

Kindertransport Association Oral History Project
Interview with
GEORGE KRONENBERG
June 7, 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_A_9_GeorgeKronenberg_6_7_98]

Interviewer: We're here in Washington, DC. I'm Sharon Rubenstein and I'm interviewing George Kronenberg on June 7th, 1998 for the Kindertransport Association. How would you spell your name?

George: Name is spelled Kronenberg. First name is George.

Interviewer: Where and when were you born?

George: In 1928, July 24th.

Interviewer: And where were you born?

George: I was born in Warburg. That's spelled Warburg. It's in Westphalia, Germany. It's a small town. Most people ask me where's Warburg? And the answer I give after that is Kassel, which seems to be the larger city near Warburg. Warburg is a very small town.

Interviewer: About how many people were there?

George: I think it was a population maybe like 15,000. Something like that.

Interviewer: Was it rural?

George: Yes. Yes, very much so.

Interviewer: Were you one of several children?

George: I have a twin sister. I have a twin sister. She lives in New York. We left Germany together in December of 1938. I think we were probably the second transport. I think the first one was December 2nd, and I left December 8th. I left for Hamburg, to get to the boat.

Well, we actually went to through Holland, the Hague of Holland. The boat left from there to Harwich, England.

Interviewer: I'm going to take you back up to that day in a little while. That must've meant you were 10 years old.

George: I was 9 years old. I was 9.

Interviewer: I see. Let's go back to the earlier years. It was a rural community you said. How old were your parents when you were born?

George: Ah, how old were my parents? I think my mother was 28, something like that. My father was probably around 31, I'm not exactly sure.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

George: My mother's name was Minna and my father's name was Ludwig. And like I said, there were just the two children.

Interviewer: What was your mother's maiden name?

George: {Loewenstern} {Loewenstern} She was one of three, actually one of four children, three girls and a boy. I happen to be named after the boy. His name was George. He died of natural causes when he was very young. He had a condition of hemophilia, which I also have, which is hereditary. It's something that is passed on by the female. But when he passed away, I guess they decided when I was born to be named after him.

Interviewer: Was your mother the oldest in the family?

George: My mother was the youngest. Well, actually not. My uncle was the youngest. My mother was the second. And then there were two other sisters. One of the aunts, the oldest one actually, lived in Hanover, Germany and she survived throughout the War. She was not a Holocaust victim. She married someone who was not Jewish, although my family—her family—was a very religious Jewish family, but for some reason, which I don't know, she married someone who was not Jewish. I never knew him. He died I guess either before I was born or after, I'm not quite sure, but I never knew him. And this aunt, like I said, lived throughout the War. She was not interned in any camp or {indecipherable word} 0:04:57.6. As a matter of fact, my sister went to see her from the United States; she traveled to Germany to see her. Somehow I never got the opportunity to do that. She also passed away of natural causes.

Interviewer: And then your mother was one of three surviving children? Was your family of long standing in your community?

George: As far as I know, yes. I guess the family was there quite a long time. I'm not sure of the year it was, but it was a well-established family in the area, but unfortunately, like I said, most of my family except this aunt were killed in the Holocaust.

Interviewer: And how about your father's family?

George: My father was— Let's see, there was a sister and— actually two, two sisters. There were three children in that family. The sisters, they died of natural causes. Let's see— One of the aunts went to Spain. I have two cousins from that family, one of them happens to be living in Cleveland, where I come from, and the other one actually also came to the United States, the brother of this one, and he was one that joined the American Army when he came to this country and became an officer in the American Army and after a few years, he went back to Germany and stayed there. He recently passed away. But we never heard from him, after that.

Interviewer: After?

George: After he left the United States and went back to Germany on a permanent basis. He married somebody that was not Jewish and he went back to Germany. Like I said, he stayed there.

Interviewer: And you mentioned that your family was relatively religious, or at least your mother's family?

George: My mother's side was very religious. My grandfather was a cantor and they were very religious. My father's side was so-so.

Interviewer: I see. Was there a family business on your father's side?

