

Kindertransport Association Oral History Project
Interview with
WALTER FRIEDMAN
June 6, 1998

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: 98_DC_B_2_WalterFreidman_06_06_98] (note: name spelled wrong in filename)

Interviewer: This is Washington DC, Kindertransport reunion, and it's June 6, 1998, and I'm Melissa Hacker, and I am here with Walter Friedman. Walter, can you tell me when and where you were born?

Walter: I was born December 12, 1922, in Vienna, Austria.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Walter: My father's name was Paul, and my mother's was Else, Else Oppenheim, maiden name Oppenheim.

Interviewer: And what *Bezirk*?

Walter: I was brought up in the {*Dritten*} *Bezirk* in Vienna.

Interviewer: I'm sorry, I didn't hear which—

Walter: {*Dritten*} *Bezirk* in Vienna.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Walter: Yes. I had a sister by the name of Edith, and she was five years older than I was, and she died five years ago, in the United States.

Interviewer: What did your parents do?

Walter: My father was a bank manager of the largest bank in Vienna, and he retired in 1930, when I was seven years old. And he was always home during this period. So I enjoyed having him around.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Walter: He died in '37, three months before the *Anschluss*.

Interviewer: So he retired before? He retired voluntarily?

Walter: Yes, he retired in 1930, about seven years before.

Interviewer: Was it just the four of you living in an apartment?

Walter: Yes. We lived in a large apartment, which I wrote about at least 20 pages, describing it, when I did my own memoirs. I was amazed what detail came back about this particular apartment. I was very much, all my life, into plants, and we had window boxes that I was in charge of, and worked on them when I could to get the weeds out and to make sure they were watered and all that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Did you have servants?

Walter: Yes. Before my father retired, we had— I was brought up by a nursemaid, really, until I went to school. And we had a cook, and we had a maid. And then when he retired, we cut back and just had one maid. And I continued to have some governesses, but only on a part-time basis. They were trying to teach me French, and going with me to the *Eislaufverein* (skating rink). And so I was a spoiled child. [laugh]

Interviewer: Where did you go to school?

Walter: I went to the *Akademischen Gymnasium Beethovenplatz*, in the first district.

Interviewer: Was this a Jewish school?

Walter: No, no. It was one of the elite schools in Vienna. It taught classical subjects, Greek and Latin. I took the modern option. I had Latin for five years and one year of English. I was a very good student with private tutors, and I was also not so good in English, so my mother, who spoke four languages, helped me out. She was my tutor in English. She was brought up with foreign governesses, and they were very disciplined. They were not allowed to speak German at dinner and places when she was around. So that's why she knew these languages.

Interviewer: Did you know you were Jewish, as a child?

Walter: Not really. We had a Christmas tree, and the nursemaid taught me the *Pater Noster* prayer. (She was Catholic.) And when I went to the first grade in elementary school, in Vienna you had to declare yourself by a certain religion, and had to have religious

instructions. In my school there were very few Jews, so it was done at one of the families' homes. And that's when I got very interested in the Jewish religion, and I started to enforce certain rules at home, like going around with a candle for burning any crumbs before Pesach, and we had started with Hanukkah candles. Whatever I was taught, I was implementing; I tried to implement.

Interviewer: How did your parents feel about that?

Walter: Well, my father was a highly assimilated Jew. He was about three times or four times in synagogue in his whole life. But he was very proud to be a Jew. His forefathers were {unintelligible} came to this suburb of Vienna. There was a *Toleranz* letter which stated that 100 families in Vienna did not have to wear a Jewish star, and the Friedmans were one of those 100. My father mentioned it quite frequently. He also was an officer in the army in the First World War, of which he also talked quite a bit.

