

Klaus Frank Interview

October 5, 1999

What was your name at birth and would you spell it?

Klaus Martin Frank, K-L-A-U-S M-A-R-T-I-N F-R-A-N-K.

And when were you born?

I was born on March 30, 1921.

And in what city?

In Dortmund, Germany.

What was the total population of the city?

It's about half a million, close to Kansas City size.

OK, and what was the Jewish population?

Uh, about two thousand, if I remember.

What do you know about the circumstances of your birth?

I was born at home, Dresdener Strasse *ein und sechzig*, which means street of Dresden 61. And I was a first born. I had a sister which came three years later and I don't remember much. [laughing]

Do you suppose there was a midwife?

Oh, yes, yes. And there was a doctor, too. And there was a *bris*. [laughing]

What were your parents' names and could you spell them?

Richard Frank, no middle initial, and Emmy Frank nee August. Her maiden name was August.

OK. Would you spell it?

A-U-G-U-S-T.

OK, and do you know how your parents met?

Yes.

Tell us about it.

My dad came back from the World War I and he opened a import and export business with my uncle in Denmark. And he was on a trip to Berlin, I believe, when he met my mother which was going from Elberfeld , her birth town, which was not too far from there, on the same train to Berlin, also to, on a buying trip. My grandfather owned a department store in Elberfeld which is now Wuppertal.

So they met on a train?

They met there and a year later they got married.

Ok. Um, what was your mother's role in the house?

She did not work, she was... she kept the household together. She, she played bridge, I believe, several times a week, and otherwise she was what they call here a housewife.

Did she ever have an occupation before she was married?

No. She didn't know how to cook either.

So who did the cooking?

We had a cook. We had a maid.

What was your father's occupation?

Well, he used to own a furniture store together with his brother, Max, but after the war... the war came along, and the business was... they couldn't get any merchandise or whatever, but the business failed so he went into business with my uncle in Denmark.

And that was the import-export business?

Yes. He dealt in linen from Bielefeld, I believe. It's a town in Germany where they produced linen and English woolens. It's mostly fabrics.

And who did he sell to? Who were his customers?

Well, it was an exchange – it was a barter business. My dad sent the coal, or whatever it was, to Denmark where they didn't have coal, and my uncle in Denmark procured the

fabrics and sent them back to my, to my uncle. He was the supplier. So there was a constant exchange of... that was by carloads, I mean in quantity.

So ultimately your father, did he sell the fabrics?

He sold the, whatever he got, the eggs, he sold that in Germany when my uncle sold the coal and the, and that stuff he got from Germany sold it in Denmark or England.

And he sold it just to regular people, customers or companies, or...?

No, there was a company involved but I was never too interested and I was too small really to know. I know my, my uncle's office in Copenhagen was quite impressive. That I remember.

You were there. Describe the members of your families, their names and ages and their relationship to you, besides your parents.

I had a younger sister, which Marianna, which lives now in Copenhagen, Denmark.

And how much younger is she than you?

She is three years younger than I am. And that's the only relative I have as far as brother and sisters are concerned.

Did you have grandparents?

Yes I had... my, my mother's grandparents lived in a town not too far from us in Elberfeld, and I was there several times. That was... they both died - my grandfather died in 1935, I believe, and my grandmother did not want to immigrate when we were ready to leave. She thought she could, she could stay... As a matter of fact she went into hiding. She went into hiding, and she moved from Elberfeld to Mannheim where she went to school originally, and the Catholic, it was a Catholic school, and the Catholic sisters hid her for about three years or four years, and somebody talked and she ended up in Theresienstadt...

Oh, she did?

... and she died, we never did see her again. I have some letters of her, of hers which she wrote from Theresienstadt, and the Red Cross furnished me with the death certificate.

So you know exactly...

I gave that, by the way, to the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

What kind of work did your grandparents do? Do you have any idea?

Well, my, from father's side...

Well, before you go there, do you know what your mother's side did?

Yes, they had a department store.

They owned a department store. OK, and you saw them quite often?

Yeah, about three or four times a year, and we went there quite frequently. It was not very far. As a matter of fact, my parents put me on a train once and I went there over the weekend all by myself.

Now tell me about your father's parents?

My father's... he was born, it was the second wife of Joseph Frank in Hamburg the Palatinate. He was born there to his second wife. His first wife, that would be my grandfather's first wife, died when he was 7 and he married again.

Died when your father was 7?

No, no... when my father was 7, yeah, and then he married again and had two or three more children. There were 12 children altogether in that family and they... on top of that, they adopted one cousin which was left as a orphan, so they had 13, 13 descendants. None of them, only a few got married. The ones which got married didn't have any kids except my dad and my Uncle Max in Dortmund.

Really, out of all of them. That's interesting.

So, there was one time where I was the only survivor of the whole blooming family.

And what kind of work did your father's parents do? Do you have any idea?

I think he dealt in cattle, but I am not quite sure. It was either wine or cattle because it was a wine region and I know there are some... Actually I would have to look it up, but I think it was something like that he was...

Now did you see them as often?

No, well he was, he died and my grandmother died shortly after World War I. I never did know them.

Never did know them. What are some of the fondest memories you have of the grandparents that you used to visit?

Well, I used to go there quite often and he used to take me to the zoo quite frequently, which we didn't have a zoo in Dortmund. And... but the zoo not only was it very interesting, but it went by the way of the *Schwebeban*. The *Schwebeban* is a elevated tramway which was the only one in Germany which followed the river in Elberfeld from

one town to the next and then back again, and it was built over the railroad, of course. Kaiser Wilhelm opened it in 1890 or whatever, and it is still in use today. We were there visiting a couple of years ago and I showed my kids the *Schwebeban*, which means elevated tramway.

Well, that would be exciting for a young child to ride on.

Yeah.

So do you have any other memories of them?

Well, we had some family dinners and so on in my, my grandparents' house. I remember some of the furniture. I remember that there was a, there was a porcelain cat with seven kitties on a pillow in front of the fireplace. And I don't know what ever happened to it, but this was, I used to play with that cat.