George: My father was a salesman for a textile company. I don't know the name of that. My grandparents, whom I only knew my grandmother on my father's side, they also come from a very small village not far from where I come from and they had a business. I'm not totally sure what they sold, but they had a store. They owned their own home, it was a very large home, and they had a business and I think they sold almost anything. Like a—

Interviewer: Like a general store?

George: Like a general store, yes. And one of—

The sister of my father who was instrumental in bringing me to the United States from England, she was a pediatrician in Germany. And she married someone who happened to be affluent. He had his own bank in Hamburg. They had no children. So they left Germany I believe it was in 1938. I'm not sure what part of the year they left, but they

left in 1938 and they went to Switzerland with the idea eventually of bringing whatever family they could out of Germany, including my parents and one of the grandmothers, but unfortunately that didn't happen. Although they left— They lived in Switzerland about six months and my aunt got tired of living out of a suitcase and decided—originally they wanted to go to Israel, but that didn't happen—so they decided to come to the United States. They happened to have some very good friends in Cleveland, Ohio and since it was wintertime and my aunt got sick and tired of traveling, when she saw Cleveland she decided that was where she was going to make her home.

So when I was in England, we did correspond and eventually they asked us if we would care to come to the United States, my sister and I, and we said yes. So in 1946, we came to Cleveland.

Interviewer: You wanted to go back again. Did it feel like a close family when you were growing up?

George: Well, like I said, I was very young and, yes. My parent's and my sister and I were a very close family. And my grandmother. We were extremely close. I had one aunt, another aunt, that I was very close with and as a matter of fact, I used to go on vacation there quite a lot. So yes, it was a close-knit family. My mother's side, being religious, were a little more—a little warmer other than my father's side.

Interviewer: Did you observe the holidays, then?

George: Oh absolutely. Yes.

Interviewer: Did you visit with your relatives in other places, surrounding communities?

George: Well, we traveled a little bit in the area. Like I said, Kassel was nearby. We went to a place called Dortmund, Dusseldorf, these towns, but that was probably about it. I never went to Hamburg until I actually left Germany. We left from there. This was after Kristallnacht where my home was—

Actually, at that point, my father and my sister and I, we were at home. Kristallnacht. My mother was not there, she was visiting my grandmother, her mother, in Hanover. And during the night, like it happened all over Germany, they came and smashed every window in the house and in the morning, my father was arrested. But they let him go after a couple of hours. My father decided to go to Hanover where my mother was. And we stayed there, probably no more than two or three days. I don't remember exactly how long, but it was a short time. And we went back to Warburg, and when we got back, my home was totally destroyed. There was not a stitch of furniture left. It was just in ruins, totally.

Of course, we couldn't stay there, so that's when my parents decided to go to Hamburg where this aunt and uncle lived, also my father's mother was in Hamburg, my

grandmother also. So we stayed in Hamburg I guess probably a week or so, I'm not quite sure exactly, but it was a little longer, and that's where the arrangements were made for my sister and I to go to England.

Interviewer: Let's go back a little in time. You said, "They came." Who was it who destroyed your—?

George: The Nazis.

Interviewer: Okay. Were people from Warburg involved?

George: Well, interesting you should ask that. Yes. I just found that out, that there was a school opposite to where we lived and I visited— My wife and I went to visit Germany two years ago and we met two people: one was the vice mayor of Warburg and the other gentleman was an artist, quite a prominent artist. We had tea or coffee with the vice mayor. And in talking to him about this night, he mentioned that the children from that school were involved in throwing— actually the rocks which I thought were rocks— I guess Warburg made sugar and these were the raw sugar, lumps of sugar, that was thrown through the windows by these children.

Interviewer: Were they a part of Hitler Jugend or was it informal?

George: I really don't know. My guess would be it was probably informal, although— I saw these kids, the Hitler Youth dressed up in uniform, these kind of things, while I lived there, but I didn't think too much about it really. But I didn't know exactly who was involved in throwing these lumps of sugar. I thought they were rocks that were thrown.

Interviewer: When this occurred— You mentioned that you found out a few years ago that some of these children were involved. What was the Jewish population of Warburg?

George: It was a comparatively small Jewish community. I would say just two or three hundred families, not too many, because the whole town wasn't very large. There was a synagogue there to which my parents and I went on a weekly basis, which also was destroyed that night. But it was not a large Jewish community.

