

Frank Adler Interview

October 21, 1999

Today is Thursday, October 21. I am sitting here with Mr. Frank Adler in his home. We are going to be talking about his experiences and his family life before the war started, during the war prior to his leaving Germany, and his experiences once he got to the United States. Frank, could you please give me your name as it was given at birth?

Okay, Franz, F-R-A-N-Z, Julius Schwarzalder, S-C-H-W-A-R-Z-A-L-D-E-R. One word, meaning black eagle. There is a reason for that name.

Tell me the reason.

All right, uh, the family resided in a ghetto house in Frankfurt that had the signpost of a black eagle. So the family adopted that name from the house. That was very common in Frankfurt. Perhaps the only major city in Germany where Jews voluntarily took family names, because elsewhere they did not until they were required to by the government. That usually occurred in the 19th century. In our case, of course, it was much... it was in the 17th century. But some go back even farther. The Rothschild's, who were neighbors of ours, our family, adopted their name in 1567 as a matter of record.

How far back does the Schwarzalder name go?

The name goes, doesn't go back nearly that far. It goes back, I can document, it can be documented as of 1680, which isn't very far back in the scheme of things.

Compared to... yeah. Your middle name, Julius, were you named after someone?

I was named after my mother's father.

Where were you born?

In Frankfurt.

What year was that?

1923.

Do you know the circumstances of your birth? What your family was doing at the time?

Oh, yes. My parent's had married about a year before, not quite, 11 months before. My father was a commercial builder.

Oh!

My mother was at home. I am the first, and only, child of the family. Which, by the way, was very common among upper-middle class Jews, at least in Frankfurt. The men customarily didn't marry until they were firmly established - could take care of a wife and child, and my dad was 45 when he got married. And that was not at all uncommon.

How old was your mother?

My mother at the time was 31.

Thirty-one when she got married?

When she married. Thirty-two when I was born.

Thirty-two when you were born.

Yeah. So...

Tell me your parents' names.

My father's first name was Paul, Schwarzalder. We changed the name on coming to the United States because it, it seemed too unwieldy for most people to deal with. And my wife, Lois tells me she would have never married me if I had retained that long a name!

Nobody would have known what to call you.

I would have had signature cards in banks and all sorts of places. There isn't enough room for all that!

And your mother?

My mother's maiden name was Jacobsohn, J-A-C-O-B-S-O-H-N. First name Dora. She was born in the Prussian province of Posen which is now the Polish province of Poznań. It became Polish at the end of World War I. And the population there had a plebiscite and the majority voted for it to become Polish and the ones who voted for it to remain German left.

Do you know how your parent's met?

Yes. My mother was his secretary.

For your father?

My father's secretary.

Your father's secretary. Wonderful.

Actually second in command. She was the office manager I suppose you would call it today. But she had powers to sign and... for the firm, and so forth.

What about aunts and uncles? Did your parents have brothers and sisters that you were raised with?

My father had no sisters. He had a bachelor brother who died in 1935 in Germany. My mother had four sisters, all of whom died in the Holocaust.

All of them?

They lived in Berlin.

Did you know your aunts...

Oh yes.

...well before the war?

Not well, some of them I had only seen once, the one time I visited Berlin. And uh, one of them I had known better. But, my mother was always in touch and always made me write birthday notes to each of them.

Did you have any other extended family?

None whatsoever. I never had a first cousin on my father's side, obviously. I had three first cousins on my mother's side, all of whom died of natural causes, nothing to do with the Holocaust.

Did they live long enough to leave Germany?

No. Two died in childhood in Germany. One, presumably dead, went to Brazil.

Tell me about your home growing up. What do you remember from... Do you remember Kindergarten? Going, your first days at school, that type of thing?

Sure, there was no public school kindergarten in Germany, at least in those days. So those who could afford it went to private kindergarten. And of course, I was sent to one which met in the homes of the different kids. They were all Jewish. There was very little social intercourse of, by the Jews, at least in our circle, with non-Jews. We were Reformed Jews,

and by the same token, we had very little to do with the Orthodox Jews, except at school. They lived in a different part of town for the main part.

Was there a large Jewish population at the time?

Frankfurt had a Jewish population of slightly more than 30,000 out of a total population of about 500,000. The percentage of Jews was much higher in the 19th century with 15% Jews in the city. 52% of the private banks were in Jewish hands. Over 60% of physicians were Jewish, and over 60% of attorneys were Jewish. And the majority, a bare majority of the professors at the university, were Jewish. Also, the stock market was heavily populated by Jewish brokers.

I am going to jump ahead for a quick second and then come back to childhood. With such a large number of Jews in such high, highly visible and highly connected positions throughout the community in Frankfurt, at what point did they start to be pulled out of their positions and...?

Well, forcibly pulled out within two months after the Nazis took power. The mayor of Frankfurt at the time was Jewish. He was immediately dismissed. The professors at the University, notably, people like Martin [unclear] - I imagine the name is familiar - within three months. Lawyers were not allowed to practice in court, Jewish lawyers, after I think March or April of 1933; really early on. Hitler took power in the end of January. So they made an immediate impact.

I want to go back to your childhood again. You mentioned that kindergarten was private and in your friends', your classmates' homes and that you pretty much lived and associated primarily with them.

All boys because in Germany, at least in those days, until you were a senior year of high school, boys and girls studied separately.

Separately, ok. Tell me, talk to me a little bit about your neighborhood. Did you...?

Ours was an upper-middle class neighborhood on the west side of Frankfurt which is still today the best area of town.

Do you know if your home is still standing?

Oh yes!

It is.

Lois and I have been there and our eight room apartment was sub-divided into two we found. We knocked on the door and a young man opened up. Allowed us in and he said, "Oh, happy to do it!" in good English.

That's wonderful.

I was with Lehman Brothers in New York for three years.

Oh, small world!

And then became a banker, at least an employee of a bank. So Lois got to see half the apartment, including my old bedroom, and my Uncle's bedroom. He lived with us...

Oh, your uncle lived with you.

Yeah. And the kitchen. He and my father lived together throughout life, except during World War I when they were in the army.

What kind of things... You mentioned the kitchen. What kind of things do you remember as favorite childhood foods?

Liver and potato salad.

[laughing] I'm sorry – I shouldn't make commentary.

That's alright. My mother was very good making ... She was not a very good cook, but she did make...

Oh she wasn't?

No. ...but she did make excellent veal liver and potato salad and we had that Friday nights. Always, always, we came home from Temple and had dinner, of, usually either of veal liver or veal cutlets with potato salad.

As a Reformed Jew, on Friday nights, did you all light *Shabbat* candles and say the *Kiddush*?

Yes, yes we did indeed. My father wouldn't have known how. My father's family for at least three prior generations had been totally non-observant, which was true of the majority of Jews in Frankfurt. Really, the one benefit, I suppose, in that regard, as far as the Jewish faith is concerned is that the Nazis almost drove people to go to synagogue. They never had before because, you know, misery loves company.

Mixed blessings.

Yeah. My father used to say that he never experienced any kind of a Jewish holiday at home. They had a... They didn't have a Christmas tree. They didn't believe in that. Except for the maid in her quarters, the live-in maid, had a Christmas tree in her room.

And that was when your father was growing up?

Yes. The first time he was inside a synagogue was when he married my mother. She made him. Well, there was a civil ceremony in Frankfurt and my mother's brother-in-law was a Reformed rabbi in Berlin. So they traveled to Berlin and had their religious ceremony there. That was the first time for him. The second time was the day of my *bar mitzvah*.

But he did in the interim, this 13 year period, observe nothing?

He observed nothing. No! He observed nothing. And after we were married, this was in Chicago where we lived, our family lived, before coming to Kansas City, I was Temple administrator there, and we had a Temple Seder, the second night of *Pesach* every year. So my mother persuaded my father to come along one year. So, that went all right. So the next year my mother assumed that he would again come with us. He says, "Why? I have seen it!"

He did it once. Been there, done that.

Right!

You mentioned that your father had, when he was growing up, his family had a live-in maid. Were servants something that was part of your life also?

Oh yes, taken for granted.

Was that something that was in the Jewish community? Or was that something that was more European?

No, I think that was true of middle, upper middle income people as well as wealthy people. I think that was generally true. In our apartment building, the fifth floor was given over entirely to the maids of the families and they lived there.

So they had separate apartments?

Oh yeah, well, yes, very modest apartments, but they did, yes. That was the, that was the scheme of things; we had live in help. And in our case, of course, after the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, Jews were not allowed to keep any female Jewish household help under the age of 45. I remember because that was the German term for this *Rassenschande*, 'racial pollution.' That was the Nazi term for it. I remember my father saying goodbye to our maid on the 31st of December - that was the last legal day - giving her a kiss on the cheek and said, "Racial pollution in action!" From that point on, you could only have household help over, female household help over 45. Because, obviously, according to the Nazis, Jews were out to, if not marry Christian women, to rape them. That is what they should expect. And of course from that point on sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jews was forbidden; marriage obviously forbidden as well. At that point, at the end of 1935, Jews could no longer be citizens. When we received a passport, the passport was good one way only.

So, once your family no longer had a maid, did your life change?

Sure, not only did we lose the maid, but my mother, at that time, my mother was the breadwinner of the family. My father had a stroke, a disabling stroke in 1931.

Tell me what your mother was doing at that point then.

Well at that time she became, she took courses in massage in order to assist my father in his recovery. And he did recover a good bit of his mobility, not all of it.

How old were you when your father had a stroke?

Eleven, no, what am I talking about? I was seven, seven, summer of 1931. He could no longer work and my mother, as I said, studied to be a nurse and a masseuse. And then in 1935, when my father's brother died, he had been a sales rep for several manufacturers of lace. I don't know what you call it, lace, the kind that you sew to dresses. He waited on the wholesale trade which was centered in Frankfurt. And when he died, my mother pretended that she knew all about his business and applied to succeed him, and became a quick study, and uh, went through all his papers and so forth and so on. They were kept, his room, his bedroom and office combined were right next to mine - my bedroom.

So your mother became a business woman at what age? She would have been late 30s at that point?

Older than that. She was born in 1891, so this was 44, she was 44. And that only lasted until '36 or '37 when all manufacturers, non-Jewish manufacturers, had to cancel their representation by Jews. So at that point you could only work for Jews. And for awhile she was a sales woman for a coal company owned by...

Coal as in...

Coal, heating. That was before the days of gas and oil heating in Germany. That didn't last very long. So, I think starting about 193-, at the end of 1937, we lived exclusively on principle. There was no income. And of course, that diminished considerably. In 1938, when the Nazis started imposing horrendous taxes on Jews, with the design to impoverish them, and they succeeded in that.

I would like to hear a little bit more about school, once you entered first grade.

Well my grade school, my grade school was a public school for boys.

And public meaning that you went to school with Jews and non-Jews at that point?

