

Kindertransport Association Oral History Project
Interview with
GERARD FRIEDENFELD
November 13, 1993

KEY:

- [brackets] describe action in the interview
- *Italics* indicates a word in a foreign language, spelled correctly
- {*italics in bracket*} indicates a word in a foreign language that may be incorrect
- {brackets} indicate indecipherable words

[FILE: EL_B_9_GerardFreidenfeld_11_13_93_mp3] (surname misspelled in filename)

Interviewer: —on November 13 at the {unintelligible} Hotel. And can you please tell us your name and where you were born?

Gerard: I'm Gerry Friedenfeld, and I was born in Vienna, September 17, 1924.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Gerard: My father's name was Rudolf Friedenfeld, and my mother was Henriette. My father called her Yetti.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Gerard: No. I was the only child.

Interviewer: What did your parents do for a living?

Gerard: My father was a tinsmith. That means he made spouts for buildings, rain drains, spouts. And he also had a store. He sold kitchenware, kitchen utensils, whatever housewife uses, and toys.

Interviewer: And your mom?

Gerard: My mother was a housewife. She kept a very good house.

Interviewer: Was it a kosher house?

Gerard: My mother wanted to be kosher, but my father wasn't. And that led to all kinds of complications.

Interviewer: For instance?

Gerard: Well, he would come home— I must tell you this, honestly. And in a sense, I'm ashamed of it but it's the truth. He would bring home cold cuts, out of spite, just to spite the situation.

Interviewer: {inaudible}

Gerard: Yes. That led to all kinds of difficulties.

Interviewer: Was your upbringing religious?

Gerard: Yes.

Interviewer: Or in between?

Gerard: Well, my upbringing was religious, yes. As I say, my mother tried to keep a kosher house. And we had separate dishes for milk and for meat, and for Pesach. Yes. She was a very religious woman.

Interviewer: Were you bar-mitzvah?

Gerard: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, here I have a picture what I looked like on my bar-mitzvah. I was bar-mitzvah on (I think it was) August 28, 1937. In fact, ladies, two months ago, on September 3rd, I celebrated the 56th anniversary of my bar-mitzvah. And on this occasion here, I recited the Torah portion, the Haftorah *Ki Tavo*, Isaiah. And two months ago, I chanted it. Our rabbi taught me to chant it.

Interviewer: So did you then go to a Jewish school?

Gerard: No. I went to a secular school, a local school in Czechoslovakia, in our little home town, until Hitler ended it all.

Interviewer: So then did you have many non-Jewish friends?

Gerard: Yes. I wouldn't say many. I had some, yes.

Interviewer: Did any of your non-Jewish friends switch alliances after Hitler came to power?

Gerard: Oh yes. They were Nazis, as a matter of fact. They were boys. I went skating with them and swimming, and their fathers were my father's school friends. And my father thought, "Oh, he's protected, because nobody will harm him. The Germans are his friends." Well, he couldn't have been more wrong. And he was wrong, absolutely. They switched

instantly. When the Germans marched in, they put on their brown uniforms, their SA uniforms. And they put my father in jail. Not only him but all Jews in our home town.

Interviewer: Do you remember specifically when things began to change in your community?

Gerard: Yes. In the middle thirties. In the middle thirties, as I recall, when anti-Semitism began to become real bad. And of course the Nazis were in power in Germany, and it wasn't long before they marched into Austria, in March 1938. And six months later, they marched into what was then known as Sudetenland. It was an area surrounding Bohemia and Moravia. And that's when my father and all the other Jews were arrested. And I still see him vividly, looking at my mother and me through the bars in the county jail. Yes. And a few days later, he and all the other Jews were packed into big trucks and hauled into so-called no-man's-land. You see, there was a portion of Czechoslovakia that was left, the interior part of Czechoslovakia. And the men were dumped on a highway out in nowhere. That's right. That was in late October, 1938. There were no men left in our home town, no Jewish men. And a couple days later, women and children were told we had to be out of our house in 24 hours. So we had to scurry and rent a horse and a cart, and load it with whatever we could, and leave.

Interviewer: To go where?

Gerard: Talk about ethnic cleansing, I know what ethnic cleansing is. Go where? Into no-man's-land, outside town. They {unintelligible} as far as the Germans moved. And on the other side of the highway were the Czechs. And that's where we dumped our belongings. And that's where we lived for three weeks, out under the open sky, in late October and early November.

