Thank you for speaking with me today. Let me start by asking you, what was your name at birth?

Maurice Halfon, H-A-L-F-O-N.

And when and where were you born?

I was born in Biarritz, France, August 27th, 1938.

What do you know about this town?

The town of Biarritz? Well, we went back three years ago; my son and I and his family went back. Biarritz is located in the southwest of the France. It's a few miles from the Spanish border. It's a twin town with Bayonne. Biarritz is a summer resort; it's right on the water. I was born in Biarritz, but we lived in Bayonne, which is right next door.

Do you know if there were many Jews in this town?

There were quite a few Jews. There were three synagogues before World War II and they had a big congregation, yes.

Do you know what relations were like between Jews and Christians back then?

Well, they were very amicable before the war. Most of the Jews were Sephardic Jews; they went from Spain to Turkey and then, like my parents, they went from Turkey to France to escape religious persecution in Turkey.

Your parents came from Turkey? Do you know when?

Not exactly. I know they were both born in Turkey. They both had large families. From what I was told, my mother had either thirteen or fourteen sisters and brothers and my father, I was told, had around twelve brothers and sisters.

What were your parents' names?

My mother's name was Fortunée. My father's name was Isaac.

What work did they do?

They worked with my uncle in a retail dress shop. My uncle was the inside man; my father was the outside man.

What does that mean, he was the outside man?

Well, that means that he went around with clothing to different places to try to sell and he went to, I guess, bazars and stuff like that and people's houses.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

No. My mother was pregnant when she was murdered.

Do you know if your family had been religiously observant?

I was told that my grandfather was a grand rabbi of Turkey. My parents, I don't really remember if they were religious or not. They certainly were not very strict; let's put it that way. I don't believe we observed a kosher house.

What are your earliest memories?

My earliest memory is the night that the gestapo and the gendarmes came to my house when I was four, four and a half, which happened around the first week in of January 1944.

Can you relive that with us?

Sure, sure. From what I read and from what I was told that was one of the last roundups that they had of the Jews. My father always thought that he was safe because he was a Turkish Jew, although he was considered a DP, which is displaced person, with no citizenship. Turkey fought on the side of Germany during the Second World War. So he thought he was safe. So he didn't go to escape. He had heard that there was going to be a roundup. I believe it was right around the sixth of January, 1944.

But he decided to stay and, sure enough, at about two in the morning, middle of the night,

the gendarmes and one gestapo officer came to my house. We lived on the third floor and it was all wooden stairs. So we heard all the commotion. They knocked on my door. My father opened it. And they said, "Are you the Halfon family?" And my father said, "Yes." And they said, "Well, you come with us."

I was in my father's arms and my father said, "Well, my son is sick with the measles. Can I leave him behind?" And they said, "Yes." And that's the only reason I'm here today.

My father gave me to this Madam Cazeaux, Marie Cazeaux, who was our neighbor upstairs. He gave her some money and he said, "Look after my son until I come back."

Could you spell her last name for me?

Sure. C-A-Z-E-A-U-X. She was a Spanish Basque, very religious Catholic lady. She was single, lived by herself upstairs from us.

What else do you remember perhaps emotionally from that experience that night?

I really don't remember anything emotionally. I mean, I didn't know what was going on. But she took me to her room, which was basically six hundred square foot, one whole room, and she put me to sleep. That's all I basically remember that night. I know all the neighbors were around on the landings and all my friends were there, all their parents who lived in the building. In fact, I saw them when I went back; there were three of them living in Spain and they came to see me.

What was your understanding of what was going on at that time as such a young child?

I had no understanding at all.

Were you frightened?

No. No, I was just bewildered, *what the heck is going on?* That's all. I mean, no. No, I was not frightened. I was too young to be frightened, I guess. I mean, my father was so at peace and so peaceful that I really didn't think anything...I really thought he'd come back the next day or that

morning.

Then I was told—in fact, I went to see it. Bayonne is divided by a river right in the middle of the town. And they were taken across the river. There's bridges all across Bayonne. They were taken to a university—there's three universities in Bayonne—and they were taken to a university where the students live and they were kept there overnight. And then they were put on a train and shipped to Drancy. They stayed in Drancy until January twelfth and then they were put on the trains to Auschwitz.

They also took my uncle and his family and another uncle and an aunt. They took nine people. That's this picture here that we have. I don't know who did this picture. But their bodies were never found. None of their bodies were ever found. My uncle came back. So maybe he's the one that set this up as a memorial to them. And my parents are the last two.

What were your days like now with this woman who had taken you in?

You mean living with her? Basically she worked out of the house; she was a seamstress. So she basically let me roam the streets. She always told me, "Don't speak to anybody; don't speak to strangers; don't speak about anything; just come back when it's nightfall." So basically from the age of four and a half, I used to roam the streets.

Right down the street from my house was the river and across from the river there was a whole bunch of little cafes. So I used to walk up and down the cafes, play with my friends. Once in a while, there were German soldiers who gave me candy. I saw some nasty things, but...I don't know if I was too young to register or what. I saw a lot of killings; let's put it that way.

I remember one day I was about five. I was walking by a little cafe and this little Frenchman was walking by. He must have been about eighty years old or so. He was just

shucking by. And these three Nazi SS men in their black uniforms with the red swastika, drinking schnapps in the back of this little cafe, they saw him coming. One of them got up and went right up to him, as he's walking right by the cafe minding his own business, and he said, "Get down on your knees and lick my boots." The little Frenchman looked at him and he got down on his hands and knees and licked his boots. This bastard took out his Luger and shot him right in the head. I must have been fifty feet away. And then he laughed. Started laughing, went back to his friends, started drinking, and he told the owner of the cafe, "Clean that mess up." Yeah, you don't forget things like that.

But, otherwise, Madam Cazeaux, or Marie was, I would say, in her thirties, never been married, a spinster. We had no running water in the house, so she had to go downstairs to the hydrant. She used to give me a bath in the kitchen every Saturday night. We had a community bathroom, one bathroom for each floor. So we had to use that. We slept in the same bed in the back, the kitchen was in the front, and where she worked was in the middle. We had kind of a bedroom in the back, but no...Just one big room; that's all she had. I spent almost five years with her.

Did you wonder what was going on with your parents and when they might be coming back?

I really don't remember that part. She never talked about it; Marie never talked about it. Yeah, I was wondering. It was strange, but...because we were a very close-knit family. I mean, we were together every night. She told me that they were taken by the Nazis and they'll be back as soon as they can. So I accepted that. She kind of shielded me from the truth.

Did she give you any other instructions besides not to talk to anybody? But did she ever tell you to not mention that you were Jewish or not give your name, anything...?

Oh, absolutely. See, my name Maurice is a very common name in France; it's like John here. So she said, "You can mention your name, just don't mention that you're Jewish. Never, never say you're Jewish to anybody, no matter who it is." So I never did.

The other people in the building must have known that you were Jewish.

Yeah.

Did you have any connection with them or they were just around?

Yeah, I had connections with those four boys living in the apartment. Three were brothers and one was a French boy. We played together all the time. Religion was never mentioned. Marie took me to church every Sunday with her. In fact, we went in the church when I was back there and they are the ones who showed me where the church was. She never told me to do anything that she did; she just told me to sit there. She never tried to convert me or anything. She just passed me off as her son.

She passed you off as her son.

Yes. And I think the priest also knew that I was Jewish. But, yes, it was never mentioned.

How did you find out the war was over?