Correct. Well, this was before Hitler came to power. I started first grade in 1930, three years before Hitler came to power. The last year, all of a sudden, in the school yard there were these boys in Hitler uniforms, which they didn't wear before. They didn't dare wear

before. Right after Hitler came to power was the first time I was beaten up in the school yard. I wasn't the only one, obviously. All Jewish boys had that experience, until some of those teachers who were decent stepped in. You know, put a halt to that.

Do you remember any of your teachers?

Oh, sure, we had my class teacher who took us all the way through from first to fourth grade, Herr Roik, R-O-I-K. Ramrod Stiff, he was an officer in World War I, Iron Cross First Class. And he was a member of the Steel Helmet, which was a military veterans' group, which helped bring Hitler to power, ultimately. But he was very decent as far as I and my Jewish classmates were concerned.

Do you have any other teachers that you remember either being supportive of you or not?

No, there weren't. Because there weren't any others. You had a class teacher, and he was the only teacher.

Oh, that was it. Ok.

Even including gym. The only other teacher I had in those years was for religion class. There is not separation - was no separation of church and state before Hitler and ultimately in the early years. An orthodox rabbi came to teach us once... like once a week for one hour religion and Hebrew.

And did the rabbi teach Jews and non-Jews? You were separated out by religion at that point?

No, no no. No, no. Correct. So at that point, then he, Rabbi Bick, B-I-C-K, was a little man, roly-poly and totally bald. He would wear a *yarmulke* with tape, tape it on his bald pate. And he, his understanding was after Hitler came to power, that all teachers, at the beginning of class, had to give the Hitler salute, which was true. So he did. Well, fortunately for him, a clarifying law came out that said Jews are forbidden to give the Hitler salute. Okay?

Small favors.

Yeah. Small favors is correct. Fortunately for him that avoided a real problem.

Did you have any subjects that you really liked? That you...

I think I liked all subjects.

Did you?

Yeah, except for drawing. Oh no - I am very poor. My penmanship is poor. I was not good at art. My lowest marks were in art and gym. I never liked gym either, to be very truthful. In pick-up games, I was always the last to be picked for a team.

What did you like to do for fun?

Well, first of all, I don't remember what we did for fun before Hitler came to power. Remember, I was very young; I was nine when Hitler came to power. My keenest memories of the earlier years, and the same, and I have checked this out with some of my old classmates, they've had similar experiences, all they could remember were political happenings.

Really?

All they could remember were political jokes. They never knew any others, because you couldn't say them publicly after Hitler came to power. Before Hitler, we used to have popular tunes, you know, and would substitute political words for the real ones. I remember the elections that went on time after time between parties, none of whom who could successfully rule. There were seventeen parties, each of them had a number because you couldn't possibly remember all of their names. And of course that was the constant topic of conversation at home as well.

[Speaking aside to someone who either enters or leaves the room.]

I remember those songs to this day.

Do you remember... I mean, is it silly for me to ask, do you remember if you had a happy childhood before Hitler came?

Yes, I had a happy childhood before my father became ill, because Sundays, he would always devote Sundays to me. I saw very little of him during the week. This was also true of the kids of my generation under similar circumstances. My father was picked up in the morning (I was already in school, I guess). My father was picked up by a chauffeured limousine that belonged to the firm. He never learned how to drive. I don't know of any, never knew of any father of any of my friends' who knew how to drive. There was no reason. They were all chauffeured to their offices. Then came noon and he was chauffeured back home for the main meal of the day which was lunch. Then he would nap and then at 3:00 the chauffeur came again, picked him up, took him to his office. And by the time he was returned in the evening, I was in bed.

So Sunday was really your only time with your father?

Yeah. Sunday was the only time. My father, my father's first political loyalty was to the city of Frankfurt. Because of the longevity, you know, that we had in the city, and I'll come back to that in a moment, because that has to do with my later schooling too. He showed me the city and the environment and he used to love to go on walks. Once or twice he took me to the horse races, which he loved to go to. He never bet a dime.

Just liked to watch.

He loved to get dressed up in his morning suit and spats and kid gloves, and walking stick, which in those days he didn't need, to see and be seen.

And what did he have you wear?

Usually, I think, a sailor suit. [laughing]

[Side conversation with someone leaving the room]

You mentioned politics and political commitment to the city of Frankfurt. Was your father, or your mother, or your uncle, was anybody involved actively in politics?

Well, my father's maternal grandfather was a member of the city council for two terms. Represented the Democratic Party. And I have the editorial of the main newspaper in Frankfurt, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, at his death about the great services he performed on the city council. Quite impressive. His, my father's mother, I never knew any of my grandparents. They all died before I was born. My father's mother was a widow for 23 years, and her sons, her two sons lived with her. She would not allow either son ever to get married while she was living.

Is that one of the reasons that your father not only was waiting until he was fully established in business because he was living with his mother?

I think so, I think so, because I think they were secretly engaged while my grandmother was still living.

How long, how long had your mother been working for your father then?

I think 3 years, or close to it. God knows what went on, I don't think very much went on in those days between people who were engaged, not like today.

I don't know, I remember my grandmother not long before she died telling, not stories, but mentioning people that she had known, with just passing comments about things that made me recognize that 'people are people' – it doesn't matter what the time frame. And some things you just don't talk about.

Well, certain things were expected of the men. They were expected to be sexually proficient at marriage. It was a forgone thing. It was *the* accepted thing. My father used to tell me about the..., never named names, but the women not only were Jewish, God forbid, who would do this, but the Jewish woman! His office was across the street from the finest hotel in Frankfurt, it is still there, the *Frankfurter Hof*. He took the afternoon off! My mother held, my mother held the fort in the office. So, I mean, she knew what was going on. That was the expected thing. Never did that with a Jewish girl. All right?

You mentioned that you really don't remember any games that you played. Do you remember...

Oh, we played hopscotch, you know that's universal.

Did you have hobbies?

Well, let me put it to you this way: One year after Hitler came to power, my father wanted to enroll me in the secondary school that he had attended, his brother had attended, their father had attended. They would not take me because by that time there was a quota system. Only a maximum of 3% of the student body could be Jewish. Well that school I think had 6 or 7% Jewish students so obviously they couldn't take any more. So reluctantly, I was enrolled in the school that was operated by the Jewish community. It was founded by the Rothschild's originally for the purpose of educating the poor Jewish ghetto children. But it developed in other respects. But it was operated by the organized Jewish community, which is a totally different animal from what we would understand the Jewish community to be here in America today.

Tell me, tell me what the difference is.

After, well during the ghetto period, of course, was a closed entity. Jews were... There was only one form of Judaism, which we today call Orthodoxy. And, after the fall of the ghettos, at least in Frankfurt, and some of the other large cities, the majority of the Jews rebelled against Orthodoxy. So that by the 1830's, in community elections, and they were held every two or three years, the only ones that could vote, by the way, were males aged 28 and over. The rule within the, that the community established by itself.

The community sets their own rules, huh?

Right. So by that time, from that time on and through the Hitler period, more than two thirds of the members of the board were Reformed, and the community was run by them, with very little allowance for many years for the Orthodox, until things changed starting in the 1880s. But prior to that time there wasn't even a *schochet* in town, there was not a Jewish, kosher butcher store. My ancestors, in those days, were butchers, but they did have, not a kosher store. And the Orthodox were belittled. That changed in time. But always the majority of Jews, at least in Frankfurt, were Reformed. I was raised that way.

Let me go back just for a second to school. What's the last grade you attended at school in Germany?

Let's see, I have to put it into American terms, ninth grade.

Ninth grade. And not in American terms what was that?

***Obertertia*. *Ober* means upper, and *tertia* means third. From that point you went to *Unter* and *Obersekunda*, *sekunda* being second, and then *Unter* and *Oberprima*. School... Let me back track just so you have an understanding of it.**

Sure.

At age 10, the end of the first four years, parents had to make a decision as far as to how to educate their children from that point forward. There were two tracks. There was the *Volkschule* which went through the eighth grade, and then you learned a trade. And then there was the *Gymnasium* or the *augymnasium* which went through the thirteenth grade. That was either in a totally classical mode, Greek - emphasis on Greek and Latin, or on liberal arts which meant emphasis on foreign languages, on modern foreign languages, as distinguished from Greek and Latin. The school, the Jewish school, the public school of the Jewish community, was the latter. So I had, before leaving Germany, I had 5 years of French and two years... a year and a half of English. Everybody studied the same, everybody. The teachers came to us. We had a different teacher for each subject.

So you stayed in the class with the same students?

We stayed at the same desk all day long. The curriculum was the same for every room in that particular grade.

Did you say, at this point, you were at an all Jewish school?

All Jewish school, it was a school that was founded, it's called the *Philanthropin*...

Oh, that's what the book...

Yeah. 1804 - 1942, that was the duration, this is the building.

Do you know why the school closed in '42?

Yes. The Nazis closed it. And everybody, by that point was deported. Anybody who was still left over was sent to concentration camp.

How old were you when you first remember hearing about the Nazis?

Very early on, I remember being told, because obviously I couldn't remember on my own, that the day after my mother took me home from the hospital...

Really? So it was a part of your life?

...that Hitler had his abortive attempt to overturn the Bavarian government. It was on the 9th of November 1923. It was on the 15th anniversary of that event that *Kristallnacht* took place, not so coincidentally. So that sort of frames my life as a German Jewish youth. And I was aware, made aware of that early on mainly because every few months there were elections and there were these posters all over the city. In Germany, even today, every few blocks, particularly in the business district, there is a column plastered with advertising - movies, stores, what have you, and before elections they were plastered mainly with electioneer posters. 'Vote for list number one.' That was the Nazis. List number two were the Social Democrats. My parents voted for them mostly. List number three were the Communists, and so on. And then there were as many as 17 different parties running.

Obviously nothing could really be accomplished unless they were given dictatorial powers, which the Nazis soon obtained, when they finally came to power. It was a terrible time after World War I for the Germans, because of punitive actions of the winning parties, against, contrary to Woodrow Wilson's promises to the Germans. French and English ignored those. Had they not, Hitler probably would have never come to power. That's another story.

So when you were growing up, and you would spend time with your friends, there was an air of politics that was...?

Always.

Always there?

Yes.

Omnipresent?

Uh, well we talked about some other things too. But it was always in the... let's put it this way, in the background. But let me go on. The same time that I was enrolled in the school of the Jewish community in 1934, I also joined the Zionist youth group. Most of the kids, starting at about age 10 or 11, joined some kind of a Zionist group. Most of them, most of us wanted to go to, what was then, Palestine. Parents weren't always so happy with the idea. My father didn't even know what Zionism really was. My mother who did know was not too enthused about it.

[phone rings and tape stops]

From that point on my after school life was taken up a great deal being involved with other Jewish kids, both boys and girls, in Zionist youth activities. And...

Give me an example of what kind of things you did.

We had discussions. We watched films. We read pamphlets. On weekends we went into the mountains near Frankfurt.