Interviewer: There were no shelters?

Gerard: Yes. Well, not to begin with. But there was a Jewish community in the town called {unintelligible}. Do you know Hanusz Grosz, Anita's father? He came from that community. And some good Jews brought us huge tarpaulins. You see, in Europe in those days, railway cars were not enclosed with metal like here. They were open and covered with tarpaulins. And they brought us a number of these huge tarpaulins. And we draped them over our furniture, on the highway, and weighted them down with rocks so the wind wouldn't blow them away. And sure enough, I remember vividly, as soon as we had created our (you might call it) tent city, it began to rain. That saved us. And they brought us a kitchen, and we had food.

Interviewer: How old were you at this time?

Gerard: Fourteen.

Interviewer: So your schooling was completely interrupted?

Gerard: Totally. That was it. Yes.

Interviewer: So when you couldn't go to school anymore, what was your daily life like?

Gerard: Well, from that place we were eventually, three weeks later, we were taken to a refugee camp. The same people who brought us the tarpaulins somehow got hold of a huge leather factory, a leather tannery that was idle. Dirty, filthy, we were told. And they had it cleaned up. They tore out all the old machinery and they built bunk beds and a kitchen and wash rooms, and that's where we were taken. And we spent a winter there. And instead of going to school, I learned to become a tailor, because everybody knew we would have to emigrate. So what good would it be to learn Latin or French if I couldn't sew on a button? So we were taught to sew clothes, sew buttons, the simplest work. And that's what I did. for several months, in preparation for emigration.

Interviewer: At this time were you with both of your parents?

Gerard: Yes.

Interviewer: So you were reunited with your father.

Gerard: Yes, that's right. And now I want to show you something. In March– [camera adjustment] This was the last picture showing me and my parents. This was taken in March, shortly after the Nazis moved into Czechoslovakia. And now comes a period that was awful, in a sense, but it led to my salvation. And I'll tell you.

On April 12th, the Nazis moved into our refugee camp. And they selected some of us for what they called *turnen*. *Turnen* in German means to do gymnastics. And what they meant was beating and torture. And one of these torture methods consisted of forcing us to climb up high ladders, I mean 25 feet maybe, and to jump from the ladder onto cobblestones, just for fun. That's the way they amused themselves. And I don't know how many times I climbed up and jumped, and I broke my leg right here, my right leg. And that was the end of gymnastics for me. And a few days later, they allowed me to be taken to a hospital. And here is a picture of that hospital. I don't know if you can see this. This was a Catholic hospital. And we were placed here. Here are the two nuns in the back. I don't know if that shows up. It's tiny. And there are two of us in each bed because the camera couldn't scan the whole width. I am here. That's me, [laugh] right here, above my finger. That's me.

And when I was in the hospital, one day a couple showed up at my bedside. And the lady's name, I don't remember. But the man introduced himself as Drucker, and he said he was an architect. And they asked me if I would like to go to England. And I said, "Well, I cannot make this decision. You would have to ask my parents." So evidently they went to see my parents in the camp, because four weeks later I was on a train to

England. How they found me, how this was arranged, to this day I don't know. I came here hoping I would get some enlightenment about this, but nobody knows.

Interviewer: Your parents didn't talk to you about the train ride?

Gerard: If they did, I don't remember it. Mind you, I was in the hospital until a week before I left.

Interviewer: What exactly do you recall about what you were told about your journey by your parents?

Gerard: Very little. Very little. They just told me I would go to England. And I was so excited about leaving, a week before I left, the doctors removed my cast, because they feared that the Germans would do it on the border and then I would be immobilized; I wouldn't walk because my leg would be stiff. Well, I had to walk with two canes to loosen up my leg, so I could use my muscles. I was taken to the capital of Moravia, to {Brno}, and that's where I met a friend of mine. That's where my parents left me. And the next morning, this young boy and I (we grew up together), his parents placed us on a train, and we went to Prague. And that's the last we saw of our parents. I said this afternoon, in one of the sessions we had, that the excitement of a train ride and of going to England, whatever that meant (I had no conception what that meant), I was so excited, I really didn't miss my parents.

Interviewer: Did you have any idea that you might not see them again?

