

Paul Beller INTV

For purposes of the woman who's gonna be transcribing this tape for print, if you could start off by just stating your name and spelling your name, and then we'll start.

00:00:37

Uh, my name is Paul Beller, um, and my spelling, the spelling is Paul and then B-e-l-l-e-r.

Great. Thank you. All right. Well, as I mentioned, I'm gonna ask you a series of questions about this quite incredible episode that involved you and your family about 70 years ago, and what I'd like to do is actually start with some of your recollections of your life in Vienna before your arrival in the United States, and specifically any kinds of memories you have as a young boy, your family life, where you lived in Vienna, just memories of your early years as a child in Vienna.

00:01:27

Okay. My, uh, beginning in Vienna, as I remember it now, relates to my neighborhood and the street that I was on, which was Shtumpergasser [sounds like], which is a local street not far from the main street which is Mariahillfistrasser [sounds like]. Mariahillfistrasser is like Broadway, where all the stars are and all the commerce is going on. I liked Shtumpergasser because it was a little bit off the beaten track, and in the wintertime, it was on the hill, so my father used to pull me on the sled, and sometimes he didn't have to pull me because on the downhill side, I just went all by myself until I got to the bottom of the hill. So I enjoyed, uh, that particular neighborhood. I liked it a lot. There was a church at the bottom of the hill, and I thought it was the big church, the stefanskirshe [sounds like], which it wasn't. It was just another little church, and for many years I mis-, mistakenly said that was right near where we lived. The truth of the matter is it wasn't [chuckles] very near, but it was an interesting way of putting it.

0:02:30

I still remember the post office across the street, the little post office that later on became an empty building, 'cause when I went back to visit Vienna many, many years later, I still saw the little post office across the street except it no longer was a public building, it was just an empty building that wasn't being used any more, so I still remember that post office as well. And I also remember the...the store that was right underneath where we lived. Uh, they, it was no longer being occupied by the same parties because unfortunately the gentleman was Jewish, and he had had to leave, and he left under very dire circumstances.

00:03:08

And what I remember the most was they had a little doggie. They had a dachshund, and I loved the dachshund. I thought the dog was the sweetest one going, and I always used to talk to the dog. It's a habit I continue throughout my life, is talking to dogs, and my wife often tells me, "Don't talk to the dog." But of course if she says that, I have to talk to the dog. And I still remember the little dachshund that they had in that particular store, which unfortunately, along with the, uh, adults, did not survive the Holocaust and, uh, they took away the dog pretty early in the game, because that was supposedly a pleasure that they had, and...and Jews weren't allowed to have any pleasures, and later on they lost their business and that particular party lost...lost their lives as well. Those are some of my earlier memories of, uh, the neighborhood where I lived.

Was it a particularly Jewish neighborhood or was it a mixed neighborhood?

00:03:59

No, it was a mixed neighborhood. It was the sixth...the sixth district, as they call it, um, Bet-, Betierk [sounds like] is the German word, [speaks in German]. And it was a mixed neighborhood. I'd say that the vast majority of people there were probably Gentile. Uh, there were some neighborhoods in, uh, in Vienna that were primarily Jewish, but this one was, uh, of a mixed nature. It wasn't particularly, uh, a large Jewish population there.

And tell me a little bit about your parents, in terms of the work they did, what your home life was like.

00:04:33

My father and, uh, and two other relatives were in the business of, uh, ply, the plywood business, shpareholt [sounds like] business. My uncle, who was the actual, uh, owner of the business, he was the primary person. His name was Max Tenenbaum. He and his brother Emil had the business and my father was with them; they were partners in the business, but the majority, uh, part of the business was in my uncle's name. It was called Mock [sounds like] Tenenbaum Company. They had two stores and they...and they had quite a bit of plywood, uh, business, and...and it supported three families rather well. It was quite successful, and, um, as far as my mother's concerned, she was a person that enjoyed, uh, the things that you normally do in a household. She was an excellent cook, an excellent baker. She like to take care of my, uh, her son, and...and...and take me wherever she could. She enjoyed going to the park and talking to the ladies. She liked playing the piano. She was a, also liked the classical music. She always like, uh, the Beethovens and the Brahms and the Mozarts.

0:05:40

Paul Beller

page 2

Uh, later when she w-, many years later when we lived in the United States, you know, she asked me about Vienna, whether it was still the Vienna that she knew, because she never really like the, uh, American approach of sneakers and blue jeans and, uh, hot dogs and hamburgers and...and Coke. I told her, "Vienna's got the same thing as we've got here," 'cause we visited Vienna later on, many, many years later, like in '81, and they had exactly that, even though you still heard plenty of, uh, classical music in the park, which was beautiful, and...and waltz music always was one of my favorites, but you also had plenty of hot dogs and, uh, Cokes and you had the blue jeans and sneakers. Uh, to her that was the, uh, American culture that she never quite adjusted to, but, uh, it's an interesting sidelight of, uh.... And as...as time went on in Vienna, I was an only child, and things were getting more difficult as the years were going closer to the Hol-, to the Holocaust period and to the Anschluss, and we were...and we were already getting worried as to what would happen and where we'd be going and what would be happening, so that's the reason why she didn't have other children, because she, otherwise she would have had other children, and I wound up being the only child in the family for that reason.

00:06:50

And then once...once the Anschluss occurred, of course, we lost everything. All those businesses were closed up, and then, uh, there, it was difficult to find, uh, even a source of finding a meal, because the Nazis had a policy that...that the stores would be open, and then they'd close during the lunch hour. That's when everything was closed, and that's when the Jews were allowed to go shopping for food, and it was done on purpose in order to make sure that they wouldn't be able to find food. Of course, a lot of stores wouldn't sell to Jews, anyway, because of the rules that they set up. I mean, that was just an example of one of the many hardships that, uh, people had during that time. But up till the time that the, uh, that the Nazis marched in, I was living a very comfortable and nice life. I enjoyed my, uh, school. I started my school in, uh, Vienna. Then later, when the Nazis took over, I had to go to an all Jewish school. They had a big picture of Hitler in the school, and I asked my mother, you know, uh, it was kind of a menacing picture, even in those days, I, and she tried to soft pedal and she said, "Well, he's the...he's the head of the government, and therefore every...every school has...has his picture in there." So I was just, uh, tried to be satisfied with that, even though, uh, I think I was thinking otherwise.

[brief pause for logistics] Your parents were from where, originally?

00:08:26

My parents, uh, were both born in Poland, which at that time was part of the Austrian Empire. My father was born in, uh, I guess central Poland; my mother was born near the Romanian border, in the southern part of Poland. And, uh, they both wound up in Vienna during the First World War. They had to leave because of the pogroms that were going on

my, on my mother's side. My father left under different circumstances. They were trying to find a way to get him out of Poland because he was getting close to the age where the...where the Russians could take him into their army, and if he wasn't in the army, he would have to be a...a laborer. He would just have to work in the fields, without any...any real clothes or any...any real attempt to, uh, survive it with any kind of comforts at all. There were already a lot of them out in the fields at his age, digging ditches and...and...and...and digging graves and doing all kinds of dirty labor work. They were trying to find a way to get him out. Uh, he was born in 1901 and this was in 1915, so he was 14 years old. And it was, they had a poor family and...and they were ag-, they were agricultural, they primarily were raising chickens in...in a small way in Poland, but they didn't have much to live on, and, uh, they felt if they could get him out of the country, it would be all to his good, because somewhere along the line he'd probably find a job somewhere else where there was more available than there was in this agricultural, poor community.