My uncle came back in nineteen—I guess he came back in 1946. He had spent a year and a half in the hospital. He was really a broken person; he had TB. The allies sent him to some kind of Violin Hospital, he told me, and he stayed there for about a year and a half. Then he came home and that's how I found out that the war was over. All of a sudden, the Germans left and the allies came to my town. But nobody actually told me the war was over. The bombing stopped. We had air raids every night; that stopped.

Did you notice a change in the atmosphere among your neighbors?

Oh, totally, totally, yes. They were more outgoing—they smiled; they laughed—where before

everybody didn't really look at each other; they just did their business and came home as fast as they could. Yes, there were nobody on the streets basically besides kids. The adults always tried to get home or go to the store as fast as possible.

You were with her for five years?

I was with her actually three and a half, four years, now that I think about it, because I came to the United States in March of '47. So about four years I was with her.

Did you go to school in France?

Yes. Yes, she put me in school. In France in those days, the boys were in one side of the school; the girls were in the other side of the school. I went up to the third grade, yes, in school. Yes, she tried to make my life as normal as possible.

When your uncle came back, what did he tell you?

Well, if I remember correctly, he told me who he was because I didn't know who he was. He told me that he was my...His wife was my mother's sister. So I guess he was my uncle by marriage. He told me that no one else is coming back and that I should be brave about it and that he'll take care of me from now on. But I stayed with Madam Cazeaux. He was a very different, different man and very withdrawn, and I guess I could understand why.

I found out later that—I didn't find out through him—I had found out through some other people that they left Drancy around January the twelfth on the trains, cattle box train. I saw a real one when I was back there. They were in there for three days, sealed in, no food, no water and no bathroom facilities. This person said that as soon as they got there, they saw Mengele. He was at Auschwitz. He was the famous Nazi physician who did experiments. And he herded everybody off to—well, they herded everybody off the train. And they said my mother was sent to the right with my aunt and my other people right away; all seven of them were sent. And my

uncle and my father were sent to the left to work. So my mother was killed within hours after she got to Auschwitz.

My father and uncle survived the rest of the war at Auschwitz. And then, if I remember correctly, the Russians liberated Auschwitz, if I remember correctly. The Germans took my father and my uncle at the end of April of 1945 and put them on a train to go back to Germany as slave laborers. The allies bombed the tracks. So the Germans had to stop the train. And my uncle told my father, "I'm going to get off and join me outside." And my father said, "Okay, I'll be right there." And he never joined him. And my uncle went back in and my father was dead in his seat. So I don't know if he died of exhaustion or of a heart attack or what. Then I was told that the Germans took the body and just threw it in a ditch on the side of the road.

Did your uncle tell you what happened between January of '45 when Auschwitz was liberated and April of '45 where he's on this train? Did he ever tell you what happened in that meantime?

No. No. He never said a word about it. They were taken before it was liberated; two weeks before they were put on a train. I guess the Germans knew that the end was coming.

He never mentioned a death march or anything like that?

Not a thing. He was very closed-mouth. Not a thing. Although when I did go back, the Jewish community there, the president of the Jewish community—it's really shrunk now; there's only one synagogue there now instead of three—he took me into the synagogue. He took us—my family, my son and his two daughters and my daughter-in-law—he took us to the temple. There's a special chair with my uncle's name engraved in it that sits right by the Talmud. He said my uncle was a special man and then he opened up the Torah and he showed me a Torah that was brought in from 1492 from Spain and he let me hold it. And then he said my uncle was a

wonderful person.

Then he took me to the Jewish cemetery, which is behind closed door, locked up. My uncle died in June of 1984. He showed me his grave and he's buried right next to a famous Jewish resister who never got caught, so his nickname was "The Phantom," and my uncle is buried right next to him.

Then he told me the history of the cemetery. It was a piece of land was bought in the 16th century by a Franciscan friar, because the Jews are not allowed to own any land. This Franciscan friar bought the land and then donated it to the Jews. They made a cemetery out of it. Then he showed me graves that were four hundred years old. He showed me little babies' tombs that's already disintegrating it's been there for so long. The cemetery is about a whole block long and it's full of Jewish graves. It has a little chapel in there. I took a stone from there and I brought it home.

You have some knowledge of your parents' fate from your uncle. Did you ever do any research on your own to try and find out anything more?

About my parents? My sister did, yes. My parents met in Istanbul. They came together to Bayonne. They got married in Bayonne around 1920, '21, or something like that. They opened up a business. I guess my uncle was there first. So they came with him—well, to him, I should say. Then they had me. They were still very young. When they died my father was thirty-one and my mother was thirty or vice versa. I think my mother was a year older, I think; I'm not quite sure. But they were still very young when they died.

My mother came from a very religious family. My father, I don't know too much about. I know he's got two brothers living in Israel now. They wrote me and they're both retired and I've never met them. For a while I was corresponding with a cousin of mine whose name is

Danny Halfon. He lived on the island of Majorca for a while and then he went back to Israel—no, I'm sorry—he went back to Istanbul and then he moved to Israel. But once he moved we lost contact. I know they're both retired, but that's all I know. I know they both live in small towns in Israel. No, that's about all I know about my father.

You told me a few moments ago that you didn't have any siblings, but then you just mentioned a sister. So can you please—

No. My sister is my adopted sister.

Okay. Can you tell us about—well, introduce your adopted family and tell us how you came to the United States.

My uncle came and got me right towards the end of February. He said, "You're going to go on a long trip. You're going to go to the United States. We have to go right now." So he packed a little suitcase. I didn't want to leave Marie Cazeaux, but I had no choice. She said, "No, no, you go, you go."

So we took a train ride to Bordeaux, which is two hundred miles north. He put me on a Merchant Marine ship called the S.S. Muriel. There were three other passengers on it. There were three old ladies and me and the crew. I remember it took a month to get to Mobile, Alabama. That's where we landed, in Mobile, Alabama. I guess that's where the ship was destined. I have an original bill of lading. My father here, my adopted father paid for the fare, two hundred dollars in those days. The crew was really nice. Nobody spoke French; the three old ladies did. We shared a cabin together and we passed the time onboard by the Merchant Marine sailors teaching me how to play poker.

I stayed in Mobile, Alabama for a month with a Jewish family. I don't know why. Then one night in the middle—and towards the end of March 1947, I was put on a plane, a

prop-engine plane, and eight hours later I was at LaGuardia Airport in New York. I was in my little short shorts and I had my little suitcase and it was snowing like crazy and I was freezing. These four people came up to me—it was Marco and Flora Behar and then their best friends Robert and Susan—and, "Mazel tov." They came and picked me up at the airplane.

I found out that they were adopting me, and then I found out that Flora was my mother's elder sister. She had come to the United States with two brothers before the war. As I said, my mother had thirteen or fourteen brothers and sisters. So they came over. I found out later that there was a custody battle for me. They all talked and I could have gone to Turkey; I could have gone to United States; I could have gone to Israel. And they all decided I would be better off coming to the United States; that would be my best shot. So they adopted me.

They had a daughter; her name is Gloria, who was seventeen at that time. She was a freshman in college. She was already at University of Michigan. So she was out of the house already. So they took me to the Bronx, where they live, the Bronx, New York where they were living.

I found out later that the real reason why they adopted, although they—I mean, they loved me and all that—because my father didn't have any male heirs. He only had a daughter. So he wanted somebody to care on the family name of Behar. That was the underlining cause for them to adopt me here.