Were any of the activities just social, just to get together and have fun with friends, or was it pretty much all focused on issues of Zionism.

It was really both. It was really both. Yes, I think so. A bit of both. And that continued until *Kristallnacht*.

You mentioned that there were both boys and girls in this organization...

At that point, yes.

...yet you went to school with only boys.

The school had girls as well as boys.

But not in the same classes?

No. Let's see, there is a drawing in here. An architect's rendering, as a matter of fact, of the school yard, boys on one side, girls on the other side, and a path in the center where the teachers walked to make sure that the girls and the boys didn't get together.

You weren't allowed to get together.

That is correct - until the 13th grade! I never got that far.

Was there any place you met girls other than through this youth organization?

No not really, unless it was a family – you know a daughter of a family friend. And I didn't know many. But in the Zionist Youth group, yes.

Were there other organizations besides this youth group that you participated in?

There were about a dozen different Zionist youth groups, different shadings.

But other things you were involved with?

No, not really, that was the main after-school activity other than homework, and the center, the youth center was within two blocks of where we lived. So it was easy for me to get to. In the evenings, well let me back up. I think it was in 1935, when Jewish musicians, professional musicians, were no longer to play in regular orchestras- symphony orchestra, opera orchestra, what have you. And this was throughout Germany. The different Jewish communities throughout the country organized their own culture organizations, with the permission of the Nazis. And they used to have drama and ballet and symphony concerts and those kinds of things. Lectures. And they were selling tickets in a large hall, I would say similar to the Music Hall. Any unsold tickets were given to the youth organizations, and anybody who wanted them, until they were gone, could go there and pick up tickets. And I used to...

You mentioned that you weren't good at art, but you liked the Arts?

Oh yes! Oh yes, very much, always have. In addition, from to 1935 or '36 on Jews were not wanted in movie theaters. 'Jews not wanted here' big signs. So obviously we didn't go. Then the theatres, same thing. But the one thing where they couldn't do it was the opera. Because without the Jewish subscribers, the opera couldn't have existed, okay, so they turned a blind eye to that. And as a consequence, for the last couple of years in Frankfurt when, by the way the opera season was on for 9 months out of the year, not like here, I was at the opera at least once every two weeks.

Did your parents ever take you to any cultural activities?

Well my father, of course... My father of course, couldn't because he wasn't well enough. My mother, yes. My mother used, my mother was an avid student and took me to lectures mainly on Jewish subjects. The famous Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* one of the great adult education institutions of Jewish life in Germany, had these marvelous lectures. I attended lectures by Buber and Heschel. And I had a marvelous Jewish education.

But your father never participated in any of it?

No he stayed home. I mean, that's understood.

Tell me about your parents. What was your relationship with your parents like? Both your mother and your father, and your father before his stroke and after?

We were mutually devoted. In those days I think that was true of all three of us. My uncle, my father's brother, he was pretty much on his own. He and my father had little in common really. And didn't look a like in the least either. He had his own circle of friends, both...

[End of tape 1, side 1]

He was in the Army service, on the Russian front in World War I.

Your uncle was?

Yeah. And so that handicapped it somewhat as well, so the social life really was our immediate family and some friends, most of them friends of my mother.

Were your parents strict? Did they have a lot of rules and expectations?

No. My father especially not. He wanted... I don't think he knew much about parental discipline. Neither did my mother. I should have said before, I always had a nanny.

Hmm.

Until I started going to school.

And that also, was that something that was typical of...

Yes.

... middle and upper middle income families?

Yes. That was not always a happy experience. I couldn't get along with all the nannies. When I didn't, they were fired and a new one was hired.

So when you didn't get along with them, what did you ...? Did you say something to your parents? Did you ask them to find somebody new for you?

Right, oh yes, of course. Right I was assertive, and sufficiently so. [laughing] Then after I started going to school, my dad needed his rest, being ill. And my mother worked or in the evenings went to lectures or to concerts.

With your mother working, did she also, and again at the point where the maid had to be dismissed, because you weren't allowed to have someone, did your mother maintain all the responsibilities of keeping the home and cooking and working?

No, I think the maid went out and did the shopping. It was a large household. We had eight rooms, big rooms, and you know, keep the house clean, and did the laundry, and so forth and so on.

That was when the maid was there, but when the maid left how did your mother handle things?

Well, we sublet several rooms because we needed the extra income after the Nazis, you know, made things so difficult. We still had household help but of course the women were over 45, but we still had them. We had one maid, who left actually before the Nazis came to power, who died last year.

You maintained connections over all these years?

She found me again. If you want to hear the story. The city of Frankfurt has a visitation program for former Jewish inhabitants. It started in 1979. Every year they invite between 100 and 150 people, including spouses, to visit for two weeks, all expenses paid, including round trip air transportation, and rooms at the best hotel in Frankfurt, the *Frankfurter Hof*, plus a *per diem*, plus theatre tickets, opera tickets, two kosher banquets in City Hall, and various out of town trips.

And this is city sponsored?

City. Frankfurt is a wealthy city. *Business Week* last month had an extensive article on it, saying it's a miracle what Frankfurt has achieved. That it has become as wealthy as the wealthiest city in America. And Jews have again contributed to that, but that's another story. Not in such a major way anymore as before, before the days of Hitler. So in any event, they are doing it by age, the oldest and by the first which is... It became known, I found out by accident that this was going on. They advertised it in a newspaper for "Jewish Refugees," quote, unquote, in German, published in New York. Somebody here subscribed to and told me. So we registered, and in addition to having that in the offing, every three weeks we get a magazine which is published by the city for the benefit of its own seniors, senior citizens in Frankfurt, distributed to them, plus to everyone they know of on the list of former Jewish residents.

So, every issue has several pictures, class pictures, of usually senior high school class pictures, going way back, 1921. Some woman sends in, 'This is my senior high school picture. Here I am forth from the right on the fifth row. My name then was such and such, and now is such and such. Here is where I live. Here is my phone number. I hope former fellow students will give me a ring so we might get together.' They had lost touch, they didn't know what their married names were, the other girls. It was mostly girls' classes. So I sent in picture of my last class at the Jewish school. So this maid of ours saw the picture.

How long ago was this that you sent the picture in?

This was published in '84.

Ok.

I have it here, upstairs, I think. 1984, 1985, something like that. They have published some other stuff of mine. They are interested in me for various reasons. I write well in German still.

Do you?

Oh yeah. I just wrote a very long technical letter this morning as a matter of fact. Yeah, I keep current. So she saw the picture, and writes me a letter, "at last a sign of life!" I was the son she never had, and so forth and so on. She sends me, she writes, "We were bombed out during the war, and all our house was totally destroyed. All I had were the clothes I wore in the air raid shelter, and what was in my purse." So she sends me two things: a photo copy of a letter my mother wrote her when she left our employment in order to get married. You know that is the sort of thing you do. And a picture of me on a tricycle [laughing] that she had in the air raid shelter. Can you imagine? So, we were in close touch, and she did not have a very good life for a variety of reasons. She died last year at 95.

Where was she living?

In Frankfurt, but at the end she was in a nursing home in, in a different town in [unclear], where she had a granddaughter.

Let's go back to your parents for a minute. You said that your parents were not at all strict or that they didn't have rules and such.

I never felt they were, but I knew how to behave.

That is what I was going to ask you, were you just a good kid, or did you ever get into rebelliousness as a lot of kids do?

I don't think any of us did. I think our schooling had a great deal to do with it. Our teachers were strict with us. There was no foolishness in school.

Was there anything that would create tension or anxiety between you and your parents, or was it just pretty calm?

Well yes, there were tensions. My mother sometimes had fits of depression, and I, at an early age, had to take over, had to put her in a sanitarium and had to run the household. At age 13, 14.

While you were still in Frankfurt?

Oh, yeah. And then later on when we came to this country I immediately went to work. I was the breadwinner of the family at age 16.

Did you work at all when you were younger in Frankfurt?

No, no. I went to cooking school the last summer we were there; it was run by the Jewish community, which I thought was a very practical thing to do. And, at that prior years I was always sent away to some children's homes. That was up in the mountains or by the beach. That's how you did it. And then, in the last year there was no money for that so I went to cooking school. It was fun.

That sounds good. You mentioned that when you were in school you had a religion class once a week.

That was in the public school in the first four years of schooling.

Was there other religious formal education in your, during your childhood?

Well, certainly in the Jewish school we had Jewish instruction every day or at least every other day - both Hebrew and general.

Is that where you prepared for your *bar mitzvah*?

No, I prepared for my *bar mitzvah* at the synagogue and with the cantor. But my basic Hebrew instruction was in school.

Was that important... I kind of, I guess... Let me ask, was that important to either of your parents that you...?

It was important to my mother, I think.

To your mother.

My father couldn't care less. He didn't want me to go to that school.

Did you and your mother celebrate Jewish holidays?

Oh, yes.

And your father?

He just watched with amusement.

Are there any favorite memories or anything that stands out about celebrating holidays?

No, I think they were always celebrated at the synagogue. There was not a Friday night or Saturday morning that my mother and I did not go. I was a boy's soprano in the Temple choir for two years or three years, and then an alto, until *Kristallnacht*. I was getting ready to be a tenor at that point. My music teacher, my high school music teacher, was also the director of the Temple choir. He and I were the last people in the synagogue other than the caretaker before *Kristallnacht*. *Kristallnacht* was on a Wednesday evening. Prior, Saturday after services my teacher practiced a Bach fugue on the organ, G minor. I was pulling the stops on the organ and turning pages. And it was after services about 1:30 [unclear]. By that time we were living in a room, in a boarding house, a Jewish boarding house, directly across the street from the synagogue.

How far distance was that from the original apartment you mentioned that your family lived in?

Half hour walk. That is the only way I can measure it because we had no car. Nobody had a car. Everybody walked.

I was just trying to get a sense of where you were and where the Germans required you move to, if there was some distance.

No, they did not require us to move in a particular place. Oh no, we simply couldn't afford to continue renting the apartment which my grandmother and her two sons had lived from 1904 on. My uncle had lived in only two apartments all of his life, the one he was born in and the one he lived in after 1903 until he died in '35, except for the army years.

Did you experience antisemitism other than you mentioned when the boys in the brown shirts beat you up at school?

Oh sure, oh sure.

Tell me about some of... How young were you when you first remember?

I remember that an upstairs neighbor, immediately after Hitler's take over, put out a Swastika flag out of his window. My first, another vivid remembrance, is that I was in bed with the flu or some childhood sickness, I don't know what, and I remember where the bed stood then because later on it didn't stand there. It was against the other wall. And my mother walked in and said, "Hitler has been named Chancellor." I remember her expression; I remember so vividly.

About how old were you?

I was nine.

And you knew what that meant?

Oh, did we! We most certainly did. Hitler, you know, Hitler made no bones about his program. He said, "We want to eliminate Jews from German life." You can't have it more clearly expressed than that.

Did your family entertain thoughts of leaving Germany once he was named Chancellor?