00:09:47

So they put him in a wagon loaded with fruit and vegetables, and he was at the bottom of the wagon, covered with fruit and vegetables, and that wagon went across the border into one of the neighboring countries, which one of the countries I don't know, from Poland. Uh, and then later, somehow he found his way into Vienna in 1915, and, uh, he...he started working there, doing whatever jobs he could get. He was not an educated man. But eventually he was able to establish himself enough to be able to make a living, and then, uh, in 19, uh, 28, he had met my mother in Vienna, and, uh, they got married in ni-, uh, in November of 1928, and that's...and that's when the family was formed.

While my mother, in her case my grandfather was almost killed, uh, in, during a pogrom, where they were on, near the Romanian border.

00:10:36

There was...there was a group of men that thought that, um, a certain house was my grandfather's, and they were gonna come in, kill the family, and rob them of everything, but it turned out they picked the wrong house, just by what you might call the luck of the draw, whatever you wanna call it, it's not much luck there, they went to another house and they...and they ransacked that house and they killed all the occupants and they, but it wasn't, uh, Mr. Tenenbaum. My mother's maiden name was Tenenbaum. It turned out that my grandfather sep-, thought to himself, if this is a mistake on their part, they're liable to come back and make up for it next time round and we'll all get killed, so they found...they found their way out, and they started traveling towards Vienna. They stopped in a number of places, and it was already during the First World War, since the war started in 1914, and they st-, they struggled into Vienna during a very difficult time. There wasn't much food available; most of the food was going to the troops on the front in...in, uh, Vienna. So they went around

trying to find food and trying to get bread, and it was...it was almost like begging for food, 'cause it was that grim. And eventually they established themselves and they established a good...a good family business, and...and my uncles, uh, they went to, through graduate school and they both became very successful businessmen, the ones that eventually had the, uh, plywood business. And, uh, then later on my father joined them, uh, after he married my mother, and they had a family business. So overall that's...that's the background.

Now when you were a young boy still living in Vienna, how would you describe your Jewish upbringing? Were you raised in a Jewish household?

00:12:15

Yeah, I was raised in a Jewish household. We were what you call, uh, you might say conservative, uh, but probably not Orthodox in the sense that my mother, uh, followed most of the, uh, requirements that you...that you would have in a household, such as being kosher, and my father went to s-, to services on Saturday whenever he could. Sometimes the business didn't permit it because they often had the store open on Saturday. Uh, my mother da-, did most of the things that you would r-, expect in a religious household. My grandmother was very religious. Uh, since my grandma was very religious, she tries to do a lot of things to please her, so we fol-, we tried to follow them, even though we weren't overly restricted, but we tried to follow the, uh, religious requirements, I'd say, to a...a moderate extent. I'd say that, uh, if you were to relate it to something nowadays, I think it would be considered conservative rather than Orthodox, but it, in some areas it was also Orthodox.

00:13:12

And...and she was very proud of the fact that she was Jewish, and she took a lot of pride in her Jewish, uh, background, and she...and she tried to instill that in me as well. And she...and she felt that the Jewish people, even though they'd been going through all kinds of hardships through all the years, were accomplishing a great deal and had a lot to offer the world, and she was proud of that fact. And she herself, uh, later on, once she was living in this country, became a very strong supporter of Israel, and of the Zionist movement, and, uh, did a lot of things in that respect.

Now, recognizing that you were a very young boy at the time, I'm interested in knowing what kinds of recollections and memories you have of how life for you and your parents changed once the Anschluss occurred in March of 1938, and then specifically some months later in the wake of Kristallnacht in November of that year, to the extent that you...

Right.

...remember.

Paul Beller

page 5

00:14:17

Well, I remember certain incidents individually, uh, which I could...which I could mention. Uh, some of them are more personal and others are more general. Uh, on the personal side, I remember coming home from school one day after the Anschluss, and being, uh, met by some boys on the street who asked me, uh, if I was Jewish. And I lied, I said I was not Jewish, and I was able to go home. And I told my mother what I did, and I was somewhat ashamed of the fact, and she said, "It's a good thing you did that, because they might have beaten you or killed you, and there's nothing we could have done about it because the Germans would not protect you in any way. It's not like you can go to the police or you can go to the Red Cross or anything else." So she said, "It's very good that you said what you did." It always haunted me and I even had some nightmares about it, about that very meeting with those boys, but the truth of the matter is, I was lucky, because they might have, uh, tried to get more information out of me and they might have found out the truth or s-, I mean, you never know what they could have done. I mean, to put it very bluntly, they could have seen, a-, asked if I had a circumcision or not. I mean, that would have been the most brutal aspect of it all, which, uh, it never happened, but I had a nightmare once with that very thought, and it did happen there, and it scared the heck out of me. And I'm a person, when I'm having a nightmare, I yell at night, and my wife says, "Paul! Paul!" and I wake up. And that was one of my nightmares, that particular incident which I'll never forget.

00:15:42

Uh, in addition to that, I remember the aspect of, uh, all of a sudden having people at home all day long. They were no longer at work because they didn't have their businesses any longer, and they were...and they were trying to make do at home. When...when all the adults are at home and you normally don't have that situation, it, it's a different kind of a life, especially when you realize you're under tremendous stress, and you hear conversations about, uh, trying to get visas and trying to find ways out, and...and finding, uh, communications limited, and in most cases if you don't have somebody to sponsor you in the United States, you're not going to get a visa, and the very grim thoughts of if you're not going to get one, uh, are you going to be one of those that's not gonna survive.

00:16:28

At that time, I didn't know yet how bad the situation really was, but I did see evidence of it in one particular area, which scared the daylights out of me. That was some men were taken away, some Jewish men were taken away, and then later the widow got the ashes sent to them in a box, and she had to pay for the ashes. This was, uh, an early example of using the, uh, gas chambers and using the crematoriums, because it happened early in the game. It didn't happen in 1942; it happened as early as 1937, '38, probably before the Anschluss it happened, too. Boxes were coming home with ashes. And when...when I heard, and my mother told me

specifically that, uh, a certain party had the ashes coming back, and...and...and...and she didn't wanna go into detail into what it meant, but I...I had a feeling I knew what it meant. That scare, scared the daylights out of me, and it's one of the things that's always remained in my mind.

00:17:26

In the early days, when they talk about the Holocaust not occurring till later, the truth of the matter is that it occurred pretty early in the game. As soon as the Germans were in charge and the Nazis were in charge in Germany, you had the Holocaust. I mean, even though Kristallnacht was, in Vienna, supposed to be the beginning of the Holocaust, which was in November of that year, but to a great extent, it was ongoing in Germany for many years as well. [clears throat] And I do remember Kristallnacht itself, when they were b-, looting and...and they were burning the, uh, the synagogues in our neighborhood, and they were looting the stores, and any store that had a Jewish emblem on it, which the Jews had to put on their windows, was being, uh, pillaged and robbed and broken into, and, uh, and then later on, after...after everything was over, the next day they acted like nothing happened, the Germans. It was just another day and people walking the streets and hello and goodbye, and...and usual greetings, and, uh, you know, like nothing ever happened because it was, to them it was just not that important. Meanwhile, it was really an example of the...of the worst aspects of the Holocaust, and at that time, people were really trying in every way they possibly could to leave the country, and make every effort they could to find different ways, and, uh, my father was particularly worried because of the fact that he was not an Austrian citizen.

We had talked before, the sort of stateless nature of people living in Vienna though not considered Austrian...

Right.

...Austrian citizens, and clearly your family, yourself and your parents were in that category.

Right.

What kind of impact did that have on your family?

