on a very high level.

INT: What's the name of the yeshiva?

HELMUT: Yeshiva of Far Rockaway, or Derech Eisen.

INT: Did COSBI like it there?

HELMUT: He liked it and he had a whole group of friends. And he got friendly with one family there, Trachtenberg. He was, Mr. Trachtenberg was on the Board of the yeshiva, and COSBI was in that house, like a son. It's unbelievable. When we came, his friend was Ted Trachtenberg, and these friendships are still the same today. When they come to Israel they stay in his house and somebody by the name of Ganz from Scranton, a whole group of boys. Nice group of boys. They all went to college, and they all learned during the day. Rabbi Pearl was giving the shiur. He knew how to deal with them. He didn't just learn. He told them other wisdom, too. It was a very, Rabbi Pearl is a very capable person in education. So then later on he graduated. (Pause) And then he met his wife in the house of Trachtenbergs. She was in Israel. Her father had been president of Young Israel of Far Rockaway. He built the whole shul, collecting money and everything. He had been a building inspector. And for some reason or other the whole family went to Israel on aliyah, lived in Bayit Vegan, and she came back just on a visit, and then COSBI happened to be there, and they got engaged in no time. Then there was a problem with the wedding. COSBI said, "You make a wedding here in the United States, it's going to cost a fortune. The best thing is you go to Israel. We'll have the wedding in Israel. It doesn't have to be so fancy and big." So we all went to Israel the first time and did a lot of sight-seeing.

INT: This is the first time you'd ever been in Israel?

HELMUT: Yeah, that was the first time. I couldn't believe it, that I would be there.

INT: What year was that?

HELMUT: I must say I forgot.

INT: Was it after the Six Day War? It must have been.

HELMUT: Yeah, it was after the Six Day War. It was under Begin. It was very nice.

INT: What did you think of Israel when you went there for the first time?

HELMUT: I was very much impressed. I couldn't take enough pictures over there. It was very impressive, sure. And we were going sightseeing day and night. There was no end to it. The first night we came, our Mechuttan took us right to the Kosel, so we were tearing (?) there, he had some shirts for us, so we could tear (?), and they showed us quite a bit already. The next day he picked us up, we went to the West Bank to Bethlehem, and took us around. Every day was well-planned. The next day we had an aunt in an old age home in Natanya. We went to Natanya. And we had scheduled a tour, the Hoffman tours to the Galil, to Meron and to Tsfat, one day tour, and Tiberias, along the graves, and all that. We took that tour, and then when we came home there was already Allen and... We had an apartment over there. You know Bendheims? You heard of them. They're very rich people. She happens to be a second cousin of Hansi. So she lived on the second floor, she said, "You take the apartment on the first floor. You have nothing to worry about."

INT: That's nice.

HELMUT: So we all had room in that apartment. So that was wonderful.

INT: How long were you in Israel for the wedding?

HELMUT: Just two weeks. So there was Allen, well Allen is also a very enthusiastic traveler. Said right away, Now we have to go. He had known it already because he had been in Israel before, for several months. But he, okay, we are going to Ein Gedi, and to Masada.

INT: You got around.

HELMUT: It was wonderful. And then we went on Friday, I remember, Dovid, Allen and I, we went to the University and walked over to the Intercontinental Hotel, down to the Kosel, I still remember. We didn't have to worry. We went there to an Arab, we had Coca Cola.

INT: You can't do that now.

HELMUT: To Ihr David. And then back to the Kosel, and then to (?), and then there was a Shabbas, we spent a Shabbas in Bayit Vegan. It was a pleasure. Then we went to Kibbutz Chofetz Chaim.

INT: To visit Werner Strauss's brother.

HELMUT: Got a guided tour there.

INT: Was that the first time you'd seen him?

HELMUT: Yeah, the first time. We had a guided tour over there, he took us around. Then we went, the day before the wedding, the wedding was on a Monday night, on Sunday we took a bus and went all the way up to Rosh HaNikra to the Lebanese border, one day and back.

