

Kurt Metzl Interview

August 24, 1999

... is 2:20, August 24th, and I am on my way to Dr. Kurt Metzl's house to interview him. [Tape turns off and turns back on] Looks like it's good. My voice is being picked up. And if Kurt, if you'll say something from where you're sitting.

I'll sit up.

Just sit comfortably, you know, because...

Yeah. OK. Well, I'll test it and see whether my voice is being picked up.

OK. What was your name at birth?

Oh, I think it was Kurt.

No middle name, or...

No middle name. I was named after the Austrian chancellor.

Really?

Kurt Schuschnigg.

And when were you born?

In April '35.

O.K., and what city?

In a little village in Austria called St. Leonard.

Is it still there?

It's still there.

Do you know, were you born at home or did they take you to...

I think I was born at home, but delivered by a midwife.

And your parents' names...?

My father's name was Fritz. My mother's name was Margit.

And what were their occupations?

My, well they, my father was a, a horse dealer.

Really?

And my mother grew up, her family owned a bakery.

So did your Mom stay in the family business?

No, then when they, after they got married, they opened up a small grocery store.

Any other kids in the family?

No. Not that I know of.

You were an only child... OK. Do you remember what the neighborhood was like that you lived in?

No, because I was three and a half when I left.

Three and a half, OK. Uh, how well off was your family? Were they...?

I think we must have been modest, very modest.

Very modest...

I mean, you know, they were tradespeople. But, uh well, I don't know, you know, my, my Dad had a motorcycle and they went on, and he went on vacations all over Austria so, I imagine maybe they were OK, they weren't poor.

Okay. All right, so now, you, OK, you were born in '35 and the war broke out in Europe ...

In '38. [sic – war did not break out until 1939, but Kurt's home country was occupied in 1938]

In '38. OK, so when did it affect your family?

Well, I think in late '38 and early '39. My father, who grew up in a little village where they were the only Jewish family... Some of their, some of his friends came over and said, "This is gonna be serious, you need to get out of here."

Yeah.

So he, he left , he went illegally, he went to Switzerland, crossing the border... at night. My mother and I stayed with my mother's mother, grandmother, and at that point I think Austrian Jews were being ghettoized. They had to leave the small villages and all congregate in, in Vienna. And so, my mother and I went to Vienna. And, then my father devised a plan for us to join him in Switzerland.

OK, what was the plan?

There was a, a railroad that went, a German railroad, that went from Germany to Germany through Switzerland, there's a little piece of Switzerland that sticks out... And in, and his plan was for us to get on that train to buy a ticket from one place in Germany to another place in Germany but when the train stopped in the Swiss town of Schaffhausen for us to get out, to get out and to say that I had to go to the bathroom. There were no bathrooms on the German side of the station. So we were able to go underneath and just keep walking.

And so it worked.

It worked. Well, I'm here.

Yeah, OK and so you were how old at that time?

[Phone rings]

I was three and a half.

So you don't remember any of this.

I don't remember anything.

You remember nothing...

[Phone rings]

But I...

Do you want me to stop this?

[Tape turns off and turned back on]

In Vienna, for how long waiting to meet your Dad?

It must have been a matter of months.

Just a few months.

OK, so you meet up with your Dad in Switzerland and then what happens?

Uh, we were interned, interned, there was a camp for, for refugees. Switzerland was turning people back at the time and so it was a real coup to get the two of us in here. My Dad, if you had been in Switzerland, on Swiss ground for more than twenty-four hours, you could claim political asylum, which, which he did when he came in so he was allowed to stay. But they had work camps and camp camps during the first part of the war, and then as the war moved along we were allowed to move into a small apartment in the city that we were living in.

So, now in these, in the camps that you were interned in, did they separate the Jews or...?

No, this was all Jewish.

Oh, OK, it was all Jewish?

It was all... yeah.

All right. And was everybody treated OK?

As far as I know it was, uh, modest, but humane. I mean there was nothing bad going on. I mean, they had, they had some work camps where people were worked very hard...

Right.

...but not forced labor camps. I mean, they built several, these small camps that were in Switzerland were road, were building roads, it was like a WPA project.

Oh, OK. And so how long did that last for you?