00:19:02

Well, the...the thing that bothered me the most was that as bad as we have it as Jews, we couldn't even be treated similarly because someone wasn't born in a certain country. Like I felt, uh, we were under terrible stress and...and everything else, and my mother at least had a

chance to get a visa. She at least had some contact in the United States that were working hard to try to get her some papers, but my father's situation was far worse, because he was still considered Polish, and to cau-, to the Germans he was considered stateless. So therefore, he was a situation where when the time came that my mother was able to get the papers, he didn't have anything, and the only way they could possibly save him would b-, would be to hide him or have him find some way of getting out of the country.

00:19:54

What happened with my father was he had surgery done in a hospital, surgery that was totally unnecessary, just in order for him to be in the hospital, 'cause the Germans were already lookin' for him. The Nazis came into the hospital and they said, uh, "We're looking for Mr. Beller," and they said, "He's, uh, recovering from surgery right now and he'll...he'll let you know when he's a little better," and they said, "Oh, that is very good. Uh, we'll take good care of Mr. Beller when he gets better." In other words, that's when they take him to the death camps. So from there he wound up going to Pressburg and hiding out with a lot of other Jews in a, uh, warehouse, where they had minimal, uh, comforts but at least they had a place to stay. I don't know whether that part of, uh, Czechoslovakia was under Nazi occupation yet or not, I just don't know, because it was the interim period, and the Nazis were beginning to take over that whole area, but some areas they might not have been in yet. And while he was there, a Greek, uh, freighter became available which would take these people supposedly to Palestine, but unfortunately, as it turned out, when they arrived in Palestine the op-, the opposition of the Arab world was such that the British forced all these people to lee-, to leave this area and...and to go onto one of their islands in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius.

00:21:17

So my father was detained for a period of, uh, about six years, throughout the whole war period. I didn't see him for seven years. He was detained on the island of Mauritius, which was a tropical island which had m-, malaria mosquitoes, and, uh, a lot of people, including my father, had it many times. And, uh, they were supposed to sleep with these nets in each individual room, but even with all that, there was still a lot of malaria there.

Now had your father already then left Vienna at the time that you were preparing yourself to leave?

00:21:50

No, he was still in Vienna until 1940. I left Vienna in, uh, May of 1939. Things went from bad to worse in the end of, uh, 1939 and the beginning of 1940. That's when they began rounding up people and in many cases sending 'em to the death camps, and that's when my mother was working extremely hard to try to get her papers, and she finally was able to leave in January of 1940, uh, and then she arrived in, uh, New York in, uh, February of 1940. But my

father, meanwhile, was detained at that time and then...then he went to Mauritius. When he went to Mauritius, my mother was already living in the United States at the time and she heard about it, and it was a lot of conflict there, too, because of the two boats that went to Palestine, one of them was sunk by the...by the Palestinian Jews, who felt the only way to keep these Jews from going to another place is to sink the boat, but unfortunately the boat also had a lot of people who couldn't swim, and my mother thought he could be on either boat.

00:22:58

Eventually she got a card from Mauritius, about three s-, four month later, and where he said, "I'm here, and I'm survived. I was on the other boat," but for a long time we were really in a...a period of extreme, uh, anxiety because we didn't know if he was a...a survivor or that he drowned. I still don't know to this day whether he was a swimmer or not, but fortunately it didn't matter 'cause he didn't have to swim. But it was a very scary period.

Let's talk a little bit about the specific episode that brought you and the other 49 children to the United States. This was in the spring of 1939. And again, knowing that you were very young, what kinds of recollections do you have about your parents first learning about this, and just talk a little bit about what your memories were of going through the process that led to you being chosen to be part of the group.

00:24:00

Um, my memories of...of how I was chosen to actually come to the United States were actually probably a little different than you might expect, in terms of fear, because I didn't have as much fear as some of these children might have had. My parents did not give me this feeling of I may be leaving and never seeing them again because of the tragedies that were occurring in Europe. She painted a rather different picture, my mother. She actually said to me, "How would you like to visit some of your relatives in New York, and have a little vacation in New York?" She presented it without any grimness or any fear, even though in her own mind I'm sure she was thinking totally differently, and I knew nothing other than, well, yeah, why not? A little vacation in the s-, in the United States might be something interesting. I didn't know the people who were there in, but there were some relatives that lived in the Bronx, and others in other areas. So I said, "Yeah, that might be nice."

00:25:00

So my mother said, "They're going to be interviewing some children and asking them if they're willing to travel to the United States on their own, without their parents, because their parents couldn't leave yet. And we want you to be interviewed and we want you to speak up in a nice way, be very courteous, be very friendly, and don't tell 'em that you're afraid to travel on your own. Tell them that you like to visit, uh, the United States and visit your relatives,

and make it all sound like...like you're going on a vacation, because this is what you're going on," they said. So when I was interviewed, I presented a very positive picture. I...I made it sound like I wasn't afraid of leaving on my own, and that I would be looking forward to seeing a different country and different people.

00:25:48

And also while I was interviewed, I was asked a question and at the same time, they offered me some chocolate, and I asked my mother for permission if I could have the chocolate, and they were very impressed with the fact that I had that kind of courtesy. My name is Paul, and...and...and my mother calls me Pauly, so after the interview, which went very well, she said to me, "Pauly, that isn't you. Normally you...you would have grabbed the chocolates. How come you were so friendly and so courteous?" I said, "I don't know, I just said the right thing, I guess." I didn't know exactly why I did it, but I did it. Uh, I'm sure that wasn't the...the crucial factor in me being accepted, but it's sort of a little on the humorous side as to, uh, what happened there. And as it turned out, the whole process went rather quickly, and we got physical examinations and whatever else we needed to do, and before too long, we were, uh, the ones notified that we were the ones going. And, uh, and we wound up going by train to Berlin and then to Hamburg, and we...and we traveled on...on the, uh, President Harding. That was the boat that took us to New York, and then, uh, we arrived in, uh, New York on the 3rd of June, 1939. It just so happens today, uh, is also the 3rd of June, 2000 and 10, just by coincidence. The number three comes up a lot in my life.

Before we get to the States, I wanna stay in Vienna for just another moment or two, and ask, again, if there are any memories at all. You mentioned that wonderful story about the chocolate. Do you have any other memories of the kinds of questions that were asked, or who was doing the asking, or any memories that come to mind, knowing that you were only six or seven at the time?

00:27:34

Well, I remember a couple of questions that had to do with, uh, the aspect of, uh, traveling, uh, on your own, and on a boat. Uh, they asked me a question which I really had no knowledge of. They asked me if I was seasick, or if I had a tendency to be seasick on a boat. Having had no experiences before, uh, being on a boat like that, I indicated that I didn't think I would be, and as it turned out, I had no problem with that at all. And they also asked me if, uh, how I'd like to try different foods, because they had a different kind of, uh, food available.

00:28:10

It's not going to be wienerschnitzel any more; it's going to be something more like jello and, uh, ice cream sundae and hot dogs, which, all of which were new to me and which I enjoyed on the boat, and I got a big kick out of it, especially the jello, because it had sort of an unusual

texture to it, you know. It sorta wiggled, and I never saw anything before that wiggled like that, and so I was wondering whether you eat it or it jumps out at you or what you do with it, but it turns out that you just eat it, you know. But I...I kind of enjoyed the American, uh, introduction to the American food in the, on the boat, as it turned out.

You don't remember who was asking the questions, do you?

No, I don't remember that.

Do you have any memories of either Mr. or Mrs. Kraus?

