**United States Holocaust Memorial MuseumPRIVATE**

**Interview with Joseph and Mary Schoen**

**January 19, 1990**

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**JOSEPH AND MARY SCHOEN**

**January 19, 1990**

Q. Would you please tell us your name and your age?

A. My name is Josef Schoen. I'm 79 years old.

Q. What is the date and the place of your birth, if you will, please.

A. I was born on October the 12th, nineteen hundred ten, and the place was in the German part of Czechoslovakia, the so-called Sudets and the district city was Šternberk where I was living, but I was born in Village Chestof (phonetic).

Q. What is the name of your parents? What was the name of your parents?

A. My father's name is, or was, Josef Schoen. My mother's name Josephina or Josepha Schoen. She died at my birth.

Q. What was her maiden name?

A. Her maiden name was Ninoit (phonetic).

Q. What was the -- what was the condition of the government at that particular time when you were born? Who controlled that portion of Europe?

A. I was in the first grade, and it was -- we had the picture of Kaiser Franz Josef, and it was the Austria-Hungarian monarchy when I was born.

Q. And did you see a change in the government taking place at that time when you were a young person?

A. Yes, I did. It was nineteen hundred and eighteen when I was seven years old when the so-called revolution came on the -- Czechoslovakia it was founded. It was just as a boy running with other boys there and suddenly saw there was starting the shooting. And we saw people falling and we run. We thought we could get away not to be hit by bullets.

Q. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively). So that was the Czechoslovakian overthrow?

A. Overthrow, yeah, of the part of this previous government, the so-called Austrian-Hungarian monarchy.

Q. So that was toward the end then of World War One?

A. Yeah. It was 1918.

Q. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively.) And would you please tell us your present address right now as to where you live?

A. My present address is Vancouver, British Columbia. I live on 141 East 46th Avenue.

Q. Now, as you were going to school, what trade did you take up and what type of work did you become engaged in when you got out of school?

A. Well, after high school I was at textile school, and then I was employed as supervisor in a silk factory, Silvat A.G. (phoenetic) in Trutmerinstrebau (phoenetic), and I had under my supervision actually six hundred employees.

Q. I see. Would you please tell us what was the condition like in that part of Czechoslovakia economically? How did the people -- how did they react to the employment picture and so on?

A. It was democracy, wasn't bad, but we felt because living in the German part of the country and being Germans, for instance, the first prominence was French or Bohemian language and German language, you know. So we felt a little bit sidetrack of a second class.

Q. I see. And were you ever in the army?

A. Yeah, 1932 I was recruited into the army compulsory, you know, if you were fit. And then I serve from 1932 to the Spring of 1934.

Q. And was that in the Czechoslovakian army?

A. Was in the Czechoslovakian army.

Q. Well, when was it then that you and your parents became Jehovah's Witnesses?

A. An uncle of mine, he was nine years in concentration camp, in several concentration camps, and he actually was a stout Catholic. And then he -- and then one book was given to him probably by one of Jehovah's Witnesses. He read it and visited my mother, which is actually his sister. And he said, "According to this book what I read, we don't have the truth. So I will write to Prague and will ask one of those men to come to my place and explain it to me."

Q. Now, what was that year that you're speaking of?

A. 1933. It could have been a little bit 13 earlier, too.

Q. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively). So he was the first one in your family who became --

A. Ja; ja.

Q. I see. So then when did you become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, since you were in the army? Evidently you weren't one then.

A. It was in the Spring of 1934. I was released from the army. And then they invited me and I saw the Photograma of Creation, beautiful slides. And it shows actually a beautiful future according to God's purpose that our whole Earth will become a paradise.

Q. Now, who was that sponsored by, the Photograma of Creation?

A. It was sponsored by the Watch Tower Society.

Q. I see. So then when did you become then one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

A. Shortly after this drama I liked it very much. I went to one of their first meetings. And a brother who came from Prague explained this and then he would ask who would go on Sunday service. I put my head down and said, "I cannot do it this time." But at the second meeting I said, "I don't get away this time anymore," so I volunteered.

Q. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively).

A. The brother who was in charge of the territory, he said, "Ja, you start on this side and I go the other way around until we meet." And we met after four hours. Can you feel the embarrassment knowing so little about the Bible being the second time at a meeting?