Gerard: If I did, I don't remember it. I'm sure *they* did. Frankly, I don't think I did. The thought was too horrible to entertain. Yes. And here I was on that train. I couldn't bend my leg. So there was a lady in charge of the transport. As I remember it, there were 136 children from two to 14. I was one of the oldest. And the lady in charge was an American Jewish lady, a Mrs. Eisenberg. She was so lovely. I couldn't sit because my leg was so stiff. So I slept in her compartment on a bench. That's how I spent the night, going through Germany.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you were carrying, if you had anything special from home that you brought with you?

Gerard: Luggage? I cannot remember what I had. I supposed I had one or two suitcases, but I have no recollection of it. All I had was two canes in my hand. And that's how I arrived in London.

Interviewer: What was the date of your departure from Czechoslovakia?

Gerard: May 31st. And we arrived in London on June 2nd.

Interviewer: And the year?

Gerard: '39. We arrived in London at Victoria Station, and we were met by a wonderful lady. And this is she. Her name is Lola Hahn-Warburg. She welcomed us at the station. And here I was hobbling along with my two canes. And she had a man with her. A tall man with a pipe in his mouth. And she introduced me to him. His name was Dr. Harry Roberts. He was the editor of a very prominent weekly magazine called *The New Statesman and Nation*. She introduced me to him and told him what happened to me. He couldn't believe it. She told me what happened to me and she mentioned that I would need medical attention, because I needed a new cast. He said, "I'll take care of this boy." So she handed me over to him. And he took me to his office in the West End, Fleet Street, I believe. That was on a Friday afternoon. The weekend was impending, the long English weekend. And he sent his secretary out to buy me some lunch. And would you believe what I ordered? A ham sandwich. At home I couldn't get a ham sandwich, but there, of all things, I ordered a ham sandwich.

And after that, we went on a train to Sanderstead. That was a very fancy suburb, near Croydon. Croydon was then the only airport in London. We arrived at his home and he introduced me to his family and to a man. This man's name was Jerusalem, "Jerusalem." He was a painter from Vienna whom he met several years earlier, a Jewish painter. And when the Nazis marched into Austria, he rescued him. He got him out, and he lived with them. And Mr. Jerusalem became my interpreter. My English was rather sketchy. He became my interpreter, and the family asked me why I walked with two canes. So I tried to explain to them. They couldn't believe it. They couldn't believe what happened. Why would the Germans do this? Well, why? How to explain it to them?

Anyway, the next day he took me to Croydon Hospital, and a cast was fashioned on my foot, with a stirrup so I could walk. And when we got home, the cast was not set yet, wasn't hard. So this prominent Englishman told me to jump on his back, climb on his back, and he carried me into his house, in front of his neighbors. This was such a lovely family.

Now, the welcome I had from Mrs. Warburg and from Dr. Roberts, everything was so beautiful there, I think I completely forgot my parents. Would you believe? I just blocked it out. And they were just lovely. And a few days later, he took me to Mrs. Warburg. I stayed at her home for more medical treatment, and then she took me to a kibbutz at Great Engeham Farm near Ashford.

Interviewer: Now, when you say kibbutz, was that built on the concept of a kibbutz in Israel?

Gerard: Yes, yes. We were there in order to become *halutzim*, to become trained in preparation of going to Palestine. Only you see, under the terms of the Youth Aliyah, the English wouldn't let us in until we were 16 years old. So we were taken out of Europe to England, sort of to park us in England until we became 16, and then we were supposed to go on to Palestine. Only the war broke out, and all shipping was requisitioned by the armed forces. And here we were stuck in England.

Interviewer: What was your life on this kibbutz like?

Gerard: Well, I didn't do much work because I couldn't, with my leg. But all the others worked. For example, June was hay harvest, and then was grain harvest. Yes. It was a regular farm. It was owned by a man named Lesser, I remember. I still see him and his wife and his daughter riding around, dressed in fancy clothes, on horseback.

Interviewer: And where was this? In what town?

Gerard: Near Ashford, in England, in Kent. Anita's father was there with me, Hanusz Grosz. I haven't seen him for 54 years, until yesterday.

Interviewer: How long did you stay?

Gerard: Well, we stayed there about two months. We lived in old railway cars that were set down in a meadow. That was fine in summer, but when the rains came in October, they leaked. And we had mud all over the place. So we were taken away from there and moved to a place in South Wales called Llandough Castle (L-l-a-n-d-o-u-g-h), near Cardiff, in South Wales. There we worked and stayed until June 1940, because this place was close to an English airfield, and the Nazis bombed the airfield. And I suppose the people were afraid they might hit us. So we were moved to Gwrych Castle, North Wales. Yesterday I saw a picture of Gwrych Castle in a book. Last night. In fact, in a group this afternoon, I mentioned Gwrych Castle, and another man said, "I was there!" Yes. This was a castle. Who knows when it was built? Built into a hillside, on a slope. A monstrosity. Cold! Couldn't heat it. Impossible.