Yes. My father, well my father said, "I am too sick to leave. I probably couldn't get a visa." This is what he said then. He ultimately did get a visa through the generosity, I would say, to a Consul in Scotland. He would have never have gotten it in Germany because the Consul that we would have to go to was reputedly an antisemite. And that pretty well is brought out in State Department telegraphs back and forth that are now open and which I have seen. UMKC [University of Missouri, Kansas City] has them in book form. So, he did not think he could go. My mother didn't know what to do. My mother said, "I can't leave my husband, but I have a responsibility to my child." So she tried every which way to find a haven for me. Including she was toying with the Palestine idea. But she was more enamoured, initially, with some kind of a scheme, I don't know the details of it. There was a group in Toronto trying to get Jewish children from Germany. Whatever happened to that, I really don't know. I don't remember that the idea of going to the United States was entertained early on. It came to the fore fairly late in 1937, and I know exactly what happened. My mother finally decided that the Canadian thing didn't pan out. She also tried something about Holland. That didn't work out. Palestine she didn't, that was too dangerous to go to Palestine, malaria. No, not the Arab thing, that was not a concern.

Different time.

But the malaria with the swamps up in Northern Palestine, that was a concern. But she finally decided we should try to get to the United States. First thing you had to do, there were two principle steps you had to take. One, you had to have an affidavit from an American citizen. An affidavit issued to the State Department. It had to be, part of it was a financial statement from the individual, personal financial statement, to prove that he or she could, if necessary, take care of that immigrant so that the immigrant would not become a burden to the country. After all, this was a depression era. That was the first requirement. Then after you had that affidavit you had to register...

[phone rings and tape stops]

The next thing to do, you had to register that affidavit with the American consul in Stuttgart which I forget how many American Consulates there were in Germany, but that was the closest one to Frankfurt. And then you got a quota number. Well in those days the

German quota, I think, was 33,000 a year, and here you had about 300,000 German Jews applying for quota numbers. If you could even get a quota number. So, there never came a time, while we were still in Germany, that that number came up. But how to get an affidavit....

Was she applying for a quota number just for you, or for the whole family?

For the family. At that point she was doing it for the whole family. Probably changed afterwards, but at that point it was for the whole family. I think was my father's concerned he didn't believe anything would eventuate anyhow. But how to get the affidavit? No, we didn't register then, first we had to get the affidavits. My mother remembered that in 1904, her father who then was an official of an organization called the *Judische Hilfsverein*. It was a national organization, Jewish organization, headquartered in Berlin, with branches in different cities.

Say the name of it again.

Hilfsverein, h-i-l-f-s-v-e-r-e-i-n, which means 'Help Society' or 'assist' whose task it was to help Russian Jews who were victims of pogoms in Tsarist Russia go through Germany to the ports of embarkation for the United States. Feed them, you know house them temporarily for a night or two, whatever was required, pay for tickets that they needed to get to Hamburg or Bremen whichever port was involved. My mother's father who had been president of the Jewish Community in Posen, of her Temple, a reformed Temple, was in charge of that for the city of Posen which had a large German-Jewish population. And she remembered that - this was right at the turn of the century - and she remembered that her father was anxious to see how some of these people were fairing in the United States. She also remembered that her father talked about a sister he had in the United States, who had gone there many years before. I think about 1880. Well it came 1904 and the *HAPAK* Hamburg-American steamship line ran round trip excursions from Hamburg to New York for people who wanted to visit the St. Louis World's Fair. It was 1904, special rates. So her father, my mother's father took advantage of that. He left his wife and five daughters at home and off he went to America to visit St. Louis and to visit the sister whom he hadn't seen in over 20 years. And my mother remembered that and she also, all of a sudden, it came back, she remembered the last name of the sister - the married name of her father's sister. R-E-I-N, Rein which is not typically Jewish at all. There are many people by that name in this country, but she may have been the only one who was Jewish, or she and her husband, and the children. All the children left the Jewish faith as it happened. Well, she remembered that but she had no way of knowing... She knew they lived in Chicago. They did in 1904. But she knew nothing else. They were children that was the [unclear]. So somebody suggested that she write the National Office of the Russian Consulate of Jewish Women in New York, which she did - and told the story and "Do you have a member in Chicago by that name?" Unlikely thing anyhow because if they were women, chances are they were married and had different names. But low and behold, they had such a member. An unmarried first cousin of my mother! So...who was living with a married sister. The married sister and her husband, not Jewish, issued an affidavit for me. The financial statement was not strong enough to guarantee that not only I but my parents as well could

be taken care of by him in the event of need, so I had an affidavit, my parents did not. My mother was in a *Kaffeeklatsch*. Do you know what a *Kaffeeklatsch* is?

Yes.

Okay, more common in those days than today. We don't play bridge in those either. A woman came in jubilantly with a Western Union telegram, which said, "Affidavit for you and your husband on way." It was signed by a man whom she didn't know. It was Alfred Decker, D-E-C-K-E-R. It turned out that he was the National Vice-President of HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aide Society, and the head of HIAS in Chicago. He had been issuing these affidavits right and left. To make a long story short about that, only four people got out, ever got to use his affidavits, my parents and another couple. The other, who knows? In any event, he was the chairman of the board of Society Brand Clothes in Chicago and where I ultimately went to work at age 16, first as a mail clerk and then in the accounting department and, after *my* army service, as assistant credit manager.

Let's talk. Let me backup a little bit because I'd like to get some information about when the Nazis came into Frankfurt before the *Kristallnacht*. You said that you were at the synagogue the day before.

The Saturday before. *Kristallnacht* came on a Wednesday. We were living directly across from the main entrance to our synagogue, synagogue, very large, larger than..

This is in the apartment you moved to after you had to leave the eight-room?

Right, in a *pension*, you know, boarding house, a Jewish boarding house.

How long had you been in this new apartment?

We moved there July 1, 1938. And now we are talking about November 9, 1938. We heard noises during the night and got up, and we heard glass being broken. It was the stained glass windows and there were men in civilian clothes running around with cans, turned out to be cans filled with gasoline, and set the building on fire, the interior. They couldn't have burned the exterior. It was too massive a structure, brick, and concrete, and stone and steel, and I saw, ultimately saw the huge central chandelier crash down.

From your apartment you saw?

Oh yes.

You watched the whole thing?

Yeah, yeah. We saw the Catholic caretaker try to rescue one of the Torah scrolls, and the Nazis took it away from him and just threw it in the fire.

Did they do anything to him?

I don't know. I really don't know. I don't remember. Maybe I did know. And then, of course, the next day they arrested most of the Jewish men in Frankfurt, not everywhere, only about a total of 40,000 men all over Germany, Jewish men who were arrested and taken to concentration camp. And they had age limits, minimum age 16, maximum age 60. My dad was 61. I was 15. But they came, they came to boarding house. All the others who fit that age range were taken away. Ultimately all came back within a month or so totally haggard, like almost walking skeletons and with all kinds of injuries. Of course they all had to sign papers saying, "I, I will leave Germany within 6 months." Although it could be only three months actually, whether that could be accomplished or not was something else. And from that... That was the end of my schooling. All of my teachers were taken to concentration camps. I only had male teachers, all taken to concentration camps. So, from that point on until 7 weeks later, I, I was pretty well indoors for fear of something what might happen.

Did you have any, do you recall, even though you had to be inside because what was going on in the streets, do you recall being able to see or talk with your friends at all during this period of time? Were you aware of what other families were going through?

Not really. There was one way we had of reassuring each other. That had, it started before, in our particular youth group, we had what's called in German a *Pfiff*. I don't know if you know what a *Pfiff* is, a P-f-i-f-f, capitol. It's a tune that you whistle. Okay? It was a particular tune what we would whistle when we saw each other at a distance, when we come here or across the street, or whatever. My friends knew where I lived and I knew where they lived; so sometimes we would go out on our bicycles and go past the house and whistle that tune, wave, communicate.

How long before *Kristallnacht* had your mother obtained the affidavit for you to immigrate?

Uh, not more than a year.

Was there a reason?

Well, my father, first of all, when Hitler came to power said, "Aw, that's nonsense."

Didn't believe it?

No, well for good reason, 'cause there had been 4 or 5 different governments in the preceding 2 to 3 years, none of which could make headway with the economy because it didn't have the powers, or were not granted the powers. So it was widely assumed that, at least among Jews, that nothing would happen. Sure, he was talking a good game. There is an editorial in the *Kansas City Jewish Chronicle*, published 2, 3 days after Hitler came to power. I think it was February 2, 1933. Predicting that nothing would happen to the Jews, that Hitler was just bluffing. I quoted it in my Temple history. But, that was a typical sentiment. Now, when the 1st of April came around, there was a general boycott of all Jewish stores by the Nazis. Rabbi Mayerberg incidentally preached the night before on that and, interestingly, he said, he was fearful that German Jews would ultimately lose

their lives, said that in that sermon, and I have reprinted part of the text which I found. No, it wasn't quite that way. I take that back. He said, "In the Middle Ages they had nothing to lose but their lives, and now they might very well be at the point of losing their livelihood." That's the way he put it. No one really thought that, you know, the Holocaust was...

So your father, your father didn't believe that it was an issue at that point; your mother had the affidavit but didn't think...

Right. In 1933 there were... no, my father's mood also changed with the times. They had to. After the Nuremberg Laws of September '35 which withdrew citizenship from all Jews, which prohibited sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews, which closed about public schools to Jews. They did so many different things, and no one had stopped Hitler. Even foreign countries hadn't stopped Hitler. When he marched into the Rhineland, marched soldiers into the Rhineland, which was supposed to be forever demilitarized under the terms of the Versailles Treaty at the end of World War I, and no one said, "Boo!". The French were right there within a few miles and didn't mobilize even. It became a forgone conclusion that Hitler could do whatever he wanted to. Nobody was, nobody was willing to stop him. It was incremental, you see.

What I'm trying to get an understanding of is if you had the affidavit why didn't your mother send you?

Oh, we didn't have it then.

Oh, you did not. I thought that you said that you did.

No, no, no, this didn't happen until 1937 that the affidavits were forthcoming.

Okay, but the year before *Kristallnacht*.

We didn't have the, our quota number hadn't been called up.

Oh, okay. So what changed after *Kristallnacht*? Was your quota number called, or did you find another way?

No, no, no. It was ultimately called up in 1940, but in the meantime, my mother [sic – means father] had a girlfriend from before WWI who had moved to Scotland. He got in touch with her, she was a well to do woman, unmarried, and she undertook to guarantee taken care of, guarantee my schooling at a boarding school, very fancy one, for 6 months. On the strength of which I was able to obtain a 6 months temporary residence permit from the British government. Okay? Well, at the end of those 6 months the war had started.

So when you left 7 weeks after *Kristallnacht*, it was under the...

For England. For England.

...it was to go to school?

... and with the understanding, yeah, and with the understanding on the part of the British I would move onto the United States.