Interviewer: Did everyone in town— Was it common knowledge that you were Jewish?

George: I really don't know. I would say yes.

Interviewer: Did you live in a neighborhood that was particularly Jewish?

George: I don't think so. From what I can remember, no, because Warburg was divided into two sections: one was called New and one was called Old. And the synagogue was in the Old

section of Warburg, so my guess would be at this point that most of the Jews were more concentrated around that area. We lived in what they called *Neustadt* of Warburg.

As a matter of fact, we lived in a building that was originally the Jewish school. In 1933, I guess Hitler did not allow Jewish schools, so the school closed. So at that point, somehow they converted that building into three apartments. My family, we lived on the main floor, and on the second floor there was a rabbi who— I remember him teaching us Hebrew, we had Hebrew lessons right there. And then there was a third family that lived on the third floor.

So I don't know exactly— I went to public school up to a point. I'm not quite sure when that stopped. I can't remember that part, but it seemed like we were not allowed to go to that school after a certain time and we were educated primarily at home by this rabbi. When I think about it the third family was also a teacher, so this is how we were educated at that point. So, as a matter of fact, when we went back to Germany two years ago, we went back to my home.

Interviewer: Did you go with your sister as well?

George: No, she didn't go. Just my wife and I went. And outside— I told my wife I know exactly where the place was. And we went there. They'd changed the name of the street, but I recognized the house that we lived in and on the outside, on the wall, there was a plaque that was explaining that this was a Jewish school that was closed in 1933. So I remember that address. There was an 8 on the house, which was right there, and we went around. I went to the hospital where I was born.

Interviewer: Which was? Do you remember the name of the hospital?

George: No, I can't remember the name of the hospital. But we went there and we walked around. And as we were walking around, there was a person that came out of an office and he was wondering what I was doing there, because we were both walking around and there was nobody else around. So I explained to him that I was born here, I come from the United States now but I'm from Germany. And he seemed very interested up to a point where he said he could drive us around and show us some of the sights, which he did.

Interviewer: About how old a man was he?

George: I don't know, probably in the 40's I would say. He was not very old. So he was not part of that generation that did all this, but obviously— They're all knowledgeable, in my opinion. Even if they try to deny some of it, they all know. But he was very pleasant and he drove us around different areas and showed us the sugar plant, various other— He showed us where the synagogue was. The only thing that actually remained was the front door, that was recognizable as a synagogue; it's now some kind of office building.

Also during that time, like I said we were interviewed by the vice mayor. It was interesting. One of the main things that stuck in my mind in talking to him is that he said that one of the most important things in Germany now is that they miss the Jewish culture. That remark really struck with me. Because there's not one Jewish person living in the town. So I thought that was kind of significant for him to come up with that remark.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

George: Well, I'll tell you I felt kind of good about that, that he would come up with that kind of a statement. I did not expect, especially a person of his caliber to come up with that kind of a remark. I thought it was an important statement for him to make, that he recognizes that something is really missing in Germany, such as the Jewish culture.

Interviewer: How old a man was the vice mayor?

George: He was younger, too. He was probably in his late 30's, early 40's also. And he was very cordial.

Interviewer: You mentioned that your street was one name when you lived there and now it's different name. What were the names of the street?

George: Originally, it was called *Mennerstrasse Acht*. *Acht* meaning eight. But I don't remember what they changed it to. I can't remember that. But I know they changed the name because when we inquired into the street—although, like I said I was right there, I was perfectly there but we wanted to make sure that we were on the right track—they told us the name had been changed.

Interviewer: Did you say *Minnastrasse*?

George: *Menner*.

Interviewer: Oh! I thought it was like your mother's name!

George: No, it's spelled *Menner*. So, like I said we ended up finding it because I knew exactly which direction to go. When we arrived in Warburg, I knew right away. I remembered the railroad station because I used to travel from there to visit my aunt. And, like I said, I remembered the hospital, I remembered the school that I went to.

Interviewer: The public school?