00:28:51

Not...not specifically. Only at the, uh, lay, a little bit later on when we were on the boat and...and, uh, over at the...at the, uh, camp, at the summer camp. Uh, I do remember them on the boat and sitting with some of them, and we're talking and some pictures were being taken. And...and of course I remember the pictures later on 'cause we have them at home, of...of a lot of these, uh, famous pictures, including the famous picture looking at the Statue of Liberty, which is a classic, and which is also at the Library of Congress and a lot of other places, but I don't remember them, uh, specifically until we were actually, uh, traveling.

And again, still in Vienna, and any memories you have of the actual process of leaving, of what you were allowed or what you did take with you.

0:29:35

Well, I remember one thing, which was, uh, which was kind of a, uh, you might say kind of sad, but it was...it was also memorable and...and it turned out to be h-, sort of historic, and that was at the train station. Uh, when we were leaving at the train station and we got on the train, that these are parents that may never see their children again, and in my case, uh, I was the only child yet, too. And the Germans did not permit the mothers or fathers to wave goodbye to the children, because it might look like Heil, Hitler, the wave. Later on when my mother was interviewed in...in future years for historical purposes, and they asked her about her experiences when I was leaving, she mentioned that particular, uh, incident, when sh-, they weren't allowed to wave goodbye. And...and because it became a...a populist statement, it also became the title of a book that was written about the experiences of the children. Don't wave goodbye was her comment and, uh, she mentions it in the book, 'cause she's one of those that's being interviewed. That's one incident I do remember as we were leaving.

It's my understanding that the kids certainly weren't leaving with too many possessions, maybe some clothes. Is there anything at all that you remember in terms of some little prized possession or some personal thing...?

Paul Beller

page 11

00:30:58

Yeah, I do remember I had a pair of leather pants, uh, in German known as leiderhosen, which is not exactly something you find in the States, but I always liked them and I thought to myself, well, even if, uh, it's not gonna be, uh, popular, I'm gonna wear 'em if I can, so, uh, when I was on...on the boat, I...I put 'em on a few times, uh, the leather pants, even though the, most of the kids wanted to get away from the...the German references as much as possible and they sorta thought I was kind of nutty for doing it, but I liked my leiderhosen, my leather pants.

Now I know you were on a train from Vienna to Berlin. I believe you only spent one night in Berlin, and then moved on to Hamburg, where you got on the boat. Based on your story about being asked whether you suffered from seasickness, I'm going to assume you'd never been on a boat like that before.

No.

So the obvious question is what was it like for a six or seven year old to set foot on what must have looked like the biggest boat you'd ever seen in your life?

00:32:02

Well, it was quite a big boat and it was impressive, I mean, but at the same time, for me it wasn't over whelming. I didn't feel like, uh, oh, my God, what is this all about, you know. I felt that, uh, all the kids were pretty active and we w-, and we had our own little adventures. We talked and we played and we did whatever we normally would do as children socialize, and, uh, and then we had some new experiences and we learned some, uh, things about the United States on the boat already. They were giving us a little introduction to what American life is all about. I was kinda fascinated with the American flag, with all the...with all the stars and stripes on it. I...I was just wondering how many there were, you know, and I...I...I didn't count them exactly but I was sorta fascinated with it, and...and I asked if I could have a souvenir flag on the boat, and they said, "We have more than enough," and everybody got a flag, and I asked for one earlier because I wanted to count, I wanted to see how many there were. And at that time, of course, there were...there were 48, because that was before Alaska and Hawaii.

00:32:57

And, uh, overall, uh, the boat ride was, for me it was not, uh, in any way a hardship or a difficult trip. I didn't have any, uh, any nausea or anything like that, and I...I...I enjoyed the various activities that we had on the boat, uh, that we did, and including some religious services and some educational parts, and the beginning of learning a little of English. And

I...I was kinda fascinated with the English language, because the German is so different, you know, in many respects pronouncing the words, you know, like the Vs and the Ws, especially, had me, uh, one of the first words that, uh, on the boat that had me completely bamboozled was the word vegetables. I...I looked at that word and I said, "Ve-ge-taw-blays, ve-ge-taw-blays, who needs a word that long?" I said, and they said, "You're not pronouncing it right; it's vegetables." But considering the way I pronounced the V, I mean, as a good example, a-, and in general, uh, that was quite an adventure and it always was. I always remember that as one of the funnier words that I started with, veg-, ve-ge-taw-blays, which was vegetables, you know.

And it's my understanding that you were learning songs. I've heard a couple of stories about trying to learn "The Star-Spangled Banner" and how it sounded so funny...

Right.

...to some of the kids.

00:34:15

A lot of the...a lot of the words were, uh, we...we sorta tried to memorize 'em, even though we didn't know what they meant, you know. Uh, it was kind of...it was kind of funny in, uh, in...in relation to, uh, again...again with the V and the W, 'cause one of the words the, one of the words was the word view, view, you know, and I...I looked at that word, and I said to myself, "Veev," I said, "veev," and they said, "What are you talkin' about, veev? It's view," and they told me what it meant, you know. And then later on when I...when I came to the States and there were cabs with that word view on 'em, I don't know exactly what it was, but it had the ta-, the word view, and I started laughin', I said, 'There it is again. That...that word is gettin' me again," and...and this time I...I pronounced it the way I was supposed to, but it was awfully strange, 'cause I was used to the different sounds, you know, for the V and the W, and I'm sure there's a lotta other letters like it, but those two come to mind.

Did you know any of the other children? Obviously you got to know them, but at the time?

00:35:14

No. I didn't know any of the children before. Since, uh, we, we've been in the States, I've gotten to know some of them again. Some of them live in the st-, in the st-, in the state of New Jersey, where I am now, and I keep in touch with some of them, as a matter of fact, and we've had some reunions, too, uh, since then, but, uh, at that time I didn't know any of them to begin with.

And what are your memories of how you passed the ten days or so that it took for the S.S. Harding to go from Europe to New York?

00:35:48

Well, I remember, uh, a num-, a number of these, uh, games that they played, games which were the kind that children normally do play. Uh, they were a little bit more Americanized games. I don't remember exactly what they were at this point. And then we...we also tried to play a few games that we were more used to from the...from the European culture like...like kicking the ball around like soccer, even though they, uh, indicated to me that we have to get used to baseball, and we have to get used to basketball, if that, those were to me just words, you know, it didn't mean a heck of a lot, but I did see what the baseball and the basketball looked like, and I saw somebody bouncin' the ball around, dribbling, in other words, and I thought that must be fun, even though I don't know what it's all about, what are they dribbling for. They, the, well, they told me on the boat, "We don't have enough room here to put on a basketball court, you know, where you actually go in and put the ball in the rim, you know, so we're just bouncin' the ball around to show you what the basketball looks like," and I thought that was fun.

00:36:42

And they also...and they also had a little swimming area on the boat, too, and...and...and we used to go in the water and do a little water, uh, whatever we could do. You know, we couldn't swim yet, but we...we had fun anyway, we just, uh, kidded around in the water just like people do that can swim, you know, they make believe, and they have...and they have a good time anyway, and we had a little bit of water sports, too.

You know, it's so hard to imagine today what it would've been like for the 50 of you kids on a boat that was otherwise just a regular ocean liner with lots of other first class – I know you guys weren't in first class, but there were first class passengers. I'm assuming you weren't just completely segregated from the rest of the regular paying customers. It must've been a very strange experience even for the others on the boat to somehow know that there were these 50 refugee children on the boat with them.