INT: It's beautiful there.

HELMUT: Yeah. So we did everything possible in two weeks. I wish I could do that these days... I couldn't do that anymore.

INT: COSBI eventually made aliyah.

HELMUT: Yeah. They lived in Far Rockaway, and he got a job, no he took some program, he learned about computers. And then he got a job at RCA. It was a very good job. Just one day, he said, "Well, we want to make aliyah. We're going to Israel."

INT: What made them decide to do that?

HELMUT: Well, his wife.

INT: Oh, sure. She lived there.

HELMUT: Her father lived there. Her mother, and her grandmother, and her sister and her brother. And he didn't mind either, but he was crying when he left, finally. So they went to Mercaz Klita, preparation, and so on. They had a beautiful apartment there. His father-in-law is well-known over there. He knew right away the person who was running the whole organization.

INT: So he helped them get settled.

HELMUT: Had a beautiful apartment. When we visited them there, we also got a very nice room there.

INT: Oh, you went back again to see them.

HELMUT: Oh, we were there four, five times. Later on we were not satisfied to go to Israel. We went to Switzerland. And the last time we went to Germany and to Switzerland.

INT: So how did you feel when COSBI made aliyah? How did you and Mrs. Bodenheim feel?

HELMUT: I felt he should have kept the job with RCA. He probably wouldn't have a job anymore.

INT: Were you upset that they were leaving?

HELMUT: No, I can't say that I was upset. Why should I be upset, somebody going to Israel, if he wants to go? Of course, we found out later, the people who were there were not as great idealists as they say they are, because they need everything. Then came the long list, send us this. All kinds of things which we don't have. They wanted to have it sent over there. My daughter-in-law is a little bit like this. She can't get enough. She buys and buys.

INT: How was Mrs. Bodenheim when COSBI left? Was that hard for her?

HELMUT: Yeah, of course it was hard for her. But other people were going too. He was not the...

INT: And then your last child is...

HELMUT: That's Dovid. He's a little bit different. He is extremely sociable. Always had many friends. He went to the Torah Academy. In the summer he went to Camp Magen Avraham, and then he went with us, too. We went to the higher Catskill Mountains with a chair lift and everything. He liked everything and everybody and he always had the house full of his friends. At that time we lived in the Ashwood apartments, and I could play ball with him outside and so on. These buildings were not there yet, there was a big lawn. He enjoyed everything.

INT: And there's a big difference in age between COSBI and...

HELMUT: Yeah, eight years.

INT: Eight years.

HELMUT: Today there's no more difference. I said that you don't notice a difference, how they deal with each other.

INT: They get along well together?

HELMUT: Very well. When COSBI comes here, Dovid has everything prepared already. Car rental, anything he wants. Whatever COSBI says, it's all done. So...he always liked to play, he liked to play ball, he went to the yeshiva, played with the boys basketball and so on. Only thing is then when he had to go to the yeshiva, he found it very difficult to sit there for so many hours and learning. It took him a long time until he really got used to it. Later on he graduated. He also went to Far Rockaway. He went to two years to the yeshiva of Far Rockaway, and then he went to another yeshiva, Shaar Yashuv, that's actually an easier yeshiva. He is not such a learner. He knows quite a bit, too, but, the yeshiva of Far Rockaway somehow was getting, maybe a little bit too high for him. So he went to Shaar Yashuv. But Shaar Yashuv is easier. Many boys are baalei tshuvahs, not from such Orthodox families, and so on, and he got very friendly with Rabbi Freifeld. He was really, the story is he's also very friendly with Rabbi Feld at the Yeshiva of Far Rockaway. He's extremely friendly with all of them. So of course he needed some extra money, too. I mean, we paid for everything. He could use some money, and he tried to help us, too. So he took a job as a bus driver for the afternoon. He went to college in the evening. And he graduated college, too, he has a college degree. A bachelor, no master or anything. He's extremely, he's very good in statistics and marketing research. Economics, he's brilliant. But anyway, he was driving a bus to make some money. It was a girls' bus. TAG. Torah Academy for Girls. And at TAG he met his wife now. That's where he met his wife. But...well, he didn't get married right away, it didn't go so easy, the whole thing.