George: The public school, which was right near the hospital. We also visited the Jewish cemetery where my grandparents on my mother's side were buried, together with this uncle after

whom I'm named. What we had to do, in order to go into the cemetery, we were told to get a key from a flower shop which was around the corner. So we did this. We went there and this lady gave us the key immediately. We went there and I found—because I used to go to the cemetery when I was young, my mother used to take me—and I remembered more or less where the graves were. I did find them and I found it in comparatively good condition. I was surprised to see the cemetery in the condition that it was.

Also, one of the things that is still a little bit of a puzzle as far as I'm concerned was that there were these three headstones of my grandparents and this uncle, but underneath there was a new stone which had all the information on there about my parents. And I mentioned it to my sister and she said that she was instrumental in having that done. So, as a matter of fact, I never really knew the first names of my grandparents because we didn't refer to them by first name, so I only knew them as *Oma* and *Opa*. I didn't know their ages. I didn't know when my parents got married until I saw it on that stone, which was kind of an emotional thing for me to find out. Also, it mentioned the year my parents were murdered by the Nazis, that year was 1944. That was on the stone also. That was a little bit hard to take, to find out at this point.

Interviewer: You said the key to the cemetery was kept in a flower shop. Do Germans who live in the community ever go to the cemetery, do you know?

George: I don't think so. I think primarily visitors that come to the town, because really there's no Jewish family living there anymore. So I would think people like myself who just come to visit who are from that part of the country, I would imagine they're the ones who would go and visit the cemetery.

Not only that, but another interesting aspect was that outside of the cemetery, which was kind of walled in, they had a large metal plaque which had all the names of the people that were murdered by the Nazis. I found my parents' name, I found my aunt's name on this plaque. As a matter of fact, I took pictures of it. I have it at home. Which was also kind of surprising, that the city did this. So I would imagine there are rather guilt feelings, so this was something that I didn't expect to see either, to see all these names from that town on this particular wall.

Interviewer: Do you know who keeps it up, the cemetery and other things?

George: My guess would be that the city is doing that because since there are no Jews living there and everything seemed to be in a comparatively good order, so I would say the city is taking care of this.

Interviewer: Do you remember your relationship with the other children in the public school and with non-Jews when you were a child?

George: I tell you, I was somewhat of an introvert as a child and didn't really mingle all that much with the rest of the kids. As far as name-calling or that kind of thing, that I don't remember— hearing that. I didn't have any real friends from the school, per se. I know there were one or two other kids that we played around with, but they were Jewish; we had no Gentile friends. So that's a kind of relationship between children.

Interviewer: Did you feel Jewish as a child?

George: Oh, absolutely. Very much so.

Interviewer: Did you look any different than the other children?

George: I don't believe so. No, I don't think so. Like I said, we observed all the holidays. We went to the synagogue. And we observed Passover, all these things that we did. So I knew definitely that— my Jewish background.

Interviewer: Was your health an issue in your childhood?

George: Well, not that seriously because although I have a hemophilia condition, the only thing that I remember as child I used to have quite a bit of nose bleeding. That seemed to be my major problem.

I didn't know that I was a hemophiliac until I came to England. I had an episode in England where I had a problem and went to the dentist. In England they seem to pull teeth very readily, more so than anywhere else. I went to this dentist and he pulled a tooth. And I lived in a hostel at that time. For about a week, I bled. And I didn't say anything until one morning I just fainted. They rushed me to a hospital and I was in the hospital for a month, with all kinds of transfusions and all this kind of thing, and that's when I found out that I have a condition called hemophilia. I never knew that. I never knew the name, I just knew that I had a bleeding disorder.

But other than that— I always call myself a borderline case. I don't have any real serious problems otherwise, with this condition.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit more about your transition to home schooling.

George: Well, let's see. Of course in Germany I went to public school until they decided that Jews couldn't go there anymore. But when I came to England— Unfortunately I came to England not knowing the language. We went— I landed in Harwich. From there, I went to London with my sister in a hostel. I was there about 6 months when they decided to make that hostel in London just for girls, so all the boys—there must have been about 10, 15 of us—we went to a town named Margate, which is the southeast corner of England, and there I went to a boarding school. As a matter of fact, we were the regular uniform, with

the cap with the RH—it was called {Rowden} Hall—and there I learned English. When the war broke out, we were evacuated inland.