Let me get some clarification. You talked about "they" all talked about where you would go, if you would go to Turkey, if you would go to Israel, or if you would come to the United States. Who are the people in the "they" that you mentioned?

My mother's relatives and my father's relatives. From what I was told, telegrams went back and forth. This is all hearsay, now, from my sister. My sister turned out to be my best friend, really.

Well, she just passed away about a year and a half ago. She really raised me.

My mother, Flora, was a very, very nice lady, but she didn't know what to do with me. When I came over she was already forty-nine years old and my father was fifty-five, fifty-six. So they were already...What do they do with a nine-year-old kid who had a mind of his own? So we fought a lot.

Number one, they spoke very halting French and they spoke English and Ladino, which is Sephardic Spanish. They spoke a little Turkish, but they didn't speak French. So they put me in school two months after I got here. The only teacher that spoke a little bit of French was in the fifth grade. So they put me in the fifth grade. They put me in school in May and then school was finished the end of June. So I picked up all my English on the streets. We lived in the South Bronx at that point, which is kind of a rough neighborhood. So I learned fast.

My father was very religious. So he insisted that I go to synagogue with him. So he used to drag me to synagogue on Saturdays with him. The sermons were in Spanish at this Sephardic temple. So I just sat there for four or five hours, just looking out the window, doing nothing, because I didn't know any Hebrew at that point. Then they enrolled me in Hebrew school. So I'm trying to learn English and Hebrew. I was pretty confused.

They felt I was antisocial because I didn't want to talk to anybody. I just wanted to be left alone because I was told, "As long as you're alone, nobody will harm you." So I remembered Madam Cazeaux said so.

And they were set in their ways. Every Sunday they went out to dinner with their friends and then they left me alone because they didn't want to drag a nine-year-old kid to dinner every Sunday. They used to go different places.

So they talked to my sister, who was a psychology major, and I guess they decided that

the best thing to do was for me to see a psychologist. So they sent me to a psychologist and once I week I went to the psychologist. It was a waste of time for me because I knew I was normal. And the psychologist, both male and female—I had a different one every week because I refused to go back to the guys. I just sat there and they used to say, "Well, tell me whatever comes in your mind." And I used to say, because I didn't trust anybody, "I don't even know you; why would I want to talk to you?" And we sat there for forty-five minutes and then the other fifteen minutes he or she sat and wrote notes. And then they would say, "Well, we had a very productive meeting and I'll see you next week." And I'd say, "No, you won't; you're not going to see me next. I don't even know you." And the next week we had a new psychologist.

And this went on for about six months until I finally convinced my sister and my parents that there's nothing wrong with me. "Psychologically, yes, I'm different. What do you expect? But just leave me alone. I'll be fine." And they finally got the message and they stopped the shrinks.

I went back to school the following year. I was put in fifth grade again, which was two years ahead of where I was supposed to be because when I left I was in the third grade. So I made friends and I assimilated fine and I was always a very—well, I was very agile, so I was a real good ballplayer. So I got friends with the kids by playing ball. We used to play stick ball and punch ball and basketball and track and we used to shoot marbles. Once I got to high school, I made the baseball team and played baseball all through high school and a little bit through college. So that was my escape, was baseball.

My sister and I became best friends. She got married. She got a degree in psychology and then she got a doctorate in psychology. She's written seven books on the college level on child psychology. I used to go to her house for dinner twice a week because she lived near me. I

got along with her husband at that time very nicely.

We had a lifelong friendship until she passed away, which was tragic because she fell on a cruise ship. They took her to a hospital in Bermuda. And my nephew and niece flew her back on a private jet to Boca Raton, Florida. And she picked up a staph infection in the hospital and died of that. They called me, and my son and I rushed down there, but it was too late; she was already in a coma. So I got to see her at the hospice—well, I got to see her at the hospital and the next day they took her. But she was in a coma and they took her to hospice and then she died the next day. I hope she knew I was there.

Let me go back and ask a few additional questions.

Sure.

How many sisters did you have?

Just the one adopted sister.

Just the one?

Yes.

I thought you said sisters plural. So I didn't hear you.

No, just one.

When you came to the United States, did anybody ask you about the war years?

No. Actually it was never talked about. Every time I asked my parents what happened to my parents, they just hushed up. For some reason, it was a big secret. No, they never talked about it. My sister finally told me when I was in high school. We were having dinner together one night by ourselves when I was about fifteen and I said, "Gloria, come on, tell me what really happened." So she did. For some reason, it was a big secret. I don't know why, but it was a big secret.

When you first came to the United States, how were you treated by other Americans?

Like an outcast. I was a funny little kid with the French accent. "Why are you here? Where did you come from?" And all that kind of stuff. You know what I mean? Kids can be cruel and I was thrown in on the streets, and, as I say, the South Bronx.

The area I lived in was kind of a melting pot. It was unique because in those days, to give you a little for instance, every time you went three blocks outside of your neighborhood, you were in a different neighborhood where you had...In my area you had the Italians, you had the Puerto Ricans, you had the Irish, you had the blacks and you had the Jews. Any time you went outside the three blocks, you were subject to getting your ass whipped because you're outside of your territory.

I remember one time I was by myself. I was always by myself in the beginning. These three Puerto Rican kids came up to me. The bullies are always in threes; they're never by themselves. They came up to me and said, "We're going to whip your ass." I said, "I'll tell you what." And I was always small for my age. I said, "I'll take on your biggest guy." And they laughed. And the guy said, "You're on." And he beat the hell of me. I mean to the point where I almost went unconscious. After that they left me alone. They became friends because they knew that I stood up to them.

I mean, I was street-wise even at that age. I was street-wise. I said, "It's better to get a whipping now than to keep getting whippings. If you challenge the toughest guy, maybe they'll leave me alone." Which worked. And to this day I learned that if you show fear, it is going to be worse. So I instilled that in my kid. Be street-wise; don't take crap from anybody.

Tell me about your education in the United States.

Well, I started in fifth grade in elementary school. Then I went to a junior high school, which

was seventh, eighth and ninth. Then I went to a high school, ten to twelve; that was Taft High School in the Bronx.

I got into a lot of trouble in high school because I was a nonconformist. I was always asked, *why am I doing this? This is stupid.* My French teacher was a German lady who called me a "petit cochon," which means you're a little pig. She told me, "The Germans didn't kill enough of you guys." I was fourteen at that point and I laid her old cold; I hit her, a female. I just lost control and I belted her out unconscious. I got sent to the principal's office. He knew my background. So he said, "I know why you did it, but I can't let you get away with it. So I have to suspend you for two weeks. But you come to my office every day for two weeks and I won't let it go on your record." The next year the teacher was replaced. True to his word—he was a Jewish principal. I think his name was Horowitz or something like that.

So I graduated high school on time. And then my sister said—because, again, she was the one with a Ph.D.—she said, "You should go to college. It's really important for you to go to college." And I said, "Okay." So I applied and the only school that accepted me conditionally was NYU. So I was one of eight hundred freshmen who went to NYU. I was on probation the first year because my grades were not that great. I did enough to get by. They told me that if I got one D or one F that I would be expelled. So I maintained a C average and they took me off probation.

I joined a fraternity my sophomore year. I became what they call a pledge master, which is the guy in charge of all the new. I was a pledge master two years, my junior, senior. I had sixty-five kids under me.

Then I graduated in four years. I graduated in May of 1960. I started September '56, went all the way through. Then I got drafted the day after I got out of college. I graduated

college May 14th, 1960; I was in the Army May 15th, 1960. I was on the bus to Fort Dix. I signed up for a six-year deal, six months in the service, five and a half years active duty, reserve duty, which is what I did.