INT: How so?

HELMUT: Does that have to be on the record, all of it?

INT: It doesn't have to.

(Pause)

INT: So all your children are married, and they're all religious, all of them?

HELMUT: All religious, yeah, very religious. In fact Dovid, Far Rockaway, they give a lot of money, he gives a lot of money to this yeshiva, too. He used to, he worked for Allen for many years. Now he still works some, but he has his own business, too.

INT: Could you talk a little bit about your relationship with your sons, and how it was, how was discipline handled in your home, and who made the decisions in the family?

HELMUT: Well, for instance, Allen was ready to learn Gemora, I found it my obligation to learn with him. There were many parents, they learned too, but although I had been in a yeshiva for a while, I couldn't just look at any Gemara and know what it's all about. I didn't master the Aramaic language and everything, so I went to the public library in New York, and got a translation, German translation, wrote everything down, and went over it. In the meantime, I found somebody who wanted to sell one for ninety dollars. I got the whole Talmud in German. So I had it there.

INT: Oh, so you had your Shas in German.

HELMUT: No, I have two, and...

INT: Sure, but you used your German.

HELMUT: Well, the American one was incomplete at that time. The Soncino only covered one area. And this was the whole thing. So for me it was good enough. Still good enough. I go to a shiur, I still take the German along, because sometimes, very often I lose, Rabbi Taub he learns so fast, and sometimes doesn't explain things. Assumes that everybody knows it, so I look in there, and I see right away, at least I know what we are talking about.

INT: So you learned with your boys.

HELMUT: Yeah, I learned with him until he could learn on his own, he didn't need me anymore. With the others, too. Otherwise, I didn't have much problem with the children. They had their own will. Sometimes we just let them do it. Instead of making a big fuss about it. To impose my will? I mean, if they would do really something wrong, I would tell them that this you can't do, and so on. And they were quite reasonable. They would listen.

INT: So were you strict in your home with the kids, or not so?

HELMUT: Not too strict, no. I would say we were pretty lax. My wife was a little bit more strict, but I wasn't. I had no time to enforce things.

INT: What do you mean by that?

HELMUT: I was working hard and had many other things to do, so to tell them, don't do this and that, and stand there and watch that they maybe don't do it, and I make a fool out of myself. Just tell them and don't enforce it, then they can really kill me. So I'd better, well, I would never do, that I would promise something and not keep it. That's one thing I was always. If I keep a promise. And actually, I would never threaten them either.

INT: So did you leave the disciplining more to Mrs. Bodenheim because she was at home?

HELMUT: Yeah, that's right. I didn't bother.

INT: I wanted to ask you a little bit about your marriage with Mrs. Bodenheim through the years. How would you describe your marriage?

HELMUT: You said thirty years?

INT: Through the years.

HELMUT: Through the years. Well, it was always very pleasant. We would always consult, I would never do anything she wouldn't like and she would never do anything I don't like. A crisis was going from New York to Philadelphia.

INT: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

HELMUT: This was a crisis because my wife thought, oh, I can just get a job in private industry. You see, she had never worked before.

INT: So what happened? You were at the shipyard in Brooklyn. You were working there as a patternmaker.

HELMUT: Yeah, I worked there, and then Macnamara announced that the shipyard will be closed, but everybody will be given a job. But the job is not necessarily in New York. It will be someplace else.

INT: And at this time you were living in Washington Heights.