00:37:40

Well, actually my contacts with the, with a-, adults was limited to mostly the people that were in charge of us, such as, uh, whether they're counselors or supervisors, you know, and...and...and they had...and they had a few nurses, people like that, and they had a few translators, but the contacts with the people other than that were...were...were quite limited, so I don't recall any of that. I would say that it was primarily aws-, a small group of adults that were in charge of us, and that was our...our contact with adults, but it wasn't, uh, didn't go beyond that.

And are there recollections of either of the Krauses on the boat trip?

00:38:14

Only sitting with them a few times. We did sit and we did have some conversations, and we did have some singing, and we also had some picture taking. And I remember what they looked like at that time, yeah, even though I don't think I had a personal, uh, conversation with 'em as such, but I did remember them as such and what they looked like, and, uh, and...and the group of kids that we were together with.

Now as you mentioned, as it happens we're talking today, it's June 3rd, and of course, as you well know, that is the date the boat arrived 71 years ago. Again, at your age, did you know anything at all about the United States?

00:39:02

No, I really didn't know anything about the United States. All I knew was that there was supposed to be some relatives in the, uh, in the New York area, even though I didn't know much about the New York area, either. And we did have some relatives at the...at the dock as I arrived, and they spoke to me in, uh, because they figured I could understand that 'cause it was close enough to German, and they asked me the famous question, "Well, how do you like America?" in Yiddish, and I said, "How am I supposed to know? I just got here!" And they...they...they probably didn't care for that answer too much, but that's what I told 'em, "I just got here." I didn't actually see them again for a long time because we went, uh, from there, uh, to the camp in, uh, in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, to Brith Shalom summer camp, and I just had a sort of a wave goodbye, hello and goodbye-, ca-, so that was it, and, uh, that was my...my only contact with 'em until later on, once I was living in New York later on.

So the relatives obviously knew, yours, and perhaps others, that you all were on this boat...

Right.

...the boat was arriving, and they were able to at least greet you...

Right. And they greeted me, uh, briefly on the...on the dock, right.

And then off you went in buses to the camp. Tell me a little bit about your memories of the summer camp.

00:40:20

Oh, the sum-, summer camp was qu-, quite an adventure, and there were some moments in

there that were a little scary because of the language problem. Uh, just to give you an example of a scary moment, which was really, uh, probably my fault, because I shouldn't have done it. Uh, in those days cars had these little ledges on the side. You could stand on them and...and you could ride, uh, while the other guy was driving, and I used to enjoy going with people in the campgrounds that were driving cars around, the station wagons or whatever they were, and standing on the ledge. But the trouble was I wanted to get off the ledge and the guy was still drivin'. And I didn't know how to speak English to him to tell him to...to stop or to slow down, so once I jumped off, and that wasn't such a good move because I got r-, I...I...I got, you know, injured myself a little bit in the process and I got some, uh, Band-aids and things like that. I mean, I just remember that as...as one that I couldn't forget because it had to do with the total lack of la-, of knowledge of the language.

00:41:20

And then once we got going at that summer camp, we had a lot of interesting, uh, new adventures which we never did before, such as softball and baseball and learning, a little bit learning how to swim, even though I wasn't really good at it but at least I had a little idea how to swim. And, um, then we started hearing some, uh, stories about, uh, the American life and American culture, a little bit about what the United States was all about, and, uh, the fact that this is a free country, and, uh, that we were leaving an area that was the opposite, you know. We didn't really have too much understanding of what the Nazi period was about, but we realized that this was gonna be better. At the same time, uh, I was wondering, uh, where were these relatives I was supposed to be vacationing with, uh, 'cause I didn't see 'em around and I was wondering, and they told me that I was gonna meet other people later on, adults which are going to be just like relatives, and I'm gonna have a real nice life with them for a while until my parents get here. I didn't know exactly what that meant, ig-, but I...but I had the feeling it was something good, because a-, most...most things about that camp were good, and we were learning a lot, and we were doing a lot of things to become more Americanized.

00:42:29

And I started pronouncing the words a little better, including my famous vegetables word. And...and...and we had a real good time for the period of the summer that we were there, and then, uh, at one point in the summer we were interviewed by...by various adults, and...and...and a family, uh, Mr. and Mrs. Amram, Philip and Emily Amram, interviewed me. We had a nice talk, and they, uh, liked what they heard, I guess, and I liked what I heard, and I think, uh, they were able to communicate with me pretty well, even though they spoke primarily English. I think I had enough at that time that I could understand then, and they asked me about, uh, coming with them and living with them for a while, how would I like that, that they have a farm, they have animals, they have dogs. I liked the idea that they had dogs, even though I didn't have a dog yet, but I always liked dogs. Even as a kid I liked dogs,

including that dog that, uh, I referred to in Vienna, that little dachshund. So I...I thought it was a good idea, and then when the time came, we...we left, and we went to the beach first for a little while, in New Jersey, and, uh, I learned, uh, what mosquitoes were like, 'cause that was a period of time when unfortunately there were a lotta mosquitoes in New Jersey, not like now. And that was the end of August of, uh, 19, uh, 39.

00:43:40

And then, uh, we m-, came to, uh, [inaudible]ville, Pennsylvania, where the, uh, Amrams had their farm, and they had...they had two children, uh, a daughter and...and a son, uh, about my age, and they also had the farm animals and they had dogs and they had everything that I wasn't used to, 'cause I was a city boy. So for me it was quite an adventure, and I...and I really liked it, and I was going to school also, even though my English was very limited, but, uh, they sent me to a...a year of school there. And meanwhile my mother was trying to do everything she could to get her papers to come to the U.S., and the war broke out on September 1st, 1939, and then things became even more difficult for getting, for leaving the country. My mother was still working on it, and...and we were communicating by postcards. She sent me a card telling me everything was fine, 'cause that's all she could write under those circumstances in a...in a Nazi country, and I wrote the same thing, "The sun is shining, everybody's happy," you know, it was...it was good feelings all the way around, even though her feelings were far from good 'cause she was in tremendous danger all the time. And, uh, so we...we communicated a little bit, and, uh, and then I lived with the Amrams for a period of almost a year, and, uh, I got a lot out of that experience, including learning a little farming, which I'd never done before, growing vegetables and...and learning how to ride a bike, which I'd never done before, either, and I found that to be quite an experience.

So even after the war started in September, you were still able to at least exchange postcards...

Oh, yes.

...with your mother.

00:45:12

We were able to communicate by mail. Fortunately, uh, at that stage we were, the United States was not involved in the war yet, so, uh, but in...in Europe itself, it, uh, it was pretty grim already, and it got progressively worse as they began to expand and move to other countries and take over a good part of Europe.

So you lived with the Amrams for about a year, and then what happened?

00:45:36

Well, what happened was, um, my mother arrived in the United States in, uh, February of 1940, along with my grandparents, but not with my father, and, uh, she ha-, she was able to get an apartment, uh, eventually in, uh, New York, and around the time she got the apartment, my school year was coming to an end. It was around June of 1940, and that's when I, uh, I moved back with my mother and, uh, my grandparents, and we...and we moved into an apartment in m-, in Manhattan, in uptown Manhattan, Washington Heights. And...and that's where I lived unt-, until I got married. It turned out to be a period from 1940 till 1956, is when I lived in Washington Heights.

So you went to high school there?

I went, are you talking about in New York?

In New York.

Yeah. I went to...I went to public school in New York. I went to elementary and then I went to Stuyvesant High School in New York, and then, uh, I went to City College of New York, too. And, uh, after I completed my education, uh, I served two years in the Army. And then I came out and I finished up with a Master's degree at NYU, uh, which, uh, also, uh, was related to the work I was gonna be doing with the federal government later on. But, uh, yeah, I had my education in New York and I grew up there, and, uh, as it turned out, I was the only child.

