

Kurt Admon

Okay. So here we are, and as I said, just start, Kurt, with your name, and if you could spell it for the woman who's transcribing the interview.

00:00:43

My name is, uh, Kurt Admon, and it's K-u-r-t, Kurt Admon, A-d-m-o-n

Great. And just so I have it for the record, tell me when you were born.

Uh, in 1928, November 12th, 1928.

Great. Okay. Thank you. Kurt, I wanna first ask you for some of your memories of your early years in Vienna. I know you've written about the neighborhood you lived in, and just tell me some of your memories of your early years growing up in Vienna.

00:01:28

Uh, one of the first things that I can, uh, recall distinctly as, uh, an event was the civil war [laughs], the civil w-, war in Vienna. That was in 1934, and, uh, the...the, uh, the...the...the battle was between the Austrian Army and the Socialist Party m-, militia in...in Vienna. The, uh, we...we were not living in the n-, neighborhood where this was going on, but we had relatives, my...my mother's, uh, older sister and her family living in the, uh, housing, uh, biggest...biggest housing project in Vienna, Karl Marx [inaudible], uh, which was the center of the Socialist, one of the centers, b-, of the Socialist, uh, Party in...in...in Vienna, and we were worried [laughs], and we heard the cannons. Now the...the Karl Marx [inaudible] was on the outskirts of Vienna, and, uh, after that we, uh, first of all, nothing happened [chuckles] to our family. Every, everything was fine, but, uh, afterward when we would go on, uh, hikes on Saturday, Sunday, out of Vienna, the route always took us by this Karl Marx [inaudible], and we could see the marks on the building because the Austrian Army shelled it with artillery, and, uh, so you could see the marks on the...on the building, and uh, remember all the time of what had happened [chuckles]. That, that's...that's for the [inaudible] memories of early Vienna.

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Uh, we lived in a tr-, proletarian community, a proletarian area, and the first...the first time we had electric light in our housing was, uh, b-, also about 1936. Until then, uh, hu-, housing had, uh, gas, gas light, gas cooking and so on, and this is in a...in a district which was, uh, next door to the may-, to the main, the original Vienna district, district number one, so

'member this is some, someplace way out, and, uh, I remember when we had the electricity installed and it changed our life. Uh, the light different, all kinds of things different.

00:04:25

Uh, radio. Now we did not buy a radio, but, uh, a neighbor, who lived in another building across the street bought a radio, and, uh, very often we would hear his his radio, because when h-, he listened to all of Hitler's speeches in Germany, w-, this was a-, before the Anschluss, this, and, uh, uh, so we heard all of Hitler's speeches from [laughs], from the radio across the street, thanks to the elec-, electricity. And, uh, one of the memories of...of th-, th-, accompanying that was always my father's remark, "War is coming closer." This is 1936.

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And, uh, we felt it, the...the, we knew what was going on in Germany, uh, to the extent that, uh, a, uh, a neighbor in our building living upstairs, further upstairs from us, uh, told us not to worry, that if the Nazis take over in...in Austria, he'll protect us. He was a member of the Nazi Party th-, in...in...in, uh, the politics of...of Austria were very complex. We had a Nazi Party which was Nazi, at-, at-, attached to the German Nazi Party. We had a local Fascist Party, which they were fighting one another. We had a s-, very active Socialist Party, which I mentioned with the, uh, the, uh, revolt against the...the...the government. We had a Communist Party. So, uh, our political life was very [laughs], very lively in Vienna.

But it does sound like your father was very prescient in thinking that war was coming, and I'm curious, Kurt, for your memories as war was approaching, as things were getting worse in Vienna, what your memories were of how life began to change for you and your family, both before and after the Anschluss.

00:06:50

Before the Anschluss, uh, I don't think that there was any change that I can attach to that, but, uh, after the Anschluss, from the first minute there was changes. The first change was the, uh, hysteria, the...the...the...the hysteria of joy with which the Anschluss was...was, uh, received. Uh, we...we lived on a street not far from the, one of the main streets where the German Army marched through on the day, and, uh, unforget-, unforgettable, the...the...the hysteric joy that...that was on the streets. Unbelievable. And, uh, th-, th-, always, I always remember that with...with, uh, [laughs],

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I...I don't know how to... how to...how to express it, but, uh, after the war, after all of everything, one of the, uh, one of the sayings in Austria was that we were, uh, Hitler's first victim. Ha! [laughs] S-, s-, no, really, unbelievable, and...and...and horrifying in a...in a way, h-, ha-, they...they...they...they were going wild in the streets, and they were the first victims,

going wild. Okay. But, uh, that was the...that was the first minute, the...the shock. It wasn't unexpected because there was, the...the...the Nazi Party in...in, uh, Vienna was n-, in Austria was not a small party. It was...it was well represented in...in, uh, in...in the Parliament, and, uh, also then...

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Then the...the...the...the s-, the, what...what changed first of all for me, for us, uh, and I'm not sure if that's what's the first thing happened, was, uh, the, uh, um, the danger of...of...of, uh, of violence, the danger of...of meeting m-, mob violence in the streets. Uh, maybe the, uh, people who were...were employed in government jobs or other, m-, maybe had...had s-, more...more, uh, more personal problems with their livelihood and so on, but what...what we felt first of all was...was the...the violence in the street, uh, not...not against us personally, but especially, uh, the Orthodox Jews, who, uh, marked by...by their, uh, looks, by...by their dressing, by the way they appeared in the streets, they were marked...marked targets, and there was a lot of it, lot of violence.

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I think...I think the, uh, ma-, uh, of big change, very...very marked change in...in be-, in...in official behavior towards Jews as a whole in Vienna came, uh, well, first of all it came in the school, really. We, the...the...the...the Anschluss was in March, in...in the middle of the school year, middle of the school semester, and the, still in that semester we were separated from, uh, from the, uh, Austrian Christian, uh, pupils in...in...in the same school. We stayed in the same school, but they marked off a section that was used by the Jews, and so Jewish teachers, Jewish pupils moved to their section and, uh, the others, the...the nor-, the normal [laughs] people stayed where they, in the other section.

00:11:01

But, uh, then, uh, next year, next school year the...the change was complete, as we were moved to a different school, which was a completely Jewish school, Jewish pupils and Jewish teachers. Uh, there were a lot of times when...when there was, and...and for us mainly, uh, by the problem of...of, uh, the...the streets, the...the...the danger of the streets, the...the...the organized, uh, the Nazi youth movement. I started [laughs] worrying about the guy with a, the, in the youth movement with a...with a knife in his, uh, belt and so on, but, uh, nothing...nothing serious, uh, did not...did not happen. What happened was...was internally.

00:12:03

Uh, we knew before Hitler entered Vienna what was going on in Aus-, in Germany before, and, uh, my father, for instance, the same, still in, within the month of March, uh, went to the American Consulate and...and went early enough to be registered at, in...in the m-, month of March, within two weeks of...of the Anschluss, uh, to fo, to...to register for...for, uh, for...for,

uh, traveling, for en-, entry to America.

00:12:46

Uh, what I remember at home was the constant, uh, constant consul-, consultations, friends, family, every day, every evening, every afternoon [laughs], ev-, every, all the time was spent, where are we going, how are we getting out. I mean, the...the...the...the, uh, I think the...the main, the...the main topic, and I think virtually the only topic that was, uh, going on in the Jewish home was how are we getting out, where are we going to, where, the...the question was where. [clears throat] Uh, America with its difficulties, uh, is, Switzerland with its difficulties, Australia [laughs], uh, you name it, and all...all...all...all...all countries, all...all places, uh, ev-, every day, every evening, consultations, I hear that, uh, there's a lee-, uh, someone who can lead us across the border into Switzerland, uh, for such-and-such a price and such-and-such, uh, uh, Australia, how can we get a visa, the problems with...with immigration to America. Uh, that's...that's...that's what was going on.

Let me ask you along those lines, Kurt.... [logistics] Along those lines, because I'm interested in what your memories are viewing this and reacting to this through a ten year old's eyes, you were about ten years old at this time or not even quite ten, I'm wondering if you remember what your feelings and thoughts were as you're hearing your parents, your family, your friends talk about the need to leave. Do you have memories of what that meant to a ten year old?

