

Gustave Eisemann Interview

January 6, 2000

Interview of Doctor Gus Eisemann on January 6th... Okay. No, I think it's fine here. Okay, we'll try it a couple of minutes. All right, tell me, what was your name at birth?

Gustav Eisemann.

Okay. And where were you born?

I was born in Halberstadt, Germany.

What kind of town was that?

Halberstadt was a town of about 50,000 population, and a very important Jewish background as far as the city is concerned.

Where did that background, the Jewish background, come from?

Well, it was a long history of an Orthodox Jewish community in Halberstadt.

Was there a large Jewish community there?

I don't know how large it was. Probably had a population of probably a thousand Jews in Halberstadt.

Okay.

I only lived there one year, so I ...

You only ... do you know anything? By the way. Let me just check this one more time. Okay. Do you know anything about the circumstances of your birth? Were you born at home? Were you born in a hospital?

I was born at home on a very cold day and was born ... walked to this ... helped by a midwife and a physician.

Was that common at the time?

That was common at the time, yes.

When was that? What was the year?

January 11, 1926.

Well, it's coming up on your birthday now.

That's right.

All right. My daughter's is January 12th. Did... Were ... Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have two older sisters. Bertha, who was born two years before I was, and Hannah was born a year before I was.

So you're the youngest?

I'm the youngest.

Okay. And what were your parents' names?

My father's name was Karl, K-A-R-L. And my mother who's still living, is 98.

Is that right?

Her name is Irene.

Okay. What did your father do?

My father was in the scrap metal business. He dealt in scrap metal.

Buying and selling?

Buying and selling. And he was in ... with an international company called Aron Hirsch and Sons, which later moved to, to Berlin and that's the reason we moved to Berlin.

So how old were you when you moved to Berlin?

One year old.

Okay. So then ... did you stay in Berlin then?

Stayed in Berlin until we moved to the United States.

What was your house like? Do you remember? Did you live in the same house all the time when you were growing up?

We lived in an apartment building, and we moved once because the apartment was sold, and so my parents moved. As a matter of fact, three years ago, Elinor and I visited the house where I was living before we left Germany.

So that was the second house you lived in?

That was the second. Yes.

When did you ...

The first house was destroyed, obviously by bombing.

And that the second house... How old were you when you moved to the second house?

I think I was about eight years old.

And so you still remember the second house?

I remember the first house, I remember the second house.

So what was the first house like?

Oh, it was a very nice apartment building. I think there were four stories at the time, and I think we lived on the third story. There was an attorney who lived below us and there was a man who was an inventor of zeppelins who lived on the floor above us.

Is that right?

And I remember visiting him one time and going through his studio where he was working.

Were you interested in, in scientific things when you were a little boy?

Oh, I was interested in becoming a physician at a very early age because I liked the physician that took care of me and took care of the fellow family - the family physician. And we were close friends and that's really how I became interested in this.

I see. Did, did your mother work?

No. Mother did not work.

Stayed at home.

Stayed at home. We had help in the house from time to time.

Is that ... What ... Did you have a maid or... ?

We had a maid. We had... we had a maid. We also had a person who took care of the children when we were young. I remember her and a starched uniform. Old fashioned European style.

Did she live with you, this person who took care of the children and the maid. Did they live in your house?

No, they did not live with us, but they came in the morning and left at night.

So, was ... did you have any sense that your family was an affluent one?

I don't think that we ever thought about money. I mean, that was not ... I think there was less concern about monetary status and I don't think we even thought about it or talked about it. I never heard a discussion of money in our home until we came to the United States.

Well, then, was your family ... Was ... Did you have ... Was your family Orthodox?

My family came from an Orthodox background, both my father and mother. They came from Frankfurt, which was a dominant Jewish Orthodox community. And, the grandparents, I remember my grandparents very well. They were all modern Orthodox.

So there was such a thing as modern Orthodox back then too?

Oh, absolutely. These were disciples, you might say, of Samson Raphael Hirsch. I don't know if you know that background, but that's the background. These were ... they were both educated.

Your grandparents you're talking about?

My, my parents. My grandparents also. My one grandfather was in the grain business. And my other grandfather was in the paper business - manufacturing various paper supplies.

Did they both go to ... Did they go to the university?

I don't think anybody in the family went to university except my one uncle who was a physician and a great-uncle who was a physician. Both dermatologists. I don't think anybody else went to the university.

Was it something that was kind of...?

They were all businessmen, primarily. Went to train, as apprentices, to various companies. Like my father was an apprentice to Aron Hirsch and Sons and were in the business there. And I think that's the way people learned businesses at that time.

Did they ... did they have some form of formal education in terms of lower school, high school?

Well, they went to *Hochschule, gymnasium.*

Yes.

Went to *gymnasium.*

Which is the equivalent of high school?

Yeah, it's the equivalent of high school. They didn't ... they did not go all the way. I think my father did not go get his degree from the *gymnasium.* I think he left at the age of 16 and became an apprentice to Aron Hirsch and Sons, and he learned the business there.

And your mother?

My mother went to school, you know. Went to *Hochschule.* High school.

Right.

And *lyceum,* which is after the fourth grade, you went either to, either to the trade school or you went to the *gymnasium* or to the *lyceum.*

And what was that, the *lyceum*?

Well, it's the equivalent of a ... it's a two tier system in Germany at the time. If you want to learn trade, you go to one type of school. If you want to become more professional, you go to the other school. For example, I went to the *gymnasium* also after my fourth grade and then you start in a different track.

At what point do you start in a different track?

The fifth year.

Okay. By the fifth grade, I see.

Fifth grade.

So were your ... Did you have all your grandparents living nearby?

No. My parents' parents ... grandparents lived in Frankfurt. We didn't have any family living in Berlin.

How far away was Frankfurt?

From Berlin? I'd have to look it up exactly to tell you.

No. I mean did you go to Frankfurt or did they come to see you?

Oh, yeah. I went there. I always went to visit my grandparents around the fall. I was there always for the Jewish holiday of *Sukkos*.

Is that right?

I always visited my parents, my grandparents at that time.

How did you get there? Did you take a train?

Train. Train.

Okay. And you used to go there. So you spent a fair amount of time with your grandparents?

Usually a week.

What was it like in their home?

Their home? Well, they also lived in an apartment building. They lived on one floor. And one of their daughters and family lived on another floor in the same building. As I recall, there was always a ... it was a large apartment complex and they lived in a comfortable apartment, you know? Everybody ...

Did they have servants too?

No. I don't recall that they had any servants. They probably had somebody to maybe help clean, but I don't recall that they had any servants.

Was your grandmother a good cook?

The food was always good, especially the baking. It was very good. But, you know, they did not have big ovens so the trays would be taken to a local baker and he would bake the goods.

Right.

And we would have to bring them back then to the house. So, the food was always very good.

Do you remember anything that your grandmother used to bake?