What kind of neighborhood did you live in?

What did, what?

What kind of neighborhood did you live in?

Oh, we lived in a normal neighborhood.

Can you kind of describe it, what it looked like.

Yes, was an industrial, Dortmund is an industrial town. It was a, it was a four stories, I believe, apartment building. We lived on the second floor. My dad owned the building, and the rest of them was rented out. There was a doctor's office was on the first floor, then we were in the second floor, and the rest of them were rented out.

So was most of the neighborhood apartment buildings, would you say?

Yeah, most of them were apartment buildings. Low, low-rise apartment buildings, the middle class, typical

Middle class.

Yeah.

Describe uh, can you describe a little bit what the inside of your house was like.

Yeah, I can do that too. The uh... It had a long corridor when you walk in, a long corridor, and the kitchen was to the right and to the left was the dining room, and then came the living room, and it was arranged just like a railroad. You know, a long corridor. The end of the corridor was a, stood a cabinet with china in it. And my cousin and I we run one day,

somehow we were running, and my cousin ended up in that china cabinet, so this is why I remember the china cabinet. [Laughing]

I don't think you mother was too happy.

Oh, it was terrible.

So it was nicely furnished?

Oh, yeah. My dad was in the furniture business before, yeah. As a matter of fact we still have two pieces here in Kansas City. Brought them over.

Did you have electricity?

Yes. [Laughing]

And what about indoor plumbing or running water?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

You had all those modern conveniences?

We lived in the twentieth century.

How many rooms would you say were in the house?

My sister had a room, bedroom. I had a bedroom. It was three bedrooms, a dining room, a living room, a great big kitchen, and a great big bathroom. The only thing we didn't have was running hot water. The hot water came from a great big monster, described in my book, in the bathroom which my dad fired up only once a week.

Oh, so everybody got a bath on Saturday night?

On Friday night.

Friday night. So you didn't have to share a room with your sister?

No.

Everyone had their own room.

No. As a matter of fact, we had a maid's room, slept upstairs. And after the, after we couldn't keep a maid anymore, I moved in there because I liked the view from up there. It was high up and I could overlook practically the whole town. Yeah, everyone had his own room.

So did the maid do the laundry and all that?

Yeah, that was upstairs also under the roof. There was a great big wooden, I remember that too, a wooden, like a bell and the power was water. Waterpower was pushing it and it was going around like this, and it was there for, for everybody.

Like what a washing machine could have been?

Yeah, only it was great big. It was enormous. You could put all the laundry in all at once.

Really, wow. Did you have other servants besides the maid?

Well, when I was little, I had a, I had a nanny. As a matter of fact, her name was Lena and I still remember her. And we had her till my... I think my sister had her, too, and she was there until we were about 5 or 6 years old.

So you had a nanny and a maid?

Yeah.

Any other housemen or...?

No, no.

Did your family own land other than the apartment building?

No. No.

Did you take vacations?

Yeah. We took vacations.

Where to?

Norderney. We went to Norderney, which is an island off the North Sea coast. And then my, my parents took me one year to the Baltic Sea. Yeah, we had vacations every once in a while. And then when I was older, I went through the, through the IOOF, the... that is the... it's like, it's like a Masonry, the Masons my dad belonged to, and we went to a youth camp in different places.

So that became a vacation to you, kind of.

Oh, yeah it was during the summer when we were not going to school.

What kinds of foods did you eat?

Fruit? [laughing]

What was cooked for you?

What kind of fruit did I...? Bananas I know. And every once in a while we had a pineapple.

Now you said the maid did the cooking. Did she cook German food or...?

Yes, mostly. No, German food. My mother did the buying, so she went to the market once a week. And she bought the butter from a boat which came down the Rhine River. Mrs. Husemann, I remember her, and she came every week for the eggs and the butter and the cheese and my mother bought it, and she was the only one who offered to take us as kids when the times got rougher, to Holland. And my parents thought about it, but they didn't, no. They thought that Hitler wouldn't last the next week.

I think a lot of them thought that. What were your favorite foods?

My favorite food? I was a terrible eater. I was very picky, I remember that. I ate peas, I know I like peas, and that's about the only vegetable. I liked cold cuts and butter and bread, that I liked. I still do.

What language did you speak at home?

German.

Were there other languages that you or your parents could speak?

No. Even though my, my aunt lived in Dortmund too, she spoke French because she was born in the Palatinate when it was under, it was French before in, when was it, '80, no, '70, in the Prussian, the Prussian-French War it became German. So she spoke German with a French accent.

Were your parents involved in anything political?

Yes, my Dad was a, he was an overseer during elections. Democratic, Social Democratic party he belonged to.

Anything else you can tell me about their political involvement?

No, I was never, I was never consulted. [laughing] No, he was a, he was busy on election days going around. Either he was checking the votes or seeing that there was no hanky panky or something like that. As a matter of fact, he was arrested once by the Nazis because he was, he was active in the Democratic party, but they let him go again. That's when we should have left, because that was right after 1934, I believe it was.

Describe the schools you attended.

I attended the normal, normal... I know it was a private school. It was a private grade school.

Was it a Jewish school?

No. No.

Just a private school?

No. It was a private school and the high school was a, was a *Realgymnasium*, was a regular...

That was a private high school?

No, no. That was a public high school.

Public high school. What were the teachers like?

I had several, I had... Well, I also was admitted, I was admitted, I was lucky enough to get into the art school when it was, when it was already prohibited. I had one teacher which didn't, which hinted that I was Jewish. It didn't, it didn't come up. And I had a French teacher which was help, was very helpful.

Do you feel any of your teachers treated you differently because you were Jewish in maybe a negative way?

Not really, no. Except that the, uh, when, when we had to stay and say *Heil Hitler* we didn't have to do it. We just had to stay there and somehow the religious education was missing. You know there was religious education, I don't know how, I never did take any. I can't read Hebrew. I never took... I got, I missed it.

So you would say your family was more assimilated?