He was proud to be Jewish, and he predicted before he died— He was in partial paralysis through a stroke for about six months, at which time he kept saying, “Hard times will be coming for the Jews, but nothing will happen to you,” which of course he was wrong. But he was very astute in that when he retired, he set up two Swiss bank accounts with mostly American stocks and bonds, which the Germans immediately wanted. They took my sister as a hostage to the Gestapo and forced the family to give the numbers of the accounts, and they then cashed them into marks. They got a very large account which we could not use except 10,000 marks a month for living.

Now, my mother, on the other hand, came from a long line of rabbis. She's an Oppenheim. The family moved in the 16th century from Padua, Italy, to Oppenheim, which is a little town in a province of Hesse in Germany. And then later they moved to Frankfurt at the time of the Rothschilds. All the Oppenheims, by the way, are related: Oppenheimer and Oppenheimer. So they're all related. They all had roots in that little town. And one branch of the family became Court Jews, like Samuel Oppenheim. He financed Prince Eugene in Austria to fight the Turks. Another one was Jud Süß Oppenheim. None of them died rich. They were rich, and then they took it all away from them, which was the custom at that time. The other part of the family continued to be rabbis. And in the latter part of the 18th century, David Oppenheim was Chief Rabbi of Prague, where at that time the center of Judaism was. And his is the only marked grave in the cemetery of the {alter} synagogue. I showed that to my granddaughters when we visited Prague and Budapest and Vienna.

My grandfather was the first non-rabbi. And he went into trades and ended up a manufacturer of furniture for the whole Austro-Hungarian empire, became very well-to-do. But he kept a Jewish house. He had the upbringing from a rabbi. I don't remember whether he was kosher or not. My mother, who married a totally assimilated man, went to the high holidays, and she would not do anything on a Friday night, but other than that, she was really not religious either. When I started— [noise]

When I started in school, late on in the *Gymnasium*, I went to Saturday morning children's services, and I studied for bar-mitzvah. I had the Chief Rabbi of Vienna at my bar-mitzvah. And one of the disturbing elements was that my father would not even go even out to bimah at the time that I had a bar-mitzvah. And afterwards I learned that he had told the {assistant aunt} who taught me, not to teach me the laying of the tefillin, which my father thought I would practice like I followed every rule that I learned. And what's further interesting is that he died, as I said, three months before the *Anschluss*, and I said Kaddish for him for a whole year, some of it under the Nazis, twice a day. And I found little shuls around that I never knew existed. And I went in the morning and I went at night. If my father had known that, he would have turned in his grave, that I would do that.

Interviewer: Jumping forward and jumping back: You said that your sister was held hostage. Can you tell me exactly when and how?

Walter: Well, I wasn't—

Interviewer: Were you already gone then?

Walter: No, no, no. I was 15 years old. And I only know it from my uncle, who was the executor of my father's estate and for my mother. What we suspect happened was that they knew somehow that my father had these accounts, whether the Swiss informed them or whether it was in his will or whatever. I doubt that it was in his will. He was too sharp for that. In any case, the Gestapo had knowledge of the banks in which these accounts were held, but they didn't have the number. So two days after the *Anschluss*, they came to our house and took my sister away. And she called or somebody called and said, "If she's not giving the number, she will be put in a concentration camp." So that was enough of a reason to give them, and my uncle gave them the numbers.

I filed class action suits, and also through New York has established a commission for getting back properties that were stolen or transferred in some way. And through this commission, I understand there's only one other person who was actually taken hostage to turn over information about certain assets. This was the Rothschilds, who had a coal mine in Germany, and they wanted the stocks that they {hold}. But they already had transferred it to London. So that's what I heard. But I can't really tell you.

Interviewer: You were still living with your mother and sister at the time, but you were out of the house when they took her?

Walter: No, I was there. Yes. Just two men in black suits came and just took her away. That's all.

Interviewer: How many days later did they bring her back?

Walter: It was about three or four days, she came back. And then we had all these nice Deutsche marks, and they couldn't really use it because it was in a *{Sparkonto}* or closed account; used only enough of what we needed for living, basically.