Well, apples... cake.

Apple cake?

Was always good. Apple cake was always good. And plum cake. I especially liked plum ... plum cake.

How about your ... was this your mother's mother that you're talking about or your father's?

It's was my father's mother.

Your father's mother.

I remember my mother's mother very well. She came later on to the United States. I think she came around 1939, she came to the United States. And one thing I remember about her, when you went there to eat, you had to eat every bit of it. She poured it on your plate and you had to eat it all. And, you couldn't leave the table until everything was gone. And she didn't ask you what you liked, like the kids today.

Just whatever was being served.

You had no choice.

How about your mother? Was your mother a good cook too?

Mother was a good cook. Good baker, good cook. The food was always good.

Do you remember anything in particular that you liked when you were growing up?

I think I liked everything pretty well, except ... you know, kosher meat was very hard to obtain in the later years when we were in Berlin. And I didn't particularly like stuffed spleen. I'm sure you've never eaten stuffed spleen.

No.

Nor have you ever eaten ...

We're vegetarian.

Have you ever eaten lung?

No.

So I've always threatened my children. When they wouldn't eat some of the food, I said, "Elinor, you've got to make lung for these kids so they understand what good food they get in this house." So one day, actually, Elinor got some lung....

I didn't think you could get it.

And I don't think anybody ate it.

Maybe it kept down the level of complaints... So tell me about your ... your ... you told me you had older sisters. What did they do? Did they go to school?

Yeah. We all went to school. We went to a day school, Orthodox day school which was the only school in Berlin, at the time, where you could finish all grades through the *Abitur*, which was like graduation at age 18, approximately. Which would be really equivalent to completing junior college in Kansas City. And, I completed the first year, *Sexte*. And my sisters were in the other part of the ... the school was divided. Girls and boys did not go together.

So this was an Orthodox Hebrew day school?

An Orthodox Hebrew day school, yeah.

Where you, where you lived, did ... did, was there such a thing as ... were there Jewish neighborhoods and non-Jewish neighborhoods? Or was everyone mixed together?

There no doubt were Jewish neighborhoods. However, I was, I was never aware that there were Jewish neighborhoods, as such, in Berlin. And I don't think we had ... there were certainly no Jews living in our apartment building. In the first apartment building, the attorney was Jewish. However, in the second apartment building, there were no Jews.

About how many families were there in the second apartment building? Do you remember?

I think where we lived, which was in the front of the building, I think there were ten apartments, so five stories. And I think there was a ... there was a, it was like a complex. And so, I can't tell you how many. I don't remember.

But there weren't ... there weren't other Jewish families living there?

Not that I recall. No. I don't think there was a single other Jewish family in that apartment complex.

What about in the neighborhood in general? Were there other Jewish families or was it just... they don't really mix?

There were some Jewish families with whom we were friendly. But they didn't live in the immediate. I think the closest friends we had lived about four or five blocks away.

So did you see the kind of thing that you see here sometimes in big cities, like in Chicago, you'd go to certain parts of the city to find all the, you know, all the Jewish delis would be there and all the Jewish restaurants. But was there such a thing in Berlin at that time?

I'm, I'm sure there was. But I was not familiar with it. The only Jewish butcher shop that I knew was on, surprisingly, there was one on Kurfürstendamm, which was one of the very fine streets in Berlin. And, I did go ...

[Phone rings]

Do you need to get that?

I think Elinor will probably get it if she's home. Can you turn it off?

[He answers, tape cuts out temporarily]

Okay. So you, you went to a Hebrew day school with your sisters. So did you go ... did you stay in this Hebrew day school the whole time you were in Berlin?

Entire time, yes.

Okay. So where did the other kids come from? This was not a neighborhood school, I take it?

It was not a neighborhood school, but the kids come from all various areas, and then later on, in the, as I remember, in the later '30s, as some of the schools were closed, children came from all neighborhoods in Berlin to go, to come to this school.

So your school remained open then?

It remained open until we left, yes. It remained open until I think, probably *Kristallnacht*. I am not quite certain, but of course, the school was completely destroyed.

Okay. Did ... what was I going to ask you? What were your friends like? Did you mainly have Jewish friends or all kinds of friends, or ...

I think at the time I had only Jewish friends.

From your school?

As I grew up. From the school, yes. And I had a few friends from, who did not go to that school. I think all my friends were Jewish.

Is that right? Okay. Do you remember experiencing antisemitism as a young boy?

You know, in Berlin, we really didn't. I think I was sort of protected to a great extent. Except we walked to school, and we passed by the *Stürmer* that was exhibited in cases along the way.

The *Stürmer*? What was that?

The *Stürmer* was a newspaper.

Oh, okay.

By Goebbels.

Yes.

And, you know, it had some pictures that we were able to observe. And you know it was obvious there was something that we didn't fully understand, or I didn't fully understand at that time. As far as, you know, once in a while you met some Hitler Youth whom would make certain comments, but I was never beaten. I was never hit. I was never, except one time when I was in Frankfurt visiting my grandparents and I was walking down the street. I was chased. But nothing came from it.

And these were ... was this Hitler Youth?

Hitler Youth, yeah.

Okay. How did you know they were Hitler Youth?

By their uniforms.

They wore uniforms?

Yeah.

What did the uniforms look like?

You know, brown ... brown.

Brown shirts? Brown?

Brown shirts. Brown hats.

Yeah. Let's see. I have a few questions here. Like, did you have electricity? It sounds like you must have.

Oh, yeah. We had all the modern conveniences, except I recall the first time I went to my grandparents' house, I think you took your bath in the kitchen. The tub was in the kitchen. And it was then covered up the rest of the week. You took bath once a week.

And in your parents' house, it was different?

My parents' house, oh, sure. We had bathtubs and we had all the – all the appropriate conveniences that you have.

Did you have a car?

No car. No. A bicycle.

And how did you get around the city?

Well, there was a *Stadtbahn*. *Stadtbahn*, which is a train, like – that travels through the city. Had excellent transportation. As a matter of fact, when Elinor and I went back, I knew exactly the station that you had to get on and where to get off. I remembered how I went to school sometime. But you only, but you only took the train to school and commuted when the weather was terrible. Otherwise you walked.

Yeah.

Or, sometimes I would ride my bicycle.

Yeah.

You know, they had bicycle, special bicycle ways to go.

Bicycle paths?

Bicycle paths, yeah.

Did ... you told me about some of this. Did your parents have a vacation home or anything? Or did you mainly go to your grandmother's?

We didn't have a vacation home, but we traveled to each summer we would go someplace. For instance, Czechoslovakia. We went to the, we went to the ocean. We went to various places. My parents traveled quite a bit. My father was in the United States quite -- a couple of times before we moved -- on business.

Did you travel with your parents or ...

We traveled with our parents to... I went with them to Czechoslovakia. We went to, we always went on vacation sometime in the summertime for a short period of time. And, you know, we went to visit our grandparents. But we didn't have, we didn't have a summer home at any time.