HELMUT: We were living in Washington Heights. We had everything we needed. We had friends, we were going to the bungalow colony together with the friends, we had a good school system, we had beautiful shiurim, everything was, Wednesday night was a shiur for me and another night was the Sisterhood for my wife. Everything was fine. In the summertime we went to the country, but we still for fall and winter, we had a beautiful park up there, and we would meet other friends there, and it worked out, everything was fine. Then came this, the story is of course, there's not only one job, but what I had there, this was a career. I had benefits, and I would have lost them. If I would have...

(Door interruption)

I had a career.

INT: How long had you been working at the navy yard at this point? Well, you had been in the government.

HELMUT: I was a year and a half away from getting some kind of a pension, but I wasn't there. So I would go out with nothing, wait until I'm sixty-five, and then be eligible for a smaller pension. So they offered me to go to Philadelphia for a month to try out a job. The same job. How I would like it. So I went there and when I came back, they handed me a paper that said a job offer for Philadelphia. So anyway, we decided to take it, and I know it was the right decision.

INT: But at the time did it seem like the right decision?

HELMUT: Yeah, it seemed to me to be right. Of course, I tried in private industry, too. But at that time my field was not good in private industry. There were not many jobs available. They had small shops, this wasn't actually for me. They maybe had one or two people they were steady, and the others, they hired them when they had work, and then they laid them off after a month or two.

INT: They couldn't count on it.

HELMUT: That was no precision, that's the way it was. It was highly paid, but I'm not the type to do such a thing.

INT: Did you and Mrs. Bodenheim sit down to make this decision together?

HELMUT: Oh, sure. We talked about it day and night. And I talked to Rabbi Breuer about it. And some friends, too.

INT: So you got different opinions of what you should do. You asked for them.

HELMUT: They couldn't offer me better jobs. The story was, while I worked there I always learned how much money other people are making, and so on. So I looked around for a job. Somebody came and said, maybe I can offer you a job there, I can break you in. So I saw what he was doing. For instance, one man, he had a tannery. So I saw what they were doing. The work was miserable. Then he asked me, "What are you earning?" I told him. He said, "Oh, we can't pay this kind of money. Our people, they work for much less money."

INT: Doing a miserable job.

HELMUT: I had seen these people in shul, they're nicely dressed, walk around like big shots, but the jobs were not too. Then other jobs, the same thing. I cannot say that anybody offered me a job which was adequate. I really didn't. I didn't think it was worth it. And there in Philadelphia I could continue my career. In fact when I went, I didn't lose a week's pay. I went and I just got the next paycheck, the same benefits. And I must say, the people were very nice here. I would think, I came there with a very high seniority, that they would be jealous, or anything. They were not jealous at all. They were very friendly, cooperative, and so on. And then later I was transferred to a much better job. I transferred into design. Drafting and design, which I liked much better.

INT: What about the community when you came here?

HELMUT: Well, I had a chance to investigate. I was here for a few weeks before. It wasn't bad, what I saw. There was Lower Merion, there was Young Israel, there was Reim Ahuvim. I could see that you could live here, too. Whatever was in Washington Heights was here, too. But over there, it's under one roof. Here, there's something in this shul, this shul, this yeshiva.

INT: But you weren't afraid that it was going to turn into a less religious environment.

HELMUT: No, in fact, not at all. There were some people who were here that were even more extreme, more religious than Washington Heights.

INT: So the religious issue...

HELMUT: At Breuer, it was never an extreme congregation. They were very moderate in everything. Here, some of them were more extreme.

INT: So that was very difficult for both of you to leave. And the children.

HELMUT: Yeah it was difficult. But the people here were very nice. There was a subway strike when we left in New York. We were fortunate to get a cab to take us to the station. When we came here, our furniture were not here yet. We had rented a house over there in Arlington Street. The furniture was supposed to come the next day. So the family Adler's, they let us stay in their house. Had a big house on Woodbine Avenue, they took everybody in for the night and they were extremely helpful. We became their best friends. We're still friends. They live in Teaneck now and we live here, and they come here. They stayed here in our house.