Interviewer: Do you remember the *Anschluss*?

Walter: Oh yes. I was an active Boy Scout. And before the actual *Anschluss*, the *Hitler Jugend* had demonstrations, and we had counter-demonstrations. The Boy Scouts in Vienna, we went out with flags and things like that.

Interviewer: If people watching this don't know, can you explain the Boy Scouts?

Walter: Well, the Boy Scouts is an international organization consisting of different levels: the young people, and then they have the teenagers basically, so-called regular Boy Scouts, and then they have older Boy Scouts. And it was started by an Englishman by the name of Baden-Powell. And it tried to generate people with moral standings and good will to others, and taught a lot of other practical things, like how to knot rope, and how to light a fire, and things like that.

Interviewer: In Vienna, was it an all-Jewish Boy Scout group?

Walter: There were some groups which were all Jewish. I happened to end up in an all-Jewish group because the *Dritte Bezirk* had 20,000 Jews. And by the way, there's a museum now for the Jews of *Dritte Bezirk*, whether you know this, and they try to document all these people. So I happened to be in a Jewish, but there are others that were Gentile. In England I joined a group which was strictly Gentile, which was run by Bobby, a policeman, who was the master scout. And we'd go on hikes and we would have a summer camp, which we built ourselves. It was very primitive. And then every other year or something was a jubilee in a country that people joined. I didn't go to one, but I went to camp once.

Interviewer: And you would have counter-demonstrations?

Walter: Yes, we had counter-demonstrations, quite a few of us, which of course didn't help at all. Yes, I remember. I haven't really written about that yet, so not all the details have come back. I've gotten the voice dictation software, and I find I have a lot of difficulties with that. I'm a very dictator; I've dictated complex reports and all that. But somehow you have to separate each word on that version that IBM came out with in 1996. They now have a newer version where you can just continuously talk, which of course is a great advantage. So I don't know whether I'll get the new one. The old one was over \$500, which is a lot for software. I bought it really for my wife because she has no hands. She's disabled, paralyzed. So anyhow, what was your question?

Interviewer: Your memories of the *Anschluss*.

Walter: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Had your mother started talking about leaving Vienna?

Walter: Well, if my father had lived (this is something that goes on in my mind), would he have crossed the border a couple days later, leave all his other assets in Vienna? Would he have stayed and said, "Nothing will happen to me because I was an officer," and so forth? I couldn't really answer it. He is not alive.

But my mother, at the time my father died, was 42 years old. She never handled any of the business and estate affairs. It was overwhelming for her, both the *Anschluss* and being a young widow without a husband. So she didn't even think about leaving at first. I mean, that came a couple months later, when everybody began to realize, with the imprisoning of men in concentration camps, and the scrubbing of sidewalks and things, a lot of the abuses, the taking over of businesses and all the things that were almost immediately introduced. The discrimination laws, which took a few years in Germany to be implemented, in Austria they were overnight implemented. And they were implemented with great enthusiasm of the population themselves. So she obviously realized, like everybody else, that something has to be done to get us out. But at that time, right after, she was not ready. And neither were her advisors. My grandmother, for example, was alive, and she didn't. I remember we were going to a temple on the Friday before the actual official *Anschluss*, when the vote came in by the Austrian population. And in a way, I said we should leave, we should get out. But my mother said, "No. How can you?" You know. So we stayed. That's how it went.

And I might as well jump ahead, if I may. I came on the Kindertransport through the compliments of Adolf Eichmann. What actually happened is, when he was in charge of Jewish affairs in Austria, he was transferred from Berlin. And he needed a place to live. He and actually three of his deputies needed a place to live. So they sent out a scout to find a good location and a luxury apartment building where they could be living. And the scout recommended an apartment building that was owned by my family, including myself had inherited a part of it. So they evicted the four Jewish families that lived there, they moved them into our large apartment, and then they dealt with my uncle as the executor of the estate, and they were very fussy about what they wanted. We had to take the toilets out; they wouldn't sit on a toilet of a Jew. Little harassments, and some quite expensive. And of course we, as the owners, had to pay.