But you did ... you went on vacations and traveled quite a bit?

Well, we traveled at least once a year.

Yeah. That's good. Did ... was your family *shomer Shabbos*?

Absolutely. Strictly *shomer Shabbos*.

And strictly kosher and all that?

Absolutely. Strictly kosher.

And your grandparents too, I assume.

My grandparents more so. You know, different levels, but absolutely. Yes.

You said ... you mentioned that they were modern Orthodox. What did it ... what was ... how would you describe modern Orthodox back then?

Well, I think they were ... they were not traditional Orthodox, from you might say from eastern European.

Right.

They were ... belonged to a congregation where you didn't have any ... I don't know how to say it, strict decorum. Everything had to be done a certain way. They were not *Kabbalists* – *Kabbalistis*. I don't know how you say it. They were not ... they didn't belong, certainly, to any sect like the – how do you define it –

You mean like the...

Chabad.

The Hasidim.

The Hasidim, no Hasidic.

They were not Hasidic. Okay. They were pretty ... it sounds like they were capitalists.

No.

If they were in the scrap metal business.

No. No. I didn't mean that ...

You didn't mean the secular –*Kabbalah* ...

Kabbalah. Kabbahlists.

Right. *Kabbalists*, okay.

So ... and they were modern from the standpoint of, you know, being interested in literature and arts and music and whatever.

Did your family do things like... in terms of did they go to the symphony or go see plays and things like that?

Well, my parents always went.

Just your parents?

We went as kids. I remember seeing the *Freischütz*. That was the first opera I ever saw was the *Freischütz*. I saw it in Berlin. I was scared to death that he was going to kill the girl on the stage. Had to hide my head.

So they took you along sometimes?

Yeah.

Okay. What did you like to do for fun as a youngster?

Play soccer. Play ping pong.

The usual things kids like to do. Were you *bar mitzvahed*?

***Bar mitzvahed* in the United States at Beth Shalom Congregation.**

Is that right?

Came here in September...

In 19- ...

No, not in Sept ... early September 1938 after being first in New Jersey where we stayed with an uncle. And Blanche Sosland is my cousin. We stayed in their home first and then in an apartment in Perth Amboy where they lived. And then came to the United ... came to Kansas City in late August or early September. And I was *bar mitzvahed* in January 1939.

Okay. Let me, let me make sure. Before we come to the United States, let me see if I covered everything on when you were in Europe. We touched on this a little bit, but how were ... did you have any sense of how Jews were accepted by the general community when you were still living in Berlin?

Well, I knew only at the time that we left Germany because my father could not conduct business anymore. I did hear that. I also realized that my parents spoke either English or French at the dinner table when they didn't want us to know certain things. We figured out that obviously there were some concerns. We also realized that --

Your parents were ... excuse me, but your parents were fluent in both English and French?

Not fluent but they could speak some, yes. Enough to converse at the dinner table with whoever was there who could also converse in those languages. You know, we realized that we were not accepted when they had air raid warnings and practices and we went down to the basement, and, although, my father had been a first war veteran ... First World War veteran and had been wounded and had received the Iron Cross Second Class, we were ... he wore his ... you know, everybody wore their little badges that they received in the ... as the result of whatever medals they had. They wore little badges instead of the medals. Went down in the basement and we were told, "Jews don't need to come down." You know, "Jews don't need to go in the air raid shelters."

When was this that there were air raids?

This was probably in ... air raid drills.

Air raid drills?

Air raid drills probably were in 1937 and '38. We left in May of '38, so it must have been '37, '38. But I remember those times.

But there were air raid drills?

Air raid drills, yes.

So you were ... do you remember when Hitler came to power?

Oh sure, I remember. Absolutely.

Yeah. Do you remember what year?

It was '33.

'33. Yeah.

Came to power in '33 and we lived, at that time, I remember distinctly that we still lived in our first apartment building. And I remember at the time that the *Stürmer's* - troops -- were running through the city. I remember, I remember *Unter den Linden*, which is one of the main thoroughfares in Berlin –

Right. Right.

The various marches that went on during the various times, and the parades, the various parades that went on. You know, fully aware. But, and ... You know, you went with the crowd. You looked on as the parades went on. You looked. And there probably was not as much of a problem in Berlin in those days. First of all, we had the Olympics in '36. And I went to the Olympics in '36 and watched a soccer match with my mother. So we didn't have some of the problems that you had in some of the other cities in the earlier times. And my father went to the Olympics and saw Jesse Owens run in all his races.

I was just going to ... I was just going to ask ... did you ... about the ... he was the black man who in the Olympics, and wasn't ...

Yeah, won three medals ...

Right. Right.

Hitler refused to meet him.

Right.

As a matter of fact, I have a book with all the pictures that I collected. I have an album and collected all the proper pictures. I don't remember how I got that. I think I got them from cigarettes, you know, just like coupons. That's how I got these various pictures. And I have a complete album of the summer Olympics of 1936.

Is that right? Yeah. Do you remember your parents being fearful or really worried about Hitler when he came to power?

There was no question my parents were worried. They were worried about business. My father traveled to the United States in '36. I had uncles here -- my uncle on my mother's side and my uncle on my father's side -- and they urged him to leave Germany. You know, it's pretty hard to pick up. And not until my father could not conduct business anymore and was told by, by people with whom he did business that they just couldn't deal with a Jew anymore.

Were these people...

He realized ... these were friendly, friendly businessmen.

And they were people he dealt with for a long time?

Dealt for years, yes. And he realized that he had to leave. And that the family had to leave.

You mentioned *Kristallnacht*. Were you in?

No. No. We were not there.

Okay.

I mentioned it only because at that time, synagogues, and there was a, a large synagogue to which we belonged ...

Right.

... attached to our school, and that destroyed the school. So we know that that's the night that the synagogue and the school were burnt and destroyed.

Okay. You mean, that you had already gone at that time?

We were gone. Sure.

Yeah. So ...

[Phone rings.]

Elinor will get it.

Okay. Are you sure?

Well, we'll see.

We'll stop it again. [Tape stops briefly]

Okay. All right. So, anyway, when your father ... when his business activities were curtailed so that's when they decided that they had to leave?

Yes.

Germany. Okay. Were there ... were there laws that were passed that affected his ability to do his work, or was it more just things that were said to him?

I don't know whether there were strict laws, but I think there was pressure not to deal with Jewish businessmen.

All right.

You know, there were laws passed from '33 on when Hitler became, to power. But, apparently it did not affect his business until '37 or early '38.

Did you have any sense of your family ... Did they try to fit in with the non-Jewish community or did they, or did Jews pretty much keep to themselves?

I don't think we ... that ... well, we really did not have any non-Jewish friends.

Now you mentioned that you did. Was that also ... you didn't ... was that your family also?