INT: In general, when you would make any kind of decision -- this was a major decision to have to uproot your family and move here, change job, well, keep the same job, but move to a different city -- other decisions, as the children were growing up, between yourselves, how did you decide things? Did you always sit and talk with each other and decide together, or did you, it was always your decision that she would go along with?

HELMUT: No. We decided together. We were turning things upside down.

INT: Looking at all the angles.

HELMUT: Looking at all the angles. If we needed, we would ask outside people but...

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE NINE, SIDE ONE)

INT: You were saying that you always make decisions together.

HELMUT: Always make decisions. Even today, we make all of the decisions together. If we get an invitation from so and so to come to a Bar Mitzvah we decide together are we going or we're not going.

INT: And with the children, raising the children and deciding what schools they should go to, or discipline problems, always be together?

HELMUT: Yeah, everything together. I don't know how can we not do it together. Are there people where just the husband makes decisions?

INT: Yeah! Yeah, there are, sure.

HELMUT: I never heard of such a thing. I can't believe it. That's not natural.

INT: Well, or one person is stronger than the other, so that the other person, or they make it seem as if both of them are making the decision, but really one is always giving into the other. But it sounds like you have a very equal relationship.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Can you describe your relationship in any other words over the years, what it's been like?

HELMUT: (pause) It was an excellent relationship. Very efficient in carrying out what we decide.

INT: What do you mean by that? Efficient?

HELMUT: Once we made a decision, we did it, we went through with it.

INT: Is it easy to talk to each other, do you enjoy the same things together?

HELMUT: Sure, we enjoy. Go to concerts.

INT: I know you love music. Does she also?

HELMUT: Also. Maybe I have a better education in music, I've attended concerts and opera since I was fourteen years old. Always.

INT: So you taught her?

HELMUT: Yeah, but I don't know whether she wants to be taught so much about it. Right now, I let the music approach her. Let her do with the music whatever she wants. I mean, I like Wagner very much. But I'm not trying to convince her how beautiful it is. She may not exactly understand it. Or Strauss. It's not for everybody. She likes Mozart, and songs, she likes Schubert's songs. But Beethoven she likes, Beethoven symphonies and so on. And she doesn't like music which is under-orchestrated, and she doesn't like it when it's over-orchestrated. She likes music written, let's say, like Beethoven. Strauss, Mahler, they have a stronger orchestration. So as far as paintings and so on are concerned, I'm not too great in that. She's very interested in painters. Van Gogh, Rembrandt. Although I was taken to the best galleries in Germany which were available, the one that's in Castel. Castel they have the original Rembrandts.

INT: How about nature?

HELMUT: We both love nature. She loves nature. She likes planting, and so on. When we go, right now it's a little bit difficult for us to go away for a few days to the Poconos. We find it doesn't pay. We can go in one day to a place we are going to a lake, and it's just as nice as Promised Land State Park. So why go for dialysis to Stroudsburg and make a big deal out of it? We can go there and go home again. Our house is still nicer than any motel.

INT: How are you handling your illness now? When did you get, how is that for you? You're on dialysis three times a week. How long has that been going on?

HELMUT: That's over four years.

INT: Four years? You've been on dialysis for four years?

HELMUT: For over four years, yeah.

INT: How is that for you? Is that very stressful for the two of you?

HELMUT: Not for the two of us. For me, well, to sit there for over four hours on a chair, and have two needles in the arm, which they always have to put in, and living on a crazy diet and drink very little, it is not easy.

INT: This has been for four years?