I wasn't really a great student. I just did enough to graduate. I had five jobs while I was in school. In the summertime I was a waiter up in Catskills. During the school year I did everything. I worked in a men's haberdashery store. I worked on the census. I worked in my uncle's restaurant as a waiter. I worked with my father; he owned two businesses. He had an antique business downtown and at night he had a concession place in the county center, Westchester County Center, which is like Thomas and Mack is. That's about the best I could equate it to. We had a hundred and eighty nights that he used to work there.

He had night blindness. So he taught me how to—well, my sister thought me how to drive when I was fifteen. So I was driving without a license for a year and a half and driving him. It was thirty miles from our house in the Bronx to Westchester County Center. So I used to work with him at night.

So I was quite busy and maybe that's why...I'm not making excuses because I wasn't a very good student. I just did enough to get by. But I also had jobs all the through. I almost paid my way through school. My father paid the tuition, which was thirty-five dollars a credit, but I paid for everything else. I paid for my books, I paid for my clothing, and I paid for my car that I got. I managed.

Yes, it was important for them, too, and my sister, for me to have a college degree, which I never regretted. So I'm a college graduate from New York. I had all my education in New York City. Then when I started traveling with my jobs, I took two years of correspondence law school.

What did you study in college and what was the nature of your military service?

I was a business major with a minor in prelaw. And the service, which is kind of funny, they asked me what my background was and I said I was a college graduate. So they said, "Oh, so basically you have no work experience except you're part-time." And I said, "Yeah." So they put me in infantry all the way.

The kid that blew up a train in New Hampshire and the judge told him he had to go either in the Army or jail, they made him the company clerk. So I kind of laughed about it because...My friend from the fraternity, we joined together. And out of two hundred and forty guys, we had twelve college graduates and all twelve guys were the Jewish guys. The DI, the drill instructors really resented that. So they really stuck it to us. I was on KP one day out of every nine days in the service because I was the spokesman for the twelve guys. As I said, I had no fear, and I still don't. I told him exactly what I thought of the Army, "It was a waste of time. If you guys fought like this in the wartime, I don't see how you won a war. And all the waste that's going on...I mean, why do I have to do a fire wash in a fire-proof building? Why do I have to pick up butts of cigarettes when I don't smoke?" I really wasn't a troublemaker. I did everything they told me to do, but I always questioned everything.

Then after I finished my basic eight weeks, they put me advanced infantry another eight weeks, my friend and I. I learned how to shoot every weapon imaginable. I learned how to shoot everything from a forty-five automatic to a bazooka and a fifty-caliber machine gun, a thirty-caliber machine gun, B-A-R, you name it. I learned how to fire and how to throw grenades. I mean, the stuff that you really can use in peace time. You know what I mean?

And then five weeks before I was supposed to get out, they said, "Would you be interested in going to OCS school? We noticed you got a college degree." I said, "What does

that entail?" He said, "Well, we'll send you to Fort Benning, Georgia, and you have to enlist for two more years." And then I said, "Well, what happens if I fail?" He said, "Well, then you stay in as a private." And I said, "Nah, I think I'll pass."

So I went into the Ready Reserves after six months where I had to go to training one day a week and then I had to go to summer camp two weeks every year. So that was the extent of my military. I learned how to do pots and pans. That's what they kept putting me on, pots and pans. And now I understand they don't have that anymore. Now they've got people they hire to do KP. So, yes, that's the new Army for you. But all we did was march and march and march and bivouac. That's why to this day I don't go camping because I hate it now because of all the things we did. I mean, we went bivouacking almost all the time. So that was my Army career, a total waste of time.

Now, I must admit, though, during the Cuban Crisis I was on alert. But I came to find out later that it was all a put-up job because Kennedy new exactly what Khrushchev was going to do with the Benkoski papers. I read the Benkoski papers. They had a Colonel Benkoski inside the Kremlin who fed everything to Kennedy. So he knew exactly what Khrushchev was going to do. He knew exactly when he was going to back down. And then they let him hang this guy; they didn't even try to save him. He got shot. They found him out in Russia and shot him. I read the papers by his son.

I read a lot. You can see all my books inside. I read a lot. That's what I do when I watch TV; I read.

Tell me about your professional life after you finished the service. What kind of work did you do?

My first job after the Army, I was a welfare investigator in the city of New York. I was put in

the South Bronx on 161st and Melrose Avenue. Even in those days, it was full of minorities, blacks and Puerto Ricans. There was no Mexicans back there. I was twenty-one years old, twenty-two. I graduated college when I was twenty. I was put in charge of AID, we just call it, Aid to Independent—well, children, really. But it was called, I think, AIC or AID; I'm not sure.

Anyway, I had a caseload and I used to go around to the families, go see where they live, see how they do. I was there for ten months and I saw all the fraud and corruption going on. So I said something to my bosses. I mean, I know for a fact that I saw the same black child passed around from parents to parents so that they get more money from the state or the city. I used to tell my bosses that. And strangely enough, all my bosses were Jewish and very liberal. And they kept saying, "Look, I'm retiring in a couple of years; don't upset the applecart; just give them whatever they want." Being a fresh, new kid, I said...And they used to change my reports all the time.

Then one day it came to a head. I went to see a girl by the name of Gloria Gonzalez. She had two kids. She was twenty-five years old. And she kept hitting me up for more money for shoes, more money for clothing, more money for this. Then one day I pick up the Daily News and I find out that Gloria Gonzalez got busted with six million dollars' worth of marijuana in her house, and I had been there the day before. And I told my bosses that. And he said, "Eh, it's not our matter." So I quit. I said, "This job is not for me; I quit." So I left.

So anyways, I looked around for a job. So I found a job as an administrative assistant to the vice president of Playtex Bars and Girdles and I applied. They were at the Empire State Building. And I got the job. The job turned out to be really interesting. For six months I was going to be his administrative assistant on the Empire State Building. We were on the sixty-fifth floor. And then for six months I was going to be sent to Dover, Delaware where the

headquarters were, the factory. I was going to run three states on credit. And then after that—or before that they were going to send me out as a salesperson to take care of territories where the salesman quit, and then I was going to run it for six weeks until they hired somebody and then I'd move on to the next territory. I was single. I had no establishment. I tell you that was a great job.

So I stayed in the Empire State Building about four months and then they accelerated and moved me to Dover, Delaware, and I stayed there about three months. And then they had an emergency—well, to retract for a little bit, Playtex was a real tough company to work for. They lost 76 percent of the sales force; every six months they lost 76 percent, because they were tough. They demanded quarters. They demanded that you sell a new product every two weeks. They had a sales meeting in Chicago every two weeks, which meant that it was on your time that you went to Chicago. And then you left Saturday night, then you had one day off and then you went back and sold again.

So the salesman in Iowa—that's the first place they sent me, Iowa—lost his wife; she committed suicide, unfortunately. So they sent me to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and I ran the territory for six weeks. I traveled the whole state. Met a lot of Jewish retailers. Even in Iowa there were a lot of Jewish retailers in Iowa. Then they hired somebody. Then they sent me to Oregon for six weeks and I was there. Then they sent me to Texas for six weeks and I was there.