So my uncle was in his office quite frequently, and he was there on, I guess, a day or two after the Kindertransport had been finalized. Eichmann had been very involved, and he was the officer or actually member of the Cabinet who arranged this with a Danish banker's wife, a Gentile. {A Dutch}, I should say. I forget her name.

Interviewer: Is it {Lilly Weissmuller}?

Walter: Yes, I believe that's her name, right. And so a day or two later, when my uncle was there, he asked him, "Do you have any children?" And my uncle said, "Yes, I have three daughters." He said, "How old are they?" He said, "One is 14, the other one is 17, and the third one is 22." He told him there's a transport going in a few days, and the two younger daughters could go. The older one couldn't. And then my uncle said, "I have a nephew." He said I was 15. Could I also go? He said yes. And that's how I ended up on a list of the first transport from Vienna on December 11th. And I guess that may have been one of his only good deeds that he did in all his life. He was actually not a bad tenant. He paid rent. He set the rent, and then paid it religiously. And like all the Germans, they're always accurate in terms of everything had to be documented and so on. But I never saw him. I left. This conversation probably took place in early December, and I left on the transport on the 11th of December.

Interviewer: And your sister?

Walter: My sister, no. She was too old. My sister came about three or four months later. I helped her to get out. During the early parts of the period in London, I lived in a number of places. And the last place I was before I went to work was an old estate which was converted to barracks in World War I. And every weekend, some families came from the neighborhood, like Colchis and Ipswich, and were taking out the boys and girls, just to spend the time with them. And very early, there was a request whether anybody was a Boy Scout. You know, it's an international organization. So I met a wonderful British family who helped my sister to get a job as a companion, which was an allowed profession that she could work {unintelligible} over 21. By the way, I was in touch with this family for many, many years, and finally we lost track. And one of a number of trips that I made to England, I searched her out. I knew they had a hardware business, and I knew they were in Colchis, so it was very quick. Didn't take too many phone calls. And we got together, and they were very happy to see me. And the widow (she was a widow at that time) came to visit us in Florida, in our second home. So we re-established the contact. But that's how my sister got out.

Then it was in a zone when the war started. This area was in a zone that was expected to be invaded as one of the first areas. So all so-called alien elements, alien refugees or alien foreigners—it's not the word.

Interviewer: Enemy alien?

Walter: Enemy alien. (See what happens to you when you get old? [laugh] You've heard this story before, right?)

Interviewer: No, tell me your story.

Walter: I know. Anyhow, she couldn't stay there anymore, and she went to London and she got another job and so on. So eventually we lived together, and we got a very nice apartment

in Cricklewood. And then my mother was stuck in Vienna because she had to pay the {*Reichsfölksteuer*}, which was a very high tax that you left. You had to have a certain income; above that, you had to pay the tax. And for that, in order to have that liquid, she had to sell properties and so on, which took a while. Of course they were bargain prices, because people knew that you had to sell. The same applies to businesses. We didn't have a business. But in the case of businesses, the second level of management knew exactly, you had to get out or you [were already] in a concentration camp or something. So they got these businesses for a bargain. And all this took time because it was done in a legal manner.

So my mother eventually got an affidavit to come to the United States, but she got on a waiting list for the Austrian quota, and she went to {Portugal}, where she stayed, I think, a few months. She went to {Portugal} in 1940, already during the war, and then crossed over when she became eligible, crossed over the Atlantic to come to New York. Then she applied as a mother for affidavits for my sister and myself, which came through in '43, in May '43. Actually maybe a little before. We arrived in May of '43. We left, I think, three or four weeks before, in a large convoy.

Interviewer: I was going to say, how did you travel from England to the US in '43?