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No [laughs]. Very...very simple answer to...to the...the, no, nothing. I was l-, I was listening. I wa-, I...I...I...I remember the discussions of the...of the, but...but the p-, any personal reaction for me, no. No. Uh, the p-, I...I had other reactions as time, uh, progressed, but, uh, for th-, that, the...the took...took for granted. Look, I...I heard about oth-, other countries before, uh, it be, we...we...we were aware, at least in our home, um, uh, about the war between Italy and...and Ethiopia, th-, Abyssinia, uh, Aby-, uh, [inaudible], these fantastic names, but, uh, okay. N-, no, the...the, uh, uh, the change came with the Kristallnacht, the change that I ca-, that I felt, that I could see, so if you want me to talk about that and its...

Yes, absolutely.

00:16:31

The...the ro-, the rolling development of that, I'm...I'm...I'm ready to go. And Kristallnacht started for me the day after. Nacht was at night, but the next day, the next day we went to school, and as I mentioned before, uh, this was already a school, Jewish school, Jewish pupils, Jewish teachers, Jewish management, Jewish people. Uh, about not first thing in the morning, but about nine o'clock, maybe, or something like that, uh, the principal of the gr-, s-, school

came into our class and instructed us to go home, straight home. He didn't say why, he didn't say what, but he...he was obviously very upset, and so we had no idea of what was going on, but something was going on.

00:17:30

And, uh, so we w-, we left school br-, not...not all together but, uh, filtering [laughs], filtering us out into the street so that it would not be too noticeable that there was a...a sudden, uh, movement of...of many Jewish pupils. And so I walked home, but, uh, didn't get home. Ne-, ne-, near our, uh, how-, near our house was a Jewish synagogue on one of the main streets in our...in our district, and so I...I walked there, by there, and there was this huge crowd around the synagogue. I had no idea what was going on, it was a huge crowd, and I kept pushing myself into the crowd to see what [laughs], what's going on. Uh, I c-, I c-, I couldn't see what was going on but obvi-, obviously it was something that had, uh, negative meanings, and not, uh, but I c-, I couldn't see.

00:18:43

I did...I did not see, but it was burnt down and fi-, and finally the synagogue was burnt down, but, uh, I didn't, I couldn't see at...at that time, I couldn't see flames. And so I...I left the crowd and walked home, uh, nothing, I didn't, I had no idea what was going on, and only when I got home was I informed of what was happening out there and I...and I don't know why, and, uh, uh, th-, we were actually closed in for that day.

00:19:15

Uh, later on, uh, later on I found out, we found out that, uh, one of my uncles was arrested at...at, uh, that day of Kristalln-, even during the night of Kristallnacht, uh, the Germans arrested a few thousand men, Jewish men in...in [inaudible], and one of my uncles was in on the list, the, uh, I don't know why, but...but he was. So, uh, this, by the way, was the man that was living in...in Karl Marx [inaudible] before and, uh, and maybe that had something to do with it, but I...I don't know. Uh, his wife was very [laughs], very upset, this is h-, my mother's older sister, and, uh, my mother was a cooler person than she, and so it, uh, to a great extent it fell upon her to try and find out what's going on and how to get him out.

00:20:25

And so my mother had an additional task now in life, going to the, uh, Gestapo headquarters and trying to find the, find her, uh, brother-in-law, or find out where he is, what, how can he get out, when can he, and so on. Uh, during that period, few weeks, couple of weeks after...after Kristallnacht, uh, when she was not home, she was [laughs] by the way doing her...her routine at the...at the Gestapo. Uh, we, uh, we had un-, un-, unwelcome visitors. A young couple came to our how-, to our apartment.

0:21:21

My father was home, luckily, and, uh, they came with a paper informing us that we are being, we have to r-, get ourselves out of the apartment where we are in, and it's...it's been allotted to them, how, why, when, and, uh, my father was a [laughs] courteous man and talked to them nicely, and, uh, trying to think of a, what possible arrangements could be, when...when they could come, when we could move out and so on. While we, while they were talking, my mother came home and, uh, that...that, I should say, at least saved the day. She said, "Look, I have a baby here," my brother was a little bit over a year old at the time, "and I can't move out just like that. If you want us to move out, uh, we have to have time to, uh, find where to go." And they were, I think, a little bit, uh, uh, embarrassed [chuckles]. I don't remember exactly, but I think they were not so used to th-, to s-, an odd situation like this either, and they agreed, and, uh, they made the arrangements that we would look now, start looking for an alternative apartment and...and then they can move in.

00:23:06

My mother and father started looking for a place to live, and it became a bit of a problem because we were not the only ones who had the, this problem. There, this was part of a move of ch-, pushing the Jewish population closer, not...not the ghetto, but moving it...moving it closer together. Uh, by the way, [inaudible] was...was the man in, of the Gestapo at this stage in Vienna. Afterwards he moved up [laughs] [inaudible]. Uh, we found a place on the same street, uh, I...I don't think s-, exactly understand the logic of...of...of...of the move, for, from...from their standpoint, we found a...a, an apartment in the same street of, uh, a grocery which had been closed down by, Jewish grocery which the Gestapo had moved out and closed the...the, they...they were living there in the b-, many places in Vienna, maybe other places also, where they have a grocery and the back of the grocery is the apartment of the guy who's running it. So we moved into this, uh, apartment and, with a grocery store, the grocery store closed and we moving, we are in the apartment, and one of the rooms in the apartment is closed with a...a seal of the Gestapo.

00:24:40

They had moved most, whatever, they had moved into that room, the Gestapo sealed it, and my mother put a table against it [chuckles], and that was our...our...our ea-, our kitchen, uh, eating breakfast [chuckles] table. I w-, I w-, that...that seal frightened me. That seal frightened me. I w-, I would say every meal that we ate, I was...I was sitting next to the table there, pushed against the door, can't, what happens if I break the seal? Th- [chuckles], my...my...my first feeling of terror was at, was the seal in our apartment. And, uh, anyhow, so we...we moved, uh, and stayed there, and, uh, that was, uh, that was quite a shock.

Kurt, what was your father's occupation?

00:25:56

Uh, he...he was, um, a...a cutter in...in a factory, in...in a clothing factory. He...he was a tailor by...by...by profession, that he, he'd learnt in a school in Vienna, learned the profession and had a diploma and [chuckles] certificate, but, uh, so he...he was a cutter in...in...in a factory.

I'm gonna ask you to start again about your father, and can you start by saying, "My father?" ...

Right. Sure. Sure.

I appreciate that.

00:26:44

Good. [chuckles] My father was, uh, was a cutter in a clothing factory. Uh, I think it's men's clothing, if I remember correctly, and, uh, that was a profession. Uh, you...you had to, in order to...to work as a cutter, uh, you had to have a certificate in Vienna, and he'd gone to school, he, in Vienna. Originally he was also from Galicia (?) like my mother, but, uh, uh, after the war, First World War, after the First World War he was discharged from the Austrian Army in Vienna and he stayed in Vienna and did not go back to Galicia, and started...started working and started making, uh, learning something, a profession. Anyhow, he...he was working in this factory, and, uh, in addition he was also working at home sometimes for, often, uh, sewing men's suits to order, to sa-, not, uh, not, uh, manufacturing, but he was still working at the time when...when, uh, when we're talking about now. Uh, [inaudible].

00:28:16

There was a time in the early part of 1939, I gather, when your family, along with so many others, were looking for ways to leave Vienna, that somehow someone in your family heard about this opportunity for some children to come to America. And I'm gonna ask you again what, if any, memories you have of how your family learned of that and what memories you have of beginning to explore the possibility of you leaving your family and coming to the United States.

Well, bef-, before that and connected to that, I, uh, should tell you [clears throat] about his activity regarding the, uh, move to the America.

His activity?

I'm sorry?

I'm sorry, you said his activity?

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00:29:21

His activity in...in...in...in arra-, trying to arrange, uh, im-, immigration to America with a...with a sister in America, and from that is a, uh, the natural lead into what you've asked me. Okay? So, uh, am-, amongst the, uh, all the activities I mentioned of...of...of...of, uh, looking for outs, the first and...and the most obvious out for us was, uh, the presence of a sister of my father in America. She, uh, had moved to, from Galicia, Poland, to the United States right after the First World War, and would, had a family th- there now. She'd married and had two...two sons, but, uh, uh, as poor as a church mouse, and had no possibility of...of directly helping us with immigration, which at that time involved having an affidavit of a, of a American citizen that, who can, uh, guarantee support to the, for the, for you and so on.