So it was understood from the British perspective...

That was part of the documentation.

...but from the German perspective they allowed you to go because it was for schooling?

No.

How did you get out?

The German government would be happy to be rid of Jews any old way and confiscate, after they had confiscated virtually all of their possessions. Okay? They wanted to be rid of Jews and get their belongings. And they said...

So the German government was happy to just have anybody leave whenever they wanted to at that point still?

Yes, right, right. Those who returned from the concentration camps, you know, I told you, the ones who had been arrested during, in the aftermath of *Kristallnacht*, as long as they promised to do everything possible to get out within 6 months, they could, they were sent home from concentration camp.

When you left, when you left your parents, do you remember that day?

Oh boy...

What your parents said?

My dad did not think he would ever see me again. My mother really didn't betray that much emotion. Put me on the train...

Was it understood that you wouldn't be coming back to Germany at that time?

Oh sure, sure. Passport wouldn't have been good for it anyway. So, so that's what happened. I arrived in England and went to school there 13, 14 months. And then the number was finally called up while I was in school, the quota number. And so, I saw the American Consul in London and got my visa. Greatest thing in the world, that American visa, without which you can't come to the United States. Here is my...

This is your father's passport?

Yeah, immigration visa, such a little thing, without it you couldn't, you could not come in.

You said earlier that you came to the United States before your parents?

Yes, because they were in Scotland. They left Germany 5 days before the start of the war on virtually the last train out, leaving all their possessions behind.

How long after you had left for England did they leave?

8 months.

Okay, and had you been able to communicate with them during that period of time?

Oh, yes, and I have every letter that my parents wrote me. I don't know what happened to mine, probably not legible. My mother typed. My father had a gorgeous cursive handwriting. Anyway, what were you saying?

About, how long it was when you come to the United States and your parents came.

They left Frankfurt the 27th of August 1939.

For England?

For Scotland.

For Scotland.

What happened was at the same, no, the same woman who helped me also got some money...

Your mother's school, childhood friend?

Father's.

Father's childhood friend.

Not childhood, girlfriend.

Oh, okay.

Who happened to be Jewish, so maybe they were just platonic, maybe just a platonic girlfriend. Let's hope.

Never know, will we?

No.

Friends are good.

Yeah, so she mobilized. She got some money together and got the help of a Presbyterian charity in Scotland to take care of my parents for a certain time, on payment, from these funds and so forth. So they were in Scotland at that point. And there was a rule on the part of the American government that those in Scotland had to, could not be issued a visa anywhere except in Scotland. Don't ask me why. So the same Consul who issued my visa while in London, traveled to Scotland, not just for my parents, where he also had an office, and that's where my parents received it. They received it 5 weeks after I did. By that time I was already in Chicago staying with cousins of my mother that I told you about, temporarily.

So there wasn't a great deal of time between when you arrived?

No, no.

Yet there had been 15 months you said roughly, from the time you had lived with your family in Frankfurt to the time you lived together again in the United States.

Right, right. Longer than that actually, yeah, about 17 months, right.

You had said that your father because of his stroke was unable to work for a period, however he did get better, was he?

But he never again able to work.

Okay. Do you remember what your parents said about their feelings about leaving Germany at that point?

My father was sorry to leave Frankfurt, and happy to leave Germany. Now, that may sound incongruent.

No I, well, from what you have said with your family history there.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was very, very proud of that. He had even received a citation from the city government at one point. The principal of my school, the Jewish school, showed a family tree of mine and even pointed to it in a petition to the city government when they needed some kind of a permit, I forgot what the details were, to show how long some Jewish families had lived in the city. And that family tree at that point had only gone back to 1595, and I have since been able to establish it backwards to 1487.

When ya'll left, did you have any knowledge of where you friends or your family friends were going at that point? Do you...

Yes, my parents would write me while I was at school, "so and so said goodbye, so and so..."

Did very many of your friends, were they able to leave Germany?

Most of them were. And yet there is a memorial wall, more than just one wall, it goes around the entire ghetto cemetery, with memorial tablets. Over 11,000 Frankfurt Jews died in the Holocaust. It's a lot.

Do you know the Jewish population of Frankfurt is today?

Yes, about 5,000, virtually none of whom are German Jews. They were displaced persons, who were... survived the war, who came from the East: Poland, Russia, Romania. They found themselves in a displaced persons camp in Höchst, where the Höchst Marion suburb, well, it is the name of a suburb of Frankfurt, now part of the city, where that factory was. Which at one time was Jewish owned, by the way. So in any event, we were there for a short visit in 1990, we went to see my old maid and also for me to do some research. We went to that synagogue, my old synagogue, rehabilitated at the expense of the city - 3 million marks spent on that. It looks ugly today, and strictly Orthodox. Lois had to sit up in the balcony. So, I met two men there who told me that they were from Frankfurt originally. I didn't know either one. They had been at Israel, had moved there before the war, to what was then Palestine. They couldn't take the climate. They came back. They said there were, I think, two or three others like them. Everybody else, they told me, were East European Jews, everyone, except those who were now a new generation born in Frankfurt, you know. They spoke German, but they really were not Germans. I went up to the Rabbi and said, "I was *bar mitzvah* in this synagogue." He said, "You were? When was that?" So I told him... gave him the date, 1936. "*Ach, ein Yekke.*" You know what a *Yekke* is?

No.

***Yekke* is an east European Jewish expression for a German Jew. And it's a derogatory expression!**

And this is the Rabbi talking?

This is the Rabbi talking, speaking in German, okay?

How did you feel?

It was [unclear] terrible.

Did you say anything?

It was disgusting. No, no. He turned away from me and went like that. Awful.

Something I forgot to ask, going back, before you left, which was whether you had to wear the Star of David in Germany and the responses?

That regulation went into effect during the war after we had already left.

After you had left, okay. The other question I wanted to ask you about your days before leaving Frankfurt. I have gotten the impression that you really, your family really socially associated primarily with other Jewish people in the community.

Right . . .

Were there any non-Jews who were regularly part of your life?

No

None at all?

No, none what so ever. Not after my 4th grade. Because by that time the Nazis were in power. But you had to be careful, you had to be very careful what you would say and, you know, the same thing even was true of non-Jewish children. If they heard their parents say something against the Nazis, they were expected to report it to the Hitler Youth leader. And you know what the result was then. And it happened. That actually happened.

Children turning in their parents . . .

Children turning in their parents . . . And of course, in the afternoon after school the kids, the Christians, the so called Christian children changed clothes to their uniforms. The girls to their BDM uniforms, *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, League of German Girls and the *Hitler Jugend*, Hitler Youth boys and they march up and down the street singing their songs. “When Jewish blood splurts from the knife, things will be so much better,” you know, this kind of stuff.

And this is what you listened to as you crossed the streets?

Sure.

Okay. Now you’re in Chicago...

Yep.

...and you’re living with your mother’s cousins . . .

Right, until my parents arrive . . .

Until your parents arrived. When your parents arrived, did you stay in Chicago?

Oh yes. We....I found a furnished, a modest furnished apartment. We had no furniture, we had nothing. You know, each of us left with two and a half dollars in our pockets. That’s all you were allowed to take out. And I arrived in New York with five dollars.

And how did you get the extra two and a half?

No, no no no. How did I get those? A distant cousin, we have great-great grandparents in common and I talked to him. He's now 90, he was 91 on the 1st of August and I spoke with him on his birthday and again last week, and we were really close friends more than relatives. But, he came to this country early on and prospered and he sent me that five dollar bill while I was at school.

Ohhhh

And I didn't exchange it into British Pounds, I still had it and that was the money I had. There's an interesting story to that. I stayed in New York for a few days with a Jewish family in Brooklyn whom I never knew of before and haven't heard of since, but the man and the family was the employer of the husband of my mother's, my mother's cousins in Chicago – longwinded. So, I forget what it was, I think they couldn't take me in Chicago until Saturday. I had arrived in Monday, on a Monday. We docked April 1, 1940, would have dock the day before except the Longshoreman's Union doesn't unload ships on Sundays, so we were anchored by the Statue of Liberty for a day. It was very pleasant.

What do you remember about coming into the Harbor and seeing the statue?

It's a thrill, it's a thrill. No question about it. And you know, a dream come true. And so anyway, I stayed. I wasn't suppose to arrive in Chicago until Saturday, it was Monday. So I stayed with this family and on Friday I was supposed to take the Pacemaker - you probably don't even know what that is?

I only know the medical pacemaker.

Well no, I'm wearing one.

That one I know . . .

No, the Pacemaker was the fast coach train of the New York Central that ran between, daily, between New York and Chicago. The one with Pullman cars was the 20th century, but that I couldn't afford. So, anyway . . .

And how fast was fast? How long did it take?

You get on, I think, about four in the afternoon and you reach Chicago about eight the next morning. All coach, very nice. So, much nicer than British trains, I assure you. Somebody had bought a ticket for me. Now, I had to do two things on my own, I was told: buy dinner on the train and rent a pillow, which the porters made available for a quarter. I got on the train and eventually went up in the dining car and was seated opposite a gentleman who was eating fish. I like fish. Well the waiter came and put this pad of paper in front of me. Have you ever eaten in the dining car on the train?

I have but it's been so long and I don't recall.

Okay, well you have to write out your choices from the menu, they don't write it down.

Okay, yeah I do remember having something and I think we checked things off at that point.

Well, no this you have to write it down. I said look, give me the same thing as this gentleman is having; some fried fish, potatoes, and vegetables, okay. He's having a cup of coffee and he was eating, by the time my fish arrived he was eating a pudding. And a few minutes later the waiter put a bill in front this man and he looked at it and pulled out a five dollar bill - on the plate, you know. The waiter came back and took the plate and the five dollars and came back with the same plate and a quarter on it. And the man took the quarter and left. Here's for all the money in the world for me on a plate that was fish and potatoes and vegetables and pudding and a cup of coffee, plus the pillow for this. So, I was miserable. The man comes back, the man who'd been eating, came back and got a hold of the waiter and says "you short changed me!" And you only gave me a quarter back. He says, "That's right!" You gives me one dollar bill and I gives you a quarter change." So the man comes to me and asked me whether I had perhaps witnessed what was going on and I was only too happy to oblige. Okay, so I arrived in Chicago with four dollars.
[laughing]

Well, I'm so much happier.

No, probably three seventy five, I probably left the quarter tip.

After that, that was generous.

Right, right, right. So on Monday, that was Saturday, on Monday morning I went to see, made an appointment to see Mr. Decker, the one who get out the affidavits for my parents. Old gentleman, welcomed me, happy to see me. And he says "well, where you going to be going to school?" I said, "I can't afford to go to school, I have to take care of my parents." "Oh, well let's see what we can do?" So he introduced me to purchasing agent, I guess it was. Says alright, maybe we can find you a job. Didn't even ask how much it pays at that point. I took it and lifting, this was Society Brand Clothes, men's clothes. Sorting out some swatches, you know what I mean?