Now I'm sorry, you might have mentioned this before and it might have escaped my attention, so let me ask it again. You told the story of what your father was doing and where he was during the war. Was there any communication with your father during...

Yes.

...during those years.

00:47:18

Throughout the entire period, in, uh, while he was in Mauritius, we had correspondence together. He wrote letters and, uh, we wrote letters, and at that time it didn't have to be postcards. And it wasn't under any kind of a censorship because it was under British jurisdiction, uh, and even though the British weren't exactly our friends, but they weren't our enemies, either. So he was able to write, and...and he expressed all of his experiences, and...and including some, uh, good experiences that we had there, because, uh, he was a person who tried to make the best of...of a difficult situation. Like he volunteered to go

shopping, uh, to town whenever they needed food at the, uh, this detention camp, and he w-, he volunteered to work in the kitchen to, uh, help cook and...and...and do certain things which gave him something to do, and also enabled him to, uh, occasionally get a little extra food for himself, also. And...and even with his malaria, he...he just expressed it as it was, but he didn't complain much about it. He was always satisfied with his life. He felt as long as he had a family and he had a...he had a, you know, a job, whatever, because it was good enough for him. He was satisfied.

00:48:26

Uh, he was a...a person you could say the cup was always half full with him. He...he was not a person who complained about the bitterness of life, which many people do because they feel it's a, you know, it's a tragedy in what happened, and my mother often had the other approach. She was quite a bit more bitter about many of the experience that she went through in life, but my father always said he was satisfied as long as he had his life and his family.

Do you think that your mother therefore didn't have a lot of confidence that your father ultimately was going to be able to join the two of you in the States?

00:48:55

No, she felt that it was going to be possible once the war was over, but during the war years she didn't have any expectations at all, because there simply wasn't any way of doing it 'cause that area had a lot of Japanese submarines also, so there was no way the British were gonna permit anybody out at that time. But once the war was over, then they began working on getting him to the, he did go to Palestine for a short time, and he...and he went through some difficulties there, too, but eventually he...he was able to get on a freighter that took him to the Port of Baltimore. By coincidence, later we lived in Maryland for most of our lives, but at that time we were New Yorkers, so our first trip to Baltimore was, uh, the one to pick him up and...and it happened to be on July the 3rd, 1946, the day before Independence Day. Kind of a historic day and another number three, which I have a lot of in my life.

So at that point you were already about fourteen...

I was. I, my bar mitzvah was...was...was without my father. My bar mitzvah was in 1944, and he came here in, uh, 1946, so I was, uh, bar mitzvahed without my father, yeah.

Let's see. There's a database that lists all of the Austrian victims of the showa, and there are some Bellers listed in that. I don't have the first names. Do you know of any family members who were victims of the showa?

0:50:30

No. The...the ones that I know of are the ones that lived in Poland. My father's family, the entire family that lived in Poland was...was...was killed by the Nazis as they came through with machine guns. It wasn't, uh, sent to the death camps, they just came through these towns on...on their motorcycles, the Einzan[inaudible], they called 'em, and they just killed everybody that was there. They had to dig their own graves, and then...and then they, uh, buried 'em. Uh, and he lost a lot of...of people, of course the last name being Beller. Uh I don't believe that these were the ones you're referring to. In Vienna, we...we didn't have any...any Bellers that was left there afterwards, so it must've been other people that...that went through that.

Yeah. It might be. It's a very exhaustive, meticulous list. Among the many things the Nazis did, they kept very good records.

They had good records of their slaughters.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And it's all written down. So you moved to Washington Heights. And I'm assuming that until many years later when you had some of these reunions, you really didn't have anything at all to do with the Brith Shalom group or the Krauses.

00:51:49

No, I didn't. Once I was, uh, living in Washington Heights, I didn't have any contact with them at all. Uh, I...I did remain in touch with the Amram family, and we did...and we did visit them sometimes. I took my...my kids later on, when, uh, when they were old enough to appreciate it, and we actually went down to Washington, DC and spent an afternoon with them, and I also visited them when I was in the Army, because I was stationed in Fort Mead, Maryland at one time and it wasn't far from Washington, so I spent, uh, a day visiting them also during that time, which was in 1954. And we kept in touch with the Amrams in general, because we felt it was a...a very worthwhile family and, uh, and my mother had a lotta respect for them and...and had very good feeling for them, so we...we...we kept in touch. But as far as the Kraus family's concerned, I didn't have any contact with them.

Did the Amrams ever tell you later on why they sort of stepped up to the plate and took you in, and what their role in all of this was?

00:52:53

Paul Beller

page 20

No, I never...I never got that information. I never knew exactly why, uh, they decided to do what they did, the Amrams. I..I didn't have that kind of a background on it. I had a feeling that they may have had some contact with Brith Shalom, with the organization, but I didn't know if there was any relationship actually with any particular individuals there. I figured they had to have some contact with Brith Shalom 'cause they were doing the...the work, you know, and they're the ones who...who they came out to to the summer camp, but I didn't know anything, uh, beyond that.

And likewise, I'm assuming that as a very young boy when you first arrived here, you had no way of knowing what this group Brith Shalom was. I'm curious at what point later on in your life did you discover some of the details about who and what this whole operation was about, and what Brith Shalom was about.

00:53:47

Well, actually I have to give my wife credit for the reason why I found out a lot more about Brith Shalom. For many years I was wondering, uh, are they still there, and what are they doing, you know, uh, uh, did other children come over later, was anybody else sponsored, and, uh, are there any reunions of the children, I was wondering and...and I didn't have any basis for really knowing. My wife happens to be very effective in using the computer, and...and I'm not. I do my work, mostly rou-, routine stuff, but she does a lot more research. And one day she happened to find Brith Shalom on the, uh, computer, and she said, "Here they are in Philadelphia, and there's a coupla names here and there's phone numbers. Why don't we give 'em a call and see, uh, if, uh, what things are going on there?" And when we called them, they were thrilled, because they were looking to see if they could establish some kind of a reunion in Philadelphia, and, uh, they didn't d-, they didn't know where I was any more because my parents had moved to Santa Barbara at one point, and their last point of reference was my fa-, my mother, and they didn't know any more about where Paul Beller was, and I eventually went to one of those reunions in Philadelphia with quite a few of the children that had come over, and we had quite an interesting gathering, and we also spoke on our individual experiences and it was something special. And that was, uh, a good way of getting back a little bit with Brith Shalom.

Now I also happen to know that your mother lived to quite an advanced age, right? She lived to...

00:55:15

My mother lived to the age of 99. My father lived to the age of 93, and...and one of the most amazing aspects is my grandfather, who was a diabetic, lived to the age of 97. That part has me even more, uh, impressed than the other two, even though living to 99 is pretty impressive, too. And we were just about ready to celebrate her 100th, uh, birthday when she

did pass a few months before then, but sh-, they...they are long livers. Despite all...all the things they went through in a lifetime, uh, they were long livers, genetically speaking. Maybe that speaks good for me, you never can tell. The doctors say it probably does,

And along those same lines, I'm quite curious, given the long life that both your parents had, as you were older, was this an episode that they talked with you about as you grew older, just in terms of the original decision to send you off with this group?