My sisters didn't, and I don't ... but I'm sure that my father in business was dealing primarily with non-Jews.

Right. But do you recall like having like non-Jewish friends of your family over for dinner or something?

I don't recall.

You don't recall?

No. I don't recall that we had it ever.

Okay. And you mentioned going to the theater and things like that. Did your family go to ... were these... Was this Jewish theater or was it just general?

No. No. We went to the ...

Opera.

My parents went to the opera. They went to the theater. They went to the philharmonic. And took part in all the cultural activities of Berlin. I went to the museums. I remember going to the various museums with my parents. It was certainly with my mother more so than with my father. So we participated in those activities.

Right.

And I also went to school. You know, I went to the day school, so the day school would be long hours. And then I had, in addition to that, special additional Hebrew lessons twice a week. And on *Shabbos*, Saturday, I would have Saturday afternoon lessons or participate in a study program.

So your parents wanted you to have additional Hebrew education?

They wanted me to have a... yes, absolutely.

So, it sounds like preserving a strong Jewish identity was important to your family.

Extremely. Yes.

Was that not true, for example, of some of your friends who were Jewish?

No, I think my friends did the same thing.

They were all the same.

Yeah.

Yeah.

We played soccer together. We played ping pong together. We went to school together.

And then you went to the synagogue together on *Shabbat*.

Absolutely. Yes.

Okay.

Friday nights and Saturday morning. Friday night we went to a different synagogue, which I also, by the way, visited when we were in Germany a few years ago.

Why did you go to a different one on Friday night?

It was near our home.

Yeah.

Near our home, we went to that one on Friday night. And the one that was ... where my school was, it was about, walking distance. Must have been almost two miles. And so we would walk there. That would take, that would take 35 minutes to get there.

Right. So you'd walk there Saturday morning.

Well, we walked to school that way too.

Right.

Walked home from school. We weren't pampered.

[laughing] Okay. All right. Let's see. Did you notice anything else, any other changes in Germany when the Nazis came to power? I mean, you mentioned your father and the difficulties with working. Were there other things or there were certain things closed to you and your family?

Well, I was not as aware of it...

Right.

...because I was young.

Right.

I do remember that on Sunday afternoons, somebody would come from the ... and collect money for Hitler Youth or for the, for whatever cause was at that time deemed appropriate by, by the Nazi regime. And they came in their uniform. And you were supposed to have everything cooked in one pot ... one pot, on Sunday. Actually, to preserve, so that you were not extravagant on Sunday. And the rest of the, what you would normally spend for a Sunday meal, you would give to the, give to the cause, the Hitler cause. So they ...

So you were ...

They ... I think almost every Sunday they came by to make sure you didn't do elaborate cooking and collected money. But we weren't bothered in any other way.

What about Zionism? Had you heard about that when you were still in Germany?

Yes. Heard about Zionism at the time. My father belonged to B'nai Brith Lodge. And there was a rabbi in, in, who had a very large Reform congregation, Joachim Prinz, who later on was a rabbi in Newark, New Jersey.

Oh.

And he attracted a very large following, and my parents went there to listen to him speak. He was an outstanding speaker. And, I learned something about Zionism, because I belonged to *Maccabi*.

Oh, yeah. I did too.

Sport organization, and so you learned something about Zionism there.

Were your parents in favor of it?

I think my parents were. Yes. Primarily because some members of the family immigrated to Israel, at that time Palestine...

Really?

...in the early '30s. There were several families on my mother's side who went there. And in the early '30s, I have a cousin who went there in the very early '30s. So we were aware of Zionism. I think my grandparents were not so much in favor of Zionism because they were afraid that the members would not follow the Orthodox tradition. I think there was a cleavage at that time ...

Right.

... that we were cognizant of. And, but I think my parents belonged to ... were in favor of the Zionist movement.

I see.

As a matter of fact, my father was at the Second Convention in, I think it was in Basel, Switzerland. We have a book from the Second Convention.

Is that ... so your father went to that?

Uh-huh.

Was that the one where ...

Herzl spoke.

...Hertzl spoke. Yes. So, did ... when was that? Do you, do you recall the year?

I don't recall the year. I'm sorry.

That's okay. Do you remember your father talking about Hertzl?

No. He ever... not that I remember did he ever talk about him.

So he maybe ... maybe he became a greater figure later and he wasn't necessarily an immediate ...

That's right. That's right. But we had a, I had a great uncle who was a contemporary of Weizmann -- went to school in Darmstadt with Weizmann. And he went to Israel. He was a physician. And he, very certainly, was a great Zionist.

That's interesting. So there was a strong current running through your family. Sounds like a lot of doctors in your family.

Just two.

Just two?

Just two.

Before ...

Well, we had some cousins who were, cousins of my parents who were, was a physician. Two cousins. But, primarily, we were in business people.

I see.

I had one uncle who was a dermatologist on my mother's side. He was one brother of my mother. And one uncle on my mother's side of the family. There was one cousin's on my father's side that was a physician. That's it.

Okay. So then ...

Very large families, by the way.

Yeah. And that was another thing I wanted to ask you. It sounds like you had an extended family, cousins and aunts and uncles.

Well, I had six... On my mother's side, there were there were seven. On my father's side, there were six brothers and sisters.

Yeah. Wow.

That's a pretty large family.

That's pretty large. You must have had a lot of cousins and ...

Yeah. I had one aunt who died at the age of 98 in New York, who had, I think at the end of her last great-grandchild was born, I think she had 90 some odd great-grandchildren.

That's wonderful.

So we had, we are a very large extended family.

That's nice. Did ... so then, your parents made the decision in '37 to come to the United States?

Well, they applied for affidavits. My uncle here in Kansas City gave many, many affidavits. I know he brought the entire family out. And my uncle in New York brought my mother's side of the family out.

Was it difficult?

With... Affidavits. And ...

Was it difficult to get out of Germany at that point, or not yet?

The only problem was just before we left. My father had to go to the Gestapo. He was called to the Gestapo. And, of course, as we learned later on, terrible, terribly fearful that something would happen to him and he wouldn't be able to leave. But apparently nothing happened.

Why was he called to the Gestapo?

I think they just wanted to scare him a little more, that's all. But he ... but he had his affidavit and affidavits for the whole family. You know, we had to pay, had to pay a lot of money in so-called taxes. And, at that time, when we left, we couldn't take as much out of Germany as people could in previous years. By '38, by the time we left, we couldn't take as much.

You mean of your personal belongings?

Personal belongings and financial substance. You really couldn't take much at all.

I see. But, at least you were allowed to get out and take some things with you.

Yeah. At least we were able to get out.

So, how did you – how did you get to America? By ship?

By ship. We left from Hamburg and went on to Manhattan.

You didn't go steerage or anything like that?