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She found some relatives that I n-, I never met, uh, afterwards, even, uh, when I was in America, who were better off than she, and she convinced them to give us an affidavit, that is, a guarant-, an official guarantee to, for...for such-and-such an amount, if, uh, to...to...to s-, to support an immigrant who will c-, if he...if he has a quote, uh, two...two problems, one, the certificate, and two, the quota, for, of a particular country. Uh, and so she st-, she found this family of ours who could, uh, give us a quo-, uh, an affidavit but had, didn't have enough money to give the affidavit for our whole family, and, uh, the amount that they gave was sufficient for my father and one of the children, and...and...and for me, if, but that was the end of the, uh, of the financial backing that...that they could give.

00:31:55

And so, uh, all th-, the, a lot of, uh, a lot of, uh, b-, bureaucracy concerned with producing this affidavit in America, but also in Vienna at the...at the embassy, the American Embassy, and, uh, so our...our main efforts were in that direction. Aside from that, he was also looking at other things like...like, uh, uh, crossing into Switzerland, which, uh, was not too safe, because many of the people who crossed into Switzerland were afterwards returned to the German Army, so that was not such a good...good idea, to Australia, where we ha-, we had some relatives who had found a...a route to Australia. It was, the...the, that's what they were doing. It was, that was a full-time [laughs] plus occupation, finding the way to get out.

00:32:57

Along the way there, in, uh, in April, the time th-, [laughs], uh, in...in April we had direct contact from the, uh, Jewish Community Center. The Viennese Jewish community had a...had a [speaks in German], it's called a German, uh, com- commu-, uh, cultural center in...in Vienna, and they actually, they had contact with all...all of the Jewish population in Vienna, and, uh, they were the official representative towards the government also of the Jewish community in...in...in Vienna. We, so we, our c-, contact was from the [speaks in German] to

us that, uh, there's a Ger-, uh, a Germ- [chuckles], an Amer-, an American delegation coming, or was already in Vienna perhaps, uh, I don't know the detail, that, uh, is looking, wants to recruit fifty children who, uh, whom they will take to America before their parents come.

00:34:12

So the...the...the, uh, request was a) for people who are on the short list for getting to America, and b) willing to have their child go alone, not with, uh, not with them, but takes, the child goes and, uh, th-, then as time develops, the...the parents will join them in America. So, uh, we...we went [laughs].

00:34:44

And I know...I know there was a discussion at home. It, it'll sound funny, but it...it, it's true, uh, my mother was very worried because, uh, well, so she's a Jewish mother and her firstborn is Superman, and, uh, she knows that in America, uh, pee-, children are kidnapped. This is going back to...to Lindbergh, ten years earlier, the, yeah, it was ten years [laughs], ten years earlier. She was worried if...if...if, uh, if...if children are kidnapped in America, then...then my son is in danger [chuckles], and she wasn't so sure she would send him without her supervision.

00:35:27

Anyhow, we went, and we had an interview with the Kraus family, in, at the [speaks in German] in center of Vienna, and, uh, they said, "Okay, nice...nice to have met you, and...and, uh, within a few days or two weeks," I forget, whatever it was, it wasn't two weeks even, uh, "we'll contact you and let you know if...if, uh, if we can include your son in...in...in, uh, in the delegation." The same day, my, I had...I had relatives in...in Vienna, I mentioned before, my...my, and my mother's, uh, sister, my mother's brother-in-law, another sister, the youngest...the youngest sister, and, uh, that day, my...my, the older aunt and my, uh, her, my, uh, her, my uncle, her husband and, uh, the son, who was a year older than I, uh, and another uncle also, went on a trip, on a, not a trip, went to emigrate to Israel, to Palestine, and, uh, had one more sister, uh, my mother's si-, youngest sister that I mentioned before, who ha-, her hu-, had married in the meantime also, her husband was a member of, uh, Hakoach football team.

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I don't know how many people who see this remember or know what...what a fantastic team [chuckles] this was, uh, a Jewish football team, soccer team, in Vienna, [inaudible], and this was an international team that was traveling all over the world, it was known, to the point of because his being a member of [inaudible], he got, uh, an arrangement to...to emigrate to England, and they emigrated to England shortly after I left for America. So football is good for something [laughs]. Anyway, that was the, that was our...our...our development of...of, uh,

a means of getting out...getting out.

Let me interrupt for just a second. Kurt, you mentioned a few moments ago that your mother was not so crazy about the idea of you coming to America. Tell me what changed your mother's mind.

00:38:29

My father [laughs]. That's, well, I, uh.... M-, I...I mentioned that my...my mother was, uh, was very unexcited [chuckles] about having me go alone witho-, without her supervision to an odd place like America where children are kidnapped, but my father w-, was more practical. I mentioned before also his, uh, obsession with the fact that war is coming, and the obsession started a year before, or more than a year before.

00:39:14

Uh, h-, he was very sure that...that there was n-, nothing to, no...no way to stay, and no...no...no minute to spare, and he sh-, he did everything, he dood, he did, and I, afterwards in...in my letters to, the letters he wrote to me, uh, you can feel...feel the tension all the time of...of the, of every minute counts and...and...and every minute may be too late, and he was right [chuckles]. F-, unfortunately for himself he was right. But, uh, he convinced her. He convinced her.

00:39:56

And, uh, within I th-, I think about a week, or a week and a half after our meeting in, at, in...in the kultusgemeinde in Vienna, we got written notification from the Kraus family that, uh, they decided they were willing to include me in the lucky fifty, and, uh, I think we had s-, something like another ten days or two weeks at the most to organize. I think it was even ten days to organize the leaving. [sighs] Okay, [speaks in German]?

I wanna ask you specifically, do you have a memory of meeting one or both of the Krauses at the [inaudible]?

Yes, yes, definitely the two of them.

Tell me a little bit about your recollections of them.

00:40:54

No, no, no, I th-, they, I...I remember seeing them but I don't have a recolle-, I can't, I...I remember seeing them, I remember speaking with them, but, uh, I don't...I don't...I don't think I was...I was, uh, calm enough to [laughs]...to form impressions of them, no, no, it's not the, not a good question, I have, I haven't had....

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That's all right. That's okay. Well, then, tell me a little bit about, you mentioned having ten days or so to prepare to leave. That's got to be a very dramatic thing. You're only ten or eleven years old at this point, you're leaving your family. What do you recall about that period, as you were preparing to leave?

00:41:57

I don't, I th-, I...I don't think that we, uh, we had so much time to think [chuckles]. I...I don't...I don't re-, rem-, uh, we...we...we had just had one shock. The same day, as I mentioned before, this was the same day that I got the...the...the, that we went for my interview, uh, was just a week before, week and a half before, uh, the major part of our family had g-, had...had left us. Uh, my father had no...no relatives in...in Vienna at all, no family whatsoever, and, uh, my...my mother had a large f-, fairly large family, with the two sisters and a brother and accompaniments [chuckles], but, uh, so I...I think it was feeling the shock of being...being virtually alone, and knowing also that, uh, very soon the youngest sister would sh-, who was still...still in Vienna, would also be leaving shortly be-, before then, and, uh, my father at this point also had...had no idea of, uh, when his...when his, uh, visa would be approved.

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Had no, he had, we had all the ne-, necessary documents, but we didn't have a small question like approval. That came much later, and much, three months later, since it was too late. Uh, so I...I was packing, and not...not too much to pack, 'cause it's a one...one, uh, uh, one eleven-year-old [chuckles] boy going to...going to a foreign country. Not too much to do. No.

00:43:50

And, uh, the thing, uh, that, uh, outstanding in...in, and that I can recall in this whole period was that, uh, I had never riven, ridden in a car before, uh, 1939, uh, the ca-, one of capitals of...of Europe, but I had never been in a car. But to the...to the, I was going to say airport [chuckles], no, uh, to the rail station we drove in a taxi, and th-, and this...this was my introduction [chuckles] to mo-, the modern life. I rode in a taxi, in a real car. And, uh, from here on, memories are not too...too vivid.

0:44:43

I think I was in, uh, some kind of shock. Uh, I w-, I was really surprised when reading of, uh, of comrades of mine, reading their...their description of leaving and of...of the...the, uh, being at the train station and so on. I don't remember. Don't remember. I know I was there. I w-, I...I know I rode there in a taxi [laughs], but, uh, [mumbles]. So we...we...we...we got onto the train and we were...were instructed beforehand not to make demonstrations or anything like that, just be, to be as private as possible, and, uh, so we went...we went on the train.