Um hmm.

Okay. So I did that for a few days with a very nice lady overseeing me. And then they decided, no, they could use me in the mailing room. So I was promoted to the mailing room. Same pay, thirty cents an hour, twelve dollars a week, which I brought home to my cousin's home. He told me, now you can't spend all of that. Street car is five cents each way, so that's ten cents and you working five days a week, so that fifty cents you need for transportation. And once every two weeks you get a haircut, that's fifty cents more and you can take a sandwich with you to the, to work. Buy yourself a pint of milk and the rest you put into a savings account. See, well I was told to follow his directions, what my

parents expected of me. So I opened an account at the Continental Illinois Bank Downtown and started a savings account with that money. When my parents arrived, we were in this rooming house, the practice was continued. Expenses were a little higher. I still managed to save a dollar or two every week. Actually, I turned all my money over, there's no withholding taxes in those days. Couldn't been taxed anyway, didn't make enough money. I turned all my money over to my father who posted it in his book, which I have, and just as he had done in Germany, everything has to be accounted for thoroughly, and he gave me my allowance. Save a little bit here or there but mainly I lived on my allowance. I have the twelve dollars a week.

So, did you ever go back to school?

Yes, I did go back to school. First to a high school where they had night classes in bookkeeping. Went there after work.

How long after you had gotten to Chicago did you go back to your education?

I think probably after a few weeks.

Oh, it was pretty quickly then?

Oh yes, I had to improve myself. I mean this thirty cents an hour, you know. And I almost lost that job in the mailroom when a few months later the minimum wage went to forty cents.

Too steep for your employer huh?

Yeah, yeah. Well, I saved myself. In any event, my mother found a job, after some months, as a industrial nurse for Spiegel, the mill.

Let me interrupt you here a second. You had said earlier that you learned English while you were in school in Germany.

Yes .

How well did you speak English when you got here?

Okay, there's a story that goes with that. When I arrived in England all by myself,

Oh, of course England first, yeah.

I had a big steamer truck. It was gone. It couldn't be found on the ship. They took me, you know, from the port in Holland over to Harwich, England. So nobody there could speak German at the port. They had an interpreter but he couldn't speak German, he spoke French. It was the first time that I gainfully employed my knowledge of German [sic – French] after having studying it for five years.

German or French?

French, French excuse me. So we got along fine with that but my English he didn't quite comprehend. It was not as good as I thought it was.

You had had a year and a half of instruction?

Yeah, yeah. High school – how much do you learn? You got to live in the country in order to learn. So, sink or swim for me in school and I learned fast. Excellent school and I mean...

How did your parents learn English?

My father had English in school. He knew some, he mostly remembered dirty jokes. [laughing] Which he enjoyed telling me.

He did?

Yes, oh yes, oh yes! That's part of the education of a young man, you know.

Okay, I'm not privy to that.

Well, I don't know if your brother had that experience, or not.

I don't know, you need to ask him.

Yeah, you didn't ask....

I can't my dad telling dirty jokes, I don't know.

Okay, well only in English and in French, I know them in French too.

[Speaking aside to someone who has just entered the room.] Okay, you ventured in at an interesting point in the conversation.

[Also speaking to the person who has just entered.] There were two calls, Sue called, Dan called by mistake, he meant to call David. Alright . . .

Okay, so your father practiced his English telling dirty jokes?

Right, and he knew some expression when they wrote me from Frankfurt while I was in school and he would throw in a few phrases that he remembered. Also French phrases, also Latin phrases which I did not understand, never took Latin. And my mother took English classes in Frankfurt at night.

In anticipation of moving?

Yeah, sure. She wasn't working anymore. She had lost, I mean . . . They had no income, they were living on savings exclusively. Until those were taken away in order for them to be able to get a passport. And of course during that interim time was also the time when all silver and gold and jewelry of Jews was confiscated. Because of the murder of that secretary in Paris.

I don't know this . . .

Okay. On October the 26th or 27th of 1938 the Polish government informed the German government that it was going to cancel all Polish, all passports of Polish citizens who hadn't been back in Poland for X number of years. Which involved tens and thousands of Jews living in Germany. They had come from Poland after World War I. So, what'd the Nazis do? They arrested all Jews with Polish passports, put them on trains and took them to the Polish border, throw them out and the Poles wouldn't take them back and they were sitting on the border for days not knowing what would happen to them. The son of one of those families was a student at the Sorbonne in Paris, 21 years old. And in protest he bought a gun, went into the German Embassy in Paris and shot the first person he could find there. It was the third secretary of the Embassy... some other. That was the excuse for *Kristallnacht*.

Oh.

The German said all of Germany rose in righteous indignation on the part of all good Germans against world Jewry which had performed this dastardly crime. And they imposed a fine of one billion Marks on the Jewish community and which, for the most part, was carried out by confiscating all silver, gold and jewelry with the exception of gold wedding rings, one knife, one fork, one spoon per person. Everything else was gone. Confiscated. So, you know that was the start of the real impoverishment program. I'm surprised you haven't heard of that. Lots of literature about that if you ever want to read up on it, in English. But that was what artificially triggered *Kristallnacht* because Nazis were ordered by Goebbels, the propaganda minister to dress in civilian colors and put the synagogues to fire and so forth. So the confiscation was in punishment for what this young man did in Paris. Okay? Mass confiscation.

How long was your family in Chicago?

Well, we . . . 1940, my dad died there in, in '52. I'd been in American Army Service, for that I was living in Chicago.

Did you go on to college after you graduated high school?

I went to night school, eight years of night college. Northwestern and then the University of Chicago.

And you lived at home with your family?

Yes, until we married in 1952 and . . . No, we married in 1950, excuse me. We have our Golden Anniversary next May.

Oh, how wonderful!

Yeah. Workman coming in and they see this [unclear] on the left in English the wedding certificate, “you been married how long? To the same person? Incredible!” To the same person.

So you said your father lived in Chicago until he died.

Right

What about your mom?

My mom came, followed us to Kansas City in ‘53. I’d been the administrator of a reform Temple for seven years after the war and then took, was invited to come here after an interview.

Were you working as an administrator at the synagogue before you met your wife?

Oh yes.

How did you get into that line of work?

When I was stationed in New Guinea, well I was always interested in things Jewish, and regularly attended services Friday nights, Saturday mornings in Chicago, various reform Temples. And during the war I was stationed in New Guinea and I was the acting chaplain there after the, after the regular Jewish chaplain there had left and the base was allowed one and I became the acting Jewish chaplain by appointment of the Protestant base chaplain. And we conducting a *Seder* for three hundred GIs, when I arrived there the wine was gone the *gefilte* fish was gone, hadn’t even started *Seder*. And I conducted the service every Friday night for about six, six to eight months, something like that.

What did your father think of this aspect of your service career? I mean, since he, you said that he really didn’t think much of . . .

No he didn’t. He said it was nonsense. But really, you know. Why bother, why waste your time about such things, you know? That was basically his attitude.

So it was just something you were wasting your time on?

Sure, that was the basic attitude, but it was very nice. Then I was on the general headquarters, MacArthur’s headquarters in Manila, and my desk was next to the desk of the Chief of Jewish Chaplains for the whole Far East, Dudley Weinberg, reform Rabbi, became very close friends. There was a Jewish Welfare Board Home in Manila that had

existed there since before the war and we use to have gatherings there a couple of times a week and he gave lectures, I gave some lectures. I mean, I was pretty proficient early on. And he encouraged me to go into the Rabbinate before my . . . and after I came back he got the Placement Director of the Hebrew Union College to visit with me and I was offered a full scholarship to Hebrew Union College, but they wouldn't, advance placement I think, skip the first two or three years. But they wouldn't look after my parents. My parents had to be provided for. So, that was an impossibility. And during the war, during my Army service, I was still in basic training I took, everybody takes an aptitude test and various things. And I was the first person in Camp Lee, Virginia to get a perfect score on the administration aptitude test. So I became an administrator, okay? And wound up, as I said, in New Guinea. Was there for a year and a half and then Manila general headquarters teaching GIs about the GI Bill of Rights and what the union, what the United Nations was proposed to be all about and I was also the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Armed Forces Radio Network Far East and worked with people like Hans Conried, I don't know if you remember the name, played captain Hook on Broadway and with Mary Martin. And Lew Ayers, you've heard that name, married to Ginger Rogers. Not that time, they were divorced by then. And other people of that caliber and delivered phonograph records to Mrs. MacArthur's home because she liked classical music. I was the source for that. Anyway, so after I couldn't become, go into Rabbinical school, a friend of the family who was the administrator of a large reform Temple in Chicago, urged me to become a Temple administrator, and that's what I eventually did become and serve for seven years. And then in a congregation the senior Rabbi was a very straight task master and who couldn't get along with the assistant Rabbis. Well, I was no competition, but I knew as much as the assistant Rabbis did. And so I became the assistant, non-ordained assistant rabbi for six years. I conducted every Saturday morning service.

Did your father ever come to services?

No. Yes . . . once.

He did?

After Lois and I announced our engagement, which infuriated several of my board members, because she came from a conservative home, "you mean our daughters aren't good enough for you?" This is 19-, 19-, 1950. Can you imagine? And admit it!

Well, after having seen *Last Night of Ballyhoo*, the play that was at Missouri Rep last year and talking to my mother, I was unaware until a year ago of the animosity between . . .

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sure.

...and that was how you were.

And Chicago was a hot bed!

How did you meet your wife?

Well, my mother gave massages to her mother. And that's what she did in this country, on the most part. And of course my mother talked me up. So, I guess Lois overheard some of these conversations, and my temple youth group for singles, young single adults, was on a campaign to win more members. Well I didn't know anybody in the congregation who didn't already belong. So I had to go outside of the congregation, to make a long story short, we had a blind date for that purpose. I brought her to the temple and that was the last time either of us, were at a youth group meeting. We then started the young married group.

And through the years later. How long had ya'll known each other before you became engaged?

About a year, a year, yeah. She, she wouldn't say yes for a long time. And her father was very upset.

Because you were not conservative?

No. Because I couldn't support her in the style for which she was accustomed. Especially having to support my parents.

Did your parents develop when they settled into Chicago, particularly when you were away in the service, did they develop a circle of friends that were from Chicago or people who immigrated?

Yes, let me tell you what happened there. And this is, and I mention this frequently when I see what's happening with immigrants from Mexico who won't adapt themselves, who won't learn English, you know. The main task of practically of all the German Jews who came to America during this period, the first task was learn English. Speak only English. Forget about, even with other German Jews, don't speak German, speak English only. And as far, if you couldn't make it economically, don't look to the person who issued the affidavit. It was a self help group, that's what it was called, self help. And we helped each other. People, I remember at the beginning I got bedding, sheets, and blankets, and pillows, and pillow cases for my parents and myself, from self help. All German Jews who had come here previously, who have themselves been helped by people, you know, in similar circumstances. And then later on we did for others as well but to a more limited extent because, not long after that, nobody could come over anymore. So we, you know, we came quite late. But that also engendered the social circles. So, in the very beginning we would spend a lot of time with German Jewish people but we all spoke English. And we would have been aghast if any of us had said to a school board, you know, "teach us in German." That's unthinkable! You become an American! That means you speak English. You take on the customs of the United States!