I must tell you a story about Gwrych Castle. There was a staircase, an enormous staircase, wide and huge, maybe four stories high. All marble. Gorgeous. And one day we had a wedding there. One of the functionaries of Youth Aliyah. Arieh Handler was his name. And he married a lovely young woman, {Henye Prilutsky}. And there she came down that staircase. We kids were stationed on either side of the staircase with candles in our hands. No other illumination. Very, very romantic. And here she came— They both came down that staircase, in her long train, white gown, and I fell in love with her, [laugh] with {Henye Prilutsky}. She was just gorgeous. Didn't have much future. [laugh] I still remember that. She was just a beauty.

Interviewer: How many other children were at the castle?

Gerard: Oh, who knows? Hundred, 150? I really don't know. We had cold showers all winter long. No hot water.

Interviewer: At this time, were you writing letters to your parents?

Gerard: No. As a matter of fact, I wrote to my mother via an uncle in Brussels. I would write to him, he would take my letter out of the envelope and put it into another envelope, and send it to my mother. And the same the other way around, back and forth. And this ended abruptly when the Nazis marched into Belgium in May of 1940. And from that time on, as I remember it, I corresponded with my parents via the Red Cross. And each letter consisted of 25 words. And that included the address.

Interviewer: Do you remember what those 25 words were?

Gerard: What can you say? "I am well, Hope you are well," and that's about it. And the last letter I received (as I remember it, again) was early in spring, 1943. And the address my mother put down on the letter was T-3. I imagine it was a building of some kind. That was the location, their address. That was the last sign of life I had from my parents.

Interviewer: Do you remember what that letter said?

Gerard: Just like "We are well and I hope you are well," I suppose. What more can you say?

Interviewer: Did you manage to save any of those letters?

Gerard: No. All gone. Too bad. All gone. That was the last letter. And of course what I didn't know then was— Oh, this was Warsaw, from Warsaw, from the ghetto. And at the same time, there was the Jewish uprising. That was the end.

Interviewer: Did you know what was going on at home at the time?

Gerard: No. We had no idea. I don't know if anybody knew. I suppose some people must have known, because people came out of Europe and reported. The British government knew. Now we know that the British government knew and Roosevelt knew, but no action was taken.

Interviewer: Did any of the children talk about what was happening at home?

Gerard: I don't know if the subject ever came up. I don't know if we ever talked about our parents. They were out of our life.

Interviewer: So you were on this kibbutz, and the intention was to make aliyah eventually.

Gerard: The intention was to make agricultural workers out of us.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to Israel?

Gerard: No. In 1943, I joined the army, the Czech army, and I became a tank driver. And then I went to France after the invasion. We went over to France in August 1944. And from there, on to Czechoslovakia. And I made the enormous mistake of staying in Czechoslovakia. I should have taken out British citizenship, and I could have gone anywhere in the world without any quota.

Interviewer: What was it like for you, returning to Czechoslovakia?

Gerard: Hard. You lived from meal to meal, scrounging for food, at first. And then after about a year or year and a half, it improved.

Interviewer: Do you remember why you chose to return to Czechoslovakia?

Gerard: Well, this was my home, and I had hoped to find somebody. And I did. I found a cousin. There were three cousins in our family on my father's side: Hans Weiss, Hans Friedenfeld, and myself. And I found him. He returned from concentration camp. He survived! Just barely. And I was happy to have somebody here. And then my cousin Hans Weiss, in York, Pennsylvania, made contact with us. And when he heard I was alive, he wrote to me such a lovely letter. He was ten years older than I. And he wrote to me, "Come to America," he said. "Let me be a father to you." So how could I turn down such an invitation?

Interviewer: When you returned to Czechoslovakia, did you already know what had happened to your parents?

Gerard: Yes. I went to my home town and I saw our house in shambles. The whole place was in shambles. There was a bridge about a block away, and the bridge and the houses changed hands between the Germans and the Russians, several times. And then as the Germans retreated, they dynamited the bridge. And when they blew up the bridge, all the houses in the neighborhood sort of jumped up and cracked. What a mess. I went up into my parents' bedroom. Awful mess. The Russians lived in there. There was dirt, filth, and would you believe, a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* lay there.