And then after that they said to me, "We want you to have a permanent territory." So they sent me to the South Side of the Chicago in the middle of the winter. In December—actually, it was November '63, they sent me to Chicago and that's where I was when Kennedy got killed. I was driving on the freeway and it was freezing. I called my boss and I said, "If you don't get me out of here, I quit. I don't like it here. If I wanted to stay in a big city, I would have

stayed in New York. It's freezing all the time and it's not me. I don't want snow."

So the sales manager in Los Angeles said, "Would you like to come work in L.A.? I have a territory in L.A." I said, "Yeah, sure." So they transferred me to L.A. I had a car accident on the way in St. Louis, bashed up my—I skidded on ice. The car was still in a drivable area.

So I went to L.A. They put me up in a motel in Hollywood. I had to go to work right away. So I started doing the territory. My territory is everything outside of L.A. I had the desert, I had San Gabriel Valley, I had a little bit of Orange County, but not L.A. itself. So I stayed there for about three months.

Then my boss got fired. I don't know why, but he got fired. Then they brought in a guy from New York, Joe Valino, a big fat Italian guy. I knew him from New York. I didn't get along with him then. So he started pushing me, "Sell more girdles, sell more girdles."

The rubber girdles cost three cents, two cents for the tubing and one cent for the product. I saw that being made in Dover, Delaware; that's where the factory was. Basically only one person handles the whole thing. They have these small, medium, large and extra-large machines. They dip it in latex. Then they send it around. They go into a room with cotton flocking there and the air just pushes it into that. Then they send it—well, the guy takes it off the machines and they stuff it into a rubber tubing—or to a tubing. That's it. And they sold them for twelve ninety-five. That's how much profit there were in those days.

So they had a special going on, on these rubber girdles. So I went out to China—no—the China [Lake]...naval base out in the middle of the desert in Ridgecrest where the average temperature is a hundred and ten and I sold those poor people twelve dozen girdles. I'm sure they've still got some today. And I went home and sent a telegram, like I was supposed to. And my boss said, "That wasn't enough; you should have sold them twenty-four dozen." And I said,

"No, I couldn't sell them twenty-four. I couldn't even sell them twelve in good conscience." So we had a fight. So I told him in no uncertain terms, "Take your job and shove it up your ass; I quit."

Eh, I didn't have any doubt about my ability. So I was out of work for about a week. Next thing I know, I saw an ad in the paper for Jantzen Swimsuits looking for a sales trainee. So I signed up to go for them. They looked me up. They flew me to Portland, Oregon. I met with the vice president. He gave me the job in the L.A. office. I got married at that point. They sent me as a trainee in New York—I mean—I'm sorry—in Los Angeles.

[Pause in recording]

So anyway, I was there for about six weeks in the home office and one day they asked me to come in the office and they said that the salesman in Memphis, Tennessee just quit. "Do you want the job?" I said, "Sure."

So my wife and I packed up. It was the middle of the selling season. We drove to Memphis with all my clothing that they gave me. I had six racks full. They set us up in the Holiday Inn on Poplar Avenue, which is the main street of Memphis in those days, in 1964. I set up shop. They gave me one room and then we had one room just for the clothing.

I started traveling right away. My territory was Memphis, the whole state of Arkansas, half of Mississippi down to Jackson, and Tennessee, and like fifty miles outside of Memphis. I started traveling. I got along great with the people in Arkansas. They were real nice, nice. I always tell the truth. Well, I lied one time and I'll tell you about it right now.

My territory was Philadelphia, Mississippi, and I got there the month after those three civil guys got killed. I drive into town. This is an experience I'll never forget, naturally. And I go to the store. And the guy took one look at me and he said, "Are you a Jew, boy?" And I said,

"No, sir, I'm Italian. I'm from New York and I'm here trying to sell Jantzen Swimsuits." He goes, "That's okay, good boy, because here we don't cotton to Jews and niggers." Just like there, right to my face, a month after those guys—I don't think they even found their bodies at that point. I had to keep my mouth shut, one of the few times I kept my mouth shut. I mean, as I told you, I'm a street guy. So I know when to keep my mouth shut.

So we did business. He bought a little bit and then I left. Then I was all over the place. I hit every small town in Mississippi. I hit every small town in Arkansas. Anyways, I became the Salesman of the Year for them my first year because I did so much business that was a bad territory.

I was getting paid five and a half percent. So my wife and I did fine. We had an apartment and we moved to a nicer place in a place called Germantown, which is a really nice area of Memphis. I was there for about a year and a half in what they called the C territory. They have A, B and C and then these people.

Then they called me in and said, "We want you to go to Connecticut and New York. We want you to take over the territory from the Bronx to the Canadian border, the whole state of Vermont and a half of Massachusetts not including Boston." And I said, "I don't want to go. I'm happy here. We made a home. We've got a lot of friends. My son was born in Memphis and I enjoy it here. We don't want to go." They said, "Okay." And they said, "But the territory in Connecticut is doing much more business; you'll make more money." I said, "I don't care. I want to stay here."

So after about the third time they came to me and said, "You've got to go; we hired somebody to take your place; we hired a local salesman." And I said, "You did what?" He said, "Yeah, we hired a local salesman, so you're going to have to go." And besides, so I said, "Send

me the records." So they sent me the stats. And the territory in Connecticut, according to their stats, was doing three hundred thousand dollars more business. So that means I would have done about eighteen thousand dollars more in commissions.

So we packed up and we went. I found a place in Colonie, New York, which is right next door to Albany. Well, I did one swing around and I found out they lied; their records were three years old, they did less business than I was doing in Memphis, and my expenses were twice as much in New York.

Then I got into a head-on accident in Long Lake, New York. I went to the store. It was rainy. By the time I got out, it was snowing. I was going up the hill, people were coming down the hill, and we had a head-on collision. The people next...were thrown through the windshield. I just got a bump on my head and my car was demolished, brand-new car. I had three thousand miles on it. Totally demolished.

So I got home and I told them what happened and they sent me more samples. I went back to the dealership where I bought this car out on the island and they sold me the exact same car for the exact same money. The insurance paid for it. I told my wife, "I'm not happy." She said, "Well, do what you want to do." So I called my boss up and I said, "You know what? Take your job and shove it up your ass; I quit." And it was tough because my parents were in the Bronx. So we were able to see them all the time. But I just was not happy.

So I put my son—he was about a year old at that point—and my wife on a plane and I drove back. I gave them back all the samples. I went down to the showroom in Manhattan, gave them back all the samples, and I drove back to L.A. by myself. I made it in three days. We found a place in Encino, California, and then I went looking for a job again.

I found a job with Wrangler Jeans. They were looking for salesmen. Yes, I had plenty of

confidence in those days and those days it was not like it is now. Everything is computer or you meet people face to face. In those days I made a pretty good impression and I knew how to talk.

So I got the job. My job was almost the same territory as I had with Playtex. I knew the whole territory well and I started selling Wrangler Jeans and ladies wear. My quota—I'll never forget—my quota was seventy-six thousand for the year, but they were paying me five and a half percent while everybody else was getting three percent because that's the same that I was making with Jantzen. And I said, "No, I'm not going to go lower; that's what I was making." Hey, they figured my territory was only seventy-six thousand; how much could it hurt? So they made me sign a waiver saying I would never tell all the other salesmen how much my percentage was, the same nonsense.

Anyway, I'm driving around my territory. We got this nice apartment in Encino. We're really happy. One day I walk into a store in Ontario, California called the Hub Distributing Company, Army-Navy store. I met Lou Miller and I said, "Lou, I have exactly what you're looking for. We have a bell-bottom jean for women that wholesales for two fifty and it would be great for people who go fishing and people who work outdoors." So he looked at it and he loved it. In those days you doubled the price and you keystone it and then you add a quarter.