Walter: In a luxury liner, but it was part of a 140-ship convoy. And it was very slow, because the speed of that liner had to be the same speed as the slowest boat for general merchandise.

Interviewer: Who were the other passengers on the boat?

Walter: They were a lot of refugees, German, Austrian. It was a mixture of everything. And I met a girl on the ship who was from Czechoslovakia, and she got into Vasser, which at that time was really quite an honor. It's a girls' school. And I visited her when I—I went into the Navy myself, after I got over. I was drafted. We arrived in New York in May of 1943, and in September I was drafted. And they put me into the Seabees of the Navy, which was a construction battalion of the US Navy. I wanted to go into intelligence, but I guess they needed a body in the Seabees. And nobody heard of a Jewish refugee joining the Navy. That was unheard of. Anyhow, I was unhappy because I realized after I was in the Navy that this was the deluxe outfit in all the defense services.

Interviewer: How so?

Walter: Well, we had a lot of good things. I eventually ended up on a little island off the northern end of New Guinea, and one of the first things they did was build a tennis court. And since I was a tennis player from way back—I started when I was 10½ years old (my parents put me in a club), so I was always playing tennis, wherever I was. And so that was really, for me— They also had an ice cream making machine. Things like that. The officers stole everything from a place in— They called it “organized it” in Australia, where the ship that I went on to go to that place where we built the major Navy base.

Also people were better equipped and so on, a lot of things that were— We saw the Army people come and eat our ice cream. [laugh] So we came to New York.

I'd like to back off a little bit, if I may. I had a few months of training as an apprentice in an automobile repair garage in Vienna. I got that job through the chauffeur, a friend of my father's. And they were anti-Nazi so they hired me at very low pay. I didn't really learn very much, but I was exposed to repair. I mostly brought lunch for the mechanics, and went off for parts, and washed the cars. Very rarely did I get a wrench in my hands. But it was a job and I was exposed.

So when I was in England, the first job I had, they found a trainee job (they called it) with a large lorry or truck repair garage on the west side of London. They got me the job and they put me into an orphanage to live. By the way, the orphanage was a terrible place. They had mouse and rat traps under the beds. It was a miserable place. I had nothing in common with the boys. We had a common area in the basement. They would lock us there, and so on. One morning I opened the locker and took out— My mother had bought me a beautiful pigskin toilet case. I looked at it. There was a hole bitten inside. The rat liked the black bristles around the outside of my hairbrush and ate it all off. So that was my trigger point to try and get out of there.

And I called my aunt, who had arrived in England a few months before, and said, "Could you help me find another place?" So she advertised in the *London Times* and we got several responses. One of them sounded very good, and she looked at it and said it's fine, so I transferred there. As it turned out, she didn't have any room. So she made arrangements with the next-door neighbor who also had a boarding house but didn't serve food. So I joined a French boy who was over from France to learn English, and with his limited English and my limited French, we giggled all the time at lunch and at dinner. And the landlady thought we giggled about her lousy food. So she threw both of us out. And the man next-door, however, said, "You can stay," and then it was near the outbreak of the war, and he went back to France, and I stayed by myself. I paid five shillings or something for the room. Well, my aunt said, "That's no good for a 16-year-old boy. You can't be by yourself without food." So she shopped around and found the owner of the best restaurant in Vienna. *Drei Husaren* was the name. He had bought or leased some way a townhouse, which he had one room upstairs that was unused, and he rented it out. So I came from terrible food to wonderful Viennese pastries and everything else that he served.

So as soon as I was settled, I enrolled at the {unintelligible} Polytechnic in an engineering course, which was my interest. And I joined the Boy Scouts, as I said, where I got to know the lower middle-class boys, mostly interested in girls and all that, which is true everywhere.

Interviewer: And you were not yourself interested in girls?