No. No. We went second class. And I was amazed. I know one thing. I was – we were absolutely shocked by the abundance of food. I mean, it was just... we just couldn't believe the variety and the abundance and the type of food that was served on the boat, on the ship. It was just unbelievable!

So it wasn't a bad trip or anything?

No. It was a wonderful trip.

Yeah, I would probably think ... you were how old then? 12?

12.

Yeah. So it must have been a big adventure for you?

Yeah, it was like an adventure. We didn't realize. At 12, you don't realize the problems that your parents went through. And the, and the change from being fairly comfortable -- not fairly -- but being comfortable in your home and going to a new area and starting life all over again, really. Starting a business over again, starting schools over again. I mean, they, they obviously had concerns which we, as children did not.

Yeah. Right. So...yeah. You mentioned you came to New Jersey first?

Yeah. Perth Amboy, New Jersey, because Uncle Moe -- Moses Eisemann, who was the youngest brother of my father -- lived there. He came to the United States in '33. He had graduated with a Ph.D. -- and in metallurgy and chemistry, and could not get a position in Germany with his Ph.D.. I mean, at that time, obviously there was discrimination against Jewish Ph.D.s at that time. And, so he came and he immediately went to work. He was, he was in demand. He worked in a -- I think it was American Smelting Company -- as a research scientist. He worked there until his retirement.

Is that right? So he... so he was in New Jersey. He was the one who was there?

Yes. New Jersey. Uh... he and his wife lived in Perth Amboy until my Aunt Käthe died, then he lived in Kansas City.

Okay. But you didn't stay in New Jersey? It was just ...

We only stayed there in the summer time, and then came to Kansas City.

You... You just stayed in Jersey for a few months...over the summer you said or was it...

Well, I went to school first, when I came here on Friday, May 13th. Friday May 13th I always feel is a very lucky day. So, Friday the 13th doesn't bother me like it bothers some people.

We got married on the 13th. I always thought it was a good number too.

Yeah, that's a good day.

Yeah.

But, you know, a lot of people have this superstition about Friday, May 13th.

Right.

We came here on Friday, May 13th, in the afternoon. And when -- and my name was changed because the immigration officer added an "e" to my first name. Instead of being "G-u-s-t-a-v," it's now "G-u-s-t-a-v-e." You know "e". Obviously, my parents were afraid to change anything, coming from the, from Germany where you didn't argue with officials.

Right.

At that time ... to the United States where... who knows? Some clown probably took care of the papers and he didn't care.

Right. Right. So you came here to Kansas City. And did your, um...

We came here to Kansas City in a non-air-conditioned coach. Of course, the trains were not air-conditioned and it was hot. Very hot.

Yes. It was very hot at the time.

In 1938 when we came here. And we came through Chicago, you know. And came to Kansas City. And we lived at 3757 Paseo on the top floor, which also was not air conditioned, of course.

Did you have air conditioning in Germany?

No. We didn't have air conditioning. Air conditioning didn't come into play until ...

The 50s, I think.

Oh... yep. Very early 50s maybe in some places were air conditioned, possibly, in the late 40s. Very late 40s.

And your ... your parents already spoke some amount of English ...

Yes.

... when they came here?

Yes. But they did go to school. They went to Faxon School to get lessons in United States government so they could become citizens.

Right.

And, we went... I went to Westport Junior. When I came here, they put me in the 6th grade. When I came to Kansas City, they put me right away... Lets... lets see, no... When I came here, I was put into the 7th grade. There was no 8th grade in Kansas City, so when I... They supposed that I had graduated at 7th grade from New Jersey and they put me in the junior high school, which was freshman year high school in Kansas City. So, as a result, I graduated at the age of 16 from high school.

Oh. So you ...

So I skipped really two years.

So, you went to ... you did go to school in New Jersey, then?

I went for, you know, school for about a month.

Oh, just for a month?

Uh-huh.

Okay. And then ...

And I couldn't understand anything. I had a little, a little dictionary. A very small German-English dictionary. And somebody would point out some things to me, but I had a ... I couldn't speak and I couldn't understand. But you pick up a little bit here and there, and slowly you learn to speak English.

What did you speak at home with your parents?

German.

Only... Did you speak Yiddish at all?

No.

Just German?

Just German.

Oh. Did ... what about some of your friends? Did they ever speak Yiddish with their ... everyone just spoke German?

Everybody spoke German.

Oh, that's interesting. And then in the synagogue, the service was all Hebrew?

All Hebrew. No German, except when the rabbi would give a, would give an extended speech. But that was rare. I think he only spoke two or three times a year.

It was different from now.

Oh, yeah. You didn't have a sermon all the time.

So, so then you ended up in Kansas City. And what did you think of Kansas City when you came here?

Well, I thought it was a very nice place, you know. No, I became, I adjusted fairly quickly. I had some problems in school. I had one teacher who said I'd never amount to anything. But I just didn't understa... couldn't understand anything. So then, always, I always remember that. I couldn't understand how anybody could say that, but, he told me straight out that I'd never amount to anything because I couldn't understand, couldn't do my work properly.

You didn't go back and show her your medical degree?

No. No. Not interested.

Then, did, did it take you awhile to learn the language?

I think it takes about six months to learn a language well. I had speech correction classes when I was in high school, by a wonderful man by the name of King who, during the lunch hour, would take those of us who came and other students who had some speech problems, and teach us how to speak correctly. You know, German is a guttural sound, where English you speak in front of your, in front of your mouth, so to speak. And taught us how to ...

Front of the mouth ... right.

...how to pronounce our th's. You know, I had to do it over and over and over again. He helped me tremendously because I did not have so much of an accent, although I'm told that when I speak with my sisters, I always regress into a German accent.

Your sisters came too? Your whole family came?

Whole family came together.

What about your grandparents? Did they come?

My grandfathers died in the early '30s. My grandmother on the Eisemann side died in Germany in 1938. She did not want to leave Germany and died of cancer. And my Grandmother Isaac came here and lived in New York.

I see.

Of course, she had three sons who lived in New York.

Were ... You mentioned that your father went to work for Continental Grain Company?

Uh-huh.

What did he do for them?

He was the – first, he was the office manager here. And then, later on, he was assistant treasurer in the company. And, that was his position.

Was he with that company for a long time?

Well, he was there from 1938 until he retired. My father was quite ill in his last years and died rather early. He died in 1961. I think he retired in about 1959 or 1960. He was ill quite some time.

How old was he when he died?

Well, he was 67.

So, did your father go directly to work for them, or did it take a period of time before he got work when he came here?

Well, he really wanted to go in the metal business, but that was not to be at the time. And since the family had been in the grain business in -- my grandfather on that side had been in the grain business, it was just to join his brother who was here.

Was his brother working in the grain business?

Yeah. My father ... My uncle, whose name also was Gus, Gustav, had been... came to the United States in 1912 to join a relative in the, in the grain business in New Orleans. Then, unfortunately he was caught in Germany when he visited and had to join the German army in 1914 to '18. He went back to the United States right after the First World War and was in the grain business the entire time. He was in Kansas City as the head of the Continental Grain Company office for quite some time.