Did you ever encounter any antisemitic acts once you moved to the United States?

Not overtly in civilian life. To some extent I did in army life but I think some of it was innocent and it was said, things were said by people who didn't even know I was Jewish. You know?

Innocent in that they meant what they were saying, they just didn't know that it applied to you.

Right. Didn't personally, right, yes. And of course certain expressions "don't Jew me down," you've heard that?

Oh yeah . . .

And the like, you know. Some of it was said innocently and some was said by people who were just ignorant. And I had some of that in basic training. I served with hillbillies from Tennessee, so you know, who had never seen a Jew. I had this experience in Kansas City. I remember, many years ago, Rabbi Mayerberg was invited to speak about Judaism to some kind of, I think it was called a fellowship class, at a Baptist church north of the river. And something happened he couldn't make it so he asked, he sent me. And so I talked something about Judaism and afterwards somebody came to me, "you cannot be Jewish." I said why not? "You don't have horns." Now we also had an experience, I once . . .

This would have been in the fifties not long after you came here?

Right. I once took a group, a church group through the old temple on Linwood. And at the end of the question period, somebody piped up and said "where do you slaughter these sacrificial animals?" Okay?

And how did you respond?

Well, I told them "yes, in the bible days, one or two thousand years ago when the Temple in Jerusalem the priests made such sacrifices. But since the destruction of the year 70 that has ceased to be the case by Jews. But people don't know that. At least that's what they . . . No one laughed, incidentally, when that question was asked.

They were all wondering if somebody was going to ask the question for them, I guess.

Yes, yes, you're right.

Tell me again when you married. What year was that?

1950.

1950, oh so, that's right. Next year is your 50th anniversary, that's wonderful. Okay. And how long had you been married when the two of you moved to Kansas City?

Three years. Not quite three years, yeah.

Why did you choose to leave Chicago?

The temple where I was serving was losing its members, because of a changing neighborhood and there being for twenty or more reformed temples in Chicago.

That's something I'm not familiar with. That sounds wonderful.

Right, yeah and also greater Chicago. So the future seemed bleak and the Rabbi, of whom I was very fond and he was very fond of me, said "I am going to retire, take early retirement, but I want to see you placed first." So I had various offers. Checked them out but the one I took was the one in Kansas City. I'm not sorry.

And at that time, in 1953, you said your father had died the year prior?

He died in '52, yes.

And your mother was still living in Chicago?

She was still living in Chicago, she followed us here.

She did?

Yeah. She had no other family really.

What were your first impressions of Kansas City?

Well, let me say what I heard about Kansas City. I had trouble finding it on the map at first but after I received that letter from, which I still have, in an envelope with the corner imprint of Meyer Jewelry Company, 1015 Walnut Street, Kansas City, six Missouri...

Oh how wonderful!

Yeah, Leo and Meyer, the son, the son-in-law...

Oh I remember going there.

Well, he was then vice president in charge of personnel, saying my name had been recommended and might I be interested in making a change. And if so, please send us, it didn't say you'll be there, but something amounted to that. So I did. Somebody else had been interviewed first, so I did, and I was invited down and things went from there.

And was Lois happy to be moving? Was it difficult?

Well, she didn't know where Kansas City was.

Either, yes . . .

Either. And, says "how do you get there?" I said "well the way I came, which was by train, overnight train." It snowed that day, January of 1953. Says well, "you do as you think best. If you decided to take the position, we will come too." Our older one, Dan, was then seven months old. So that's what came about.

If he was seven, I'm not . . . I'm losing site of the months here. Was Dan born before your father died?

Yes.

So your father had an opportunity to meet his grandchild?

Yes. He died six months later. So, my experiences at B'nai Jehudah can fill books, some of which will remain in the closet. But all in all, I've been very happy.

How long were you with B'nai Jehudah, how long were you the administrator there?

Administer thirty years, developer and director eight years. Thirty-eight years.

Thirty-eight years . . .

Seven years in Chicago, so that's pretty good.

And how long had you been in Kansas City when your second child was born?

Little over a year.

Okay. And you just have the two children?

That's it.

Tell me their names again, Dan?

Dan and Paul.

Were either of them named for family members?

Paul was for my father. Dan, we always liked the name.

Good enough, okay. Well I know that you've got volumes you could share about your years with the B'nai Jehudah but.....what would.....can you give me one of your first momentous experience with B'nai Jehudah? Do you remember something early on that was particularly memorable?

Well, yes. I came here and discovered that Rabbi Mayerberg was about to complete twenty-five years of service with the congregation. And I said, well what's being done to honor him on that occasion? Hadn't thought about that! Typical. Typical for boards, for temple boards, I can tell you that. Well immediately took that on as a challenge and it came off magnificently. It really did. We had a wonderful weekend. And while others got the credit, and I was happy to do that, you cannot be a good administrator without giving lots and lots of credit to the volunteers.

Jean is very good at doing that and not taking it for herself.

So, and the old ladies, Mrs. Paul Uhlmann, Senior and Mrs. Arthur Mag and Mrs. Nathan Rieger, you know... the grand dames.

Where did you and Lois move to? Where did you live when you first moved to Kansas City?

We moved into a Dible home, we needed to have a GI house. We had an apartment in Chicago, so we couldn't afford anything other than a GI house, you understand.

And the Dible homes were considered GI homes at that point?

Well, it depended on which would qualify for a Veteran's Administration loan and the Dible, there were only two homes, we were told, that we could qualify for. One was the Winn-Rau houses in Meadowlake . . .

Where is Meadowlake?

Meadow Lake is between 75th and 77th, State Line to Belinder, that general area, okay? The Winn-Rau, we went there and we had a big dining room in Chicago and there we left the furniture that we had for it, there it is. There was no way of getting it into that home, remember? [seems to be speaking aside to his wife.]

It literally wouldn't fit through the doors? Or would it fit through the doors and take up all the space.

Mrs. Adler: Actually there are two cabinets and we only have room for one here. One's up in the loft. But here we have all this furniture, what are we going to do with it in this tiny space?

Yeah, and the Dible houses were really great, we felt big.

Mrs. Adler: Plenty of space.

Lots of space, so we bought, [unclear] had just been started and we were the first people on the block at 7936 Charlotte, with horses grazing across the street. And the workman coming at night, going into the homes in which they had worked the day before, stealing the plumbing fixtures. That was an introduction of Kansas City.

Welcome!

Yeah.

Were there any challenges to, I mean, difficulties that you found either in getting settled in here or leaving Chicago at that point?

Well, it's always a big adjustment, especially with an infant. I came first by myself and I stayed for the first month at the St. Regis Hotel. I bet you don't know where that is.

Never go to St. Regis, no.

Also known somehow as the St. Regis Hotel, corner of Linwood and The Paseo, northeast corner.

Oh, okay.....yeah.

Northeast corner

Northeast . . . Okay, I was going to say it's a block down just across the street.

Mrs. Adler: It was right near the temple.

Two room apartment for twenty one dollars a week and the mice and the rats...

Are free.

...were free. That was right by the temple so..... Then we moved into President Gardens for because our house as yet had no gas in it because the gas workers were on strike.

Mrs. Adler: The house was finished, the furniture moved in...

No Gas.

And that was it. Since your position was with the Temple, I guess I am making an assumption that your social circle developed from...

Of course, and until... I was fairly active in Federation for a while, not in an elected capacity, but volunteering, fundraising, and so forth, and with the exception of that experience, Jewish life for me really revolved around the personnel at B'nai Jehudah.

How long were you in the United States before you applied for citizenship?

I didn't apply for citizenship.

Tell me more.

Okay. Because you have to take out first – you cannot become a citizen normally until you have been in the country for 5 years. You can take out citizenship papers after, I forget, one year – two years.

Oh, your service in the Army would have...

Okay. I went into the Army officially as an enemy alien. I was officially...

Because you were a German citizen.

Because, as far as the United States was concerned, I was a German citizen. As far as Germany was concerned, I had no citizenship- a very peculiar situation. War broke out and the rule was you could not travel more than 25 miles in any direction without special permission of the nearest Federal District Court. And while I was working at Society Brand Clothes in the mailroom, I was invited by somebody there to spend the week at a YMCA camp in Wisconsin and I had to get permission from the court to do that. So I went in as an enemy alien, didn't have to go in, but I went in, and at the end of basic training just before I was there in Camp Lee, Virginia near Petersburg and they took a bunch of us from various, originating from various countries, by truck to Richmond, Virginia one afternoon and we were quickly sworn in as citizens and back on the truck in time for late chow at the base.

Easy enough.

Yeah. My parents, of course, they had to wait for 5 years, and they became citizens in 1955.

Something I asked several times about when you were growing up about hobbies and what you did for fun – once you came to the United States, were you immediately aware of a difference in the environment in terms...

Yes, except at work. I came here during a presidential election year in 1940. And that was, of course, the topic of conversation among the employees, off and on. And Wendell Wilkie was a Republican candidate and Franklin Roosevelt ran for a third term. And Lindbergh was saying things that were not too friendly to the Jews and promoting his America First cause which seemed frightening to us and uh... We felt Roosevelt was our great savior, but we didn't know about Roosevelt – I think you know what I am talking about. So, we were real enthused when Roosevelt won his third term. In general, you started saying something about hobbies. I was, became involved in a group, and I don't remember just how it came about on the south side of Chicago where we lived, it was a ping-pong club, and we won the south side championship. I think there were about a dozen or more teams, and I was playing ping-pong every weekend.

Wonderful!

Yeah, it was great. It was great.

What about after you all got married? What did you do...

Well, this was at the very beginning.

Right, right, I'm sorry, say that again Lois?

Mrs. Adler: He lived at temple.

He lived at temple, right. That's another tape.

That's right.

Okay, we talked a little bit about your kids. Do you ever talk with your kids about the war and what it was like living in Germany before the war?

Sometimes.

Did they ask questions or is it something that you felt...

Mrs. Adler: Paul does.

...you could bring out?

Oh, yes, Paul our younger one does, more so than Dan.

Mrs. Adler: And Michelle.

And our oldest, our older granddaughter, Michelle, who just started college.

How many grandchildren do you all have?

Four -, and Michelle just started college. She takes an interest.

Tell me your sons' wives' names and the names of their children.

Okay, Dan's divorced – he has his older child, Michelle, is in college. She lived with Dan until starting college in Council Grove, Kansas, where Dan has his business. And his younger child, David, lives here with his mother. He is a freshman at Shawnee Mission East. And our son, Paul, with his wife, Heidi, have a joint practice in clinical psychology in Springfield, Massachusetts, and they have two children. Jonathan is twelve and he will be *Bar Mitzvah* next year in Springfield. And Katie, who is eight, just started her Hebrew studies at the temple there.