Walter: At that time, as a Boy Scout, you were brought up, you know, not yet. You were too young for that. So I stayed on that job until I was interned. And I tried to get the scoutmaster to keep me out, but no way. So I went to a series of internment camps and ended up on the Isle of Man. And the Isle of Man was really in many ways luxury. They took over a lot of the bed and breakfasts and hotels, and they would put barbed wire around the whole island, basically. And one of the features, as far as I was concerned, was they had beautiful tennis courts. In fact, they were lawn courts. So we started immediately a group to play tennis, and then the English officers set up a tournament, and I played in the tournament. I got into the semifinals when my release came through. And I didn't want to leave. [laugh] Believe me.

Well, how that happened is, my sister, who was already then in London, went to see this landlord that I had for maybe four weeks altogether. And at that time the law was, if you lived with an English family and were under 17 (which by that time I was under 17; I was 16, close to 17), you can get out of the internment. And this kind man made out an affidavit, stated that I lived with him, and therefore I got out. But I had to go back to the place where I left before I went to the other place. So they gave me a single room on a top floor, and I think it was the second night I was back, I watched the bombing of the city, which was the first bombing attack of London. It was a fascinating sight, seeing wave after wave of bombs. We were on a hill, plus my position on the top floor was obviously a very desirable location to see it.

So then the Bloomsbury house, which was the committee that oversaw the children, they found out where I was, and I was alone, and said, "No way. You got to go to a hostel," where you're forced to go to a shelter and all that sort of thing. So they found a hostel (it had actually just started) for children, which had three boys and three girls. That's all there was. A very small place. And the landlady was an alcoholic. She took us to the pub very often, and cared less whether we went to shelter or not. They had these concrete shelters in the middle of the road. And again, we weren't really that scared of it. If the sound came very close, we went out. The entrance to these shelters was maybe 50 yards away. So we didn't go very often. And as I say, the landlady cared less. And one day two policemen came and arrested two of the girls. So we found out that they had been prostitutes—Germans, German Jewish girls, prostitutes. And they were caught stealing something of whoever their johns were. And when that leaked out to the committee, that hostel was closed down, of course. Nobody knew that. They were out all night. The landlady didn't know where they worked, in subway stations or in a shelter or something. So they were out all night and slept all day. So that ended that hostel. Then I was transferred to another one, which was very nice. I forget the name.

In the meantime, when I got back from internment, I had to find another job. They would not get me the job back at {Shell Max}. So I don't know who found it for me, but two of us from the hostel were given again an apprentice job, a trainee job, with a taxi garage off Edgeware Road. And it was not too far, so we could use our bikes to go there. We had to start early, about 5:30 in the morning, to get the cabs ready to go out by 6:30. So this was when the Blitz already had started. And we went there on our bikes. You never knew what you found on the way. There were small craters and things, emergency vehicles out.

At 5:30 it was already past the time that the German airplanes came over, so there were no further bombings. So we got there, and there was always a woman there. Apparently, we found out later that one of the mechanics slept with her in a taxi. And so they kept teasing us with our lousy accents that we had, both of them. So we were sitting in the small office for at least 20 minutes or a half hour. So I said to the fellow that worked with me and says, "Why don't we drive the taxi, learn to drive?" Because we were doing it in the garage to move the taxis around, to take them for washing and whatever. So we did it. And that's how I learned to drive. And we spent only about 20 minutes. We confused a lot of people that were looking for cabs. We didn't stop. [laugh] And then the other fellow, we exchanged, so he learned to drive too. Now, you may have seen the article "How I Learned to Drive in London without a License." It was a little article I had in the *Kinderlink* a couple years ago.

So anyhow, that job, while this was going on, I continued to go to night school, and I got an {ordinary} certificate in mechanical engineering, and I had another year into the so-called higher certificate of mechanical engineering, which was not the same as like your bachelor's degree, but if you had five years experience in addition to that certificate, you would get something behind your name. I forget what it was.

Interviewer: Just because we have a time issue, let me jump quickly ahead. After the Navy, what did you do?