Interviewer: You were still a fairly young man.

Gerard: Soldier, yes.

Interviewer: How were you able to cope with all this?

Gerard: I ran away. I ran away as fast as I could. I went back to the train station. I ran.

Interviewer: Where did you run to?

Gerard: Back to my unit. Back to my army unit. See, I was given leave, and I was given my army rations, so I had something to eat. And I got on a train. I rode the train all night. And I didn't want to see that house anymore. But the next time I came back, the house was cleaned up and fixed up, and this crack was filled in.

Interviewer: When was that?

Gerard: Oh, maybe six months later, eight months later. And a family moved in. So I told the people they did a wonderful job in maintaining the house. I said, "Live here." And I didn't want any rent from them. I said, "Just keep the house in good shape." Little did I know that two years later, the Communists would take over and I would run away. So the house is still there, but there's no point even in trying to get it back.

Interviewer: You said you got this letter inviting you to come to the United States. What happened then?

Gerard: Well, at first I resisted. I said, "Why should I emigrate?" Well, the urgency came up when the Communists took over. On February 26, 1948, the Communists took over the government. And suddenly this letter became very urgent for me. But first I had to get out of Czechoslovakia to emigrate. So I did.

Interviewer: How did you get out?

Gerard: Well, I met a man. He happened to be the gunner in my tank. I met him on the street in Prague. {Edlanik} was his name. He was from Zagreb, from Yugoslavia. And I told him, "I want to get out." He said, "I have an uncle. He's a border guard. Go and see him. He'll take you out." Well, this was a foolish thing to do, just to trust people blindly. But I did. My Hebrew name is Bezalel. That means "in the shadow of God," that same {year}. And I must have been in the shadow of God, because everything I did worked. Everybody I was referred to and passed on to did exactly as expected. So I took a train to the border and I went to see this man. He was a border guard. And I told him I had a girlfriend in Vienna, but I had to go to the Austrian side to meet her. So he took me across. And I telephone her and she came from Vienna by train. And we spent a day together, in an inn, in a tavern. Well, I told her {Giesa} was her name, Giesa Nussbaum. So I told her. Suddenly she said, "You know, you're already in Austria. Why go back?" So I said, "Well, I've got to straighten out my affairs." All right. So I went back. And I went to see my cousin, and we arranged to meet again the following Friday night. And would you believe, it worked, because this border guard said, "If you want me to help you get across, you have to be here before June 1st," because he was supposed to be replaced by young fanatics with bloodhounds. And I was back. And sure enough, he showed me where to cross, and I did. And an Austrian border guard hid me, and he called my girlfriend. She came from Vienna on a night train, she brought false papers for me, and in the morning, when another train came from Prague to Vienna, we boarded that train and off we went. Everything worked like clockwork.

Interviewer: How did you feel?

Gerard: I was so much in love with her, I didn't even sense any danger. I felt so protected. And yet everything hung by a hair.

Interviewer: So where did this train take you?

Gerard: To Vienna. There were several periods in my life when everything I did worked just beautifully. And here I was in Vienna, inside the Russian zone of occupation. And that's where I was for two years.

Interviewer: What was the date when you arrived in Vienna? Do you remember?

Gerard: Yes. Early June, 1948.

Interviewer: And you were there—

Gerard: Two years. How did I make a living? I'll tell you the truth. Black marketing, selling candy and chocolates, buying and selling. That's how I made a living.

Interviewer: How did you get into the business?

Gerard: Necessity. Giesa's brother was a wholesaler in black marketing. And so he let me in on this, on the side. Those were times—I wish I could reconstruct how we lived.

Interviewer: Was it an enjoyable time for you, living in Vienna?

Gerard: No, no. No, it was not, because Vienna was partly still in shambles from bombardment. And everybody was on edge. Nobody knew what happens next. First of all, you couldn't leave the International Zone. The American Zone and the British Zone, for fear of being kidnapped by the Russians. This was a daily occurrence. People would disappear right off the street. They would be pulled into cars and disappear. Frightening. Just like drive-by shootings today. That's how people disappeared.

Interviewer: Your intention had been to go to America. So did you know you would end up staying in Vienna for that long?