I would imagine three years, two, three years.

Two or three years and then you went into an apartment?

Then we, we moved into a, first into a rooming house and then into an apartment.

OK, and then...

The apartment is where I have my first memories from.

Now when you were finally in the apartment, your parents went out and got jobs or ...?

No, they were not allowed to work.

They were not allowed to work, so...

No. So, we were supported with a small, you know, with living expenses, uh, I think part, partially by the Swiss government and partially by the Joint Distribution Committee.

And what were, I mean, your parents, as far as their, their attitude?

Well, I mean we were, we were always scared that Hitler was going to come in. I mean, I remember several times getting on a train in the middle of the night trying to go into the interior of Switzerland to get away from the advancing armies of Germany but he never came, so.

Did you, did your family, did you feel, did you experience a lot of antisemitism when you were living in the apartment in Switzerland?

Well, I grew up thinking that I was Swiss ... but I also was accused of having killed Jesus whom I didn't know... Who at that time I didn't know who he was. I knew I hadn't killed anybody.

Right. So it was, was it just kids or adults as well?

Kids. No, no - mostly kids.

So, you were going to school? They let you go to school.

I was going to school and, uh, it was like, I don't know, it was the only existence that I knew, so it was alright.

So how old were you before you left Europe?

Well, I came, we came here after the war in 1948.

Oh boy, so you were there ... OK.

And the years after the war were very tough because we were trying to find out about relatives. Every, all the relatives were left at home, nobody made it through. One uncle got out to England, one aunt got out to France. One uncle went to Israel also illegally in 1939. But all the grandparents and uncles and aunts of my parents, everybody got wiped out.

And when you were living in Switzerland and you knew all about the camps, you knew what was going on or just bits and pieces?

You know, it was, it was bits and pieces. But I knew about it before the end of the war, 'cause there was stuff that, that you could read. I remember distinctly a little yellow book called "*Juden Los Unter Hitler*," "The Fate of the Jews Under Hitler." That was maybe 1944.

So how old were you then?

Nine.

Gosh, you were nine years old. So did, so how did that, I mean, were you, like, scared to death?

No, I thought I was Swiss. I felt pretty safe.

Really, how interesting.

I mean, I felt bad because my parents cried a lot.

Yeah.

But, for me, life was pretty good.

So what was school like?

School was good.

School was good.

Hard, my father, you know, yeah, it was regular, regular school. The Swiss school system is set up a little differently than it is here, because you advance, they have two tracks: a vocational track and a learning track, it depends on what kind of grade - how you do in school, on which track you go to.

Did you have very many Jewish friends that you went to school with?

I don't think so. There were no other kids my age, that I, in that little community that we were... There were some older kids but nobody my age.

Well, what about socially? Did your parents have...

There were a few other families, maybe five, six other families, so that was it.

That was it.

There were some Swiss Jewish families and the Swiss were, were relatively nice, they got nicer as the war went on. Some of the Swiss were pro-German at the beginning of the war. That's it. And in '45 we, we applied, we had applied for an American visa. My Dad had applied before the war but nothing ever came of it, so when we reapplied we really had 1938 as the time that our original application said. By '48, we came under the displaced persons quota.

Now, were your parents religious Jews, or ...?

My mother was from a very religious family, and my father was modern.

So what kind of...

But there was no religious training or religious... I mean, we had services on Rosh Hashanah. There were, maybe there were ten, twelve people who had a little service, but that was it.

That was it. So were you, so you didn't go to Hebrew school?

No Hebrew school.

So you didn't know Hebrew...

No Hebrew.

...you didn't know...it was...[laughter]

[Phone rings. Tape stops and turns back on and picks up mid-sentence]

...being the only Jew and the only redhead in the elementary school that I went to.

Did that bother you?

It didn't bother me, but I couldn't get away with anything.

[laughing]

I was always marked. And, you know, I think antisemitism was a way of life. I mean, people talking about, accusing me of doing things to their Lord, to their Lord. People saying that their, their fath..., you know you couldn't get into a fight with somebody without saying my father says they should have killed all of you or you shouldn't be here or...

Yeah, but, you never understood..

But, those were, those were just very, you know, small incidences. I think overall, people were friendly and hospitable.