Interviewer: I think we jumped ahead. I was actually referring to your experience in Germany when you went from the public school to being educated in your family home because you were no longer allowed to go to school in Germany, in a public school.

George: In a public school, right. Well, I don't remember all that much about that except that the teacher that lived in the building, we had lessons—my sister and I—we had almost like private lessons at that point until the time that we left.

Interviewer: Did you feel fear or any other strong sense of anxiety or other emotion when these changes were occurring?

George: Not really. Not that I can remember. It seemed to be kind of a natural thing, because we were 8, 9 years old. So not really.

Interviewer: How about your parents? Did you notice any changes?

George: No, not really.

Interviewer: How about your father's career? You said he was a salesman.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: For a textile company. Was it a Jewish concern?

George: That I don't know. I know very little about that other than that he used to travel. He was away for one or two days at a time. And I knew that he was involved with textile and that's really all that I knew. My mother did not work.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you had a warm family relationship with your mother's relatives.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: Was the environment at home fairly warm and happy?

George: Oh yes, yes. Oh absolutely.

Interviewer: Then when you were being educated at home, it was with your sister.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: Was she given the same education as you?

George: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Was that something progressive that your sister would receive the same kind of—?

George: Actually, it was— You were just beginning your fundamental education and we were both the same age, so we were learning the same things at the same time. So, no, it didn't really effect us in any way.

Interviewer: You mentioned that on the night of Kristallnacht, you were in either Hanover or Hamburg?

George: We left the next day for Hanover. After— In other words, that night, once they smashed all the windows, the next morning after my father was released from the police station or wherever they took him, we went to Hanover to my grandmother.

Interviewer: Was that an important turning point for you? Was that a surprise or a shock?

George: Probably more a shock because certainly we were afraid of what had gone on and we thought at this point what is going to happen. We didn't understand fully what was going on there. Because my parent's never explained to us the Nazi era or what was going on. We never really talked about it. I saw, as a child, I saw the German army in their armored cars and all this kind of thing, going through the street but it was never told to us— Maybe it was intentional that we shouldn't feel afraid of what was going to happen. So it was sort of— It just seemed to have happened.

We realized that something was wrong, that we couldn't stay there. And of course once we came back to Warburg from Hanover and saw the place totally demolished, at that point we were not told that we were going to leave Germany. This all happened once we went to Hamburg. Because, like most of us, we were told—our parents would tell us—that “we will follow shortly afterwards.”

Interviewer: You're parents told you that?

George: That's right. And we were also told that we had someone in England who was a brother to my uncle who brought us from England to America, he had a brother who lived in London, and that he would sort of look after us in the interim. Though he was not married and he had his own business, but he came to visit us on weekends in the hostel in London and also throughout my 8 years in England, we were in constant contact with him. So we called him Uncle even though he really wasn't.

So we always hoped that our parents would follow. As a matter of fact, if the War in 1939 would've started, let's say, a month later—according to my parents, to whom we were writing constantly—were ready to come to England. But the War started and they were not allowed to leave.

Interviewer: Had they made preparations in terms of—?

George: Leaving?

Interviewer: Yes.

George: They wrote to us that they had their lifts all arranged for whatever they had to be sent to England, but that never came to be. That never happened.

Interviewer: Did your father, by the way, have the opportunity to work after Kristallnacht?

George: I really don't know that. I don't think so, but I really couldn't tell you. I don't know. As a matter of fact, I know very little of what happened or how they even lived and for some reason, we never asked that question. Because when we left Hamburg, my parents and this cousin with whom I was— lives in Cleveland, were at the station to send us off and never asked what happened to them after we left. Where did they go? Where did they live? I never knew that. I knew we wrote to one another, but it was never really— we never delved into where they lived or how they lived.

Interviewer: And they didn't say.

George: They didn't say, no. But in asking my cousin, I think they must have lived in Hamburg afterwards, that they didn't go back to Warburg. How, I have no idea.

Interviewer: Was your cousin about your age?

George: He's six years older than I am.