Q. I see. Now, what do you mean by service?

A. I mean house-to-house service, you know, that actually Jesus instituted or introduced.

Q. I see. So then that's when you became one

A. Ja.

Q. I see.

A. And shortly after that I put an application in for pioneering and then I was called not long after that to Bethel service because one of the German brothers couldn't stay, remain anymore in Czechoslovakia so he got to go back. And there was a need for one looking after the ship, shipping department. So I volunteered and I was accepted.

Q. Now, that was what you're referring to, the Bethel, is that the branch over there in Czechoslovakia?

A. That was the branch office, I would say, an outlet of the headquarters in Boklenia (phonetic).

Q. And that was located?

A. That was located in Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia.

Q. And what type of work did you do at that branch headquarters?

A. At the branch I did -- I was in charge of the shipping department. I mean, I was in charge of all the mail that went out, magazines, books, packages. The railway was employed, you know, with bigger mails then the post offices, you know, so I was in charge of everything.

Q. Now, what was that year?

A. It was 1934.

Q. All right. So Hitler had just taken over in Germany in 1933?

A. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively).

Q. All right. Well, what was it about the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses that put them on a head-to-head collision, so to speak, with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party? What were your beliefs that caused that?

A. See, we weren't actually affected by it yet, you know, because Czechoslovakia was different, it was democracy and the various ways freedom. Though in some services from house to house they would find points they could -- for instance, one booklet would have 64 pages, ja. And then in order to make it attractive, cover was put on. And they considered this as a second printing sheet, you know. So very often it was we were arrested because it was beyond the normal printing sheet. So short arrest was well made. And I was a couple of times involved with police, but every time I got away free.

Q. Okay. Well, what was it about the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses though that put them on a head-to-head collision with Hitler and the Nazi Party when they finally did take over in Czechoslovakia? What were your beliefs?

A. My beliefs were that Jehovah God is the sovereign ruler of the universe, which would include our earth, as the most high. Christ Jesus was ruling in the midst of his enemy as the king. His kingdom would be the only instrument which would diverse the whole situation and bring final peace on earth and paradise condition which actually was Jehovah's original purpose, to make this earth a paradise.

Q. Do you mean the whole earth would be a paradise?

A. Yes. And mankind's greatest enemy, death, will be done away permanently. No government could make such a promise. And that was actually pointed out already by Abraham, you know, when he says, "All nations or individuals of the nations will bless themselves." And this actually shows actions. Most Bible translations say we will be blessed. But this means a passive waiting until it comes. But when it says, "Will bless themselves," they have to do something in order to reach this action. They got to be involved.

Q. So then you feel that the whole earth will one day be at peace and be a paradise?

A. Yes. That was God's promise. That was his original purpose, though the first couple failed, Adam and Eve. But it doesn't mean that Jehovah God shelved his original purpose. It still is main objective. And that's why actually Christ died.

Q. I see. Well, why won't Jehovah's Witnesses go into the army? Why didn't they support Hitler since other Christian religions were doing that and joining the armies?

A. Though we respect them as secular authorities and believe under Romans, you know, in the 13th Chapter, showed we should be subject to the secular authorities, but it does not mean that they are the only authorities. The Bible shows us, for instance, we have to do a certain work as Jesus instituted, the preaching of the good news from house to house to all the nations, ja. And then forbid this. They act the same as the Apostles did. As it is stated, we have to obey God more than the other governments. It means God is the prominence. For instance, when they start a war and then they feel we should give our life and everything for the government or for the president, we cannot do that. What's left for God? The Bible says we should give to those governments what is due to them, to pay taxes and many other things. They make electricity, the streets, and all the other things we obey. We are the best citizens in this regard. But when it contradicts God's government or God's principals we cannot obey. What's left then for God if you give everything to the Caesars?

Q. So then you wouldn't go then into the armies of Hitler to kill other people then?

A. No, we wouldn't go. It's interesting that the Hebrew scriptures, the prophet Isaiah, for instance, has something to say that helps us to understand it. In the second chapter of Isaiah, numbers 2 to 4, and it must occur in the first final part of the days that's our time that the mountain of the house of Jehovah will become firmly established above the top of the mountains. Mountains in the scripture refer to governments, ja. And it will certainly be lifted up above all else. So actually, the highest government that exists. And to it all nations or individuals of nations will stream, and many people will certainly go and say, come, you people, let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the House of the God of Jacob, and He will instruct us about his ways and we will walk in His path for our Zion law will go forth and the word of Jehovah out of Jerusalem, that means the Heavenly Jerusalem. And he will certainly render judgment among the nations and set matters straight, redeeming many peoples. And they will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore. So how could we read such an instruction as the Bible says, kill our Christian brothers, for instance, as in some countries or most of the countries Catholics in the First and Second World War killed Catholics, protestants killed protestants. So actually killing -- or we are lifting the sword or the rifles against our own Christian brothers.