So, overall, you felt pretty comfortable?

Felt pretty comfortable. I had nice friends, grew up safely at a time when I didn't even know what was going on to kids my age that didn't grow up safely.

And your parents?

They, they sat around. I don't know. Played gin rummy. There was not much to do. There was not, there was not... my mother occasionally went out and worked on a farm illegally because you weren't supposed to work. But, uh, food was rationed, so she got paid in food by the farmer, that, that helped.

OK, so alright, take me back again, how old were you when you left ...?

Switzerland?

Switzerland to come to the States?

Twelve and a half.

Twelve and a half. Ok, so now what did you, as far as socially, as a young kid ...

Coming in here?

No, no, when you were still in Switzerland? What was, I mean, did you have parties to go to?

You know, it was the war time, there weren't a whole lot of parties. We had, I had some friends, and we hung around. You know, we swam. We went sledding in the wintertime. We went to school. But I don't remember any huge parties or celebrations.

OK.

I remember everybody being very happy when the war was over.

Yeah.

There was celebration then.

And so now, your parents had decided to come to the United States, were they thinking of going anywhere else?

They weren't interested in going back to Austria, which was the only other option at the time...

And so they did not, they didn't even want to go back and see what was left or...

Absolutely not.

No interest whatsoever.

No interest whatsoever.

Even when they got back, when they came to the States after a period of time, they never, ever

wanted...

No, no. No, I finally got my mother to go back to Switzerland to visit some friends that she had in Switzerland and I wanted her to go to Austria to see it and she wouldn't do it.

It was just too painful?

But, but I finally convinced her that she had to go get an Austrian sweater for my kids. Well, for my kids she'd do anything. So she got on the train, took the train to Vienna, got off, bought the sweaters, went got back on the train, and went back to Switzerland.

Oh, my gosh.

She felt very, very...

You weren't with her?

...scared. I wasn't with her. She felt very scared about being in, in Austria.

Ah, interesting...So how did you feel about leaving Switzerland?

I hated it.

Really, you wanted to stay?

Yeah, well, I didn't know why we, why we had to leave. I mean it was an exciting, you know, it was an exciting trip.

Do you remember the trip?

Absolutely.

OK, tell me about it.

We took the train to Paris. Then we were in Paris for a couple of days. Then we took the train and we ended up in Southampton. We came across on the Queen Elizabeth, on a boat. We landed in New York. We were processed in New York by HIAS and I remember distinctly them saying, "There's too many of you people in New York already, you need to leave."

Oh my gosh, that's a great welcome.

That was really scary. And we only knew New York or, Chicago I'd heard about, but that was a gangster town and nobody would go to Chicago. That's all I knew. That's all we knew. And so they said, well, let's see, your father, you were a horse dealer, so the three places you can go to is Kansas City, or Sioux City, Iowa or Louisville, Kentucky. And we

had never heard of any of those. I'm sure it's like your parents.

Yeah, sure.

And we came to...

So your Dad said...

My Dad said to me, "Where do you want to go?" and I said, "Kansas City sounds nice." So... we ended up in Kansas City.

Oh gosh, because he was a horse trader.

Yeah, well that didn't help him because he didn't speak any English.

Yeah, so you spoke fluent Swiss...

Swiss and German.

Swiss and German. Ok. So you came to Kansas City, then what happened?

Well, we were put on a train in New York, and the, and between New York and Chicago it was not, it was not, you know, it was relatively inhabited countryside, and in Chicago the Travelers Aid met us and took us to another station. We changed stations. We all had tags on saying who we were and where we were going..

Now...

And they put us in the station, they put us on a train from Chicago to Kansas City. My mother had a nervous breakdown, she had never seen so many, so much space without humanity in all her life. She was sure where we were going. And we landed, we came to Kansas City, and uh... we were met by what is now the Jewish Family and Children's Service at the Union Station...

Oh yeah, they met you at the station?

Uh huh.

Now it was just you and your parents?

The three of us...Uh huh.

And that was it?

Yeah. A lady by the name of Bess Udell...

Bess Udell...