Interviewer: So he was about 15. And did he leave Hamburg with you, then?

George: No, he did not. As a matter of fact, he and his brother and mother—I think his father had passed away already—went to Spain. He met someone in Spain and he got married there. And this aunt and uncle in the United States brought both my cousins over to the United States.

Interviewer: But your cousin was with you at the station.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: And your parents were with you.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: Was this about a month after Kristallnacht, did you say?

George: Yes. Because Kristallnacht was in November and we left in December. So these arrangements seemed to have been made very quickly.

Interviewer: Do you know how your parents were aware of the transports?

George: I don't know how, but from what I understand, it was done through the organization, I think it was called *{Borwenhaus}* and also— I can't think of the other name, in London, but they worked together with these two organizations to get us out of Germany.

Interviewer: Do you remember what it was like to be on the platform with them, or at the station?

George: Well, there were quite a number of children that went on this train. It happened so quickly that we no sooner got there we were on the train and my parents left.

Interviewer: Did they say anything particular you before you got on the train?

George: The other thing I seem to recollect is that they would tell us that they would come shortly afterwards, this kind of thing. The train ride from Hamburg through Holland, I remember it stopped at various stations and there were people at the stations that would give us candy and chocolates, this kind of thing. Once we arrived at the Hague of Holland—this was in the evening—we were transported on the ship. One of the things that struck me funny was that in Germany we had these feather quilts on the bed. Here there were these blankets and they were all tucked in. I had no idea: how do you get into bed? It was like a hospital bed. This I never saw before. That seemed to be something that stuck in my mind because it seemed kind of unusual. And then when we arrived—

Interviewer: Were your sister and you separated?

George: No, we were together. We traveled together.

Interviewer: You traveled together. And at night, when you slept, there was no division between girls and boys?

George: I don't believe so. I think we were in the same cabin or whatever, bunks that we had,

Interviewer: How did the two of you feel? Were you excited, anxious, upset? Did you derive any comfort from each other?

George: From each other, because my sister and I were very close. She says to this very day that she kind of took care of me. She was a protective individual, I guess, although we were the same age. Even when we arrived in England, we were in Dovercourt and it was freezing. We were in these little wooden shacks. We also— We were together. They had bunk beds. We stayed there—I'm not quite sure—I would say a number of weeks.

Interviewer: What did you bring with you?

George: Very little. Just the bare essentials, a few clothing, except you were not allowed to bring anything of value. But I did bring a watch that was supposed to be given to me on my 13th birthday bar mitzvah, and I stuck that watch in my sock. I was not searched. I have that watch at home. It still works. This watch belonged to my grandfather, so it's got to be over a hundred-something years old. That was the only valuable thing that I had, except for a few things that we were allowed to take. I guess there was a list that my parents had to check off of what we were allowed to take. So I don't think we had big suitcases like a number of— No, we didn't.

Interviewer: Did you have pictures of your family?

George: I have, yes. Not very many, but I do have. I have one picture of my parents and an aunt, which was just a very small photograph which I enlarged not too long ago in Cleveland and I framed it, I have a little larger frame. I have a few other pictures of my parents at home, but I would say I don't have more than three or four pictures.

Interviewer: Are you a person who has a good memory for faces? Do you remember people?

George: I have a good memory for faces, but names I'm not so terrific with. But faces I do remember.

Interviewer: So the people who you knew in Warburg and your family, is it easy for you to call up the way they looked?

George: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: So when you got to England, it was cold.

George: It was freezing. Absolutely freezing.

Interviewer: When the boat docked, were you awake?

George: Oh yes, oh definitely.

Interviewer: Do you remember seeing the cliffs or the shoreline?

George: No, I can't say that I do. But I remember getting off the boat and being transported to this camp and we were housed in these wooden huts. There was a sink—I can see that in front of me right now—where the water froze. When you tried to turn on the faucet, the water would come out as frozen. In order to keep warm, they had these hot water bottles that were made out of stone which we— They poured water in there and we stuck those in the bed to keep the bed warm. I don't think they were very good!