You said that's how your father got work at Continental Grain?

Yeah. Uh-huh.

So, what was your early life like in Kansas City? Was it comfortable or was it... ?

Well, it was not as ... you know, I felt I had enough comfort. I joined the Boy Scouts, Troop 61, Beth Shalom. I went to Hebrew school.

At Beth Shalom?

At Beth Shalom.

But you didn't ... now, there was no Hebrew day school back then here?

No. No Hebrew day school. No. I went to ... had some private lessons. Had great lessons. I had -- you know, I had friends. I made some friends through school. Went to Westport.

Was it like in Germany, where most of your friends were Jewish or did that start to change here?

I think initially most of my friends were Jewish. I had some non-Jewish friends, but predominantly I had Jewish friends.

And did your family remain as observant as they had been in Germany?

I think initially, yes. But I think one drifts. We certainly drifted. And I think generational, we drifted a great deal. And I think my mother certainly remained as Orthodox always, except in later life, she ... when we moved to certain other areas in the city, she did ride on Saturday. She never did, would ride before that time. My father for a number of years had to go to work on Saturday, which he did not like to do. So, there were obvious changes that came about.

Yeah. I'm want to make sure sure... your interview is somewhat different. A lot of these questions don't apply to you.

No.

Fortunately. Did you, did you face any discrimination here in Kansas City?

Discrimination, Kansas City - when I became a physician.

When you became a physician? Really?

Yeah. There was obvious discrimination. First of all, in, when I was interviewed for medical school at KU, I felt very much discriminated against. There were very few Jewish medical students at KU in those days. There were no Jewish professors. The only, the only person who was on the faculty as a, as a voluntary faculty member at that time was A. Morris Ginsberg. But when I had my interview for trying to get into medical school, I was interviewed in Lawrence, Kansas. And everybody was very courteous there. When I was interviewed here in Kansas City, it was obvious to me that there was major discrimination. And the final blow was, when Harry Wahl, who was a dean, said, "You're Jewish?" "Yes." "You're Orthodox, Conservative or Reform?" I said, "I belong to a Conservative congregation." "That's all. Good-bye."

Is that right?

That is a ... yes. And, of course, they named a hall after him. That hall should, that name should be taken off. There was obvious discrimination. There was Larry ... there was Dr. Calkins the OB/GYN Professor. He was a antisemite. Dr. Orr he was also an antisemite. I think there were ... I think there was a hotbed of antisemitism over there.

Is that right? That ... now ...

The first, the first Jewish resident in surgery was Abe Ottman. And later on, of course, Milton Ozar was in surgery, resident in urology. My former partners, until they retired. I think Harry Statland was the first Jewish intern at KU. And there weren't many. And Morris Statland was a resident there. And then I was ... I became a resident in medicine. There weren't many there.

So they, they let you into the medical school, but they ... but it was clear to you ...

No. I did ... I did join a fraternity, a non-Jewish fraternity in KU. Which was a little unusual.

Is that where you went to college, undergrad too?

No. I went to junior college here in Kansas City. It was wartime and I went straight to med school. I don't have an bachelor degree, I just have my...

So you went to junior ...

... my two years junior college, went to med school.

And then you ... so you must have been really young when you ...

I graduated at 22 from med school.

Yeah. Yeah.

And, you know, at that time in Lawrence, Kansas, there were very few Jewish people. Very few. The Cohen family. But otherwise there weren't many Jewish families. But I felt really ... the other blow was Dr. Wahl was the Professor of Pathology. And guess what day he called on me, supposedly, in class. It was on Yom Kippur – of course I wasn't in class.

Yeah.

So, you know. So if you ask me if there was discrimination, it was obvious. And, I made it. And the other Jewish physicians who preceded me made it.

Right. And, so...

And in Kansas City there were other discrimination, obviously. St. Luke's Hospital. Harry Morris and I finally broke the, the discrimination against Jewish physicians not being on the staff at St. Luke's.

When was that? When did they allow you on staff?

That was in, oh, that was in the '60s when Harry Statland was president of the Jackson County Med Society. We decided at that time to apply to St. Luke's Hospital. And I had some friends over there, and... who were eager to have us on the staff. And we applied and we never heard from them for many months. And so then I wrote to them and asked what happened to my application. They said, "Oh, we refused your admissions to St. Luke's staff." So we called the Commission on Social Justice, or whatever the commission was

called in the State of Missouri, and they came down and interviewed us. And we heard from St. Luke's that it was all a big mistake, and please reapply. I would never reapply, but we said to the first Jewish man who had come to Kansas City, the first Jewish physician who will apply to your staff and we will see what you do. And then the first one was Ralph Becker. He applied to the staff and was admitted. But we weren't the only ones who were discriminated. Dewey Ziegler who then was Professor of Neurology at KU. His application was refused.

Is ... so that's why ... was Menorah Medical Center around then?

Oh sure. Sure. Menorah started in 19-... Menorah opened its doors in the early '30s. So sure.

Is that ... that's why ...

We just wanted to break in.

Yeah.

We didn't want to admit our patients to St. Luke's. We just said we want to break the cycle of not hiring Jewish physicians on your staff.

So you succeeded in doing that.

Well, we succeeded, yeah. But, I was... I will not go to St. Luke's for anything. And I hope they lose lots of money with their new hospital out south.

From your mouth to God's ear. And we're in agreement there. But, all right. Okay. Well, there are questions here that are not really ...

Not applicable.

... appropriate ... yeah. Things like how did you meet new friends. I assume you met new friends through going to school.

I met through the Boy Scouts, school, through Beth Shalom. That's how we met, how we made friends here.

When did you become an American citizen?

I became an American citizen in an unusual way. You know, you usually you become an American citizen through your parents below the age of 18.

Right.

Well, what happened is that I had to become an American citizen by myself. I was just turned 18 and was in medical school. And my parents, at that time, had not become citizens yet and they were just -- it took five years to become a citizen. And they... I was told if I applied separately, I can become a citizen. And I went down to the Federal Building on 8th Street downtown, and a judge who had his feet on the table -- really, he had his feet on the table. He said, "Will you swear to become a good citizen?" I said, "I do." You know, I was -- from the old, you might say from the old school where you stood at attention...

Right.

...and clicked your heels. Here this judge raised his hand "You're now a citizen." That was my... I became a citizen by myself.

That was easy. At least it was easy.

Well, it was easy, but he didn't ask me any questions. I don't know. He must have had a couple of drinks beforehand.

Yeah, that's not surprising. I had to pass a test and everything to become a citizen.

Well, my parents had to pass a test. I didn't have to pass a test. I just ... and then I went to med school, did my internship and then the military.

You said you went into the military after your internship?