... met us and uh, they had a house on Twenty, on Linwood and Olive and so we got a room on Linwood and Olive and we were processed in...I was taken to the Alfred Benjamin dispensary for my, for my physical and uh, the guy who did my physical was Dr. Kanter, who ended up being my partner later on after I finished medical school.

Oh, my gosh.

And my Dad couldn't go into the horse trading business because he couldn't speak any English and you can't trade horses...

Yeah...

So they said, "Why don't you go to work?" and they got him a job at a kosher meat market.

Uh-huh.

And so he learned how to be a kosher butcher, and that sent me through medical school.

That's all right.

Yep.

Now the, when you came to this country and you didn't know any English, was that just extremely frustrating for you and your family, was the language barrier...

Yeah, I was put into 4th grade.

Yeah.

Probably should have been about a 7th grader. So I was put in with the younger kids cause I didn't speak any English and then as I picked up English, that was in January of '48, I went to 4th, and then maybe by March they put me into 5th grade and then the following fall I was put into 7th grade, then 8th grade. By then I caught up.

Sailed through it...

Went to Central High School. Then I graduated, went to Washington University in St. Louis on a scholarship and here I am.

Made your parents very proud.

Yes.

I was remembering your mother...

We didn't have any options...

She was so proud of you.

They took us to Kehilath Israel, they said, "What kind of religion do you want?" and Rabbi Solomon kind of adopted us and I had a crash course in Hebrew.

So, were you *bar mitzvahed*?

I was *bar mitzvahed* here. We got here in January. I was *bar mitzvahed* in May.

Wow! That was a crash course, gee whiz.

Did fine.

You did fine?

Gave my speech in German. Did my *Haftorah*.

Now, was the adjustment really hard for you parents, or did they...?

The adjustment was difficult for my parents. Because they, you know, it was much harder for them, because I picked up English relatively fast.

Yeah...

And the mannerisms of adolescence.

Right. Now, when you started, when you went to school in Kansas City, did you experience any antisemitism?

No. No, people actually were very nice. Uh, I mean, the school that I went to...

Which school was it?

...was Benton School which is on 30th and South Benton had an assembly to introduce me. Oh, my gosh...

I was the first person, the first refugee to come and go to school there. And they introduced me, and they told, I guess they did, I didn't speak any English at the time. But they said, you're from Switzerland, could you yodel for us? So, I had never yodeled before in my life, but I had to get up and yodel for them.

Did you do it? Were you able to do it?

Well yeah, because I figured I knew how it sounded more than they did.

So did you get a standing ovation?

Absolutely.

[laughing] Oh gosh, that's great. OK, let's see. Turn this off for a second.

[Tape shuts off]

...So they had a bigger adjustment than you did, part of that being that you were young and more malleable and you didn't have their experience of a great loss, etc.

Well, they were still adjusting to the fact that no family members were here. You know, that they were without family, they were without language. But I think they did really well. They went to night school to learn English.

They did? And they went to citizenship school?

I knew we were in when we were driving out in the country one day and my father turned to me and said, "What's the English word for eggs?"

Eggs?

It was very confusing, about which language he had to start thinking about and talking about.

So did you help your parents learn English? You probably learned it faster than they did.

Well, I was, I think I picked it up pretty fast. The story on linguistics is that if you come here before you're through adolescence, you have a good chance of picking up a language and picking it up with virtually no accent. And I worked, I worked at that. I remember when I went to medical school we had uh, a physical exam and well part of that was having to do a speech test for a speech therapist. I was very careful because I knew English was my second language. And so she said, when I was through reading the paragraph, she said, "Well, you have troubles with your "Vs" and your "THs", don't you? So, I hit her which was the only appropriate thing to do.

I think that was fair.

Yeah.

Now let's get back to your parents, they, your Dad went to work at a meat ...

At the kosher meat market. My mother worked cleaning houses and taking in sewing at night...for, there was a fellow who had a cleaning and sewing store, she did his sewing at night. And...

And then your Dad at some point...

My Dad at some point opened up his own, his own store.

Did he ever miss being a horse trader?

I don't think so.

Really?

We always liked to go...We always liked to go to watch horses...

He had the interest...

But he had too much time in between, you know, he had ten years where he didn't or fourteen years where he didn't do anything.