HELMUT: Yeah, for four years. Well, I had the whole condition since 1948. The doctor said there is something on my kidneys, but they couldn't make it out. Only later on, sophisticated tests found out that the operation of the kidneys, the kidneys were perfect. All x-rays were perfect, but the kidneys didn't do their job. That was found out by a doctor in Lankenau Hospital. And my blood pressure was always very high then. They said I have to lose weight. I lost weight and it was even higher. So then they became suspicious. And then they checked, blood work and so on, and they found out that the functioning of the kidneys has been going down steadily. Said he has to send me to a specialist. The specialist treated me for a month, and then he called me up, he said, he has to put me on dialysis so I can survive. I was going down all the time. It was getting worse. So I couldn't believe it because I felt well. I did not feel bad. But the tests, they were very bad. So I called Dr. Werblowsky. I had known him for a while. I said, "Look. My doctor wants to put me on dialysis. I don't feel there's anything wrong with me. What do you advise me to do?" He said, "Well, dialysis is a serious matter. I advise you go to another doctor, get another opinion, go to the Jefferson Hospital to Dr. So and So." I went to him. He looked at the records for a minute or two. He told me "I agree a hundred per cent with Dr. Siegler. He said, "You don't understand. Right now you feel fine. Just wait three weeks. In three weeks you will be listless, you won't eat anymore, and you will be in tough shape. To give you medicine for this, the medicine

will be worse than the disease." Transplant, that's out for me, too. I'm too old for that. He said, "Go on dialysis, and that will be it."

INT: You just have to continue with the dialysis.

HELMUT: Then I started dialysis. You have to start it in a hospital. So I spent a week in a hospital, to get used to it, and then they sent me to, that is a different dialysis department. This is for in-hospital. So I went to the out hospital. Where I'm going now. And that's where people are who walk around outside, and just come in for their treatment, and go home.

INT: Does this make you very tired afterwards?

HELMUT: Yeah. Today I was on dialysis. I came home, I slept for at least two and a half hours after. The whole system makes me tired. I go to shul in the morning at a quarter to seven. Get up at six o'clock. Come home, eat breakfast, learn a little bit, read the newspaper, then I'm already tired. I can sleep then. Yesterday I slept from nine to eleven. Was sound asleep. At eleven o'clock, I was refreshed. There I could go out, went shopping, different places and all this, drive around for about three hours.

INT: So you can be tired in the morning, even after a night's sleep.

HELMUT: I can be tired any time. Since I've been on dialysis, I also didn't sleep as well as I used to. I have a sleeping lab, I went there, but I felt it was not for me. But I'm not sleeping badly. I wake up at night and I have some cube soup, half a cup, a hot cup, and I go to bed, and that puts me back to sleep. My theory is that I get hungry always after two hours. Because I cannot fast. On Yom Kippur, I have to eat the shiur, very little every nine minutes. Other Tanneisim, I cannot fast, because after two hours I get hungry and nauseous, so I can't do it. But that happens at night, too. I wake up because I'm hungry. I eat something, go back to bed. Again, maybe twice, three times, but I still get a good night's sleep.

INT: So this is a total change in your life for these last four years.

HELMUT: Why?

INT: It doesn't bother you anymore?

HELMUT: That I had to sleep?

INT: It changed, I mean, you have to three times a week you have to be in the hospital.

HELMUT: Yeah, but otherwise I still do the things I did before. I mean, I can take care of my finances and my bookkeeping, I haven't lost interest. I still go to shul. If I don't go on dialysis, I go to shul. Tomorrow morning I go to shul at a quarter to seven. In the evening I go there to learn.

INT: And you go to your shiurim, yeah.

HELMUT: Well, in shul we learn. We learn between minchah and maariv, and after. That's the way Young Israel is set up. There's a whole group. It's like a minyan club. So I still have my interest in music, and so on. What I cannot do is very often, to sit for hours. I go to a shiur, to Rabbi Taub. I purposely come late, because the shiur is on Monday. In the morning I was sitting there for over four hours. So in the evening I should sit there, and half of it I don't understand anyway, what he's saying.

INT: So you cheat a little bit.