Oh, yeah. We did hold the High Holy Days and my dad had a seat in the synagogue. As a matter of fact, when I got older after that, you know, after I became *Bar Mitzvah*, I used to go by myself on Friday nights, even though my parents didn't go.

How far did you go in school?

***Oberterzia*, which would be the last year of high school.**

You did, you graduated high school?

Oh yeah. I didn't graduate, that's not the same...

Oh, okay, but you did complete it.

I didn't graduate. No, I made the... At that time I should have gone on to the university from there, but that was...

That's when all the...

That's right, I was arrested and that was it.

And what were your favorite subjects?

Singing, drawing and gymnastics [laughing] all minor [unclear].

All the fun stuff?

But I was good at languages.

You were good at languages?

Yeah, yeah. I learned French. I learned French pretty good and they taught me to learn Spanish and...

And so now are you fluent in those languages now?

Yes, three languages, yeah.

Really, wonderful. What did you do for fun when you were young?

Well, we played soccer, but, always not with Jewish kids. Really, I was always in the neighborhood except when it got, after I was about 15, then I got more involved in with Jewish kids.

So could you kind of describe your friends when you were young, what was, you know, and some hobbies that you had?

Well, we, we used to, we used to read stories... this, that was when we had, we were Jewish, a Jewish group from the youth group. And we used to walk a lot, used to out on Sunday mornings and walk in the woods. And I played soccer.

And did you belong to any other organizations besides the youth group?

Organizations? No.

The youth group was like an organization that you belonged to?

Yeah, yeah.

Was that your teenage years you are talking about?

Yes, right.

Well, you spent your spare time doing those things you just...?

Yeah, yeah.

Ok. Did your parents like your friends?

Oh, yeah. I never had any problems.

Okay, did you have friends of the opposite sex?

Yes, I had several girlfriends. One didn't make it out.

Really? And how did, how did you meet?

We met through the, getting together after school and, you know, on Sundays. Yeah.

Just kind of spending time?

We took lots of walks and talks, went to the movies... What else do you do? We didn't drink, we didn't smoke.

Well, good. That's probably changed a lot. Did you have a job during that time at all?

I went to art school on the, in the evening while I was going to school.

To high school?

Yes, and then after that I had a job at department store, a Jewish department store, as a decorator. I mean I, it was, what do you call it?

Like windows?

... an apprentice and I had that for about two years and as a matter of fact, the owner of the department store, the son I met, you won't believe it, in a theater in Dortmund some thirty years later.

Really, and you remembered...

... sitting next to me in the theater.

How incredible, and you both remembered each other?

Yeah, and according to his affidavit, I got my pension from Germany.

You mean after you saw him again?

Yeah, right.

And he was cordial and happy to see you?

Yeah.

How did you get along with your parents?

I had no problems with my parents... [laughing] My parents had problems with me more than that.

Well, that's what I mean. Were they strict or permissive would you say?

No, they were pretty strict. But I knew better than... my dad was not really a disciplinarian but he pushed it off to my mother. She was the one who laid down the law. I remember I was caught smoking once and he caught me, and he said "So you want to smoke?" He says, "Come into my study." He had a study there and a great big desk. "Then if you want to smoke something, smoke something good." And he gave me one of his cigars about this big. And I got violently sick and I didn't smoke til, til I was about twenty-two or twenty-three.

Good lesson. Would you consider yourself rebellious?

No.

Were there other issues between your parents and you that created tension?

Well, there was the old question that my mother wanted to leave and my dad didn't want to leave... But they didn't ask me.

But I mean between you and your parents, was there any other kind of tension?

No. No.

What values or standards were most important to your parents?

Values as far as what is concerned?

Well, I mean, what values did they stress? Did they stress, education, honesty... I mean, what values did they impart to you?

Oh, well my mother... My dad... My mother was fashion conscious. Let's put it this way. We were dressed according to the latest, that, of course, because she grew up in a, in a department store and she was active in the department store too before she got married, so that was... My dad was only interested really in stamps. He collected stamps which we sold

in Dominican Republic. And he was a walker. He took his cane and he walked. He walked for miles, with, together with my uncle or whoever was going to be close. My mother was more of a fashion nut, not really a nut, but she saw to it that we had the right shoes, the right clothes and looked prim and...

So, how you presented yourself was important. How you presented yourself to the outside world?

I didn't really care.

Could you think of any other ethical or moral values they stressed in any way?

Well, I was interested in art. I was collecting all kinds of things. I collected pictures. My dad smoked, and there was one cigarette, for each pack you got a, you get a, you send it in you get a picture, and I have a full album of the 1932 Olympics in, in Los Angeles which I collected through that thing which is really very interesting.

Yeah, it is.

And I collected miniatures, painting miniatures, because they were also to be had by a, by a cigarette manufacturer, and we traded those things.

Like baseball cards?

We still do. Yes, like we do with the baseball cards.

What was the religious life like in your general community?

Of course, there was one synagogue which was the same as here, the Temple. And there were several smaller ones which were, you know, Conservative and Orthodox.

So everything was represented then?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

How were Jews accepted by the general community?

I don't think they had any problems. I never heard of any.

Did you ever experience any kind of antisemitism?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, sure. I was beaten up once and some of the... at school I had some problems, but usually my classmates got me off the hook there.

So who were the people that were antisemitic? Like bully type...

They belonged to the Hitler Youth.

Oh, I see.

They were drilled into that.

But they weren't part of your school or anything?

Well, there were some in school, too. As a matter of fact, there were some teachers which would uh, they were not really, they were antisemitic and you could tell, you know. But that came gradually. It wasn't from one day to the other, you know.

Describe your religious education.

I didn't have any.

But you were *Bar Mitzvahed*, you said.

Yeah, I learned, I learned my *Parsha* by memorizing. I couldn't read it. I memorized it.

Did you have a tutor?

What's that?

Did you have a tutor?

Yes, the Cantor was the one who, who drilled it into me and as a matter of fact it was *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* which is a long *Parsha*. And I memorized the whole thing including the melody, I sang it, but that's about it.