Did he ride horses too?

No.

Never rode horses?

He rode sulkies.

What's a sulky?

It's like a harness race. It's what he did.

So they went to citizenship school? To get their...

Citizenship school.

And what about you? How'd that work?

I had, they were going to be citizens at the time when I was already at Washington U. So I had a special hearing in front of the judge for me.

So how long, well, wait a minute, so how long were they here before they became a citizen?

Five years.

Five years. So they did it in five years and you as well?

Me as well.

You were already at Washington U?

Um hmm. Yeah, 'cause '48, then I graduated in '52 and I think I became a citizen in '53.

OK. So was that a particularly special event for you? Did it...Was it...

It was difficult for my parents, she had, they had a hard time, they had, you know, when you take your citizenship test, you have to know more than a native born person.

That's true. So they had trouble with the tests, your Mom did?

No, well, she had trouble with who was her senator.

Oh, OK.

Couldn't remember Senator Henning was one she had trouble with.

So did she flunk and have to go back?

No, no, no. We got her something to remember about...sounds like honey... He must be from the bees. So then she remembered.

Did they feel like, you know, when they got, because I remember when my parents, it was like a really big deal for them...

Oh, it was a huge deal, because for all those years even when they were in Austria, they weren't considered Austrian, they were considered Jewish.

Really?

Oh, yes.

I didn't realize that.

All those, all those passports had "J" on there, the ones that I saw. And then, they were without anything 'cause the Swiss were not interested in giving citizenship. And then when you came here, as a displaced person with no citizenship.

So your, did they, did they celebrate or did they have a group of friends that they...?

I think there was a group of people that had a great party. I was in school.

'Cause they all became citizens. Now when you got your citizenship, was it a wonderful feeling or was it just...?

It was great. The judge was very nice. I mean I was by myself in the judge's chamber and

uh, because I was going to be at school, and he was terrific.

Yeah.

Congratulated me and said he expected big things.

I don't think you disappointed him.

I'll have to call him and ask him.

[Tape stops and restarts]

Uh, not difficult. People were wonderful, people were friendly, people were outgoing, people were, were helpful and wanted to help. People reached out. It was really nice. I had to learn all sorts, I had to learn new sports, because I grew up with soccer, never heard of baseball. Had to learn a new language. Didn't know how to say all the dirty words in English, only in German. It was an interesting transition.

Now, the kids that you grew up with, did they want you to teach them a little bit?

Absolutely, we traded.

Yeah.

You know I went to Hebrew school and we got a bunch of friends from Hebrew school and I had a wonderful *bar mitzvah* that...

At KI?

At KI, at 43rd and Prospect.

Gosh, I remember that location.

And then went off to Washington U. It's really nice.

Yeah, yeah, very nice, very nice, so... Your parents were thrilled that they chose K..., that you chose the right place? I mean your Dad asked...

Well, we never had any options.

Well, yeah, you had two other options.

Well, I mean the other places probably wouldn't, I couldn't have considered, yeah, Sioux City, you'd have to drive too far for this interview. Or Louisville.

Or Louisville.

Yeah, I think everything worked out really well.

And now, did you parents, you did say that there were a couple of people in the family who survived.

Uh yes.

And did your parents stay in contact with them?

We stayed in contact with them and actually brought all of them to Kansas City.

Oh really?

Yeah, they're mostly gone now but...

Yeah. So you have any cousins, do you have any cousins?

I have, well I have second cousins in Los Angeles and a cousin in Miami.

So, immediate family you don't ...?

Not much.

Not much.

No. And I was the last of the line of the Metzls, so when my boys come through, maybe we can continue this.

Now, real quickly now, 'cause something came to mind when you talked about that your parents, that you weren't Austrians, you were Jews. Before the war, did they feel a lot of antisemitism?

I think, I think, there were, Austria was the most antisemitic of the German-speaking countries.

So they always, I mean, even before Hitler, there was...

They always felt, yeah.

OK, so you graduated...

And actually, I looked through some papers, tried to find some papers, because we're, I'm trying to pull everything together... Trying to get my birth certificate, which is not gettable.

It's not?

No.

You tried and...