Tell me what, back to when your kids were growing up. Did you, obviously if you are involved with temple administration, there's religion around them, but did you practice, did you have traditions and holiday things at home that were part of...

Always. Sshe is the super home decorator. You should have seen our homes at Hanukah time.

Mrs. Adler: I made decorations and Passover was always at our house and the high holidays...

Still is...

Mrs. Adler: And every Friday night as they were growing up, we ate in the dining room and when we moved into our new house with the light carpeting, my friends all said, “well, you are not going to eat in the dining room still with your little children on Friday nights?” And I said, why not, and we did every Friday night we ate in the dining room.

So they grew up with a sense of your connection.

Oh yes, oh sure. Sometimes I think that became a burden, of course. I mean this is true in many professions, you know.

Mrs. Adler: But they became very involved in youth group.

Yeah. Both of them were treasurers of the youth group – both of them were treasurers of Missouri Valley Federation of Temple Youth and uh...

And do you see your grandchildren following these footsteps in terms of their connection to the Jewish community?

Well, of course, Michelle’s ability to do it – she used to come in for a while for youth group activities, but the last two years of high school that was, became a little difficult because it’s a 140 mile *schlep* from Council Grove to Kansas City...

Mrs. Adler: However, she has a strong feeling and for instance, she was just looking at a Judaica catalogue I had and when she saw some things, she said, ‘Oh, I would love that.’– So, I think she has a very definite feeling. Now she...

In Council Grove and continuing now, she has a ring, a silver ring with her name in Hebrew. She always wears that, and wears a *Mogen David* most of the time on her, you know, necklace. And...

Mrs. Adler: What’s interesting is she was the only Jewish child in Council Grove, and so far as she knows, she is the only Jewish child where she goes to college!

And because of her, I was invited two years in succession, probably will be for a third one, to represent the MCHE in Council Grove.

Wonderful!

An all day deal both years because I spoke to every history class.

Oh my goodness...

Yeah.

Lets kind of start to wrap things up here. Are there any other postwar events, since you have been in the United States, that had a particular impact on you or your life? I realize that's a rather broad question.

Yeah, it is, it really is. I don't think so. We enjoy doing things together. I am not a great one for being in the company of men. That's unusual, I think. Most men like to be out with their buddies playing golf or bowling, or so forth and so on. I'm not for that. I prefer being at home with Lois. And we don't go out all that much because we like to be at home. I am very comfortable being at home. So I like to listen to good music and we have a good collection of CDs.

Mrs. Adler: Travel.

And usually the radio goes all day.

Lois, you mentioned travel. What about Israel? Have you been to Israel?

Yes, we were...

Mrs. Adler: We'd like to go back.

Yeah, 24 years ago.

How does the Holocaust or your pre-war experiences affect you today? Do you feel that it's still part of daily experiences?

Uh... It is, it is for me. But, but, of thought at least...

Yeah.

I study every day. It's very important to me. And history and genealogy are my two basic avocations, so that all goes hand in hand.

Ties together. What about God? We haven't really talked about God's place in your life growing up after the war. Because there are people who feel very connected and close to their Judaism but God is something different somehow.

Yeah, I question that an awful lot myself. I get a feeling of inspiration from... not from conversing with God, this "I-Thou" relationship that my teacher, Martin Buber had, is not for me.

Do you believe in the concept of a God?

Yes, I believe in a power greater than myself.

Has that...

However you define it.

Right.

Okay.

Did it change... Did your belief change at all in light of the Holocaust?

Oh I, I think, in light of...

...of the Holocaust.

Well, I grappled with that. I don't know whether you read the Rubenstein literature on, you know, God died in Auschwitz sort of thing and then, Elie Wiesel for a while spoke in those terms as well. I haven't thought that through. I am not a theologian. I don't, you know, and that really doesn't interest me that much. The Jewish people interest me a great deal. The ethical concepts of Judaism are terribly important to me. The customs, some of the customs and rituals to me are experiences that tie me with my people.

What's your favorite Jewish holiday?

Probably Passover. I love *Seder*. I think so. I never looked forward to the high holidays for some reason.

No?

No, I don't.

Does it have something to do with the work aspect of thirty-eight years?

It probably, it probably does.

Mrs. Adler: I am sure it does.

Probably does.

Mrs. Adler: It was always very hectic.

Yes, trying to collect past due dues.

Were there any traditions or things – I mean I know we have talked about your mother and you went to the synagogue for *Shabbat* and celebrated the holidays. Were there any traditions that you remember particularly with your mother that you brought into your new home with your children?

No.

New world.

I don't think so.

Mrs. Adler: Just going every Friday night.

Well, we have talked about that.

Okay. What does being in America mean to you?

It's a challenge.

And has that changed over the course of your life here?

Yes, oh sure. I mean it's... nothing that I felt in the past has really been negated. I can reaffirm most of the things I felt when I came here as a source of pride, but a sense of concern has been superimposed on that as well. As to what is the future not only of America, but of the world, really. You can't help but feel that way, first of all in the atomic age. Secondly, when you hear and see some of the *mishegos* that's going on in Washington, particularly in Congress. And you wonder whether sanity will ever prevail. Those are concerns I would not have thought in those terms when I first came here. First of all I was too young. And secondly, you know, winning one's daily bread was the most important thing, and being thankful that I could do that for my parents as well as for myself. That meant the most really.

Okay, another question I am curious about in light of what you told me before we got started that you have traced your family history back to what year?

1487.

To 1487. Have there been through, your avocation of genealogy research, have there been distant family members that you have met through your research and developed relationships with?

Oh...

Mrs. Adler: Like, um... Marliese.

Yes, uh, I discovered some non-Jewish relatives, both here and in Germany.

Really?

And through my genealogical researches, we had one very distant cousin here two years ago, she spoke at the Temple. Retired Lutheran minister, now 79 years old, fully aware of her Jewish antecedents.

Were her parents Jewish or it goes back before that?

No, no, no. It goes back much before that. She has written an autobiography in which she points out among others, that the brother of her grandfather who was born a Jew in 1841 and baptized in 1843 was taken to Theresienstadt at age 90. Born a Jew. And his wife who had absolutely no Jewish background whatever went with him. It was very interesting and this harkens back to this school, one of her ancestors, one of her ancestors was the guiding light for this school back in the 1830's and 1840's, in promotion of reform Judaism and after he saw to it that *Bar Mitzvah* was abolished in Frankfurt, as an example, okay. But after this, and singing at services was in German and using Protestant hymn tunes with sort of neutral words. Okay?

You got to start somewhere.

So his son, who was the brother of one of this woman's ancestors, took it a step, tried to take it a step farther, after this man's death, and ordered to abolish the Talmud, abolished circumcision, and abolished the Hebrew language as far as prayer was concerned. He couldn't get any support, so he was baptized and he got the rest of the family to be baptized.

And this was in the 1800s?

1840's, 1840's. And this woman's great-great-grandfather had another reason, I believe, for converting. He was a physician and by law at the time, in the 1840's, could only have Jewish patients. The moment he converted he could have any patients. So a lot of conversions took place in those years for those kinds of reasons, economic and social reasons. But she has been very conscious. Knows her background very much and has written this autobiography. I found her through my studies, and we just had a visitor here for a week three weeks ago, 44 years old who is a fifth cousin once removed to me, whose mother I discovered. She was, she is the descendant of a brother of a great-great-grandfather of mine who, according to the official records, got a Lutheran woman pregnant and after the birth of the child, five days after the birth of the child, he converted in the Lutheran church and married the woman. And I have a copy of the church records, and it says there that the birth has been legitimized. Okay? So anyway, this is a young man who sells oriental rugs in a department store in Frankfurt. His mother was a billing clerk for IG Farben during the war – guess what she billed? Poison gas. She had no idea what this meant to me. Okay? Absolutely none. Zyklon B.

Mrs. Adler: She's a very simple woman.

Well sure, absolutely no education, and no one in that family ever had any real education. Well, anyway he was over here for a whole week with a friend. So, then we had some genealogical journals, Jewish genealogy journals in the United States, through one of which I discovered a distant cousin living in, now living in northeast Massachusetts - not Jewish. She professes to have no religion but I know her father was a Cuban Catholic and on her mother's side she had a Jewish grandmother.

Does your interest in genealogy stem from anything in particular?

Wanting to know more and remembering accompanying my father, while he was able to, to the cemetery to visit the graves of his parents, his grandparents and his great-grandparents and their siblings, and so forth. And we have been back there a couple of times now to the cemetery. The Nazis defaced the joint tombstone on my grandparents' graves. This had bronze letters on it, and those we knew had been removed during the war. So in place of it I had a marble panel attached to that, and we have been back to see that.

How did it feel the first time you went back to Frankfurt?

Uh, eager anticipation on my part. Horror almost on Lois's part. Now I think she should have been more prepared for it because she knows, as almost anybody who has been to Israel knows, that right next to the [unclear] airport is the Volkswagen assembly plant, you know, which horrified her. But after all, the Germans did do a lot in terms of compensation, you can't blame the present generation. And so I had feelings... We hadn't planned on going, that was strange. In 1978, we were delegates to a Reform Jewish convention, world convention of reformed Jews in Amsterdam, and we had planned to spend some time after that and had reservations in Switzerland and Italy. But you got to get there, so we had a choice really of driving, renting a car, driving through Belgium and France or driving through Germany. So I decided almost on the spur of the moment, let's go through Germany, and looked at the map, and found my way to Frankfurt and I didn't have to look at a local map to get to the cemetery, straight to it.

Mrs. Adler: Went straight there.

And from there straight to my old house of which I knew was intact because our son, Paul, had been there and seen it. That was intact, the whole neighborhood was intact because it was right by the IG Farben headquarters and Eisenhower wanted that as his headquarters at the end of the war, so he saw to it that that area was not bombed. So we knew that that was intact. And uh... but now, I'm glad I went, I'm glad I was able to find the graves and make the arrangement for that marble plaque.

Mrs. Adler: And our son, Paul, was the one who encouraged us to [unclear].

Yeah, he had been there two years before and brought back photos of the house and of the temple, and so forth... yeah.

Well, I am through with my questions. As I said when Neil was here, is there anything I have not asked you about that you think is important to your story?

Well... I don't think so. I think you have asked some very good questions.

And we could go on forever...

Yeah, I know, and I hope, I hope that the responses have been what you were looking for.

Well, my first reaction is to say I'm not really expecting anything in particular but in terms of the broad nature of all the things we have covered, I think this has just been wonderful.

Thank you.

Yeah, and it's...

I told Jean yesterday when she called here about Neil Tucker, I said I hope I won't embarrass you.

I think that – I just don't say it out loud. Okay, I guess were through then.

Good, I think you did a beautiful job!