And what about your sister? Did she have any kind of religious...

She went to the Jewish, Jewish *Volksschule*, Jewish grade school. And after the grade school, my parents sent her to England. She was in England during the war. We didn't see her for about 10 years. She went to school in Hastings.

Did she have a religious education there?

Well, she was, by the time she came, we met her, she was Orthodox and she married an Orthodox Jew and she eats kosher. But when she is at our house, she doesn't eat kosher, can you imagine that.

Now, does she live in Denmark, did you say?

Yeah.

Interesting. So, was Judaism practiced in your home at all? Did you have any kind of traditions?

Well, it was uh... Yeah, it was, we kept all the holidays. We went to... My dad, as a matter of fact, we usually... its too far to walk, so we took a taxicab to the synagogue, but we had the taxicab stop two blocks before so we could walk to the... you know. [laughing]

So you went to the Reform Synagogue?

Yes.

Did your family keep kosher?

No. My aunt, my dad's sister kept kosher.

Did you celebrate *Shabbat* as well as the holidays?

Friday nights we went to the synagogue sometimes and most was for me to meet my buddies and I went by myself even if my parents didn't go.

Which holidays were most important in your home?

Well, it was, usually it was, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur and Sukkot and Hanukkah. Sometimes we even had a tree at Hanukkah, would you believe it? [laughing]

What was your favorite holidays?

The Jewish holiday? Well, it was, I guess it was Hanukkah.

Presents?

Yeah. But I still fast. I never did eat anything on Yom Kippur...still not to this day.

Were any Jewish foods served in your home?

***Challah* and *matza*, of course. But it was mixed with bread. [laughing] You could have both. Yeah. And my aunt, my older, my dad's older sister, she was still kosher and she cooked quite a lot. And *matzaballs* and, you know.**

So you did have traditional Jewish foods. Did you celebrate any secular holidays?

No, not really. We didn't celebrate Christmas, you mean, or Easter, or... No we didn't celebrate.

Were there any national holidays or anything like that that you...?

No.

What kinds of Jewish cultural activities took place in your town?

Well, they had a... what was it called? They had an organization which put on plays...

Were they Yiddish?

Yeah. Yeah. No, some of them were German, too. And there were readings. I remember going to a few of those. And then we had a, an art exhibit, I remember, which was on, on Jewish, Jewish art... but I don't remember really.

So it did have some Jewish culture in your town?

Oh yes. Yeah. Yeah.

What impact did the secular culture have on your life?

Well, my dad, for example, considered himself a German before he was, other than, he was a German Jew. And well, he stayed almost to the last minute until he finally decided it was too much. He was in a concentration camp with me, you know, for five weeks.

[Friend arrives and interview ends and then resumes.]

Oh, you were saying that your father was a German first and then a Jew. This kind of leads to the next questions. Were your parents more concerned about maintaining their Jewish identity or fitting in?

Oh, they would rather fit in.

Okay. Were you encouraged to develop relationships with all people or just with Jewish people?

I didn't have no choice. Once in 1933, started, my Christian friends disappeared. The ones which lived around us I used to play soccer with, they were nowhere to be seen and I had to, I was forced to, to look for other friendships, and it was there because everybody else was in the same boat, you know?

Before that, did your parents care...

No, they didn't care. They didn't care.

Were your family interested in, you know, the secular culture like the art and the music, and philosophy, what was going on around them?

Oh, yeah, my dad had a pretty extended library and he bought books all the time.

How did Zionism affect you and the Jewish community?

My dad was not in favor of it at the beginning. Of course, that changed later on. We did have a, what do you call this? The blue...

Oh, the Blue Box? The National Jewish Fund?

The Blue Box. Yeah, yeah, we had that. And, as a matter of fact, I remember that very well, standing there with the money in it.

What did Zionism mean to you at the time?

Well, it meant that... I wasn't in favor of that either. I would have rather gone somewhere else, but I was, you know, I followed my parents. You know, I was not old enough to really make up my own mind. And by the time Zionism came around to my mind, of course I was all for it.

Did you belong to any Zionist clubs or anything during that time?

No.

Did you have an occupation before or during the occupation? At that time in your life, had you started an occupation?

Oh, no. I was going to school. Except with the apprenticeship at the department store.

When did you first become aware of the Nazi presence?

I saw Hitler in my hometown when I was probably fourteen years old or fifteen. He drove by our house in an open car and if I would have had a bomb at the time, I could have just dropped it in there because...

Were you aware of what he represented at the time?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You could tell there were Nazi flags all over the place and people standing and...

And you were fourteen, were you aware before?

I know exactly when was... oh yeah. I was the only Jewish kid and, you know, there was, there were questions. You know, what's the difference, why are you different?

From the time you were...

Oh yeah. I grew up that was a completely Christian neighborhood there. I grew up in...

Do you remember the first day of occupation?

The occupation? Well, see, I left before the war. I, that doesn't apply.

It probably doesn't, no. On seeing Hitler that day, what kind of feelings did you have? Did you want to bomb him?

Well, I would have, yeah. Right. [laughing]

When you first saw the Nazis, when you first saw them, did they seem threatening to you?

Sure.

And what about your parents, did they...?

Well, I was, you know, the police... No, not the police... The headquarters was not too far from our house, I could see them, you know, in their uniforms and threatening. It was threatening just to look at them, you know.

Do you remember discussions about the Nazis in your home and, you know, what kind of discussions your parents had?

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Can you share that?

My dad always said that can't, that can't last, you know? Hitler is gonna, he's going to be gone by the time, six months.

And when it was apparent he wasn't going to be gone, then what kind of discussions...

Well, it took a long time for my parents to realize that we better get out while it's, while it's still time.

What did they do in response to the Nazi, you know, presence? When they decided to get out, what did they do?

Well, we were in a concentration camp. We had to get out. We took the next train to Denmark.

They came and deported you or you took the train...