Q. So that was the reason that Jehovah's Witnesses didn't go to war then?

A. Yes. Then there's another reason, the apostle Paul shows us in Second Corinthians, 10th Chapter, that our warfare is not a fleshly one. For instance, when the apostle Paul mentioned in Ephesians, the 6th Chapter, our fight is not against flesh and blood but against superior and visible authorities. How could you succeed fighting invisible spirit creatures or authorities with carnal reference? It would be just foolish. And that's what the apostle Paul has to say in the Second -- Second Corinthians, the 10th Chapter, Versus 3: For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage warfare according to what we are in the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but powerful by God for our turning strongly entranced things for we are overturning reasoning every lofty things raise up against the knowledge of God and we are bringing every thought in captivity the sake to be obedient to Christ. So here the apostle Paul says woe if I don't declare the good news from house to house about God's kingdom. And then he also said, and in this way he will not share the blood guilt what the nations have toward God by fighting each other and killing each other. He said, "I am free of this blood guilt. If -- if we would desist on warning the people about this we would be blood guilty in the eyes of Jehovah and Christ Jesus as king.

Q. All right. Well, let's go back then to the time that you went to your branch headquarters there in Prague. What was your assignment there and what type of activity did you do then?

A. Ja, I ran the shipping department, ja, and I was in charge of everything what had to be shipped to pioneers and the congregations and so on.

Q. Where were you sending the information, the publications, to -- to what countries?

A. Oh, not only to Germany but also to the -- I mean, Czechoslovakia, but also other countries, you know, like eastern countries, ja.

Q. Uh-huh (Indicates affirmatively.) Your society had their headquarters for Germany in the City of Magdeburg?

A. Ja.

Q. Now, When they were closed down did you help out in any way by taking over what they had done?

A. You see, Switzerland was actually -- the Swiss branch was in charge of everything, as Brother Rutherford put Brother Hardwick in charge of whole Europe. And then pioneers and everything. But they were sent from Prague as pioneers whether it's Hungary or other countries, you know.

Q. I see. Now, when was it that Hitler finally came into Czechoslovakia?

A. See, it was 1938 that Hitler insisted to take the German part to annex it with the rest of Germany. He said the so-called -- I would say the fringe, you know, of the country. Now, all Germans right up into Bohemia, Corispot (phonetic), Rutenberg, all German cities and German people living, you know, and he tried to get this. So the Czechoslovakian army mobilized. And I, since I was a soldier at the age of twenty years, they just called me back and I refused everything. Then suddenly one of the head generals or what he was in charge, officer of the army, he delivered a speech, and he said, "So, soldiers, now our president demands your life blood for the fatherland." After he had finished I approached him and I said, "I listened to your talk. I am not obeying the least of it because I am a Christian and believe in the Bible and will be guided by God's instruction with the -- written in the Bible."

Q. So you --

A. So he had me arrested right way. And then after some time, maybe a few days, Hitler took the so-called German part the Sudetenland, and annexed it to the rest of Germany without war. And then I was released and then approached this officer. Had. I had -- in the meantime I received books, you know, of that time, for instance, in Germany restricted here I have Vindication, the book of Vindication. There were three parts dealing with the social, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, the book Lights, the book Light, two parts giving fine information; and the book Deliverance, here, a book at that time. And all those books were actually forbidden at this time. It's interesting here I just would remember since I was in charge of the shipping department, I was asked to send Rigista (phonetic), a book, a book Rigista to Hitler that he must have received it and read it. I see from this comment my father being an old party member of the Nazis, says, ja, when he came home once he said, "Today our Fuehrer spoke about you." He said the -- "Our Fuehrer spoke about you." He said, "There comes this American, Judge Rutherford, and he claims that we are from the devil and we are going to be destroyed. But I'm telling you this time, not Heyman will be hanged, but Mordechai." I referring to this book, you know, that deals with Heyman and Mordechai \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, you know, so he must have read it or else how could he have read those comments?