00:56:13

My mother did most of the talking because my father was a more, uh, you might say, uh, not as talkative a person, and the person that was mostly more of a working man but not so much of a, uh, ce-, cerebral person even though it was mainly due to the fact that he didn't have much of an education. Uh, I'm sure he had the ability, because some of his letters, he...he, that he wrote were...were quite detailed and...and...and showed a lot of writing ability, and, uh, I think overall he probably could have done a lot more, but the education just wasn't there for him. But my mother gave me a lot of background on what happened, and she explained to me all the different things that went al-, went into it, and...and all the...the difficulties she had with the Nazis in order to getting her papers and how closely, how close she came to not getting 'em, and how she had a lot of problem even when she was leaving because when she left, she had to go by way of, uh, Holland and Belgium, and those co-, and they weren't occupied by the Nazis yet, it was the beginning of 1940, and there was a lot of fear that because these, uh, people were...were German refugees or Austrian refugees, that...that the Belgians wouldn't even given 'em, cooperate with 'em to have 'em leave from there, 'cause she left from Rotterdam. And she had a lot of, uh, problems just getting accepted as a refugee who was leaving, you know. To...to them, the Germans were all the enemy in Belgium and Holland, and later, of course, shortly thereafter they were occupied by the Nazis.

00:57:29

My mother got out a few months before that. So she had some hardships, uh, along the way, and she described many of them along the way, and she herself never forgave the Germans and the Austrians for what they did. She said the Austrians claimed that they were occupied, but in reality, they were...they were good Nazis and they helped the Nazis in every way they could, and they considered Hitler to be the local boy made good, because he was an Austrian, so, uh, to some extent he was the local boy made good, so, uh, when he came into Vienna, they...they greeted him with all the, uh, support that you could possibly want, and everybody was Heil Hitlering all over the place.

00:58:03

So, uh, in her case she always had a tremendous amount of bitterness towards the Germans and the Austrians, the, and...and...and all the things that happened to them along the way, so,

uh, my father was more satisfied with life and just said that he's glad he has a family and he has a life, and he didn't describe it and discuss it as much, even though he went through a lot more than my mother, 'cause of that period that he had to go through on that island and all the things he went through, but she was quite talkative.

And I did get a lot of information also from my grandfather, 'cause my grandfather was quite outspoken and he was very in-, uh, he was like my father figure, because during the years my father wasn't here in the United States, which was for seven years, he was the person that gave me most of the information about what the world was about, and...and what he thought about the future and...and things of that nature, in...in...in terms of possibly there being a Jewish state. He became a very strong supporter of Harry Truman because he recognized Israel, and...and he gave me a lot of insight into what experiences we had in Europe and everything else, so I learned a lot from my grandfather.

And I'm sorry, how was he fortunate enough to get out?

00:59:07

Well, he...he was able to get a visa also based on...on some business people that lived in...in New York that we were related to, my grandparents and my mother, but my father, because of his status, wasn't able to get it. And they traveled together on the same boat when they arrived in New York harbor in, uh, February the 3rd of 1940.

Right. And I wanna make sure I understand something correctly, 'cause at the very outset, when you said your mother was first talking to you about why you were coming to the States to visit these relatives, was that just a story that she made up? Because you later said that when you arrived here, you were asking where the relatives are, and then....

00:59:46

I'm not sure exactly, uh, you know, what she, uh, intended in that [inaudible]. I mean, it wasn't so much that I was going there with g-, with that as my great anticipation, that I'm going to visit the relatives, you know. I was just thinking it was a new place, it was a different world, it was something interesting and maybe an adventure of sorts. I wasn't so much thinking about the individuals that I'd be visiting, so I wasn't that disappointed, even though I was wondering a little bit about it because supposedly I was supposed to be with them a little while, and instead I was in a summer camp. But it...it certainly wasn't upsetting, because the activities at the summer camp were quite interesting, and, uh, fulfilling, and so I didn't...I didn't miss them particularly, and later on I got to know them in New York, when we were all living in New York.

I was just wondering if she herself – you may not know this – if she knew that you weren't

going, coming here to stay with the relatives.

01:00:38

She knew that. 'Cause they told her in advance that, uh, even though I didn't know it myself, that they were going to be s-, situated in a summer camp for the summer, and then they were going to be living with families until their parents could come to the States, if they could. So she knew, uh, something about this, so she wasn't surprised when she heard that I was in a summer camp. But I have no knowledge of it myself.

When you think back to this episode, what sort of stands out for you, whether there's a moment or a memory, just looking back after all these years?

01:01:17

Well, I think, uh, the humanitarian aspects of, uh, of trying to save children because their parents might not even survive, the...the fact that a group was willing to go to...to...to this effort. To get visas is not easy. Uh, United States had a lot of problems because of the Depression itself. People weren't exactly welcoming the refugees to the United States, and I'm sure, uh, we were not exactly gonna be welcomed with open arms. To have somebody willing to put himself on the line for...for these children, uh, and...and to do all the work and all the different things that had to be done, into-, including taking certain risks as well, 'cause he's a Jew coming into Vienna trying to help other Jews, uh, wasn't exactly an easy thing to do with the Nazis being in the background. Uh, the most impressive thing to me is that people were willing to do something of that humanitarian a nature, putting themselves at risk, and, uh, and...and in the process saving, uh, 50 children and also, uh, saving generations for the future because fortunately, uh, most of us have had children and grandchildren, and I'm lucky enough to even have great-grandchildren, so, uh, that...that effort, uh, that humanitarian effort by Brith Shalom stands out as the, uh, as the biggest, uh, aspect of the whole thing to me.

Now since you mention your mother's bitter feelings about Germans and Austrians, I have to ask your feelings about that subject.

01:02:42

Well, my feelings have been somewhat different on the subject, even though I realize there are anti-Semites in every community, and in Austria and in Germany as well. Since, uh, I would say in more recent years, both Austrian and German governments have gone out of their way to try to show some of their regrets and some of their, uh, responsibilities for what happened, and also to try to make some efforts in a...in a very specific way, like both, uh, Germany and Austria have been pretty supportive of the State of Israel, and, uh, they've also tried to, uh, make some compensations to, uh, people that are no, uh, suffered there, such as pensions, uh,

uh, which, uh, some of my relatives have received.

01:03:34

And, uh, I got the impression that they r-, a lot of the Germans in this generation really regret, and...and are ashamed of what happened in that period and don't try to in any way indicate that they were just following orders, like, uh, like the German officers said when they were accused of...of...of the slaughters, they were just following orders. I get the impression that they are actually a...a different, uh, civilization and...and...and they are, to some extent, not guilty of what happened then, even though, of course, in every group there are some Nazi types and there are some skinhead types, and...and we have 'em in this country, too. In certain times we've seen examples of it. But overall, I don't hold this kind of a, uh, resentment. I've been back a few times to, uh, Austria, and I was invited b-, to come back this year by the Viennese government for a week with my wife to, uh, probably symbolize some of this regret and some of the sorrow, as well as respect for, uh, who we are, and, uh, because I still can speak some German, I might be able to speak to some schoolchildren there and express some of those thoughts, 'cause I do it here in the United States. I speak on the Holocaust experiences and, uh, express some of my own experiences, and I might be able to maybe even do it in Vienna.

01:04:47

But overall, I...I don't hold that...that kind of a bitterness, even though I...I realize how tremendous the damage was and how many, uh, millions were killed and the hor-, and the horrors that went with it, and I do describe that when I speak on the Holocaust, even though I try to, depending upon the audience, if I speak to children, I try to make it a little gentler. But I...I can certainly, uh, say that, uh, I don't feel the way my mother felt about it, even though I can certainly understand her feelings as well, 'cause there are a lot of people that stim-, still feel that way, and they indicate they'll never buy a German product or they won't do this or they won't do that, and that's, uh, each person has to do it their own way.