What does it mean to keystone it?

It means that if you sell something for two fifty, you sell it for five dollars and you add a quarter for shipping and you sell it for five and a quarter or five ninety-five, so you make a profit.

Anyways, he ended up buying my whole quota. It was so successful. The people at Greenville, North Carolina where the headquarters are were going bananas because I was selling more than they thought I would and my commission, well, according to to them, I was making too much money.

Anyway, Lou Miller and his brother turned out to be Miller's Outpost. You probably saw them. They had stores all over the country. That was my store.

So they took me off that and they put me selling to eight department stores in L.A. I said, "No, I want my Lou Miller." And they said, "No, no, you can't have that, but you're going to make about two million dollars sales in this one." So I said, "Okay." So I did that for a year and they couldn't handle it. So they told me now, "You have to hire a junior salesman on your nickel." So I said, "No, I don't think so." So anyway, they insisted on it and then they started cutting me back. They took some of my products away.

Some of those department store managers were really, really shady. In order to do business with them, you had to contribute to their charity, QT. Then I also had to be the bill collector. We had some stores that didn't pay us for two years. So they cut out delivery for them. They're big was that you need us more than we need you. And I said, "No, we don't. You need us more than we need you."

So anyway, things got from bad to worse and I just wasn't making the kind of money I was supposed to. So I told Wrangler Jean, "Take your job and shove it up your ass," and I quit.

Then I saw an ad in the paper for Manhattan Shirt Company. They were looking for a sales rep. So I applied. I went and talked to them. Everything was at 110 East Ninth Street; that's where their mart was. So I applied. They liked what I had to say. So they said, "We want you to fly to New York and talk to our bosses." So I said, "Okay."

So I flew to New York. By this time I was on my second marriage. I flew to New York. They wined and dined me, put me at the Warwick Hotel for three days, and talked to them, flew back to L.A.

About a week later they called me again and said, "We want your wife now to go to New

York with you to meet the people." Because this was a sales manager job entailing the Western United States. I said, "Sure." So we went. They wined and dined us again. Blah, blah, blah. I go back to New York for three days and then we go back to L.A.

My wife was a really nice woman, my second wife. She was college-educated and very, very pretty, looked like Pocahontas. She was Armenian, tall, about as tall as I am, long dark hair, and really made a good appearance.

So they called me back a week later and said, "You've got the job. Out of six hundred people, we decided we want you." I said, "Fine, when do I start?" They say, "You start Monday." I said, "Okay."

So Monday I went to the office and Wednesday they called me and told me I was fired. I said, "What do you mean fired?" They said, "Yeah, the vice president that hired you got fired, so we're firing all of his people." I said, "I don't even know the guy. He just happened to interview me." He said, "Yeah, but you're considered one of his people." So I said, "Now, wait a minute. You spent ten, twenty thousand interviewing me and flew me back to New York and now you're firing me?" He said, "Yeah, that's how we do things." I said, "Okay."

So for a while there, it was tough. I couldn't find a job. Then my wife and I split up. I had to sell my house. I got custody of my kid. I was one of the first five fathers in L.A. that got custody of our sons—or their children. Because I refused to let go because of my background. The judge said, "No, that's how we do things." I said, "No, I'm keeping my son." He said, "You know I can put you in jail?" I said, "You go right ahead. I'm not leaving my son. My first wife started messing around with my neighbor and I kicked her out. And now you're going to tell me you're going to give custody to her?" I said, "I don't think so. I'll leave the state before that happens."

So he gave me temporary custody for a year to my son. He said, "If she doesn't protest in a year, you've got full custody." Well, she never did. In fact, she never saw the kid. So I got full custody of my son.

After we left my second wife, I was a single parent for twelve years. I didn't know what to do. So I became A Little League coach for eight years and I met some great people there. I met the cream of the crop. I was living in Northridge at that point. One of them was very, very wealthy, and he said to me, "Have you ever thought about becoming a real estate broker? You and I could open up a business together." I said, "No, I never really thought about it." He said, "Well, with your college education, you don't have to wait the two years; you can become a broker right away if you pass the exam." I said, "Okay."

So I went to school. I failed the first time. And the second time I passed it and I became a broker and we opened up business together and I became a broker for twenty-two years. We had a great relationship and that's how we came to Vegas, together, this guy and I.

We made the fatal mistake—we came with eight hundred thousand in cash. We had a lot of money. But then we made the fatal mistake of opening up a bar and that wiped us out completely. I mean, everybody there was a thief. We had nineteen people working for us on Boulder Highway and we had nineteen partners we didn't know about. Then I met my wife who passed away four years ago. I just told him, "It's not working out." So I gave him the business.

My wife was in politics. Even though she was twenty-seven years younger than me, we just made a match. I was fifty-two, she was twenty-five when we got together. For about a year she supported us. Then we found out she had cancer. So I went back to work and I became a security officer at New York New York, and I'm still there today, full-time. Then as she got worse and worse and worse, we sold our house. We had a house up on Hollywood Boulevard

and Bonanza, beautiful, big, thirty-five hundred square foot house overlooking the whole valley. We decided we better sell it and just rent, which is what we did. She fought it. She had radiation. She had chemo and operations after operations. She finally passed away May fifth, 2012, Cinco de Mayo day.

We rented this house twelve years ago and I decided to stay. My son wants me to go live with him. He's very, very successful. He's a vice president of Travelers Insurance. He manages the whole state of California for them and he has four hundred and twenty-five people underneath him. I said, "No, I'm going to stay here. I like it here." So that's where we are today.

He takes me on vacation every time he goes and he has two weeks' vacation. The first time he went to Mexico and I didn't want to go. I wasn't ready. It was about a month after my wife died. The second time we went to France. He said, "You've got to go. I want to find out more about my background."

So we went to Paris for a week and then we took a train down to Biarritz and Bordeaux. He set it up where we had an interpreter, a nice lady. That's when I found out my uncle had remarried and had three kids that I didn't know anything about. So I met two of them, two of my new cousins, and I met his widow. She's still alive. Then I met—there was five people, but four of them that I grew up with knew that I was there. They wanted to meet me. So three of them live in Spain now and they came down on the bus and we made a whole day. Then the other one was a postman and I was with him for about three, four days. Then we went back to my apartment. The landlady let me in my apartment, my old apartment. It's full of Algerians now.

We went to the Shoah Museum—to go back to it—we went to the Shoah Museum in Paris. My parents' names are on the wall. There's a picture of me with my niece—or my cousin, who was twelve. She got taken. The only picture they had of her was with me on her lap. So

the twelve thousand little Jewish kids that got killed, she was one of them.

And her name?

Her name? Well, it's in here. Let's see. Isn't that sad I forgot what her name is? Nellie, Nellie Barit. Yes, Nellie Barit. She was twelve when she died. And then Easton were the other ones. Then my parents are down here, Halfon. Then my uncle Balle. Balle was his family.

So I met his new wife. She kept the store open all the years that they were gone and when he came back he married her. I didn't know anything about it. When I got here I wrote him twice and I was told he didn't want to—he wanted to forgot all about the background. So he never wrote me again. So I never saw him, never heard from him again. Yes, that's the way it goes.

But I lived on borrowed time for seventy-four years. I mean, I should have been dead three times. I got shot once in the head when I was a kid. I opened up the curtains during curfew and a German soldier fired me and the bullet ricocheted and kind of hit me in the forehead and just skinned me and that was it.