Q. So he was very upset with Jehovah's Witnesses even over that?

A. He was very upset. As we know from later information he even went so far when hundreds of thousands of telegrams came, you know, to his office and comments where he threw the -- smashed the ink bottle against the wall and said, "These brood are going to be exterminated." He had in mind to wipe out Jehovah's Witnesses.

Q. Did your branch office send one of those telegrams to Hitler saying he should stop prosecuting Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany?

A. I don't -- I don't recall that, but we were not involved so much as Germany themselves. For instance, my wife's parents, ja, they had a part in doing this and was actually quite risky.

Q. Uh-huh (Indicates affirmatively). Okay. So when was it then that Hitler came into Czechoslovakia and took over, and what began to happen to you personally?

A. See, then when I was released and I went to this high officer there, I said -- he said, "Are you remaining here or are you going to Germany? "No," I said, "my place is in Prague at the branch, you know, of the Watch Tower Society, and I'm going back." So when I give him a witness he just shed tears and congratulated me. Really, I was amazed about his changes, you know, ja. Then I came back and the police had instructed us already that everything is in the hand of the Gestapo. Hitler insisted, though he said he's not interested in the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Q. You mean he had already taken over Czechoslovakia now?

A. No, he didn't. He hadn't taken over yet. But he aimed to do so, you know. And he didn't -- he hadn't taken complete Sudets, you know, he just started with it. And when I came back I right away sent three 20-ton railway wagons with German literature, sent it into the German Sudet, you know, so when this was becoming Germany, you know, they had all the German literature for -- enough for the whole war.

Q. All right. So then what happened after that then?

A. And then the police instructed us and they said they can do nothing anymore. It's all in the hand of the Gestapo since Hitler had insisted that this German university should remain open. And in reality it was only a Gestapo center for the training center.

Q. Now, what was that school?

A. Pardon?

Q. Was that the German school or was that the one in Prague?

A. That's in Prague.

Q. What was the name of that school?

A. Pardon?

Q. What was the name of that school in Prague? Was that the Czechoslovakian school?

A. I don't get you what you mean.

Q. What was the school that Hitler wanted to remain open?

A. No, that was the German university.

Q. Oh, the German University?

A. German university, ja, and it was only a Gestapo training center. Then we received the order, you know, from the governing body to dismantle the machines and to be shipped to Holland to print there. So one morning our lawyer came and say, gets up 6:00 in the morning. He said German troops marching from six sites into Prague. So we were prepared. We dismantled the machines and then didn't take long the Gestapo came there but the machines and everything was already in boxes. And then we freight papers, and everything was given to the shippers, you know, the movers, and they were in charge of handling it right to -- into Holland.

Q. Now why didn't they confiscate those printing presses and so on even though they were in boxes?

A. You know, they still were scared of the USA. They said, "We never touch German properties," ja. That's why they didn't touch it, didn't prevent it, ja. But what they did when the Gestapo came once to ransack the branch, they said they are looking only for two German brothers, that was Karl Krowser and my name, since I had the last time before this happened everything sent under my name so they were looking already for me. And it's interesting then when they came there and they would order me -- we had, for instance, on the boxes outside we had the language that was printed and inside written on. But we used those cartons when they were empty and put other literature in it. What they got here were all archaic languages we never used: Arabic, Egypt, and all this. So they asked me to put all this into a room and then they sealed the room. There was no German literature there. And they were interested only in German literature that had been moved already before in those railway wagons.

Q. I see. So then the reason then the Germans didn't pick up the printing presses is because it had USA --

A. Ja.

Q. -- written on them?

A. Ja.

Q. And they had respect for the United States, or fear or whatever?

A. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively).

Q. Hum, very interesting. Now, how did the presses get all the way to Holland, just by these shippers?

A. Ja, they used the Rhine, ja. And first the Elbe and then the Rhine -- and then the Rhine, you know. And then when they came and opened bolts, you know, what it is, four weeks and all this getting rusty. And then put Harbeck in charge of all Europe, he came with an engineer brother and he said, "Now we will unpack this and we will have to clean everything from rust." In six weeks he comes and show us how to put it together.