HELMUT: No, I cut it short. I told it to other people there, too. They've never been on dialysis, they don't know. But I have learned, I get something out of it. It gives me an idea what this part of the Gemara is talking about. I cannot go very deep into the subject. It can be very complicated. Shechitah, animals, kosher, not kosher, the Gemara can be intricate, complicated. But basically there is nothing changed. There is just not that much time available anymore. I practice piano, too. If I have time. So I haven't changed very much. Lately, my son in New York, he would like us to come to Washington Heights. I told him I'd rather have him come here, because I also have arthritis in my knee, and he lives on the sixth floor. On Shabbas, walk to the sixth floor, and down to shul, and then the trip itself? I don't want to drive. After dialysis I'm tired, I would take a train, but that's also strenuous. But to go to upstate Pennsylvania to that lake, that's no problem. We did it last year, we are going to do it this year.

INT: Oh, that's good, so you can still do those kinds of things. Those kinds of trips you can still do.

HELMUT: Oh, yeah, I can do a number of things. Right now I also wouldn't want to go to Far Rockaway and Monsey. Lately, I have been complaining of lack of energy a little bit, so I don't want to force myself into anything. I told the doctor today, he didn't pay much attention to it. I told it to another doctor a few days ago, so he said, "What are you complaining about?" I said, "I don't have as much energy." So he said, "Well, what did you do, for instance?" I said, "Got up, went to services at quarter to seven, did some studying, reading paper, then I rested, then I went shopping." He said, "Where did you go?" "Went to a bookstore, went to the supermarket, I went to a gas station. A number of other things." He said, "How old are you? 76? What are you complaining about?"

INT: You're doing okay.

HELMUT: Today something similar happened to me. I told him. Yesterday I really was lacking energy. Then I had an idea. I thought maybe my blood pressure is too low. I ate a cube soup. Half a cube. Never a full one. They always say it's dangerous, the chemicals. It depends how much you take, I guess. So I felt I needed it. So I took it, and I felt much better. I have the impression, it happens to me that the blood pressure can drop at certain times.

INT: So the food affects that.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: I wanted to ask you just a few more questions to finish up. One of them is, through all your life, and especially during the war years and after, did your belief in G-d change at all?

HELMUT: Always, yeah.

INT: You always...

HELMUT: Always believed. Yes. I always believed in, I suppose if I say it in English, in the Pirkei Avos they say, "If you take the yoke of heaven on you, then the yoke of the world will be easier." So I did that right through the army. When I was in the army I didn't worry whether the Germans were shooting, or what the mines would do. I was worrying, how can I shave with an electric razor.

INT: You weren't afraid of the mines? You weren't afraid of being killed?

HELMUT: No, I wasn't afraid. I wasn't afraid.

INT: How do you explain the Holocaust, then, that six million Jews were killed, and a million children. How do you reconcile that with a belief in G-d?

HELMUT: (Pause) That's a difficult question to answer. I don't know whether I'm qualified. I can only say what I have thought about it already. (Long pause) Well, there's a place in the Tanach where Eliahu, he went to Mt. Sinai and he was complaining. He said, "Everything is going wrong with me. I just showed them that G-d lives, that there's a G-d, and they agreed," and the next day already, the Queen is trying to kill him, because he killed all the idol worshippers, the priests, and he was completely desperate. So G-d appeared to him in different ways. First it was a heavy wind, then an easy, just a little bit of a wind, and there was G-d. G-d told him, he said, "First go to Elijah and make him your successor. Then go over there, anoint somebody a king, and do this and that." Completely worldly matters. And Eliahu, he understood that right away. He was a great man. So the son of Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Mendel Hirsch, he says G-d was telling him what's going on there, you don't understand. You think sometimes something is destruction. For G-d this is building up. So it can be that all this destruction apparently was necessary to build up something. A new world.

INT: The State of Israel, maybe?