Then we lived like this, like I said, for a number of weeks. Then every Sunday, I remember, people—English people—used to come to this place and they used to pick out who they wanted in terms of being taken in to their families. My sister and I didn't want that. We used to hide from this because we didn't want to be in a family at that time. I guess we were content just being there, until my “Uncle” came to visit us. He said he would make arrangements for us to come to London.

And so my sister and I went to London, to a hostel, and I stayed there a few months. There probably were about 30 of us, roughly. And then they decided to make this particular hostel a girls' hostel, so the boys, we went to Margate, which is in the southern portion of England. And we stayed there until the War broke out.

Interviewer: And that was the first time you were separated from your sister?

George: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

George: I didn't—I wasn't too keen on that but I didn't have a choice. They made a decision about what was going to be. As a matter of fact, once I left there, I hadn't seen my sister for 6 years. She left London, I guess, once the War broke out and she was also evacuated inland. And although I had an address, we did correspond, but I never saw her, she never saw me. It was 6 years.

Interviewer: At what age were you separated?

George: Probably like 9 years old, 10 years old. We were 9 years old at that point.

Interviewer: Was your “Uncle” keeping track of her as well?

George: Oh yes, oh yes. He actually, while I was in London, he used to come visit us on weekends and he used to take us out. As a matter of fact, he used to always tell us if we wanted to

take a friend along we could choose a friend to come along, and we did. He would take us out to a restaurant or this kind of thing. He really was— He did kind of try to look after us throughout our stay in England. Even when I was living in other areas, there were times when we were able to go to London. We would spend a weekend with him. He had an apartment. He was single. We would stay just for the weekend and he would take us—he would take me—back to where I was.

Interviewer: But you and your sister could never coordinate to be in London at the same time?

George: No, no, no because— I don't know. She lived under very difficult conditions, from what I understand. She never really discussed her way of life and I only found out about maybe two years ago—my sister lives now in New York—and we were able— She started to talk about some of the things which she experienced, which were very unpleasant. I have to say the conditions I lived under were a whole lot better than her conditions.

The only reason that we came back together was that after this episode with my tooth extraction—I guess I was pretty sick—she was contacted and she came to visit me and they had her living at a hostel in Birmingham and they made arrangements for her to remain there. So she left this family that she lived with and she came to Birmingham. Since I didn't live too far from there, it was decided afterwards that I, too, would go to Birmingham. And that's where we were reunited.

Interviewer: That was at the age of about 16?

George: That was at the age about, yeah, 16. That would be about right.

Interviewer: That would've been in 1944?

George: Yes. Because I left in 1946. She was already working. She worked as a hairdresser at that time, in Birmingham. I was more fortunate. I went to school. They sent me to first a technical school. And after a year, they decided maybe that was not the right thing because of my hemophiliac condition and I went to a commercial college.

Interviewer: When you say "they"?

George: The hostel.

Interviewer: You were in hostels the entire time you were in England?

George: I was two years with an English family.

Interviewer: When was that?

George: That was— Probably about 1944. '45. Something like that.

Interviewer: So after you were already 16.

George: It was before that, actually. It had to be before that. I lived with an English family for close to two years. As a matter of fact, when people ask me “where did you stay?” I’ve said I stayed no more than two years in any one place. So I stayed two years with an English family at a place called Aldridge, which is a small mining town not far from Birmingham. As a matter of fact, we had—again we were lucky, there were a number of Jewish boys that went to that area—we had Hebrew lessons every weekend. A teacher came from Birmingham to this little village and we had Hebrew lessons. We had services Friday night. And these people we stayed with were really understanding, obviously, they didn’t object us doing this. They were not Jewish. And this family took in two boys.

Interviewer: Do you remember their names?

George: Their name was Bailey. Their last name was Bailey.

Interviewer: Did you keep in touch with them after that?

George: No, I didn’t. I know that a lot of the people like myself got very close with their families, those that lived with families. As a matter of fact, some of them adopted them as families. Somehow I could never do that. I never felt that I was part of the family. Although, like I said, the people were very nice to us. We were not mistreated or that kind of thing. When the decision was made for me to go back into a hostel, they did not object.

Interviewer: How was the decision made? By whom?