We tried. And then, but some papers that my parents had saved of the work they were doing, I mean, before they were thrown out of the city that they lived in and had to go to Vienna, they had to pay all the, make sure they had to get a, a slip to make sure that all the taxes had been paid.

Yeah.

I mean they were going to get their due from whoever. And my Dad's journey into Switzerland was harrowing. I mean he got beaten and robbed and, but he made it. That's all the counts.

So you, after you graduated from Washington U...

Yeah, I went to medical school at the University of Kansas. And then I did my pediatrics training in New York at Cornell and then I went into the Air Force for two years.

Really?

Voluntary.

[phone rings]

Voluntary. Why?

[tape stops and restarts]

What did you do?

No, I was a medical...

Oh, OK.

I was chief of pediatrics in Turkey for two years, it was about...

In Turkey?

It was not bad.

That would be interesting.

It was very good.

And then you came back to Kansas City?

Then we came back to Kansas City.

Because you liked Kansas City so much, you just, you always knew you'd be back here?

Actually, it was like, it was the best job offer I had. I think. Now, my parents were here and...

Yeah, so now, when did you get married?

In '61.

In '61.

I met my wife in New York while I was in my training.

Is your wife a physician too?

She's a psychologist. And we have four boys.

Oh, you have four children? I didn't realize that. How old are they?

Oh, [laughter] Jonathan was born in '64, Jordan in '66, Jamie in '68 and Josh in '78.

So anybody married?

Not yet, that I know of.

And where are they all?

Jonathan's a psychiatrist.

In Kansas City?

No, he finished his psychiatry residency at Stanford and he's taking a PhD in American cultures at the University of Michigan. Jordan is also a doctor. He went through pediatric training in Boston and then did a sports medicine fellowship at Harvard. Actually he has a job at the hospital that I trained in at Cornell. Hospital for Special Surgery in New York as a sports medicine doctor. And Jamie is a, has a PhD in History from Oxford and a law degree from Harvard.

And where is she?

He.

Oh, he.

He's at the, he was a White House fellow for a year and now he's working at the State Department. And Josh is a junior at the University of Pennsylvania. He's in Europe at the moment, he's taking a semester abroad.

So, is he going to be a medical doctor too?

We don't know yet. We'll put no pressure on him. We'll see what he wants to do.

Obviously, they are all good students.

They're nice boys.

They're very bright. Sound like you've done pretty well. [laughing]

For a little kid from Switzerland and Austria, right?

Yeah, a redhead too.

[Tape stops and restarts]

What does being an American mean to you?

What does being an American ...? Uh, it's roots. I mean, it's a place that I'm part of and I feel part of and my parents felt part of, and my kids feel part of, compared to what it was like in Europe before the war, when even though things might have been seemingly stable, there was no stability. This feels pretty stable. Although, I must admit, before we left Switzerland, one of our Swiss friends said, "Be careful, there are Hitler's everywhere."

Yeah, well...

Who knows whether the next one won't be in the United States?

Um, hmmm. Yeah, absolutely. Do you think that Americans don't realize what they have here, they take too much for granted?

I don't think they take things for granted. I think everybody who talks about any of the things that they talk about, I mean, who should they vote for, or what's the Kansas Board of Education doing, or, you know, what are my First Amendment rights. I think everybody appreciates that.

Would you live...?

Especially those of us who earned it.

Right, that's exactly right. That makes a huge difference.

I think so.

Do you... is there... would you, would you live anywhere else? I don't mean Kansas City, I mean any other country?

Well, you know, I'm sure if instead of coming here we would have gone to Brazil, I feel that I might feel the same way about Brazil. I feel pretty strongly about being an American. I felt strongly enough to volunteer for the Air Force when they weren't drafting.

What year was that?

196 ... 3.

So that was before Vietnam?

Just the beginning of Vietnam.

Just the beginning? Were you ever worried about, you know, being sent over there?

Well, I was a pediatrician. And they said if I volunteered, they would make sure I would be doing pediatrics. Probably there wasn't a whole of pediatrics in Vietnam at the time.

Yeah, yeah. Okay.