Walter: Well, I got on the GI Bill of Rights. Actually, one very hot day, I was on an island about one degree off the equator. And I played tennis in the middle of the day, and we had a bucket of ice (I played singles), and the next day I came down with a high fever. I went to the small hospital, and maybe I shouldn't go into detail, but I got a medical discharge, which got me more money on my Bill of Rights. And on that discharge, you were allowed to select any place you wanted to go to. And I had previously been enrolled at the University of Oregon, where I had taken a correspondence course on American history. I presented that to my mother and sister, and they thought it was not such a good idea, it's too far, "We won't see you at all," and so on and so forth. So I said, "All right. I don't like New York, but let me start in the Midwest. And if I don't see anything there, I'll continue out to the west coast." And I took a trip, and as it happens, I had dental work prior to going on this trip, and the dentist had a niece at the University of Wisconsin, which was one of the places I was going to visit. And they really convinced me that that's the school for me. I then stayed, and I graduated in two and a half years with a BS (a science degree) in mechanical engineering.

You haven't read the *Kinderlink* for— Maybe you don't even read it now. But I also had an article in the *Kinderlink* on how I graduated without having a high school degree, because I never finished school in Vienna. So I started there, I started with advanced standing, and the advisor said, "I've got to get approval from the Department of Education whether your schooling in London had the way of giving you advanced standing in the United States." But I started, and they let me start, and I ended up with all A's, in all the subjects that I had. And about two or three years later came a report from

the Department of Education in Washington that I could not have advanced standing. My advisor was on vacation at the time. I'd already looked at some other schools, and the first one that came to mind was University of Minnesota. And I applied there, went there, and my advisor came back, and he said, "Any foreigner who can get A's in the first semester in advanced standing isn't going to leave the University of Wisconsin."

Interviewer: Hold on just a sec.

Walter: I finished with honors and got into the honorary fraternity and all that. And I was going to use up the GI Bill of Rights or the disability. And I had made up my mind what area I wanted to specialize in, so I shopped around in different {schools}. Because I had high grades, I could get in any school. And this was before the veterans really all came back. So one of the schools was Columbia in New York, and I decided to enroll there, which in many ways was a mistake, because I think it was a lousy school as far as I'm concerned. They might have the reputation, I don't know, but that's my opinion. The professors all did consulting on the outside. They were more interested in that than the students. But the mistake was also, there was mostly night school and Saturdays, which in turn helped me a little bit because I could make some money on the outside. And also I met my wife there (of 49 years, almost 49½; we have our 50th next January). So it wasn't really a mistake. [laugh]

Interviewer: Is she American?

Walter: No, she's Viennese. She has a separate long, interesting background. She's an American born in Vienna as an adopted child who didn't know that she was adopted, nor did she know that she was an American, [laugh] which is unusual for any of the refugees. But anyhow.

So after graduation, I was offered a job with GE, which I rejected. I took a temporary job, and then another temporary job which lasted for two years, and then a few jobs after that, one in Chicago, one in New Jersey. About six years after I graduated— I always wanted to go into consulting. So after six years, I decided I was ready to be a consultant. And I was a consultant in a logistics field. As a Seabee, I saw the importance of providing the supplies and of managing the stocks and all those things, and the handling. So I got two consulting jobs in a period of 13 years. And then I felt I was ready to start my own business, which I did. I had the firm name of Walter Frederick Friedman Co., Inc., and we were on Madison Avenue, New York, and then later we moved close to where we lived in New Jersey. Then we had a wonderful staff who was great. I enjoyed it. It was very high pressure work: a breakfast in San Francisco and a lunch in Chicago and a meeting in New York. You know, you were constantly flying and having major reports. We had most largely companies. Not all. {We had} New York City for four and a half years as a major job, and we were consultants of GM. So it was a real pressure job. But I had developed a reputation. I did a lot of writing, lecturing, and taught, all those things that require you to— Well, people think you're an expert. You really aren't, but it's what they perceive is what really counts.