When was this exactly? Do you know what year?

Yes, 1944, yes. That's when the air raids were going on and you had to keep the drapes closed. I was wondering what was going on. I heard all that noise, the bombing going on. All my records were burnt up at City Hall.

We did find my parents' original marriage certificate; I have that. Then Biarritz sent me a certificate copy of my birth certificate, so I have that. But otherwise that's all I had. I had a little napkin holder when I came, but it got lost.

I have a couple of questions for you, but I definitely have to start with...Three times, you said, you escaped death.

Yes.

So the shooting when you opened up a curtain during blackout.

Right.

Okay, during the war. And what about the other two?

Well, the second time was when the German officer said I could stay instead of being taken with my parents when I had the measles.

And the third time, when I was driving back to L.A., I was by Pittsburgh on a freeway and I got involved in a seventeen-car accident. A guy cut another guy off. And I was right in back of him; I was in back of a big truck and the truck was real high up. I slid underneath him and didn't get a scratch. And then I heard, "*Pow, pow, pow, pow, pow*." Three hours later the cops finally untangle all the mess and I come backing out. And they said, "Who are you?" I said, "I've been here the whole three hours." "There's not a scratch on you." I said, "No, not a scratch on me." He said, "Well, two or three people got killed." He said, "Not a scratch." He said, "Just go." So he didn't even take my name. I left. So there's somebody definitely looking out for me.

A couple of other questions. I'd like to go back.

Sure.

You were married three times?

Yes.

Did you want to mention any of the names of any of your wives?

Sure. The first one was Lily; her nickname was Penny. She was my age. We met...I learned how to love playing poker. So when I was in L.A. I used to go play at Gardena, poker, and she was a cocktail waitress there. So I met her there.

Then after we got divorced and I lost my first—well, actually I had a beautiful condo and I gave it back to the builder because we had only moved in like six months before I found out she was messing around. She's still alive today, by the way. So I gave the condo back to the builder and I lost all my investment rather than pay a credit rating.

And I moved back into an apartment in Northridge, and I met my second wife there, Rosemary. She was living there and I met her by the pool one day. Then we got married.

The funny thing, in both my first and second marriage, we were married five and a half years exactly.

And then together we bought a house in Northridge. That's when I had the trouble; I couldn't find a job for about six months and she decided to leave. I always say the month of September 1980 was probably the worst month I ever had. She walked out on me. I had two jobs. I was a salesman for a pharmaceutical company, which I hated. I was working there nine to five. And then at nights from six to six in the morning, I rented a taxi from a friend of mine for thirty-five dollars a night and I drove a taxi every night. I was only paying him thirty-five dollars a night and I was making about a hundred bucks a night, easy.

Anyway, she left. My car radiator blew up in my face and I got all kinds of scars here. That's a little one there, but all on my back. And then about a week later I got shot in a holdup. I was driving the cab at night and I get a call—in fact, I drove a guy to Gardena and right next to Gardena you got Watts. And usually I don't answer those calls, but I was right there, like about a mile away. So I answered a call to go to the so-and-so house to pick up. So I take the call and I'm going down this street, right around 140th Street and Vermont, which is a terrible neighborhood, at like two in the morning. I looked for the number she gave me, the dispatcher, and I can't find it. I said, "I've got forty-four and forty-eight, but I can't find forty-six." And she

said, "We were told it's a back house."

Sure enough, there was an alley there. So all I was thinking about was getting a fare. So I parked my car here and I started walking down this alley and there was nothing there. And I turn around and there's three kids with a gun, "Okay, mother F, all your money." So it was a setup.

So one thing my friend taught me—the guy who owned the cab was an Israeli Sabra, which is an Israeli born Jewish, nice man, David Berkowitz. He was a tanker man during the Jewish war with Egypt and he had migrated here. He told me now, he said, "Maury, remember don't ever keep all your money in one pocket."

So I had a twenty-dollar bill here. So I threw it down on the ground. And the guy reached down like this with his gun. So I reached for the gun and I punched him and I broke his two front teeth. He picked up the twenty and he ran. And I should've let it go, but my adrenaline was flowing, so I started chasing him. And he turned around and he shot five times. See this black spot on my ear?

Yes.

That's a nick. He got me here; I got a scar here that they had to do surgery on. And he hit me three times in the back, grazing. Now, I'm bleeding all over the place.

That's your fourth time.

I forgot about that one, yes, my fourth time. So I say, "Help, help, police, police," or, "Somebody call the cops." The cops come. They looked at me and said, "You're not badly hurt. Just get out of here." They didn't even take a report. That's how bad the neighborhood was; they didn't even bother to take a report.

So I go home and I wake up my wife. And I said, "Honey, honey, I got shot in a holdup."

She looked at me and said, "That's too bad, dear." And she went back to sleep. And I knew the marriage was over at that point. She walked out about two weeks later.

So anyways, I had to sell my house and moved back to the same apartment. And then we met. I took my son with me. But I wanted to stay in that area because my son was going to school and he knew all the people. We had Little League.

And her name was?

Rosemary. Really a nice lady. She died of cancer a few years ago, too, like my wife did.

Then we moved here. I came by myself with my friend and he was married. So we sold his house and he moved here. He bought a house at the country club, which is really a nice house. In those days it cost him two hundred thousand to buy a house there. I moved into an efficiency apartment.

I used to walk down—it's only about a mile—to the Flamingo and I used to play poker there every night just to do something. Then my wife—or my wife-to-be was setting up residency for divorce. So she was there for six weeks at the Flamingo. So we got to know each other. Then that's when we started talking through my friend, my partner. I didn't want anything to do with women at that point. I was single for twelve years. I was just fed up. So she started talking to my friend.

My third wife had an IQ of a hundred and sixty, a really brilliant, brilliant mind. She figured the way to get to me, because I wasn't giving her the time of day, was to go through my partner because he was the only one I talked to because I don't talk to people. I do very well by myself. I am not lonely. As you can see now, my wife's been dead four years, I haven't gone out one time with a woman. I just...They all lie and I just don't have time for that. The older they get, the biggest lie they tell you. I mean, I've tried about ten times and I have yet to even go out

with them.

Anyway, so she met me through him. And then we went out one night and we decided—and I told her, "I'm fifty-two; you're twenty-five. Are you sure you want to do this?" "Oh, yeah," she said, "you're perfect for me because," she said, "people my age bore the hell out of me." So we were together twenty-two years, until she died. We probably would have been together forever.

And her name?

Her name was Beverly, Beverly Ann, and she was Irish. I never married a Jewish girl. I always married outside the religion. It's just the way it turned out. But she was great.

But my first wife converted to Judaism because she knew that in the Jewish religion the kids are the religion of the mother. So she knew how important it was to me. So she converted to Judaism. That was about the only nice thing she ever did. So my son is Jewish.

Did you give him a Jewish education when he was a child?

No. No. My father insisted that I get bar mitzvahed. So they sent me to Hebrew school and I got thrown out of Hebrew school because the teacher hit me with a ruler and I threw a board eraser and hit him right in the head and I got expelled, which I didn't care. So the rabbi—I memorized the whole thing for the bar mitzvah and then I forgot everything.

Then my father had a party and he said, "Today you're a man. You can make your own decisions." And I said to him, "Pop, the first decision I'm making, I'm not going to shul every again." And he hit me across the face. "That's not your decision to make." He insisted I keep going with him. It was all tradition with him. It's not that he was religious; it was tradition.