00:45:31

So the train took us to Berlin, and Berlin I remember [chuckles]. Of all the things...of all the things that happened, because I re-, I remember we were told that we would be overnight in Berlin, and, uh, we would, we were putting up in a, uh, s-, hostel of sorts in, uh, Jewish hostel of the Jewish Community Center in...in...in...in Berlin. And we...we went, we got to Berlin, we went to the hostel...the hostel, and, uh, had no idea where in Vien-, in...in, uh, Berlin. Only later I found out. We...we took a short walk there to...to refresh ourselves after staying there, to, and before starting the next train ride, we refreshed ourselves and walked in the streets for a few minute, about ten minutes, walk in the street, and I remember walking in the streets and seeing the street sign [speaks in German], which is a very famous street for anyone who knows Europe, or Germany for sure, it's a street that leads into the, uh, uh, no....

Brandenburg, right?

Uh....

The Brandenburg?

00:47:00

The Brandenburg, yes. It, uh, [laughs], the [inaudible]. It's...it's a very famous street which...which leads into the Brandenburg Gate, uh, center of...of German power, the...the German government, un-, unto this day, except for the interlude in...in...in Bonn. Uh, and so this, I re-, I remem-, I remember the...the name of the street. And many years later, when...when, uh, we visited in Berlin, about two weeks, uh, ten years ago, eleven years ago, I looked...looked for the, uh, place where we stayed, and I found it by...by looking around, uh, ha-, I had the address from a friend of mine, of...of where...where the, a very famous synagogue was, very important synagogue, in...in...in...in the Berlin Jewish life, and I found the, looked, started looking around the...the...the, this street, looking through the map, and I found the Brandnburg Gate, and of course [laughs] there I found Unter der Linden], which was the place that we had gone.

00:48:23

It took a few years to get it [laughs], to recognize, but, uh, so I re-, I had...I had that interlude in...in Berlin which...which left me an impression. And on, then on the boat, then I got to the boat [clears throat]. The train and so, no, no experience. The...the exper-, the...the first experience was on...was on the boat, and, uh, we sta-, I...I knew no...no English at all. I hadn't had a word of English. Maybe some other children had studied the...the, by...by chance learned a few words, I had not...not a word of English. So on the boat I learned a very

important song, "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" [chuckles]. "My bonnie lies over the ocean, my bonnie lies over the sea," and this is, uh, my...my first English le-, [laughs], first English lesson. With that...with that we got...we got almost to America. We got as far as Ellis Island, and...and, uh, with, then we...then we knew we had it made [laughs].

So that you have a recollection of seeing.

00:49:36

Yes. Oh, of course, of...of...of course, and the re-recollection with the pictures and.... Also I s-, I s-, I sent . . . I...I...I, w-, Ellis Island was a, the, uh, actually the, not Ellis Island but the statue to America was the sign that we had arrived, and...and, uh, some newspapermen came on board and took pictures of us against the...against the Statue of Liberty, and, uh, that...that...that was it. I sent in...in my correspondence with my father, I sent, uh, some pic-, two pictures, I think, fr-, of me standing against, with the...with the, the accompaniment of the other children, waving f-, Ellis Island against me. Should I read that for you?

Let's just pause for one quick second. Just one second.

Oh, I got time.

Yeah. [logistics]

00:50:49

Okay. Go. I'm going. Em, letter f-, f-, written by my father in Vienna, 15th of June, 1939. Your letters are scribbled, but nevertheless we, I and Mama could not restrain our tears of joy, picturing your young group being photographed with the Statue of Liberty. For the first time in my life, tears of joy. God granted me such fortune, and allows us.... I'm sorry. God granted you [laughs] such fortune, and granted us, the parents, to partake in it. And we have [laughs], we have heard that a boy has been especially naughty, breaking everything. Hopefully it's not you. By the way, an unwarranted fear. Be good, and obedient, and study diligently. This is your capital preparation for all your life. [laughs] I...I...I...I heard that at home [laughs], study diligently, as if I didn't even without being told. I was a good kid, no, didn't make problems. Okay, page 24.

Let's go to 22.

22, I'm sorry.

Yeah. And here we're reading the...

Second paragraph.

The first paragraph.

First letter.

The first paragraph, first letter.

Oh.

The 21st of June.

00:53:04

Oh. [pauses] [sighs] Le-, letter written by my father in Vienna on the 21st of June, 1939.
Dearest Kurti, Today we received your dear letter of the 7th, 7th of June, and we are glad....

[logistics]

Start from the beginning.

Yeah, just try not to move....

I can...I can do it, I can do it [laughs].

I'm sure you can.

I have sufficient self-control. Okay, and thank you.

[logistics]

00:53:46

Okay. Vienna, 21st of June, 1939. Dearest Kurti, Today we received your dear letter of the 7th of June, and we are glad that you feel well, are kept busy, and are having a good time. I have the impression that you are in the right hands, but you must also realize that what's really needed in life, I must call to your attention again that in your letter, only the address on the envelope is legible, and the letter itself is all scribbled, and you aren't even a doctor yet. You must write neatly [laughs]. Yeah, okay. By the way, I...I had this also semi-marked (?), but....

We're on the same....

Kurt Admon

page 14

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Okay, and from there we're going to go to page 24 – I feel like I'm leading the Seder here.

00:54:49

What was that, what would I do if you were a goy? You wouldn't know what's up, what's going on [laughs].

Now we turn to page 24.

Right.

And here, Kurt, I'm gonna ask you to read the first two paragraphs, plus, of course, that third line.

Stein-, Steinhaus?

Let's see.

Em, well, I...I...I will start explaining the le-, the [inaudible].

Yes. Yes. Yeah.

00:55:27

Eh, okay. This is a letter from Steinhaus. The Steinhaus is a place of, work camp, that, uh, my father w-, went to because he wanted to escape from Vienna. He felt that being in Vienna at this time might be dangerous for him, and, uh, so he...he went to, uh, volunteer to work at a road camp, building a highway, in mid-Germany, in mid, mid-Austria, and, eh, was working there at this time. So this le, the letter was written at Steinhaus, which, by the way, is not far from Mathausen, if people remember Mathausen, then it's not far from Mat-, Mathausen.

00:56:19

Steinhaus, 16th of July, 1939. Dear Kurti, This week I received two letters from you, and I'm very glad that so many news reports are being published about your group. It would be really interesting for me to see all of you, and especially you, in a film. I liked the pictures you cut out of the newspaper. I am well and have become more or less accustomed to the work, which is, of course, very strenuous. Maybe it's even good for me. How are you coming along with your English? I have my English books, English study books with me here, but study only on Sundays. On weekdays I am too tired, and on Sunday, I take care of mail, laundry, reading, studying, and so on. Please, please again, write very nicely, clearly, and

Kurt Admon

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extensively [laughs]. Yeah.

Okay.

I was thinking about the one on page 25, the second one.

Yes.

00:57:36

Because of the consulate, et cetera, et cetera. Vienna, 8th of August, 1939. Here he was back on holiday, weekend va-, vacation from his work at the, on the road. Dearest Kurti, Yesterday your letter of July 24th arrived. Your optimistic spirit is encouraging and hopefully justified. I have received the appointment for medical exam in the American Consulate for the 7th of July, or, 7th...7th of September, eh [laughs], and as well as a short letter from the consul that Mama, as well as Herberti, my brother, will also be able to emigrate to America after Uncle Katz extends the affidavit in a notarized letter to include them.

00:58:38

Naturally I wrote to Uncle Katz, and also took Tante Berta, his sister in America, I wrote to them at once to inform them of this, and await their agreement daily. God willing, your prophecy will come true. Understandably, considering this development, the situation and this, the development and the situation all together, we are very excited. I came home on August 3rd for a vacation, to arrange the travel documents, and yesterday spent all day on [inaudible]strasser, which is the Gestapo headquarters in Vienna, just to submit my application for my per-, exit permit.

Okay. Let's see.

Uh, 28?

I had marked...

Oh, you have one?

Yes. If I could ask you, Kurt, to read the second paragraph on page 27.

27.

Yeah, this is....

Kurt Admon

page 16

[inaudible]

Yeah. This is part of the letter dated...

Yes, yes.

...July...

Okay. [makes rooster sort of sound] Read just as it is? Not the whole thing.

Exactly, yeah.

01:00:19

Oh. Um, okay. Vienna, 12th of August, 1939. Letter. I have booked passage on a ship of 15,000 ton called Vendam, which sails on the Red Star Line of the Holland Line. The crossing takes ten days, and arrives, its arrival in New York is on October 3rd. To cover any eventuality, I applied for Mama as well. Now there are new difficulties such as the exit permit. The passport must also be extended, and to get a travel pass from the [speaks in German], community center, it is not ni- is not naturally an easy matter nowadays. Errands to run and arrangements to make, we have enough of. God willing that we all shall reap the results, that we will see you soon.