Now you've mentioned the number three a couple times, and you mentioned before we started filming that you saw a certain number three baseball player, so tell me about your Babe Ruth sighting.

01:05:39

One of...one of my experiences that I'll always remember was in 1946, my mother and I were in upstate New York in a hotel, and we were just ending our vacation in the hotel. We were sitting in the lobby of the hotel. I think it was in the Catskills, but I'm not sure. And my mother says to me, "You know who's sitting at the bar?" And I said, "No, who?" She said, "It's Babe Ruth!" My mother knew nothing about baseball, I mean zero. I don't think she knew a Yankee from a Dodger from a anything, but she...she recognized Babe Ruth. He had a

certain image; she'd seen pictures of him. He was sitting at the bar smoking a cigar and having a beer, which, uh, is a typical image of him because he was a smoker and he was a drinker.

01:06:27

I was...I was, you know, startled. I went in there and I asked him for an autograph, and he said, "Fine," and he gave me an autograph; he had a very nice handwriting. And I took it with me and later on, I kept it and my son always asked me when he could have it and once, many years later I gave it to him on his birthday in a frame, so...so he still has it at home, Babe Ruth. And it turns out Babe Ruth's number, uh, when he was with the Yankees was number three, and many things in my life that have come down to the number three, including when I arrived in the U.S., when my mother arrived, the year that...that I retired from the federal government after my 40 years of federal service was also on the 3rd, and when...when our...our, one of our families had the, a child coming from Korea, adopted child, that child arrived on the 3rd. So it seemed like, and today, this interview is also on June the 3rd, so it seems like the number there comes across quite a lot.

You know, I've been asking this question of some of the other folks we were talking to, so I'll ask you as well. When do you think you first felt like you had become an American?

01:07:42

When I first felt that I... I would say that I first felt that way at a...at a relatively early time. I...I was living with the Amrams at the time, and I was going to the school in...in [inaudible]ville, Pennsylvania, and before the classes started, everybody had a pledge of allegiance. And when I started reciting that on a regular basis in the school, on each morning s-, before the session started, it felt like something special, like I was part of this group now. I wasn't just saying it, but I was doing it, that this was...was gonna be part of my life, and nowadays, whenever I say it at...at a meeting or a gathering, and it happens regularly, like I belong to the men's club here and before our meetings start, we always have a pledge of allegiance, uh, I always, uh, feel I remember the days when it first started with me, when I was going to school in [inaudible]ville and it was a pretty special feeling, the pledge of allegiance.

Good. I'm through. Dave sometimes has a question or two that occurred to him that didn't occur to me, so I'm gonna ask him if he's got a question, but I'm gonna ask, even though he's asking the question...

Look at you.

...as odd as it feels, since he's doing the talking, to just look at me if you answer.

Paul Beller

page 26

Right.

Dave: Well, really your recollections of your childhood seem very good, and just wondering if you ever thought to compare your schools in Austria with your schools in the States.

01:09:21

Well, my...my experiences in Austria were relatively brief, because I was, uh, I was seven and a half years old when I left. I was in school there for about, uh, I guess about a year and a half, and...and I do remember just, uh, that they had a...a fairly regimented system. It was pretty strict, but they didn't, uh, require me to be anything other...other than what I was. I was in an all-Jewish school, because the Germans, uh, separated us, and in the school itself, uh, they always gave us a feeling that, um, things here are temporary, and something else is coming up and...and you may not be in this school much longer. Basically the feeling was that we were probably not gonna be in Austria that much longer, even though I wasn't sure about that. I think, uh, the classrooms themselves aren't particularly memorable, and my report cards were...were decent. I 'member getting, uh, what amounted to g-, good grades, uh, and my mother kept the, uh, report card from Vienna so I still have it as one of my memories, you know, but the actual everyday activities in the school I don't remember that well. I just remember them telling us when we were segregated that we were all gonna be together and nobody was gonna do us any harm, and we were gonna have a...a...a relatively normal classroom because, uh, the, we realized that, uh, if we were in another kind of classroom it coulda been, uh, the Nazi way and, uh, they were trying to soften it for us, but the actual everyday classes, I..I don't remember that much about.

01:10:54

SP: You know, that brings to mind something. One of the, for better or worse, one of the ongoing indictments, if you will, of the Austrian culture goes back to something you had said about all these years later, a lot of people, their version is that Austria, of course, was an occupied country and we know historically that that's not quite accurate, that the Nazis were truly welcomed with pretty open arms. The reason I'm thinking about this is that others we've talked to for the film have talked about the immediate change that they saw in their own school friends and just chums on the street, pre- and post-Anschluss, and certainly pre- and post-Kristallnacht, where their friends one day the next day were saying, 'You dirty Jew,' and the extent to which children just turned like that on a dime. Now presumably they were under the influence of their parents, of course. I don't know if you've got memories about that, and it's not even so much a question; it's just so startling to think all these years later to think how people one day could be somewhat friendly, somewhat tolerant, and the next day that was it, you were a dirty Jew, you were the enemy,

Paul Beller

page 27

you were someone to be gotten rid of.

01:12:25

I would say my experiences, uh, as far as students were concerned, in that area were...were...were rather limited. I had some Jewish friends. I don't recall having the other group where they, uh, were friendly at one time and then they turned on me. I didn't have that experience, I would say, in that area. The experiences were quite limited.

That's good. Yeah. That's good.

Dave: Actually, the only one that I remember you mentioning is how you would react to other strange, different foods, and from a child's perspective, obviously, that's like will you try new things, you're going to a different land, and so on, but it also kind of makes me wonder if they were asking about do you need to be kosher.

Well....

Dave: Or whether that's something that you thought about at the time, or whether you were really thinking, oh, well, this will be an adventure.

01:13:29

Well, I never really thought about the kosher aspect whatsoever. It never even entered my mind. And my mother, even though she kept a kosher household, I never thought of that as a subject of any interest to me, you know. I just got the food on the table and I ate it and I enjoyed it. I was a good eater. My mother wanted a clean plate, and she got a clean plate, but we never had any discussion about anything like that a-, approaching this trip whatsoever. It never even entered my mind. On the trip, I don't believe we had anything that was particularly, uh, of the bacon and ham variety, I don't think, but I'm sure it wasn't strictly kosher either, because it didn't need to be, so I don't think the kosher issue ever came up.

01:14:09

SP: You know, one of the interesting sort of sidelights to this whole story, in terms of the Krauses in particular, as my wife has told me often, these were the least religious Jews you can imagine. They were extraordinarily secular Jews. They were not religious in the slightest. Their kids went to Quaker schools in Philadelphia, and there's just wonderful irony in those people, and others who were helping them – I mentioned yesterday we had a lovely conversation with the son of the pediatrician who was part of the Brith Shalom mission. He, too, came from this strong Jewish, but grew up in a very Quaker upbringing, and it's just always fascinated me that these very secular, non-observant Jews did nonetheless, as you mentioned, at some risk, go into Nazi Germany to save Jews.

Well, the Amrams also had a Christmas tree and everything else, but, uh, didn't bother me any. I enjoyed whatever they had.

Is there anything I haven't asked that you'd like...?

I think you, I think you've covered the territory pretty well.

We covered a lot of ground.

Yeah, I think so. I was able to throw in a few extra thoughts here and there, and...

Absolutely.

...and a little humor, too, you know.

Absolutely.

Yeah. I think we covered it pretty well, you know.

Good. Okay.

[end of recording]