No, that was the Crystal Night I was arrested. I was arrested on the Crystal Night because my dad had gone to Holland which was not too far. He had heard that something was up. Somebody told him, a Christian neighbor or whatever, that you better get away, there is something cooking. So he went to Holland. He took the train to Holland. Takes about, what, 20 minutes, and he was in Holland and when they came to my house, my dad was

gone but I was there. So they told my mother “Whenever your husband comes back, we let him go... right now we take him to the police station.”

And how old were you?

I was seventeen, sixteen, I think. Sixteen... It was in '38. Seventeen.

Can you tell us, you remember *Kristallnacht*? Can you tell us what you remember what happened?

I remember I got up in the morning and went, went to the store I was going in which was a Jewish store and it was completely destroyed. I walked there and I didn't even go inside. There were people milling around. The SA was there in their brown uniforms, and I didn't even go in and I figured, well, I better go. I had a girlfriend which lived, lived not too far from there. I better warn my girlfriend's father that something is up. So I went there and he was already gone. So I went back and... no, I didn't, they arrested me in my girlfriend's house. That's right. They arrested me right there. And, uh...

Where did they take you?

They took me to the police station in a great big army carrier, open car, and we collected Jewish passengers. And that's why I say that the Germans, they knew exactly what was going on. We were driven all over town in that open car, you know, and when I came to the police station the next morning, they opened the cell bars to go to take the train to Berlin and in the next cell was my dad. He had presented himself to the, to the police station and then they kept us both.

Did any non-Jews help you?

No.

So, ok, you were deported to a concentration camp?

Mm-hmm.

And so the events that led up to your deportation was *Kristallnacht*?

Yeah.

And from then on, what...

We went directly to Berlin, Sachsenhausen.

[Tape ends and interview resumes.]

You were telling me about when you were arrested on *Kristallnacht* and leading up to your deportation. Would you start that again?

We came to Berlin, Sachsenhausen, and I got my number, 10281, *zehn zwei ein und achtzig*. I have to say it in German [laughing]. And I got an army uniform from World War I and my dad got an army uniform from World War I. And he was kind of portly, he couldn't close the buttons, so they gave him a string to go from the button to the buttonhole and back and forth and he put a paper in there. It was cold, it was November in Berlin. It was very cold. He put a newspaper underneath and we were, I was put in the youth group, there were out of those maybe 20,000 inmates, there were thirty... somehow we got, we got arrested even though we were not supposed to. So there were thirty, about thirty, I don't know exactly how many there were, but about thirty were put in one barrack. Those were the kids seventeen and younger.

And where was this?

In Sachsenhausen. That is a suburb of Berlin.

Ok.

And the barracks we slept in were brand new. They were built by the old communist inmates which had been there since 1933. And I stayed there for five weeks. I worked in the, in the tailor department. I volunteered for work because I figured it was better than standing outside and they put me behind a sewing machine and I sewed on the Jewish star on the uniforms. That was my job. And after we got all those done, then later on the triangles were different colors. Black ones were for political prisoners, yellow ones for Jewish and who knows. And I sewed those, those triangles on to the uniforms.

You did that for five weeks?

Five weeks.

And then what?

Well, my... while we were gone, my mother called my uncle in Denmark and told him that we were arrested. And he told my aunt, which was his sister in Denmark, gave her some money and called on the lawyer, and she flew from Copenhagen to Berlin with the lawyer and the sack full of money and went to the Interior Ministry in Berlin, and she paid \$500.00 a head for me, my dad, and my cousin, Larry. And the next day we were let go. Very unusual case.

And then where did you go?

Well, we got our stuff back and they gave us, either gave us a ticket or gave us the money to go back home. We took the train back home and my mother had already made arrangements for us to leave for Copenhagen. So that is when my grandmother didn't want

to go. My grandmother thought she had enough money to, they sold the department store after my grandfather died in 1935, and she had enough money. She thought she doesn't want to go. So she stayed home and that was a mistake.

And you went to Copenhagen and how long were you there?

We were there for two months in Copenhagen while we tried to find a place that would take us. We only had a visitors' visa in Denmark, they wouldn't, they wouldn't recognize refugees. And we finally... my uncle got together with the Dominican Consul, with the Danish Consul of the Dominican Republic. And for another payment of \$500.00, which went to Mr. Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, we could go to the Dominican Republic and we did.

When was this now?

That was in 1939.

Ok. So *Kristallnacht* was in '38...

'38.

...and from '38 to '39...

We were in Denmark.

Okay. All right, this concludes the pre-war.

Okay.

[Interview stops and then resumes.]

This is the continuation of the interview with Klaus Frank. So you went to the Dominican Republic from Copenhagen?

Right.

How was your physical condition at that time?

I weighed 92 pounds and I was 6 feet tall. [laughing] I was skinny because of, you know, the five weeks in the concentration camp.

Tell me the name of the camp again.

Sachsenhausen. It was a big one. Do you want me to spell it?

Sure.

S-A-C-H-S-E-N-H-A-U-S-E-N. Sachsenhausen.

Alright. Did you get medical help once you got to the Dominican Republic?

I was... The only thing I was... [laughing] That's really funny, we got to the Dominican Republic, I got a terrific earache and I went to the doctor, and the doctor took one look and he says, "Well, no wonder." He took pincers and he pulled out a wad of newspaper which I had put into my ear in the concentration camp and I forgot about it. When it was so cold and I now I get ear infections every year practically. I didn't want to get sick in the concentration camp. That would have been the end of it. So I took pieces of newspaper, rolled it up real thin and stuck it in my ear. And that thing, of course... and that's the only time I went to the doctor. My dad had, he was clubbed on his leg with a rifle butt, and the skin was... you could see the bare bone in there, and he didn't want to go to the doctor for the same reason. And that healed but it was still, it was still, you know, needed medical attention in the Dominican Republic and he got it. It healed.

How was your mental state at that time? Did you have any kind of...

No, I just wanted to forget about the whole thing. You know it's a new country. I had to learn the language, I had to get a job, you forget whatever happened there. As a matter of fact, until the fiftieth anniversary of the Holocaust, I didn't talk about it at home. My kids had no idea.