Gerard: No, but I had no choice, because you see, I had to wait for the Displaced Persons Act of 1950 to be enacted by the Congress. And this happened in July 1950. And President Truman signed it into the law. And when that happened, then the gates opened. And hundreds of thousands of people came here.

Interviewer: So when did you leave Vienna?

Gerard: I left Vienna early in December, one day in December, 1950. And I arrived in New York on December 22nd. The train took us from Salzburg to Bremerhaven, Germany, and we came on a troop ship, on a troop transport, the *USS General Blatchford*.

Interviewer: Were you traveling with friends or your girlfriend?

Gerard: No. Well, I married my wife in Vienna. And I flew to Salzburg because I didn't want to travel through the Russian Zone. I was afraid. I flew from Vienna to Munich, and I took a train back to Salzburg, and she came to Salzburg to meet me there. And she saw me off. And I went to America, and she followed a year later.

Interviewer: Why didn't she come with you at the time?

Gerard: Because when we decided to get married, I already had my immigration papers. And had I waited for her, I would have had to relinquish— You see, I was assigned a number, an immigration number. And if I had said, "I don't want to go now," they would have taken away that number and put me at the end of the line. So we decided I would go ahead and see to it that she would get immigration papers.

Interviewer: Now, this is a difficult question, but the last time you had left the people that you loved to go on a long journey, you never saw them again. What was it like for you, leaving your wife to go to America?

Gerard: Very difficult. Very difficult. It was an agonizing decision. But we thought it's the right decision, because I could do more for her from America than if we had both sat in Vienna, waiting. We had to weigh what to do. Yes.

Interviewer: What do you recall about your trip over to America?

Gerard: I was sick for nine days. I mean, sick! It was horrible. We were wedged into— Do you know what steerage means? Okay, that's how we traveled. Three days ago I was at Ellis Island, and I saw a cross-section, a picture of an ocean liner built for the immigration trade, specially built for the immigration trade. And the first-class and second-class passengers were in fine cabins on top of the deck, and 3,000 immigrants were stuffed into steerage, down in the bottom. And they showed a cross-section, what it looked like. Well, when we traveled from Europe to here, we slept in bunks, five high, and I swear to you, my nose was about four inches from the upper bunk. That's how we traveled. In fact, I looked for some kind of a display or a mention of the immigrants who came in, the displaced persons, hundreds of thousands. There was nothing. So I asked one of the park rangers there at Ellis Island, "Why not?" He said, "I don't know." He said, "You're right. There's not a word here. Nothing. No mention." So he gave me the name of a lady, the superintendent of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, to write to her and to suggest that

something be done, to put on a display of that period, because hundreds of thousands of people came here.

Interviewer: Is that where you arrived?

Gerard: No, I arrived at Pier 49 in Manhattan. My cousin's husband drove me past there.

Interviewer: Do you remember the date?

Gerard: Yes. December 22, 1950. I remember it so clearly.

Interviewer: Tell me about your arrival, what you remember about it.

Gerard: Well, first of all, we arrived the night before somewhere near where the Verrazano Bridge is now. And the ship was anchored in that area. And I stood on the railing and I saw the traffic on that parkway, on the Brooklyn side. My lord! Unbelievable, the sight of all the lights of Manhattan, all these skyscrapers. I couldn't believe it. I was so happy because this was the first time in nine days that I wasn't sick, because the ship wasn't tossing around for standing still. And the excitement of being met by my cousin, of arriving in America, astonishing. And the next day, my cousin met me, Lucy. And just traveling uptown from there to (what was it?) 116th Street, where her father lived, where I was going to stay, I was so excited, I don't know how to describe it. She's gone now. She died last year of cancer. Too bad. Yes, I remember that, and seeing all my relatives, because I had no—

Interviewer: This was your first family experience.

Gerard: That was my family here, yes. And I stayed here three, four days, I believe, and then I took a train to York, Pennsylvania, to be with my cousin Hans.

Interviewer: What kind of work did you get? Or did you go back to school?

Gerard: No, he found me a job in a factory as a time keeper. The factory made metal office furniture in York. Cold Steel Company.

Interviewer: How well did you adjust to your new life?

Gerard: How did I? I had no difficulties. First of all, I spoke the language. And secondly, everything I saw was an adventure. That's the way I am. Everything interests me. And I just had a wonderful time. I earned 90 cents an hour. That was my first job. And I lived at the Y in York, Pennsylvania. And would you believe, what little I earned, I set money aside in expectation of Elizabeth's arrival. And she came in October, the following October.