HELMUT: Which did happen. But in other words, G-d was telling him, you don't understand the way G-d functions. It can be that something is being destroyed, and the destroying means already a base for building something up. So apparently all this was

necessary to get to the world we live in. Which later on, has been proven. Shortly after the war was over, they declared an Israeli state. I'm not saying that this was an ideal Israeli state. But it was something. It was a home for people to go to. When Jews were in trouble, like in Entebbe, the State took over and helped them. Before, people were helpless. They were sitting in Germany, and they were as helpless as anybody. They were just being done with them whatever a gangster decided to do with them, and with his whole group of gangsters.

INT: And now there's a place to go.

HELMUT: And many other things. Let's say, a Jewish life. I don't know whether the Jewish life, no matter what they say, in Poland was so ideal. I'm sure there were also things which were not so great, which we don't hear about, they don't want to say it, and so on. So a new life, and the values which they had, let's say in Germany and in Eastern Europe, is being started here. It is not exactly the same thing. They don't have yeshivas which are maybe dilapidated like in some of the places in Eastern Europe or Russia. They're getting nice buildings here, and so on. But the spirit, the ideas has been preserved, and is being rebuilt.

INT: Do you think this...

HELMUT: I don't say it was necessary. It was a terrible thing. It's not up to me, such a murder, it's unbelievable.

INT: But that didn't cause you to doubt G-d at all, what happened?

HELMUT: No, not at all, no.

INT: Just that you don't understand it, and that's it.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Do you think such a thing could happen again in our time?

HELMUT: This?

INT: To the Jewish people?

HELMUT: I doubt it very much. I don't think it would happen. I think...all we have to do is open up the papers. You always see the Jews on the first, second page.

INT: For such a small group of people.

HELMUT: How many Jews are there in this world? You see the Italians, you see the successes of Julius Caesar, and all these great strategists? You see the success of Hannibal, who had a tremendous empire, going with elephants over the Alps. What do

you know about them? What are they doing? They're in the newspapers? Then you see such a country like Yugoslavia. A few years ago you could fly peacefully over Yugoslavia, all of a sudden, they turn out to be animals. So things don't always work the way we think, but I feel that the Jewish people have learned quite a bit.

INT: Well, what about the rest of the world?

HELMUT: I once asked Rabbi Bulman, when I was in Israel, I said, "What do you think about the situation in general?" I said, "First we had a Bais HaMikdash. We had a Temple in Israel. The Temple was destroyed, because of idol worshipping, right? That was the real reason. Later on, there was no idol worship. The second Temple was also destroyed, right? Sinas Chinam. People were jealous of each other, people didn't treat each other, and all this. Now you have the third state, the state of Israel over there. Do you think that state is also going to be destroyed? Is it going to be destroyed like the others?" So he said, he said, "No, we went all the way through the Holocaust and all this in order to build all this up. To destroy all this? That would be a joke. Then the whole country, then everything would have been a joke. G-d doesn't play jokes with history. It's not going to be, that's all."

INT: So Israel will be okay, you think.

HELMUT: Yeah.

INT: Would you call yourself a pessimistic person or an optimistic person? What would you consider yourself?

HELMUT: It's hard to say. Sometimes I'm pessimistic, sometimes I'm optimistic.

INT: In general.

HELMUT: I cannot say. I think I'm more inclined to be optimistic, although I'm skeptical, too. I'm not a super optimist. Sometimes I'm critical. Maybe not as critical as other people, but...

INT: Like what, for instance.

HELMUT: About what I told you before. About the Holocaust, or what Rabbi Bulman said. Probably some people say, the third state can still be destroyed.

INT: But you wouldn't say that.

HELMUT: I wouldn't say that. I think he's right. In spite of all this what happened. Now, peace here and there, something will come out of it, anyway.

INT: When you look back on your life, so what would you say are your greatest accomplishments in your life?

HELMUT: (Pause) My greatest accomplishment is being thrown out of my entire way of life, which was a very easy one, going into a country which was a very difficult one, going through a war, coming out of the war with flying colors, and later on living a normal life. Family, four sons and seventeen grandchildren, and so on.

INT: That's a lot. Thank you very much. It's been a privilege, thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)