Right after. I volunteered and knew that I sooner or later would have to be called in the military, and might as well serve my, my time. So I was in the Air Force. I was in the... I was a medical examiner in the Air Force. And I was... the only single medical officer in the Strategic Air Command. And so, as a result, I had duties all over the world, and finally when I told my colonel that it wouldn't hurt him to do a little work himself, I ended up in Korea. The next day I got my orders.

I guess he decided to do some work and send you to Korea, was that it?

No, he decided that maybe I shouldn't be there.

That's right.

I should go to Korea, so ...

So when were you in Korea?

I was there from 19-... let's see. I went there in December 1950 and I was there for seven months.

Okay. When did you and Elinor meet?

We met in Boston in 1953. Elinor was a senior at Wellesley and I was a fellow in hematology at New England Medical Center.

I see.

Which was part of Tufts.

And so ... And that's right. I didn't ask you that beyond medical school, so you went on for post-graduate training?

After medical school, I went through my internship. In those days, we had to work rotating internships. And I was at Beth Israel Hospital in Newark, New Jersey.

Oh, okay.

And then I went into the Air Force for two years. And then I was at KU as a resident for two years in medicine. And then I was a fellow at the New England Medical Center.

In Boston?

In Boston.

So how long were you a fellow?

One year.

Okay.

And then I came to Kansas City to join Dr. Abraham Sophian and Harry and Morris Statland in practice. At that time, Morris was still in the military. He came back about six months later. And Harry and Morris and I were together until both of them retired. And, of course, the office now and staff and clinic has eight physicians.

So when did you and Elinor get married?

Elinor and I were married in November 7th, 1954.

I see. And she grew up here I assume?

No. Elinor grew up in New Jersey.

I meant in the United States. I meant to say here in the United States.

Oh yes. She was born in the United States.

She didn't come from Europe.

No.

Okay. All right. So then you came back to Kansas City then?

Uh-huh.

All right. Okay. I have some questions here about your professional life as an American. You've always been a physician.

Always been a physician.

At?

And primarily ... well, I was ... primarily worked at the Menorah. I was on staff at Research Hospital right from the start. And I've been associated with KU. Still go there every Thursday morning for a conference. Taught medical students for many years as a, on Friday mornings at the VA Hospital where they have a rotating program for junior medical students. And taught there until two years ago when I cut back. And was a clinical Professor of Medicine at KU. And now because of what's happening in the healthcare field, I also go to St. Joseph Hospital, Research Hospital, where I belong since 1954. I've been active.

They didn't have the same kind of discriminatory policies that St. Luke's did?

No. As a matter of fact, before Menorah was built, Research Hospital was also before that, before the First World War, called the German Hospital, had Jewish physicians on the staff. St. Joseph Hospital had Jewish physicians on the staff. The hospital [unclear as phone rings]...

Do you want to get that? [tape stops then resumes]

Hospitals ... Research Hospital had discrimination. The OB Department had major discrimination against Jewish physicians until much later. There was discrimination against the Jewish physicians in certain select societies.

You meant upper... upper crust society?

No. No. I mean medical societies.

Medical societies. I see. Okay. All right. And your children were born here?

Children were born here. They were all born at Menorah Hospital.

So were mine.

Yeah. They... They're all married. We have eight grandchildren. [Phone rings] **Elinor will pick up.**

Okay.

Unfortunately we only have three grandchildren here in Kansas City. My oldest son lived in Hong Kong with his family for about eight and half years. He's in Washington, DC now. He's a senior vice president of Marriott Corporation.

Is that right?

My middle son is an attorney here with a local firm, Lewis, Rice and Fingersh. He's been a partner in that firm for years. My youngest son is a physician. He's an oncologist and he lives in Manchester, Vermont.

Your youngest son. Your youngest son lives in Manchester, Vermont?

Uh-huh.

Okay. All right.

He's the... He's the medical oncologist and head of the department at Rutland Medical Center.

I see.

Head of the department and only member ...

Small department!

Well, no, it's a rather large department. He's the only medical oncologist there.

I see.

But there are two radia... radiation oncologists. It's a large department and they do a lot of work.

Right. Right. And I've actually been there. Not there, but I've been to Manchester. Well, there are some ... you mentioned... You mentioned going back to Germany, right?

We were invited, like so many people have been, by the German government to come back. I was sort of reluctant to go back. We were invited by Berlin and my sisters had been there also a couple years prior to the time that I went. And I wanted Elinor to see where I lived and I wanted her to see where I went to school and I wanted her to see a little bit of Berlin. So we went back reluctantly. And on that particular trip, there were people from all over the world who had come back. It's amazing what had happened to the Jewish ... we were all ...Jewish who had come back, invited by the Berlin government to come back and see what, what was happening in Berlin. And they wanted to be forgiven for all the things that had happened to us.

When was that? I was not aware that the German government had invited ...

Well, they've done that right along. And we were one ... they, they had done thousands of these trips. My mother went... You know, it went by age. And my mother went years and years ago. I forgot now how many years ago she went. And they invite you, all expenses paid. Give you a certain amount of money on per diem. While you're there, put you up in a hotel and have arranged various organized programs for you. But, I was able to show Elinor where we lived. We went to the apartment house. I did not want to go up to the apartment and knock on the door. There's a dentist there in the apartment where we lived. The ... we went on the train that took us to, the station where we, where we ... the *Stadtbahn* which is a city type of train that goes throughout the city. Excellent transportation. And I knew exactly how to walk from our apartment building to the station and to go on the train properly and where to get off. Unfortunately, they were building on that station where you had to get off to go to where we went to school. But we got there later on. There was a memorial marker at the place where my school was. And this was very emotional for me. But it mentioned some of the names of the various teachers and rabbis who were there teaching. And I knew how many of my classmates had perished in the Holocaust and how many of my teachers probably, you know, perished. As a matter of fact, there's a book that the former headmaster wrote in Jerusalem about this school and where some of the students were, what happened to many of the students and teachers. And we saw other areas. Another very memorable occasion was that we visited the synagogue where - which had been rebuilt completely - where we went on Friday night, where I went Friday nights with my father. And we were there and had a very lovely service Friday night. As a matter of fact, Elinor and I liked it so much, we went back on Saturday morning and, so these were important memories. On the other hand, I felt uncomfortable in Berlin, in Germany, as such to be there. And I've been in Germany once before with my good friend, Norman Polsky, on a business trip that he organized. At the time, he wanted a physician to go along. And I'd been there as a physician in the Air Force on a temporary trip to where my colonel and also the general of this particular Air Force bomber wing wanted to spend some time in Garmisch, which is a resort place, and so I had to go along to give them their penicillin shots in case they got syphilis or gonorrhea.

Oh. Okay.

So... but I felt uncomfortable. Every time I was in Germany, I felt uncomfortable. When I was with Norman Polsky, I said "That man's a Nazi." And that particular businessman whom we happened to see. And I...I just felt very uncomfortable. I would not want to ever go back there.