Really? So you stayed the war with your family...

Yeah, that's right.

...in the Dominican Republic? Okay. Do you know how many people from your town survived the war? You have no idea?

No idea.

When did you meet your wife and where?

I met my wife when I was looking for a job in the Dominican Republic. I got a job at a photographer. He was from Austria, and that was Eva's uncle. So we met in the darkroom. [laughing] We met at his studio, the photographer's studio. He was the one, he got a job as a photographer and at the same time I got a job as a cartoonist at the paper, the same paper. He was a photographer and I was a cartoonist. And that's where I met Eva.

What attracted you to one another?

Well, we were all in a group again. You know that was a time when there were probably a hundred or maybe more families. We were one of the first families to get to the Dominican Republic, and Eva came six months before I did. So there were quite a few young people

there and nobody speaks Spanish. We all had to learn it, and that got us together. Didn't get married til nine years later.

Oh really? Now did you get married... So, how old were you at that time?

I was eighteen.

18? You were very young and how old was she?

She was uh, she came to the Dominican Republic, she was eleven.

Oh, ok. So were you mostly friends at first?

Yeah, right.

When did you... Were you in the Dominican Republic when you decided to get married or were you here?

Yes. No, we got married in the Dominican Republic.

Can you describe the wedding?

[Laughing] Yeah, it was, we had a rabbi, Hugo, and it was... My grandfather, no, not my grandfather, Eva's grandfather owned a soap factory in the Dominican Republic, and the deck of the soap factory, that's where the wedding took place. That was a mixture of German, Austrian and Spanish refugees, from the Spanish Civil War, and Dominicans. There were probably eighty, ninety people there and equally divided. It was like the United Nations.

Was there food and music?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I don't think there was music, except a guitar maybe. There was no, no band or anything like that.

What did your wife do before she was married?

Going to school. She was going to school.

She was going to school for those nine years?

Yeah, she was going at the, to the university. She was... she was going to school.

After the war ended, you were there, you were in the Dominican Republic when it ended? Where did you want to go after that or did you want to stay there?

There was never any question that we were going to go to the States because... I'm writing, this part I am writing the book again... Everybody was leaving the Dominican Republic. Why, I don't know. Everybody could make a living there but nobody wanted to stay. Why, I don't know.

No reason...

It's because if you go, I gotta go. You have a feeling when you sit on a little island with two million people, you have a feeling that life is passing you by. That everything is happening in the States and you think you are missing something, which is really not true. But that must be the reason.

So where did you actually, where did you go when you left the Dominican Republic?

We went to New York and I hated it. Terrible.

How did you travel there? How did you get to New York?

For the first time in my life, we flew from Dominican Republic to New York.

When was that?

That was in 194... got married in '46... in early '47.

What were your first impressions upon arriving in this country?

Well, I didn't see the Statute of Liberty. [laughing]

That's what I expected you to say... [laughing]

No, it was... I was not used to that many people at once, but I never did like it.

So your impression was...

You couldn't find a room. It was shortly after the war. There was no rooms, no apartments available for any price.

Now, did you parents come with you at this time?

No, they came later.

Ok. You came yourself.

They didn't come until we were in Kansas City. There was no way of getting an apartment. We stayed on Riverside Drive, beautiful view of the Washington Bridge, in a one room efficiency, which means you could share the kitchen and you could share the

bathroom and you had one room. The bed was a single mattress bed with a double mattress mattress on top of it. At nine o'clock in the morning they shut the heat off and I was sitting there in the middle of winter trying to draw cartoons for *Saturday Evening Post* and I had my gloves on, no heat. It was terrible.

So you did get a job there in New York?

I didn't get a job, never did get a job. Eva got a job.

But you drew cartoons for...

I tried to peddle... I did peddle cartoons to the Spanish magazine, there was several magazines and I sold a few here and there, but it was... Came, came December we decided we were going to take an vacation and go to Kansas City to see my cousin Lutz, and that's how we got to Kansas City.

So what were your first impressions of Kansas City?

Kansas City was wonderful. There was snow this high, didn't have a car, [laughing] but I didn't mind because I missed the snow during nine years of the Dominican Republic. I was ready for snow, and I didn't mind it. And we had an apartment, we got an apartment on, where was it, 39th and almost State Line. And Eva got a job and I got a job.

Can you describe what your apartment was like?

Yeah, it was about this size. [laughing]

So this is about 8' by 8'? [laughing]

It was the upstairs of a one family house. Downstairs lived a widow and she rented the upper part out, but it had a kitchen, a bathroom and one room and we didn't have any kids so it was wonderful. It was warm and, you know.

Could you speak English at the time?

Well, it was pretty fast.

How did you learn English?

How did I learn English? Well, in the first place, for nine years I read the *Time Magazine* because I got it for free at the paper. They had a subscription. Nobody else could read English and I couldn't either, but I got the magazine and that's the way I learned Spanish, you know. I had to.

By speaking and learning...

And here I got a job at Rothschild's doing signs, you know. I had to learn English. Never took a lesson in my life.

Can you describe your experiences as an émigré, you know, coming here. How did you adjust?

Well, I already did the adjusting, which was much worse, in the Dominican Republic when I was seventeen. So this one here was a piece of cake.

So what were your biggest challenges when you first emigrated, would you say? What was your biggest challenge?

Biggest challenge? Well, it was the language probably.

But by the time you got here, there wasn't so much of a problem?

Well, once you learn one language... I had Latin and French in school, you know? The Latin helped me with the Spanish and once you learned one language, the second one is not really all that hard.

Did you face any discrimination once you got here?

No. As a matter of fact, there was no discrimination in the Dominican Republic either. The Dominican Republic consists out of sixty percent blacks, forty percent mixture and whatever is left, those are white ones from out of town. And there was no discrimination. I remember here I went onto a bus once and I sat down next to, in the back of the bus, and the guy told me, who was a black citizen, he said "You can't sit here. You have to sit in the front."