Another thing that's so astonishing: A Congressman helped me to get the immigration papers to her.

Interviewer: How did you arrange that?

Gerard: Through my cousin. That was unheard of. In Europe, this wouldn't happen. [laugh]

Interviewer: So you finally got your wife here and set up a home?

Gerard: Yes. When she arrived, we spent, I think, three days or four days at the St. Moritz. Whatever money I saved, I blew. I still remember, we ordered scrambled eggs and chicken livers, and it was served to us on silver. That was the last few dollars we had. [laugh] St. Moritz on the Park, right on Central Park, with a view of the park. Can you imagine?

Interviewer: She must have been very impressed.

Gerard: She thought I made a million. [laugh] Yes.

Interviewer: Did you have any children?

Gerard: Well, eventually, yes. One day a daughter arrived. I don't know how that happened. [laugh] That was a surprise. [laugh] And three years later, a son.

Interviewer: Another surprise.

Gerard: No, that was no so— The first one was.

Interviewer: So they're grown now?

Gerard: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you told them about all the experiences?

Gerard: Yes, but not in any organized way. Just a little here, a little there. They didn't who much interest yet. Maybe this recording here will tell them the story in some fashion, in an organized way. And then, as I recall other instances, I can record this in writing, and maybe add to it. This is very valuable.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any ways that your past experience has affected your children?

Gerard: My past experiences affected my children? Yes, of course, because— Well, for example, what happened to me in the past (this psychiatrist talked about it today), in a sense, being sent away by my parents, I interpreted this as being neglected, pushed away. And this led to enormous anger on my side. Enormous. And not so many years ago, I was still a very angry man. And our rabbi, Rabbi Brickman, who is also a Jungian analyst, he helped me enormously overcome this anger. I worked with him for four years. He's a very patient man, very insightful man. I'm a different now than I was eight years ago. Very much so. And as a result, I'm much more patient with my children too. I don't criticize them so much.

Interviewer: Do they have children now?

Gerard: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think they will tell their children?

Gerard: Not for a while, because they're too young. How I am ever going to talk to their children, I don't know yet.

Interviewer: Maybe this will help.

Gerard: Maybe so. When they get a little older. Right now they're only six and eight, my daughter's children, and my son's are three and six months, so that's a little early. They'll have to wait a bit. But this will be a wonderful base, yes.

Interviewer: I'm curious. You were just talking about having to go through therapy with the rabbi, and how this helped you. Do you now have a sense of what you've gained and what you lost from your experiences as a child of the Holocaust?

Gerard: I've gained a sense of balance. I've accepted what happened to me. As I said, I'm not so angry. And also, having a lovely woman, a loving woman, helped me enormously. When the opportunity arose to come here, Dorothy said to me, "You must go. It's important for you." There was no doubt about it. And coming here, meeting people from the past, from 54 years ago, it's a thriller. And seeing so many lovely people, sharing so many experiences.

Interviewer: And what about the things that you lost?

Gerard: The things I lost? Well, they're irretrievable. I have to live without them, have to do whatever I can.

Interviewer: What does it mean to you to survive?

Gerard: To go on living. To be kind to others. To be loving.

Interviewer: Since you're making this tape for your children and their children, what do you think are the most important things that should be carried on to future generations?

Gerard: The knowledge of what happened, and the fact—[weeps] and the fact that I managed to go on, in spite of what happened. The fact that I managed to do it! At times, I doubted if I could. And then I summoned new strength from somewhere, and I went on, kept going. It's just marvelous that I managed to come here, to live this long, to be healthy.

Interviewer: Is there anything else? I know you brought some photographs. Are there any that you didn't show, that you would like to show?

Gerard: Well, those were the main ones.

Interviewer: Anything else you'd like to say before we close?

Gerard: Before we close. I'm very grateful to you for doing this. My daughter kept saying to me from time to time, "Dad, why don't you write your story?" Well, this will be it. I have much more to add, I'm sure, as I recall other instances and episodes in my life, which I can fit into this story. But I've never done anything like this. It's wonderful. You know, at times I wasn't even aware that you were filming me. I was so involved.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Gerard: I thank you ladies for doing this for me. If this can be of help in any kind of research, I'll be delighted. If anybody wants to hear any more of what I have to say, let me know. Let me know.

Interviewer: Thank you.

[End of Interview]