When was it that you were there on this last trip when you were with Elinor?

The last trip I think it was three years ago.

Not very long ago.

No.

Did you lose family during the ...

The only person we lost in the ... was an uncle on my father's side, an uncle by marriage. And he lived, they lived in France since 1933. They went there and lived in Paris. When the Germans moved into France in the Second World War, they were in the Vichy area. And he was given to the Germans by the Vichy government. You know, a lot of this is coming out now.

Yes.

And he lost his life in a concentration camp. And my aunt is a wonderful, was a wonderful person. Never remarried. She had two children. So, that was the only member of the family who succumbed. We had some very close friends, especially of my parents. A man my father joined in business in Halberstadt. They had no children and they sort of adopted our family as their children. They died in concentration camps in Holland. You know, were, were transported to, went to Holland and succumbed in concentration camps. And I had one cousin who came here to the United States and was in the army. And he was killed on a, on a land mine. He was in the Intelligence Corps, like so many ex-German refugees who went in the army.

Right. Because if they're, they're speaking the language.

Could speak the language.

Right. Well, you're overall just remarkably ...

We were very, very fortunate, mainly because we had relatives here who gave affidavits.

Not only to members of the family. My uncle here gave I think 150 affidavits. In those times, they had to pledge that they would not become wards of the government. You know, Paul Uhlmann, here in town, gave more affidavits than anybody else.

Right. Right.

But, my uncle gave affidavits, for example, to my kindergarten teacher who was a close friend of ours. And they went to England and that's how they got out. And he gave affidavits to lots of people.

Right.

Tried to get them out of the, out of the country.

Yeah. Yeah. I don't know. Well, I'll ask you this. How did, did ... or did the war have any kind of affect on your attitude and practice of religion?

The war in ... which war?

World War II.

World War II? I don't think that World War II so much, because I was still a youngster. And even though I was in medical school, I don't think you form your ... like all children, you revolt. And I revolted against the religion at certain stages in my life. I revolted about the going to services every Saturday and every ... I did not want to do that anymore.

But this is not really related to ...

It has nothing to do with ... in your own personal life, you know, you change.

Right. Right. I think what they're getting at is ... like Holocaust survivors you know, somebody who had lost their faith in God?

Could you lose your faith, you know, as you become an adult?

Yeah.

You realize what went on and you say to yourself, "Is there a God? Is there such a..." And you, and as you read and as you reflect, you really wonder how such a thing as the Holocaust could occur. And how could an advanced civilization, which the Germans certainly were, how could this happen? And then you have to search. What are the reasons? Where does antisemitism come from? Was it the influence of the church? And then you wonder about religion, as such. You know conflicts are going on today. Is this

religion? Holy wars? Muslims against Jews? You have to ... you have to then form your own criteria in life.

What do you ... how ... what do you think, with respect to Germany? I mean, do you have any ... and obviously you've given the issue some thought. How do you fix it, it is that something like this happened in Germany? Because it sounded like you, you all had such a had quite a comfortable life.

Comfortable is right. Absolutely.

And accepted, at least to some extent ...

Yes.

And you're very ... I mean, yours were not the life of the *shtetl* Jews.

No.

And you were very cultured people, cultured and educated people.

Yeah.

Do you have any sense of how ... any thoughts in terms of how something like this could have happened in Germany?

How? I think you had depression in Germany. Worldwide depression. You had the 1918 peace agreements that were made at the time. You know, I'm not a historian. I'm not a ...

Right.

But I think a lot had to be things done at the time when Germany lost the war and had to pay, make major payments. And there was horrible inflation in Germany. And so, during bad times, a dictator can rise. And I think that's, that's and how could antisemitism then ... that was just a ... that was a way to try to get the people aroused, so to speak. And Germans are followers. I mean, they're... they live in a... even though you had intellectuals. At that time, Jews were a lot of the intellectuals. Occupied major positions in universities. So I think there was always antisemitism, especially in Aus... in Austria.

Yeah.

You know ... I mean, that's a short ... short ... what do you say. How is it that it happened. It can happen here. It can happen anyplace.

It never dies. You mentioned Temple Beth Shalom. Are you a ... are you still active there?

I was president some years ago.

Yeah.

I was president 20 years ago. And I'm not active anymore. No. Once you've been president of something, you should go quietly away. And if they call you to ask you for some help, fine. Otherwise, you're just a participant.

Yeah.

I think that's proper. Younger people need to take over.

Sure. Sure. That's true. Do you have a favorite Jewish holiday?

Thanksgiving.

As a Jewish holiday?

As far as I'm concerned, it's the finest holiday. It's, to me, I'm thankful I'm here in the United States. I always make a little speech before dinner. It's not a Jewish holiday. I know that. But you asked me about holidays as such. And I'm very, very grateful, very thankful. And I think one shouldn't sit down for a meal unless one really realizes how grateful we should be to be in this country. As far as Jewish holidays, probably Passover is my favorite holiday.

What kind of speech do you give before Thanksgiving meal?

Well, I just say how grateful we are and that we should remember our background. Just like we should remember on Passover. But I think we take these holidays for granted. And I'm very proud to fly my flag. I have a large flag and, you know, I, I tell them you should remember that there are still unfortunate people in this world who can't sit down at a dinner table like we do.

Right.

And, we make sure ... when Friday nights, my grandchildren come over, they have to put money in the *pushke*.

Do you light candles and things like that?

Oh, absolutely. Sure. Every Friday night. We're home every Friday night. We don't go out Friday nights. And, make sure the grandchildren understand that this is charity and they must give charity. And we try to teach them the proper things.

Yeah.

Whether it takes or not, I don't know.

Well, at least you've done your job. Okay. Well, I'll ask one more, although again this doesn't really apply much to you. But do you think there are any important lessons we should learn from the Holocaust?

Sure, we should learn lessons. We should... what specific lesson should we learn? We should learn how discrimination, how antisemitism, how that can all lead to major causes of major problems in the world. How discrimination against any human being can cause problems in the world. And how we need to see to it that the wealthy support people who are unfortunate. And we also have to fight dictators. We cannot allow them. The world shut its eyes and ears.

Yeah.

That's really what happened. And one thing I remember distinctly is that they didn't want us to discuss what was happening in Germany. They didn't really want to hear... The people here didn't want to hear how powerful my parents thought the German armed forces are. They didn't want to hear that there were problems. Quiet. Don't talk about it. And even when you read about it, you realize that our government did not care. How could they turn a ship back with refugees who came here and turn them back to Germany when they knew that they were going to be incarcerated and burned in the concentration camps? So we need to learn that history should teach us... The Holocaust should teach us history... should teach us what can happen when we don't speak up.

And close our eyes and ears.

Close our eyes and ears. Yes.

Yes. That's okay. I think we are just about at the end of the tape.