[tape stops and restarts]

I remember that, or even though there was no term "Holocaust." You know, I mean we talked about people who didn't make it. You know, my cousin who the Red Cross notified us that he died twelve hours after Buchenwald was liberated. It was obviously on a march because he was originally shipped to the East. His mother died in Theresienstadt, or his mother was sent to Theresienstadt, we don't know where she died. My grandparents all died in Theresienstadt. My grand-, my father's mother died in Vienna. She was a diabetic and there was no medicine, there was no medicine made available to her or insulin made available to her. But for years I didn't think that was enough to qualify to be counted as a survivor.

Well, now part of the project...

But, but I think that it is part and the reason, the reason that I know that it is is because of people like you, who are true Americans. You're Second Generation, you're removed from this whole thing, but you're deeply touched by it and I'm deeply touched by it and my kids are deeply touched by it. I think we all share the same basic experience.

Did you feel like you had to try harder or be just the best person you could be because of what your parents had experienced? I mean, although, they hadn't been in camps...

I don't think so, but I often think the thing that I had to measure myself up to was the tremendous efforts, the life adjustments that they had to make, you know, at a relatively young age. My Dad was twenty-eight when the war started. He had to leave everything he knew, and it wasn't the world as it is today where you knew things about the outside. There was not very much communication going on. Uh, for them just to tear themselves away totally from everything they knew and their family, to go through the turmoil and then to come here at the age of forty and start out, or forty-two and start a whole new life with a new language and new everything. I mean the difference between America and Europe is, it's just huge. So when I measure myself, I measure myself up against the adjustments that they had to make. But I'm also very fortunate because, by coming here, I had opportunities they never had. You know, who knows, if my parents grew up here, what they, what they could have accomplished, because survival was such a huge accomplishment for those people who made it over here.

But don't you think it's interesting that so many of the survivors who didn't have, who came from such tragedy, etc., became extremely successful as Americans.

I think it's the drive.

Exactly, as opposed to so many Americans who, you know...

Take it for granted?

Take it for granted.

I think there must have been a selection process. I think if you weren't, not everybody who has that drive survived and not everybody who survived has that drive, but I would imagine that a majority of the people who survived had to have that drive.

So they would have been successful regardless...

To, to become something or to do something.

Yeah.

It means, it's uh, you know, look at your parents...

Yeah, you're right.

It can't all just be chance. I mean, I say that often. I was three and a half, what the hell did I know? I could have ended up in a chimney just as well as anybody else.

Yeah, yeah, sure.

'Cause... But I didn't and so...

Now, growing up in America, did your parents talk very much about, you know, the past?

Nobody talked a whole lot about anything.

Really? Interesting...

I mean, I still don't know all the details because my parents never really wanted to talk about it. By the time it was OK to talk about it, they were already too old and forgetful about the whole thing.

So when you asked them questions they just sort of, you know...

No, they always answered, but they felt funny about answering. My mother never felt, my father always, my father died in 1966 but my mother never felt comfortable talking about it. It just didn't seem important to her. The important part was not what happened to her, but what was going on now.

Really?

The important part was watching her grandchildren.

Yeah. So, and I remember. She always seemed like a real up person.

Yeah, she was a real boss.

She was a real boss! [laughing]

I remember she was, she had had the stroke and she was at the geriatric center and I walked in. I stopped by every day to see her and I walked in one day and it was January. Now she had been in there a couple of years, you know. On Sundays she'd come over here but essentially she was shut-in and she looked at me and she said, you know, with her good finger, she said, "Where is your coat?" I said, "Hey, I got four kids, I'm growing up, you probably don't have to worry." She said, "I always have to worry." And I think it's that, that drive. I mean we always have to worry... have the strength to do it. I mean my parents were tremendous, your parents were tremendous, just achieving and sending their kids forth and pushing them beyond them.

Yeah. So you must, you have strong admiration for your parents?

Yeah. I do.

Yeah. So do I. I felt the same way.

I think the last time I delivered meat to your folks I was already almost ready to graduate from medical school.

So you delivered at Admiral Boulevard?

Admiral Boulevard. I used to... it's funny how you, I used to, I'd come back from medical school before *Pesach*, they needed help, so it didn't make any difference. Kansas City has been very good to us and uh, it's a new start.

OK.

That's it.