George: I think by the people from Birmingham. They decided that after I was actually Bar Mitzvahed, and then after I got sick, that I’d be better off—and I suppose because my sister came to join me—to be reunited. So I went to Birmingham where she was, and we left from there to come to the United States.

Interviewer: You said that you initially, after your period of— When you came to England, you were in that gathering place which was very cold.

George: Dovercourt.

Interviewer: Dovercourt, where you hid so as not to be picked by a family.

George: That’s right.

Interviewer: Was England strange to you at that time?

George: Well, I would say yes because first of all I didn't know the language and here I was surrounded by people that all spoke German. And I probably felt more at home in that environment, rather than going to a family that didn't understand me and I didn't understand them. So I guess that's probably the reason that I didn't want to be put into that kind of situation.

Interviewer: Did you speak any English?

George: No. I started learned English when I went to Margate. That's where I really started learning English.

Interviewer: When you got to Margate, you must've been a little older than 9?

George: 9, but not much more. Maybe 10, but not more than that.

Interviewer: Did you go to school?

George: Well, yes. In Margate, like I said, it was a boarding school. And there we had English lessons until up to a point we decided that I was ready to go to public school and I started going to public school. As a child, you learn a language very quickly. Obviously, I think I learned it very quickly. Once the War broke out, since I went to a public school, I was evacuated—with all the kids from that particular school—inland because we were right on the coast. Along with the English kids, we were evacuated inland.

Interviewer: To where?

George: To a place called Boney Hay. This is where I went to the English family. But, like I said, there were a number of us. We all lived nearby. Like they would say, "You two stay with this family." A couple stayed with another family. We were all living very close to one another since it was just a small village. So we had friends just among ourselves.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the names of your friends and have you kept in touch?

George: Well, there were a couple of brothers, their name was Heinemann. We were very close friends. As a matter of fact, the Heinemanns, their parents were saved. They were in Theresienstadt, so were my parents, at first. For some reason, somehow they were able to leave and they came to the United States. They came to England, rather, excuse me. I guess the father must have passed away, I'm not quite sure. But the two boys, Heinemann boys, and the mother came to the United States. I was more friendly with the older boy—he was closer, he was a year older than I—and the other brother was a year younger than I. And we were very close friends. And they eventually, like I said, came to the United States. The older one, unfortunately, died some years after he came to New York. And the other brother, he lives in Philadelphia and he is a doctor, in Philadelphia, to this

present day. We're not really in contact. I'm not in contact with him, really, and I must say it's probably my fault. I'm not the greatest correspondent. As a matter of fact, I think he came to one— he came to the first reunion in England. I think we communicated by letter once or twice since then, but he hasn't come— he hasn't shown up at any of the other reunions. So we're really not in that close of a contact.

Interviewer: Were there other people as well who you became—?

George: Well, the fellow that I lived with, of course, with this family, he eventually went to Israel. And when we went to Israel, my wife and I, we went to visit him.

Interviewer: Your wife is here, by the way.

George: Yes. And unfortunately, he was very sick in Israel—I believe he had cancer—and he died not too long ago.

Interviewer: What was his name?

George: His name was Kurt Penower. Landis. Excuse me. There were two Kurts, one was Penower and one was Landis.

Interviewer: Did you make any friends among the English boys, or the English girls for that matter?

George: No, no.

Interviewer: So you kept—

George: Yes. Very much in my own circles.

Interviewer: You said you were introverted as a child. Was that something that continued in England?

George: I think more or less. I was always much more the quiet type. I think I got out of my shell in my later years, where I— One of the reasons, probably, that I became more of an extrovert, out of my shell, is when I came to Cleveland, I used to like to sing. And I was told at one point, "Why don't you take some vocal lessons?" And there was a chorus in Cleveland, a Jewish chorus, and they said, "Why don't you join that chorus?" So I decided, okay, I will try and take some lessons. I was introduced to a teacher from the Cleveland Institute for Music, which was quite a prominent school, and I went to this teacher's home for an audition. He said, "Okay, you can register as a student at the institute." And I took lessons for five years. I joined this chorus. And I think that kind of got me more out of my shell because sometimes someone—

TAPE CUTS AT 1:03:27.6