And then the last....

Last one [clears throat]. Steinhaus.

Yeah.

01:01:32

Uh, my last letter from, uh, my father was written again from Steinhaus [inaudible], on, uh, August the 27th. Dear Kurti, I received three of your letters, including one from the 15th, and I'm glad that things are well [chuckles], well is question, with you. I don't know why...why the question. This week Mama received the extension of the affidavits from Uncle Katz, and went to the Consulate. The Consulate was very nice. He played with Herberti, gave him candy, and at parting said, "God be with you," in reference to our situation, as you can understand. A few days later, Mama received a note from the Consulate with the advice that she'd, that she should a-, also ask the other citizens for consent to the extension of the affidavit. On the 24th, Mama sent a letter to Uncle Katz with this appeal. When I learned of the matter, I sent a telegram to Uncle, and am hopeful that it will ta-, be taken care of quickly. Okay. Unless you want the, [laughs], you want the last paragraph [laughs]?

Kurt Admon

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I do.

[laughs]

I do. You know I do.

01:03:03

Yes. Uh, correction to, re-, addition of, uh, last paragraph of letter of, uh, the 27th of August. Dear Kurti, Write diligently, be obedient and well-behaved. It is not always to be regretted. How is your English coming along? [sighs] War broke out four days later, five days later. That was the end.

Let's just take a quick break. Thank you.

01:03:56

[sighs] I did it. [laughs]

Yeah. I only have a few more questions for you, Kurt, and then we'll take a break.

Okay. I'm...I'm...I'm recuperating.

...ask you that, a little bit.

I don't have anything to say about [laughs]....

Okay. I don't need huge amounts of material, but I do want to be able to just accurately describe what happened to you once you arrived.

I...I...I, no, th-, [laughs]. I have a blackout [inaudible]. It's unbelievable. The blackout is more interesting [laughs]....

It is interesting.

No, but, uh, I...I, I spent three months, uh, at least, and I have virtually no memory of what ha-, what was going on, what...what...what...what was there.

[logistics]

Okay?

Kurt Admon

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Yeah. Before you get to that point, there was a tiny little detail about your childhood that I was personally interested in. You mention it in your memoir: learning to play violin.

Ohhh. [laughs]

Tell me about that.

01:05:48

That violin still exists. Jewish mothers [laughs]. No, it's not with me, but it's in, it...it, uh, it's in, w-, w-, one of my daughters has, is holding it, for some odd reason. You, the, talk...talk about the, okay. Yes, uh, m-, my ex-, uh, the, my [chuckles], my many adventures in culture.

01:06:20

Uh, I forget what age, I was about five, I suppose, eh, my mother, my father also [chuckles] decided I...I, good Jewish boy has to play violin, and so they bought me a child-sized violin, half size, it's called, and started getting lessons playing violin. Uh, when I left Vienna alone at that time, I did not take the violin with me, but my mother, when she finally did leave Vienna, during the way already, she escaped to Italy, through Italy to America, and she did not forget the violin, and many other things of [laughs].... She, uh, she brought me the violin, a half, half size violin, and she f-, she del-, it was with her until she died and then, uh, I had to take it, I can't [laughs], can't throw it out [chuckles]. But, uh, uh, did not turn into a violinist of any sort [chuckles].

I like that.

[speaks in Hebrew (?)]

English, please. Inglit (?)

Inglit, Inglit. I...I was thinking of some of, something about life in...in...in normal Vienna also, maybe, but....

Yes. Absolutely.

So, you'll...you'll ask, or I go?

You go.

[pauses] Eh, [pauses], okay, okay. Uh, are you ready? I'm ready.

Kurt Admon

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I'm ready when you are.

No, I don't....

01:08:27

Eh [pauses], we had, we...we were, uh, not practicing Jews, except for the high holy days, when my father went to pray, the Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and even I tried to fast Yom Kippur and did partially well [laughs], but, uh, and we had...we had, we held Seder, [inaudible] Seder at home also, which I...I remember mainly for s-, falling asleep in, after drinking at least two or three glasses already on the way, uh, falling asleep, but, uh, we also, I...I...I went to, uh, Hebrew school. I played hooky now and then [chuckles]. I played hooky now and then, but I went to Hebrew school, or my parents sent me to Hebrew school to be more exacting in...in...in what the practice was.

01:09:44

And also we...we...we took part in the Herzl parade every year. Theodore Herzl is, was buried in Vienna originally, before he was moved to Israel, to Jerusalem, and, uh, Herzl Day in Vienna was a Jewish holiday, or Zionist holiday [chuckles], if not for all Jews. And I remember going, and we...we...we paraded, bicycles with...with, uh, blue and white ribbons and...and flags and what have you, uh, very definite memory of...of the celebration of Herzl. Um, when...when...when I was five years old, I think, one summer we took a vacation from Vienna. My mother and went to a farm, a real...a real [chuckles] farm in...in...in the neighborhood of Vienna, and, uh, weekends my...my father would...would...would join us. We were there for a month, I think, or three weeks, and, uh,

01:11:01

It's...it's...it's unbelievable when I, when...when you think of what farming was then and what farming is today. Unbelievable. But anyhow, what I, as part of the Jewish aspect of the affair, eh, we went, my mother and I went walking one day to a store in...in the village, and I was wearing th-, th-, uh, embroidered, uh, embroidered shirt, common in the Russian community [chuckles], I don't know why...why I was wearing it, but anyhow, we, I, we came to the store and some nice woman, also another customer, came in and looked at my, looked at me and looked at my shirt and said, "Oh, what a nice little boy with a beautiful Russian shirt," and I protested [chuckles], "I'm Jewish, I'm not Russian." Mmm.

Kurt, I wanna ask you this question and again, apologies for asking a very, very intensely personal question, but I'm gonna ask it. You've read these letters that your father wrote to you as he, at the time, thought he was preparing to leave. You were in America. How and when did you find out what happened to your father?

Kurt Admon

page 20

01:12:31

Well, [laughs] [pauses] I don't ask questions. I told you before, but [chuckles] I don't ask questions. And, uh, my mother d-, took about a year, three quarters of a year, she took a few months with, before she had the...the guts to tell me, and, uh, [mumbles and chuckles] I can't...I can't be a judge for her, I can't, uh, she did right, she did wrong. That's it.

[logistics] Is there anything else you wanna add about learning what happened to your father? I know how personal and painful this is for you.

[pauses]

01:14:09

I'll tell you something, it's...it's not about a, it's not about him [laughs]. But, uh, eh, eh, when...when my youngest son was thirteen years old, I didn't have to take him to Jerusalem. I took him to Vienna. Uh, not only him, I took also then the older boy and [inaudible], the four of us went...went to Vienna to celebrate bar mitzvah in my home [chuckles], and, uh, we went to our, wh-, where we lived, and I also took them to...to the graveyard, the Jewish graveyard, big Jewish graveyard in Vienna. I had tried to be there once, but, uh, to my distress, I found out, I...I went there on...on...on shabbat, I found out that graveyards are closed on shabbat. Jewish graveyards are closed on shabbat.

01:15:24

So I...I d-, and I was just going through quickly and...and the in, out, and [inaudible], I didn't have opportunity to...to enter the graveyard and find...find his grave [inaudible]. So this was our, my...my first contact with [chuckles], with that, and my, I., my brother [inaudible] also came with us that time. He wanted to see his...his father. Uh, this was in...in, uh, 19eighty-something [inaudible], but the graveyard was still in...in, not completely, eh, not completely renewed, not completely reconstructed.

01:16:20

Eh, the many grave, many, many stones that was broken and thrown around this place, that was also many that had been, uh, had been fixed by that time by...by the families and so on. And, uh, I went to, h-, had no idea where the...the, that was an office [inaudible], this woman came out to...to...to see us, uh, what are you looking for, and I told him, looking for my father, who was buried, you know the date, I said, no, I don't know the date. I did not know the date. I know the approximate date. Do you know his, uh, when he was born? Yes, uh, [chuckles] have a story about when he was born also, by the way, but, uh, and...and...and, uh, the...the, where the, where...where he was living, uh, his...his resent-, residential [laughs] address, not where he was living.

01:17:31

Eh, he, uh, he was killed, fortunately for all of us, very quickly, and, uh, my mother got, uh, the ashes, container of ashes, no...no...no body. You don't...you don't send bodies that you don't want examined [laughs]. And she buried, she and...and...and the, my...my [laughs] big, my big brother buried him, and they put up a temporary st-, temporary marker. And the woman went out, and as, faster than you can say Jack Robinson, she was back with a slip of paper giving me the exact...exact location of where he was buried.