That was in the Dominican...?

No. That was here in Kansas City.

That was here in Kansas City, really.

Yeah.

You said you didn't talk about your experiences during the Holocaust until, what, the 50th anniversary, which was...that was uh...

When I wrote the book. 1993 or something.

Why didn't you?

I wanted to forget it. I mean....

Okay. What made you decide to talk about it?

Well, there was so much, so much publicity about it and the kids asking me, you know, what happened, and what happened, so I finally had to. But if I think about it, it all comes back...

Very hard...

...the beatings... I am sorry. [crying]

I'm sorry. You want to stop for a minute?

No, it's alright. I don't know why.

Well, those are pretty intense memories.

I didn't do that when, when I was there.

You had to be strong there, I guess, or at least look like you were. How did you meet new friends when you came here?

Well, that was easy because they were all in the same boat. You know that's a group that Lutz belongs to and Lotte Baum, his wife. He got uh, he went to Kansas City because he married, Lotte came from Dortmund also. That's how he got...

Tell us about the group. Yeah, I know, but tell us about...

Well, it was shortly after the war in the first place, so some of the guys still were going to school and some of them were in the Army, came out of the Army and we were all put together, you know, by force. And we became friends through, you know, called each other up and we did things together, and we played cards and went to the movies and went to a play.

Do you feel more comfortable with people who have the shared experience, or...?

No, not necessarily. We have a good friend of American neighbors and we get together with.

Do you feel there is any kind of an unspoken understanding between you and fellow survivors that... you don't...?

Well, in the first place, besides Lutz, the other ones were not survivors. They came here before the war, you know the ones we get together with. They were not really survivors. They were survivors in the way that they got out of it before we did, but they didn't go through what we did go through. But we have a circle, a circle of Christian friends, and some of them are Jewish. They have nothing to do with refugees, we have some American Jews, you know.

Were there any people who were helpful in you getting settled here and finding a job?

Yeah. Mr. Isenberg, Isenberg, old man Isenberg, he got me the job at Rothschild's. Well he didn't get me the job. He gave me a list of stores and the display directors' names. And I started out, you start on 9th and Main and you go up Main Street, and I started with Rothschild's and I got the job. So, but he was the one who gave me the list of... and Louis Rothschild was pretty helpful.

What did he do?

I worked there for about four years and I couldn't go any, I couldn't get any more money because I was making as much money as a display director did, so I went on my own. I tried to get together enough stores to service besides, besides the job I had at Rothschild's, and I told him I would take care of his outlying stores, not the one downtown, but he had a store in, on the Plaza and in Brookside and so on. And I said I would take care of those if I can just go off and look for some other people. He said, "Okay, I'll give you a two year contract." So I had a two year contract which was enough to get together, I had, you know a bunch of stores, and...

You did their displays? Is that what you did?

Yeah.

And that was the start of this business?

That's how I got started.

Did you go to school after you got here at all?

Well, I went to the Art Institute but more ...

The Art Institute?

Yeah. But more to use their equipment. Oh, I took some, I took some... mostly pottery and stuff like that, which I didn't use in my business. Oh, I went to junior college, too. I took cooking lessons, baking lessons, and graphics, and pottery, and welding - you name it. [laughing]

Has that been useful in your business? Some of those...

Well, yeah... well, it's useful for art appreciation if you do it.

When did you become an American citizen?

I think it took five years. In Kansas City, Kansas I became a citizen because we lived on Nall in Johnson County. And Eva and I were the only ones who became a citizen on that

day and I remember the judge who, who was sitting behind the desk and looked at me, and he says, he asked a few questions, who is the President and can you tell me what Washington did, and we answered that and all of a sudden he said, “Whistle the National Anthem.” Eva started to laugh and I can laugh and if you laugh, you can’t whistle. And he said, “You passed.” That was in Kansas City, Kansas.

So was that an emotionally significant day for you to become a citizen?

Oh, yeah.

Why?

Well, I still had my German passport and I gave that now to the Holocaust Museum in Washington. But on the passport it says Israel Klaus Martin Frank. I don’t know if you know that but there was a time when any Jew leaving Germany, put in the, the women put in Sarah and the men had Israel, and that I just detested. Israel Klaus Frank. That’s the way I had to sign my passport, too.

So becoming a citizen meant a lot. Would you like to describe your career since you, you know, as a professional in America.

Well, yeah. Many opportunities. And it’s, it’s up to you, really, to make of it. I worked pretty hard. I did Christmas decorations in the dead of winter putting Santa Claus and the reindeers up on rooftops and I did window displays. At one time I had a sign on my car serving, I think it was, five states. I went from, I had the decorations to do for the House of Fabrics which had, they had stores in five states all over the place, and I went from one store to the other decorating. And then I had other places, you know, I worked for. Milgrim, I mean not Milgrim’s. What’s the name of it... ladies ready-to-wear. I can’t think of the name of it... They’re all gone. Chasnoff’s...

Oh, Mindlin’s?

Mindlin’s! Mindlin’s, Chasnoff’s, you name them. I have a list somewhere of all the... At one time I made a list of all the, took it out of my book, all of the stores I worked for. Amazing.

So you have had a very active career.

Oh, yeah.

What kind of hobbies and recreational pleasures have you come to enjoy?

I don’t have enough time for that. [laughing]

Work, work, work.

I still do, I still do sculpture. I do drawings and whenever I go on a, on a trip, I take my sketchbook along. I putter around with the car. I am mechanical minded. I built an elevator at home.

I know, I've seen it.

So there is, there is enough for me to do. I'm going to give up this job though next year.

Are you, and pursue your hobbies?

Well, I don't know what I am going to do, but I think my car has to stay outside and I take over the garage.

What, if any, postwar events have had a great significance to you, such as the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, the 60s, feminism, assassinations, the State of Israel. Do any of them hold any great significance for you?

Well, significant meaning importance? I think the State of Israel was one. Probably the landing on the moon was one I thought was very important. And of course the fall of the wall.