Things came to a head. During Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when I was in the service, they let me out for the Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. And I came home and I was in

basic training and I was in no mood and all I wanted to do was sleep. And he said, "I got tickets to go to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur." And I said, "I'm not going." I said, "Pop, I'm twenty years old and I'm not going. I'm sorry. I came home to relax." And he said, "You've got to go; I bought tickets." I said, "I could care less. I'm not going." We had such an argument that I went back to the barracks the same night. I said, "Pop, you take your tickets and do whatever you want to. I'm not going." And we didn't talk for about a year. I went back and I slept the whole three days off. Finally my sister got us back together and then he never bugged me about religion again.

I have a couple more questions for you.

Please. I'm free. Go ahead. You're the one that's got a time limit; I don't.

Yes. That's okay. You're talking about the holidays and that experience you had. Do you think that your view of Judaism has been impacted by your World War II experience?

Absolutely. Oh, absolutely.

How?

Well, I definitely believe we're the chosen people. I am not religious, but I have had several fights against people who badmouth the Jews. I stick up for the Jews.

I met Moshe Dayan once in person. My mother was the head of the Hadassah in New York. She was president of the Hadassah, female division. They always held big luncheons. When I was fifteen she had a luncheon at my house and Moshe Dayan came to the luncheon. I'll never forget him. He was about my height. He had a patch over his eye, thinning hair. And I sat right next to him for lunch. That was one of the shining parts of my life. I asked him, I said, "Mr. Dayan"—and he didn't know much about my background—I said, "What makes the Jews so tough?" And he looked at me and he said, "Son, we're so tough because we have no place else

to go." To my dying day I'll always remember that conversation. "We have no place else to go." So I remember that.

I am proud. I am very, very proud to be Jewish. In fact, I'll show you—before you leave I'll show you something that I found in the garbage can. It's a music box that an Auschwitz survivor made and I found in a trash can. I asked the people that were moving, "Can I take it?" They said, "Sure." You play it and it's the "Hatikvah." And I'll play it for you before you leave. Then I got the Ten Commandments. I bought one more my father and I bought one for me, in L.A. So I am extremely proud to be Jewish, but I'm not religious. I don't believe you have to show your religion by going to synagogue, which doesn't mean a thing to me. And I don't not practice the High Holidays.

My son is not bar mitzvahed, but he's proud to be Jewish. He married a Protestant girl and she's the greatest girl in the world. I love her to death. She put him through college. She put him through law school. They've been together twenty-five years. And he is what he is today because of her. At the age of twenty-three, she was a full-fledged nurse and today she's a cardiac nurse. Her name is Teri. I have two wonderful granddaughters. My oldest granddaughter is going to go to college next year. She's already putting in applications. They have a great family. Religion never came up.

I'm not sure you've mentioned your son's name.

Brett. I made him Brett and his middle name is Halfon. And I told him why. He totally accepts it.

Sure.

I wanted a French name for him. So my wife didn't fight me and we made him Brett. And I said, "His middle name is going to be Halfon; there's no discussion; that's it." So she went along

with that.

And by the way, I never met her parents. We got married here in Vegas. We called her parents. She's a Southern Baptist, my first wife. We called her parents and her father was a career Marine. She said, "Pop, I'm married to a great guy." And he said, "What's his religion?" And she said, "Jewish." And he hung up on us. Never met them.

My second mother-in-law—my wife was already divorced—my second mother-in-law, her second husband got brain damage. So we talked about it and I said, "Why don't you move in with us?" And she helped break us up. Everything I did wasn't good enough for her. Plus I was Turkish background and she was Armenian and she kept throwing the genocide on me, even though I had nothing to do with it and I was French. So in the long run, it worked on her.

What is it like for you with your background to be an American?

I'm not sure I quite understand the country. I'm proud to be American. I consider myself—I have dual citizenship. When I was in the American Army, I got drafted by the French Army because, as you well know, Western Europe always keeps their male citizens. So in 1961, I got drafted in the French Army when the Algerian crisis was going on. They told me to report to Toulouse, France right in the middle of me being in basic training. I went to the CO and I show him the letter and he said, "Oh, don't worry about it; you're in the American Army." I said, "Okay." So I forgot about it.

I got out of the American Army. I was in the Reserves. One day I'm walking down Fifth Avenue and I happened to just walk right by the French Embassy. So I said, "Let me see what happens." So I went in the French embassy and I explained my background. I explained what happened. There was a male secretary. He says, "Monsieur, [speaking French]; monsieur, come with me." So he takes me into this room and there's a scroll about this big, about as big as this

table, and he's looking. He said, "Your real name?" I said, "Maurice Halfon." So he's going through Maurice Halfon, Maurice Halfon. He says, "Ah, monsieur, [speaking French]; quick, get out of here." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "You're a deserter." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Monsieur, you didn't report. You were served." He said, "Technically I could arrest you. You're on French soil right now. [Speaking French]"

Well, it comes to find out they considered me a deserter. So I told my sister, "Don't worry about it." She had to hire a lawyer in Paris, Madam Stern, and for six years it went back and forth, back and forth. Finally the French government accepted that I was in the service, the American Army, and I got out of it on...They had SETO arrangements in those days, which I don't think exist anymore. But the SETO arrangement was if you were in the armed forces in a friendly country, they considered you did your service. So they got out of it. But I didn't know anything about it. They're starting to help me in the American Army.

But I'm proud to be American. When I was eighteen I became an American citizen. I went down to Columbus Circle in New York. I couldn't become a citizen under my parents' because they were already citizens. So I had to wait until I was eighteen. That was a big year for me. I became eighteen and I also got into college in those days. So that was a big day.

Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't covered yet?

My sister got me repatriations from the French Service. She got me fourteen thousand dollars from the train people and a little bit of the jewelry that they were able to establish. So I got that, which I used on my wife's illness. I went right away and I spent a little bit on her illness.

No, that's about it. I wish I could do more.

Oh, when I went to the—my sister and I, we had a reunion in Washington, D.C. in the early nineties when the Holocaust Museum opened. When we were there my sister and I took a

whole day to go there. My parents' names were not on the registry. So they told me, well, they didn't even know they existed. So I put their names down. And then I joined the Holocaust Survivors and I send them fifty-four dollars every month to the Holocaust Museum.

I found out more. I found out there were over two hundred camps, which I had no idea. I thought there was just like six camps.

There were many more.

There are many more, right. Auschwitz was one of the main ones. I spent five hours in there.

Irony enough, when I came out of there, there was an idiot with a big sign, "The Holocaust never existed." I was going to tear the sign outside of his hands, and my sister said, "No, no, leave him alone. He's either deranged or you're going to end up in trouble with the police. So just forget about him." But I was going to take the sign and just tear it up in his face. But my sister being the smart one...

Once in a while, I do get mad of all the injustice in this world, but I do know life's not fair. I learned that a long time ago; life's not fair. Just be kind to your neighbor and do the best you can and this is what I do. I mind my own business and I try to be fair. I try to help my neighbors. I do not contribute to any other charities except the Holocaust. Once in a while, I give to the ASPA for animals. But there's so many scams going on these days that I just don't want to partake in anything else. Plus I know a lot of it, any time you give somebody anything, 90 percent of it goes to administrative costs. So I do know that Holocaust Museum that most of it goes to where it's supposed to. But for some reason, I've got two memberships and I don't know why and I keep writing to them.

You might want to keep this on when I show you the music box.

We'll pause it and then you can show it to me.

[End of recorded interview]