01:18:30

So y-, y-, you...you...you can...you can...you can destroy the graveyard, you can destroy it, anything, you can kill people, but you keep order [chuckles]. That's my...that's my, my tale of my father.

Let's just sort of wrap up your tale. I'm certainly familiar with the fact that the kids spent that summer at the summer camp in Pennsylvania. Do you have any particular memories or recollections or...?

From camp?

From camp.

No, not, uh, f-, [mumbles], not, eh, I...I remember the...the, uh, the...the, um, uh, the camp, uh, the camp guy, what do you call 'em?

Like a counselor?

Counselor. Forgot...forgot [laughs].

01:19:41

Uh, the camp counselor, I remember, who insisted that he was an Indian, and, uh, ninety-nine percent of the time walked around with a towel around his, uh, around his waist. That's, that was his official [chuckles], official, because he was an Indian, so that was his his dress. I remember that. Uh, I remember learning new food. Grapefruit, grapefruit we did not know in Vienna. I at least had never seen, never known, uh, grapefruit. Uh, sweet potato, celery. But, uh, then I had, uh, uh, I...I h-, I had a difficult period in camp, when, uh, people started, when...when the children started moving out. We...we came in June, beginning of June, and we...we were there all of June, July, August...

01:20:48

Kurt Admon

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And as time was going on, uh, one leaves and two leave, then another leaves and another leaves, and I'm s-, not the only one [inaudible] still, um, but, uh, but, uh, and I was getting worried. [laughs] Bec-, well, I had, I...I...I...I knew by this time that my father was not getting, I didn't know he was dead, I didn't, but I knew he was not getting here, and, um, I knew that my aunt could not take me, uh, economically, physically [laughs], uh, she couldn't take care of me, and so I was wondering wha-, w-, [laughs] where...where...where...where am I gonna spend my life, and, uh, took, I don't know, took some time. And then fi-, fi-, finally there was a solution [laughs]. Obviously, uh, here I am. But, uh, it was difficult. It was difficult. As I said, I don't ask questions [chuckles]. That...that...that...that, uh, well, I must, [mumbles] you're pushing me [laughs] into [laughs]....

I am pushing you.

01:22:19

Em, and then I was, eh, I don't, I...I, uh, I don't remember exactly where, another, a family, if...if...if...if a family came to pick me up [chuckles] or if I was sent, halfway station or three quarter station, I don't re-, I don't remember, but anyhow, somebody...somebody came to save my life, and, uh, very nice people. I...I...I...I th-, tr-, trepidation [laughs], really, eh, well...well, uh, from Albany, New York, eh, well doing, well...well, uh, economically well placed, nice home, uh, store, clothing store, if I remember correctly [inaudible], a car, a real car for their own family, and, uh, th-, th-, the thing that I re-, I...I re-, one of the th-, one of the few things that I can tell you is I...I was st-, I kept, I was fascinated that, uh, uh, th-, the driver was always fiddling with a stick on the floor, and God knows what is he doing with [laughs], move the stick here, move the stick there, eh [chuckles], and so th-, they had a car, and then the wife also drove it, and she's, keeps on with the stick all the time, I don't know what's goin' on and [laughs].... Anyway, eh, I had a nice room. They had a small daughter, younger than I, uh, and...and...and...

01:24:14

Beyond that, the only concrete memory I can give you is that I went to, by myself, on a Saturday during the winter, we ha-, we, I...I came there sometime end of August, the beginning of September, and I left there, eh, December. Eh, the only thing I can...I can re-, definitely re-, recall is that one day when it was raining out, I didn't know, didn't...didn't, not the rain was, what, eh, on a Saturday afternoon I went into the street, walking, walking, walking, and found a...a movie house and went into the movie house, and saw a film which I did not understand, bec-, I came in in the middle, and...and the vague se-, I...I have e-, had enough vague understandings of what was going on that in the end, years later, I...I identified the film. Three Feathers, if you've ever heard of it. It was a known, well known film at the time about, uh, uh, an Engl-, English, uh, noble who has to prove himself as a brave man and...and goes to, uh, Egypt and...and...and Sudan and fights with, uh, Kitchener and, eh

[chuckles]....

01:25:33

That, and...and then's break, in the break was a short, the chapter in the...in the life of Dick Tracy, which I had no idea [chuckles], but I re-, I remember, I remembered I didn't understand it too well, but the end was...was th-, th-, th-, the, uh, the...the...the, uh, crooks were shooting at him through a door. He was...he was...he was tied to a chair like this, [inaudible] under the door, and the police...the police were shooting at him because they're trying to break down the door, and that was the end of the chapter, and, uh, didn't [laughs].... But I saw in the newspapers [laughs] the next week they still had Dick Tracy, so [chuckles] that's when I found out what I saw, I didn't, I had no idea really [inaudible].

01:26:26

Eh, one fine day, w-, on a weekend, uh, in...in...in, uh, December, I also ca-, 'cause we had gone, I had gone, uh, weekend day, we had gone out or something and I came in, they said, uh, that we have people here to see you, introduced me to another Jewish family, and said, "We're sorry, but we have to let you go. What do you think about it?" And I said, "I'll go," you know, and...and...and, uh, feel very sorry for them, I feel v-, I feel a bit sorry for myself, too, it was a bit, very, but, uh, turned out for the best. For me, it turned out for the best, and I hope it was for them, too. I...I came to another family who had the right patience and...and...and, uh, and touch to get me into things, I guess, and...and, uh, and I'm sure that I...I [mumbles], I'm attached to this very day, seventy year, seven, oh, something like that [chuckles]. Seventy years, but...but I...I...I...I, uh, very good.

Now your mother, though, and your younger brother did arrive in the States about a year later.

Yes. Yes. What happ-....

[inaudible]

Yes. I'm sorry. [laughs]

[inaudible]

Uh, after she....

I'm sorry....

Yeah, okay.

Kurt Admon

page 24

After my mother....

Yes, of course. Of course, of course. Is this the [inaudible]? I don't know [laughs].

01:28:29

After...after my mother buried my father at, uh, Jewish graveyard in...in Vienna, she took steps to transfer his, uh, uh, affidavit to her fully, and she and her, and, uh, and my brother, her son, the baby son, h-, had, uh, had the affidavit, and, uh, I guess she cashed in the ticket and bought a ticket, and she went out of Vienna through Italy, in, uh, in March, 1940...1940, and, uh, fr-, uh, Italy was not at war yet. Italy joined the World War after the Germans had already conquered most of France, hadn't finished completely yet, and, uh, when they had almost...almost completely, then Mussolini found the courage to declare war als- [laughs], also, and stopped all traffic to America.

01:29:41

My mother was, if not on the last boat to America from Italy, then the next to the last, I think the last, and she came to America with a little son, two years old, two and a half years old, and came to her sister-in-law, my father's oldest sister, who was, as I said before, or had not said before, that sh-, was a wonderful woman, really, she wa-, but aside from all...all...all the things that...that she did for us, she's very warm woman, she, and became very close friend with my mother and they...they...they...they, close friends for all the years that they had together after that, and...and, uh, moved her into their tiny four, uh, three, one, two, three room apartment, into one tiny room [laughs], everything there was tiny, they, by the way, were also small pee-, uh, the...the...the elders, and the sons grew up...the sons grew up American [laughs]. But, uh, and...and...and she took her in and...and...and took care of, uh, my...my brother, baby brother, uh, to let my mother go to work after a few weeks, and [phone rings]...

Hold on a second, there's a phone ringing. . . . And really, Kurt, what I'd like to finish with are a couple of things. One is you were telling me before the break about your mother, and I am interested in you just basically, fairly briefly, telling me the story of your being reunited with your mother once she and your younger brother were here in the United States.