When were your children born and what are their names?

Well, we got five of them. The first one was Susie. She was born, they were all born in Menorah Hospital where we lived on Nall Avenue, same house for 30 years. Susie was the first one.

When was she born?

She was born in... [sound of shuffling and drawers opening] Where do I have it? I have it here.

How long after you got here, would you say?

Oh, she was born in '50, '54. Then '56 came Kenny, '57 came Sylvia, and '59 or '60 came Sandy.

Okay. Are you forgetting one, let's see...

Four.

Oh, four, I thought you said you had five.

No, no, no - four.

In light of your past experience, how did having children affect you?

How having children affect me? Oh, I wouldn't do without 'em. [laughing]

You know, thinking about your growing up and your past experience...

Well, I consider myself very lucky because none of them was really a big problem.

Did you have any kind of emotions upon having your children?

No, except that I felt that as long as I am the only Frank survivor, I better do somethin' about it or somethin' like that. And well, Kenny now has a, has a boy so that's good. But we didn't have any problems with the kids, none whatsoever.

Are any of your children named after family members...

Yes.

...who died in the Holocaust?

No. The only one who died in the Holocaust is my grandmother. Her name was Nannette and Sylvia's second name is Nancy.

Have you now talked to your children about the Holocaust?

Yes. Yes.

Did they ever ask about it before you, you know, you said you didn't talk about it?

Well, they started to ask when it became, you know, the 50th anniversary was, was the date when they started to ask. As a matter of fact, Eva never asked.

What?

Eva never asked.

Oh, Eva either.

Never mentioned it.

What were their... So they were grown when they found out?

Yes.

What were their reactions?

Well, no, they knew but they didn't put two and two together. You know they thought it was a vacation I took or something.

Ok, what were their reactions?

...I don't know. That's when I wrote that book.

Were they shocked or...

I don't know if they were shocked or not. They were interested and I guess they felt sorry for me but they didn't go any further than that. It probably made them more cognizant of the fact that they are Jewish.

Do you feel your experience during the war caused you to raise your children differently or have different feelings about raising them?

No, I don't think so. Maybe unconsciously, I don't know. The fact that I never mentioned it, I wanted to get it out of my system.

Do you talk about it now to them?

I can. It's a little bit easier, but not easy. It's a little bit... before that, I tried... Well, I tried twice, and after the second time, I said I can't do it. You know, it's, I'm all shook up for two days after that.

Have you ever returned to your home?

Yeah.

What was it like?

Well, it was, that town was ninety percent destroyed. It was uh, you know, it's in the Ruhr Basin which is highly industrialized, the British just bombed the heck out of it. There's not two or three buildings are standing, and the rest of it is all new. But when I got there the first time, that's when I looked up where my classmates were. It was an eerie feeling because I could... I knew the, I knew the town pretty well. You know, if you walk everywhere, I could find my way from one street to the other, but everything looks different because all the buildings were different.

Was your house still there?

The house was still there but it was a new house.

Oh, it had been rebuilt?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. We went there and I came to the conclusion that Germany is a beautiful country but there are too many Germans in there. Now that's, that's a problem.

How do your memories of the Holocaust penetrate your life today?

I want to forget about it.

Are there any sounds or smells that bring images to you or...?

Well, yeah, sometimes, but that's only a fleeting moment.

Can you tell me what might trigger something, what...?

I got into an apartment building not so long ago and they were cooking somethin' in there, and that smell was exactly the smell, it smelled of the food we got in... and it just, the...

In the concentration camp?

Yeah. Well, it's all up here.

But it's there. Anything else that you can think of?

No, sometimes lights bother me. You know when a car drives by the house in the middle of the night and you're asleep and you look up, then you see the white stripe going... That reminds me of it, because the guards used to do that when they come to check on you. Things like that.

How did the war affect your attitude and practice of religion?

Well, [laughing] I don't know. It probably... I am a better Jew now than I was before.

Did you ever stop believing in God?

No.

Do you believe in God now?

What?

Do you believe in God now?

Oh, yeah.

Do you belong to a synagogue or temple? Which one?

Yes. Temple B'nai Jehudah.

Are you active?

Oh, sometimes.

Now what is your favorite Jewish holiday now? Is it still Hanukkah?

Yeah, it would be, because I can celebrate it with the kids. That's...

What traditions from before the war have you shared with your family here?

Well, I still don't eat on, on the Yom Kippur and we light the candles on Friday... and what else... and sometimes we go to the Temple on Friday night.

Did your faith have any part in helping you when you were in the concentration camp?

Maybe. I'm not so sure.

Do you think you look at life differently having had the experience than if you hadn't?

No question about it.

In what way? Can you...

In what way? You just can't forget it, you know. It's with you and still, it's not, it's, it's always there. And I think it has toughened me, you know. I mean, if I survived that one, I can survive whatever comes here.

Do you think you deal with people differently than you would have or just how you live your life, or...?

No, that's [unclear]... no...

Or how you look at your life?

I am really a happy-go-lucky guy, so I don't see that would, it wouldn't, at least not consciously, affect my... I didn't think it changed my character -the experience.

To what would you attribute your ability to adjust to a normal life after the war? I mean you adjusted pretty easily.

Yeah, well, it's like if you throw somebody in the water. If you don't swim, you sink, so it's either swim or sink. The... Difficulties in later life wouldn't be nothing compared to what I've gone through, and, you know that comparison alone gives you...

...resilience?

Yeah.

What does being an American mean to you?

Being American? I could just as well be a Frenchman. I don't think... I just won't want to be a German anymore.

Do you feel like an American?

Oh, yeah.

Do you think Americans take their freedom for granted?

Yes, some of them do. Yeah.

Okay this is the last question. What are the most important questions that we should learn from the Holocaust?

From the Holocaust? You shouldn't do to your neighbor what you have been going through. What you should, you know, to be a *mensch*.

Okay. Well said. Anything else you want to add?

No, you got it all.

This concludes the interview with Klaus Frank.