But I wanted to retire early. I didn't want to burn out and die on the job. So I looked for a successor for the firm, and a few of my employees wanted to buy the company but they didn't have the reputation nor did they have the skill to sell, which you have to do in management consulting. You're working with a yellow pad, no structure like a lawyer or accountant has, or a doctor even. So I was advised to liquidate. And I prepared for liquidation. I moved the office into my house, and I lost a few people but anyhow. Then I was asked to give a lecture in Dallas by a trade association, a meeting, large meeting. And at that time, one of our friendly competitors from Montreal, who did a lot of work in the States, approached me whether I wanted to sell the company. So it was a happy event, because in the personal services business, you don't get any money when you sell it. That's true with accountants and lawyers and so forth. You get maybe inventory of your office or something. So I had an arrangement of phasing out over three years. And after the second year, my wife had a serious car accident. And that pretty much ended my career. I still had a few clients while she was in the hospital, but that sort of finished me working.

We had gone, while I was still working, to Vermont, bought a house there. Both of my daughters are married there, my grandchildren are there, and we kept our Shangri-la in Florida. We transferred twice a year, which was quite a job with my wife. Then about three years ago, we made the decision that it was too hard on me to do that, even though we have 24-hour help all the time, but still. So we decided to stay permanently in Florida, and that staying in Vermont or any other place was just not possible with my wife's condition. So three summers ago, we decided to stay.

And then my wife became anxious about: supposing something happens to me, she can't take care of me, and it would be very difficult in the beautiful apartment we had bought to get the emergency help and so on. So we went into a life care facility where all the services are provided, as a skilled nursing home is part of the complex. And about three months after I moved in, I had a triple bypass and a valve replacement, and I ended up with renal failure. So it was the right decision for us to move there, because I spent some time in the nursing center. She could drive in her wheelchair over and we could be together, as long as we weren't in the hospital. So that's where we are now, and making the best of it.

Interviewer: And you're very involved with the KTA?

Walter: Well, after one year I took over the role of the person that started it, who wanted really to find people of similar backgrounds for social things. And I took it over. We had a reporter write up my story in a Jewish journal, and that brought us— The first couple meetings, we were five, six people. The second or the third meeting, we were 44. A lot of people read that article and said they never heard of anything about the KTA, and they came to that lunch. And we've had pretty much success with these luncheons, once a year. We tried twice a year, but it didn't work out. We tried to go into like a Jewish community center. They didn't like that either. So we had lunch in a good place, which ended up to be expensive, and people would say, "Well," but they'd come. They enjoyed

it. We tried to present things. I put together a collage of Viennese {*Schlage*}, Viennese {records}, and they didn't even listen to it. It's very hard to get them to stop talking. And I met people that I never knew existed, actually not in the same hostels or anywhere, but same background. And that made you feel very comfortable.

So I was very lucky that after trying to convince Anita Hoffer to take over, that she did take it over. We had a small committee and she was on the committee, and she did work pretty hard on it. So she finally decided to take it over. And it was just in time, because then I got ill and now I'm not really— I do the mailing list.

Interviewer: Just for clarity, this is the group in Florida?

Walter: Yes. That's the group in Florida, yes. I do the mailing lists. I'm computer literate, not in everything, but enough to update the mailing lists and add new names and delete, and present it alphabetically or by zip code, you know, whatever.

Interviewer: Before we stop, is there anything else you'd like to add?

Walter: I could go on forever.

Interviewer: I wish you could! I wish we had the time to do that.

Walter: Well, anyhow, I'm working on my memoir, though I have stopped lately. As I mentioned, I bought this voice dictation and I'm just not good enough at it. I hate to write or type anything. I'm used to dictation from business. So anyhow.

Interviewer: Well, I hope that you finish your memoirs and that you donate a copy to the {KTA}.

Walter: I certainly will.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, Walter.

Walter: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]