01:31:46

[sighs] Eh, my mother's a very [clears throat], my mother was a very strong woman. Eh, [mumbles] she...she got into a, a little...a little two by four, not...not even two by four, and...and...and that's what she had, and...and, uh, but...but she...she was determined. And she...she [mumbles] fell in love with her sister-in-law [laughs] and...and...and [inaudible], it

was wonderful. That...that...that...that part was wonderful. And...and she went out to work, and started making money, and...and she rented a place for herself [mumbles], and she said to me, "What...what...what...what...what do I do with you? You've got a wonderful place. You're living with wonderful people who can, who want to and can give you everything you need." W-,w-,w-,w-,

01:32:50

So, uh, th-, that's what we settled on, and...and...and, uh, eh, I...I...I was, spent w-, w-, school vacations, I would go to her and stay with her a week, two weeks [mumbles]. And, uh, then, uh, well, to...to [inaudible] mothers, no problem, no [laughs], you can't get rid of 'em [laughs]. You can keep trying, you won't get rid of 'em. But, um, but, eh, the brother and...and the, fortunately, from...from, uh, my standpoint, my personal standpoint, eh, I was sent back from...from...from, uh, from Israel in, uh, 1951 to work in New York with youth groups, and that gave me, uh, opportunity to...to, I was...I was...I was in Brooklyn also, ma-, s-, s-, God knows [laughs] where, I was in Brooklyn, in...in...in [inaudible] Park, if you know, you know Brooklyn, know Brooklyn, [inaudible] Park, and, uh, it was easy, so I...I...I.... First thing I did was put my brother into a youth group [chuckles], and, uh, th-, th-, that period really f-, formed our relationship [mumbles], bo-, on both sides, [mumbles] because before that I, big brother [mumbles], kids, two years older, three years older, brother [inaudible]. Anyhow, that...that...that formed the relationship, eh, to the point where he even came [inaudible] afterwards, and he spent about a year or year and a half here in our...in our kibbutz, and felt that that was not what he was [laughs], wanted to do in life, so he left. In the end he left, and it was difficult, eh, the...the later years were much easier, the w-, world got smaller, and people move around, and...and even in Israel people move [chuckles], eve-, even in the kibbutz in Israel [chuckles], people move around, and...and...and...and then I left, uh, not too, not...not, well [inaudible]. Anyhow, I...I...I [mumbles], we left, I went to, I...I was working in...in, uh, two di-, different times with companies that sent me a lot of traveling overseas, gave me an opportunity also to jump [laughs]. [speaks in Hebrew?]

[laughs] I don't know what you just said.

[speaks in Hebrew? for some time] [stutters unintelligibly] I stopped being aware that I was moving on [mumbles]....

That's okay.

Okay?

Yeah.

Okay. Okay, okay.

It's not a big part of the story I'm telling, but I'd like you to just take a minute or two to tell me how you went from being a 10, 11, 12 year old . . .in 1948.

01:37:25

[sighs] First of all, 1947, 1948, 1949, let's not go on, but in Jewish community in the United States, it's not like it is today. This was just after the end of the war, and suddenly coming face to face with a, with...with...with a, uh, showa, and...and...and...and the, uh, coming face to face, 1947 already, with...with the...the...the struggle of the community, the Jewish community [chuckles] in Palestine, we need a state, and...and...and the whole world, many parts of the [laughs], the world, uh, uh, are cheering for you. It's not the same as it, you know, it's a di-, I...I, worlds, worlds, worlds far, far away, you cannot...cannot imagine. [inaudible] And I'm...I'm...I'm in it.

01:38:46

That's...that's the framework, and the...the...the...the other part is my personality. I try to be an intellectual, but I'm an activist. And th-, always, so I shocked the...the [inaudible], they were out of their minds, what they do, how come, they talking about, [inaudible], you brought me here, [inaudible], who...who put me into this [laughs]. They did [inaudible] with all their heart [mumbles], but they had...had a different attitude, uh, obviously, different, uh, uh, different mentality, a different, uh, generation, orc-, uh, everything was all different. And...and...and the, they devoted so much to the Zionist movement, they really, the heart and soul and the money and the time and [inaudible], but she [speaks in Hebrew?] small [laughs], small, uh, [inaudible] copy, not she's, not that she's, you know, [laughs]. So I...I...I...I learnt a very important lesson, that, uh, all, everything important, too much is now imp-, [chuckles] important lesson, that, uh, you never know where...where [laughs], whe-, what you're...what you're leading to. See, the other person does not understand what you understand, but the same words [chuckles], same, everything is fine, but same, you're not...you're not on the same.... And so I...I don't do that [chuckles]. I don't.... Eh, and...and...and...and they didn't take in account, I...I...I wouldn't have either, I started thinking about how was I, when you asked me the question [inaudible], eh, I...I...I...I ca-, I...I...I do things. I...I...I...I make conclusions and I [chuckles] start working on the conclusion, and that, that's what got me here. And, of course, the background. Without the background, all that wouldn't have happened, probably. And, eh, I'm not...I'm not sorry [laughs]. I feel quite...quite happy at home with all the mess.

Kurt, it's an incredible story. Your life is an incredible story.

01:42:03

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Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think so. [chuckles] Now [mumbles] I'm...I'm so sorry that it's credible, but, uh, incredible, that it's...it's incredible, that it's only, that...that...that, the, that we've only fifty, the only fifty. It's a, I'm...I'm...I'm...I'm not an American any more, but I used to be an American and ashamed for me [laughs]. Yeah. Tell!

Have I missed something? Is there something you would like to add?

I'm sure, but God knows what.

Yeah.

[laughs]

[inaudible]

I tell you, what...what...what....

Jeremy has just one or two questions for you.

Okay.

Jeremy: Just wondered, do you to this day feel a bond to the other 49 children that were a part of that? Do you feel some...?

[speaks in Hebrew]

Jeremy speaks in Hebrew

[speaks in Hebrew] Start again. I'm sorry.

Steve: The question is what connection, if any, do you feel with these other 49 children that shared a part of this episode?

01:44:04

I don't, I confess that I don't, uh, feel any connection with them. I haven't seen them for, uh, seventy years, uh, or something like that, seventy-one [chuckles] years, uh, the, so I...I don't, and I...I can't, I can't feel any connection with them. I...I was, I...I...I would like to see them, meet them again. Uh, when I got th-, a letter from one of them, Erwin wrote to me a few years back about...about something, eh, I was...I was very glad to...to...to get a note from him and I answered him, uh, happy, but, uh, to st-, I...I don't stay awake at night thinking

[chuckles] of those people. And I'm, I...I...I think about all kinds of things, but that's pretty far.

[logistics]

Okay?

Yeah, just a very quick question to describe your professional career. I know you mentioned before....

01:45:26

Ah. Well, professionally, I started co-, uh, university at NYU, eh, in, uh, 1945, I guess [chuckles]. Hoo! It was school...school of commerce, downtown, and, uh, then, uh, also took courses at the New School, for people who know...know New York [laughs] know what that was, is, still is, and, uh, then I stopped in...in...in...in, uh, uh, I s-, I, and came here, and, uh, uh, did all kinds of odd jobs. I was in the kibbutz. I was part of a kibbutz, and I was living in the kibbutz for many years, and, uh, then because of illness, uh, I got out of the, uh, the field work, and, uh, s-, somebody suggested that I go into trying to do what I'd studied, business, so with, together with...with other people also, I...I started working in...in...in, uh, developing cost accounting in the k-, in...in the framework of...of kibbutz economy, and, uh, then I...I...I, uh, continued studying in...in, uh, in Israel, in, uh, I went one year to [inaudible] in Haifa, and I spent another year or more than a year in...in...in Tel Aviv University, in, also in...in, uh, management ec-, economics, and, uh, s-, that, from that point on, I worked as a...as a business economist [chuckles], eh, f-, first in the kibbutz itself, our kibbutz in...in...in pl-, uh, planning, economic planning for the...for the, uh, commu-, community, the kibbutz, specific kibbutz, and then a few years in a national organization of kibbutzim, doing economic work for them, either for the, uh, mainly not...not agriculture, mainly, uh, the, um, b-, bodies that, uh, uh, the economic business bodies that the...that the national organization was...was in charge of. Eh, w-, w-, at that time we had a, owned...owned a newspaper, um, print, uh, book, pr-, uh, publishing house, eh, building corp-, corporation, um, ship, em, transport, uh, ac-, a...a number of...of...of...of...of, eh, economic activities which, in this way or...or other way served the kibbutz movement, b-, and were also in...in ki-, in kibbutz ownership, and not doing well [laughs], and so, uh, s-, one of my...my jobs for a few years was to see what to do [chuckles] about that, together with other ca-, talented people who took [chuckles] political responsibility. I...I was pure...pure professional, and, uh, except on...on...on the evening that we have a...a, a m-, meeting of the kibbutz itself, then I am participating, but I am a professional. And then I left for reasons n-, not necessary, and, eh, found a job with the [inaudible], which at that time was a major industrial corporation in, under ownership of the Histadrut. Meantime, things have changed, but at that time we were part of the [inaudible], and, uh, I worked there f-, for seven years, eight years, until I got bored. I told you I was an

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activist [laughs]. And now it's...it's wonderful, I have...I have a good time, you know, and...and...and...and, uh, my...my...my management also had a good time. As I said, they...they...they...they didn't want me to go. [sounds like doorbell]

I'll go get it.

That's my wife.

Yeah. Just finishing up with your career.

Okay. Yeah. So, any-, anyhow, uh, y-, s-, uh, I was getting bored and looking for an alternative, and they didn't find a good alternative for me within the corporation because it was, uh, all of the, all of [inaudible], but, uh, there it is, so they let me go, and, eh, somebody else, the head of the building corporation of the Histadrut, which is the biggest building corporation in Israel, heard that I was free, and called me and demanded that I come see him. I knew him vaguely, but, uh, other people who kn-, who know both of us better than even we knew each other tell him, get him, so I...I, uh, went to see him and, uh, he said, "You have to come here. We've got a, we've got problems [inaudible], come." So I said, uh, and this time I really had a cont-, a...a contract signed with a private company [chuckles]. That was a...a very unhappy situation. I had to first wiggle myself out of, I mean, if I would come, I'd first have to wiggle myself out of that. So I said, "Okay, but, eh, talk to my wife." Why talk to my wife? Because my wife has to live on what I earn [chuckles], and I was doing better before, and certainly with a new, with a private company than I was, than I knew what would be in this company. So he said, "Okay, I'll talk to your wife," so called [inaudible], and a week later or a few days, I went to see him again, and, uh, he convinced her that it was my Zionist and Socialist duty [chuckles], and also promised me that he would do what is the, what he has to do. A guy, a man says, uh, "I'll do what I have to do," then you expect that he knows [chuckles] what he really, and he did. So I...I...I...I wiggled myself out and I wiggled myself in, and, eh, well, I worked there for so, I forget how many, quite a few years. And I got tired of it [laughs], so I...I quit, and, uh, stood, decided to work as a freelancer, and, uh, somebody in [inaudible], the previous company, heard that I had quit [inaudible], the company I was working in, and said, "Yeah, I have to talk to him." She, it was a she, she knew me, she was working also in [inaudible] when I was working there, and she'd risen up to some rank.

[inaudible question] Yeah.

I'm finishing in, uh, thirty sec-....

Okay.

Okay. Anyhow, so she, eh, she said, "I...I want you to come work for us." I said, "Okay, I'm freelancing, no problem. Eh, decide what to, what I had to, uh, how we pay, how we work, how [inaudible], no problem." She said, "No, we have a little problem. We demand that you be a member of the staff. So I said, "Okay, uh, uh, what is, what [laughs], what does being a member of the staff involve?" And so we got that straightened out and, eh, I...I...I f-, went to work for them, f-, and it was...it was agreed beforehand, by th-, by this time I was getting close to, uh, retirement, and it was agreed beforehand that, eh, that, eh, I would leave into retirement from [inaudible]. So do good deeds and get, eh, [chuckles]...

Good. Okay. I think that's it. [Jeremy speaks inaudibly]

Oh, yeah [laughs].

[Jeremy and Kurt speak in Hebrew for some time]

Jeremy: My question is..... Do you understand what I'm saying?

[speaks in Hebrew]

Steve: It's about his mother. Jeremy: How did it feel to be living between two families? Do you remember, during the school year...?

[speaks in Hebrew] Shall I say it in English? I'm sorry.

Jeremy: Sit back in the chair, as you were. Okay.

You, do you know the question? Okay. Must ask it? [laughs]

Steve: No. You go right ahead and answer.

01:58:16

Oh, okay. The...the...the...the...the z-, the z-, living...living, eh, with...with two sets of parents is a difficult problem, and, eh, I'm not sure that I'm...I'm...I'm social expert [laughs] to...to, eh, solve this problem, but the...the beginning was...was certainly easy, relatively easy. My mother was in a situation where she couldn't take care of me, and she came and, she came to me and said, "You stay with them, because they are good people and because they can take care of you, and they...they want to take care of you, and I have nothing, no way to take care of you. Stay with them." So the...the...the beginning was...was easy. The, uh, the...the...the [laughs], the execution is not always the same and...and...and over time, relationships change also, so there's a, the problems arise that didn't exist previously, [inaudible] that were and

don't exist anymore, but, uh, for the first, uh, few years, uh, th-, there was no...no...no way out. The only way out maybe could have been towards the end of high school or towards sayd-, university. She didn't, my ma-, my mother was satisfied with the...with the situation, f-, f-, satisfied, I'm sure she was unhappy, but she was satisfied, when she was thinking of her son, she was satisfied that he is being taken care of better this way than if she would give her satisfaction. And she was a Jewish mother. That's simple c- [laughs], simple answer.

[inaudible]

02:0016

That sh-, she was willing to give up her personal satisfaction for my advancement, and she realized that...that, and she [mumbles], on...on the second part there's no...no question that my...my, uh, my well-being was...was...was to stay where I was sitting, and not break ties. Uh, when...when this had to break, I had a, I...I...I don't know, because I, and I'm sure she wouldn't want to break it because in the end...in the end, end, end they thought that I'm taking over the business, [laughs] b-, studying [laughs], studying business economics, and we don't have a son to carry the flag forward, so in...in the end, maybe it would have been better if I had, you know, for her, for me, I don't know [chuckles] what's better. Who knows what's better? I'm happy. [chuckles]

Sybil Frances's family lived where? Where did they live?

Which, the...?

Sybil France....

Ah! We, w-, the...the....

Where were you?

02:01:40

We lived, eh, when I was there, their house was in on L--, on Long Island, in Hauphogue, if you know, Hauphogue, when I knew, it was in Hauphogue, and nobody knew where Hauphogue was, but in the meantime it, s-, he was, he had [laughs] the one general store in Hauphogue, but he was involved in other, and, uh, then th-, th-, they also, they bought a, an apartment on, uh, on Fifth Avenue opposite the...the Central Park, they had an apartment, when I came b-, by the time I came back in 1952, fifty, yeah, '52, that was, eh, they were living...they were living there for the most part, and they were going to [inaudible] every [mumbles]. But, eh, no, it was, it...it, it was obvious, I mean, my...my future was...was...was...was cut out for me. No, th-, th-, I had no p- [laughs]....

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Jeremy: Just to finish, my question in essence was, is it only in hindsight that you understood your mother's decision that it was better for you to stay with this family, or did you understand at the time as an eleven year old?

Of course I sca-, eh, I...I, eh, when you grow up, you go out [laughs], you know, [stutters unintelligibly].

[Jeremy speaks in Hebrew]

[speaks in Hebrew]

[Jeremy speaks in Hebrew]

[speaks in Hebrew] Uh, uh, yes, the...the second. I...I...

[Jeremy speaks in Hebrew]

Uh, uh, I...I...I never thought of it before. You raised a, you.... E-, e-, my mother came as, at that time....

[inaudible]

In 19, uh, 1940, by the time she ca-, she came to....

Jeremy: Start from the beginning: My mother came....

02:04:27

My mother came to America in 1940, eh, I don't remember exactly . . . spring, spring 1940, and at that time, the question arose as what...what...what do we do with you, and, eh, and she said, "I cannot take care of you. I have nothing. I'm, I have your brother to take care of. I am on the laps of my sister-in-law. Stay, if, stay with the people that you are with. They're good people. They're...they're...they're doing the right things with you. They're willing to do it, they want to do it, they're happy with doing it. Stay with them.

02:05:23

What, yes, what, uh, what, we will, we'll see each other, you...you have, you have, uh," but I don't think we...we talked about the physical details, but it was obvious that, uh, in our school holidays, I was, eh, I was...I was...I was [inaudible] grade school, uh, uh, no, I'm confused 'cause I was skipping classes and all [laughs], that was a, I was...I was in the seventh grade

but I was doing eighth grade [inaudible]. Never mind. Eh, it was, I was still in grade school, what, w-, w-, to pull you out of grade school, the, what...what do I do with you. So I was staying. Obvious. You're going to high school, gezundaheit [laughs]. Never mind. Well, we ne-, ne-, pu-, the...the...the question, the question as a question never came up. If they wanted me to stay, she realized, I assume, that this is better for him. I, if truth to tell, have never t-, t-, uh, uh, I went in a routine, it's going, it, the routine is going, you know. I...I, I've...I've skipped, uh, grade school, uh, I've skipped part of high school, really, yeah, it was great. But w-, [mumbles] stop? [laughs]

Steve: Good. That's good.

I mean, [inaudible] [chuckles].

We're gonna stop torturing you.

[laughs]

[end of recording]