Q. So you went to Holland at that time?

A. Ja, we were brought to Holland, but it wasn't easy. You want me to relate it in details, ja?

Q. So how did you get to Holland?

A. You know, I was in actually to Holland -- we went to -- we were in Vienna, ja. First we -- in the nighttime we made our escape. And then I got a card for invitation for child's baptism where wine and everything is prepared for it and it was Dusseldorf, maybe two-and-a-half million inhabitants. And I said, "What can I do with this card? It has only the city on and no address." Then a brother who was with me, he got a card and it said I received a card and only a street is on it. I don't know what to do it. I said, "Let's put it together and maybe they fit." So then we find out that right away the next day we traveled to Dusseldorf. And when we came there and the address that didn't know anything there were not even witnesses, they were some people, you know, study with, "wait. You stay here and in morning -- tomorrow we don't find out anything we show you the harbor." We were on the way out and suddenly a lady came and said, "I am Aunt Bertha. Didn't you get my letter?" We said, "Yes, we got one but didn't know what to do," we said. "And the two boys, take them right away along." So we went in the train and she instructed us. We said Rahab was considered a harlot but she was a faithful sister risking even her life. She changed. She said, "What I will do I will do the same, though they might think of me whatever they want. But there is no other way since the Hollandish troops even when you get there you would not get through the barricades. There is only one way. I have a farm close to the border. There will be a light there. I arranged it already. And then one will take me and one the other one, my daughter, and we will embrace as love couples through those soldiers." They know her. But otherwise we couldn't get through. Then she instructed us, "But now you will meet John. He's a Gestapo man." When we heard that we didn't feel so easy. Then when we saw him we said, "Why he has this job to keep the connection open with Germany and then he had to report every day to the Gestapo about Jehovah's Witnesses." So he was actually having a very risky life, you know.

Q. So he was one of Jehovah's Witnesses then?

A. He was one of Jehovah's Witnesses, took this job to keep the on-going work going. Now, when we saw him and he instructed us and said, "If they catch me, they kill me. I take you only under this condition: That you are not afraid. When they shoot at us you don't stop. We run whether we make it or not. It's all in Jehovah's hands." And, you know -- so we then -- we felt good, comfortable, you know. Then we went through the swamps there and finally we waited in corn field. And he left to midnight. And then the sister came with her daughter to pick up us. We embraced her and then the brothers already were working in the house from the branch, you know. And they took us to the -- right to the Atlantic, Hamsted, where the battle -- where all the branch was in Holland. And we were six times stopped on the road on the barricades of the army. And they would ask everyone, Holland, Dutch people. We said, "Yes." We produced those passports, they saluted. See, sometime if you are such an assignment how they are blinded by experience. So we set up the printing plant for the Harbrick with these engineer brother came, everything was running. And then Brother Verner, he was then the branch officer, overseer. He was seeing the governor with our falsified passports because we were actually -- Gestapo was looking for us, you know, so we couldn't have legal passport. And then he just wanted to put in the stamp. As one of the other officers said, "You cannot do that. There is no legal entry." So they had to arrest us. And they says he will contact the governor and everything will be okay. So we were overnight there and the next day at the plain-clothes policemen or detectives, you know, they had handcuffed us, and came to the railway station, the branch and sisters and brothers were there to say, "Get out, away," you know. And the branch overseer said, "Why do you handcuff the people?" They said, "Oh, it's just a gesture. In the train the handcuffs will be put away." When we were in the train and I said, "What about those handcuffs?" He said, "Are you crazy? You will be turned over to the Gestapo, the German authorities."

Q. So he was going to turn you in then?

A. Ja. So we give in to this and said, "Nothing can be done. Pray to Jehovah." And then on the last station before we came to the German custom office, you know, the Dutch custom, the train stopped. There was a delay, didn't know what happened to the train. Ten minutes. So we went into the waiting room and then sudden a phone call came. It was the governor from Denmark. He had forgotten about this and now he recalled it and remembered it and said, "They must be on the border already." And they said, "Those two boys never to be given over to the German authorities. You wait until you get further orders." So they put us in prison. And then his wife treated us as if we would be guests, and she said, "My husband will come and give you further instruction."

Q. So he had forgotten and then when he remembered you were just getting ready to go over the border?

A. Ja. And then he came and he said, "In the evening the army will come. They will load you onto an army truck and advise you how to get, you know, to get saved there and you will not fall into the hands of the Gestapo." So we -- what they did, they put us on the railroad track on, you know, the gravel, and all this. If it betrays you run right into the hand of the authorities. So we decided we go down into the swamps, you know, beside those railroad tracks. And we were on our elbows crawling. Have you ever been crawling for hours waiting? You think your own heart will betray you, you know, you bumps so loud. And suddenly we heard German custom, you know, "Unholten." That means stops. But that didn't mean us, cars and trucks what they stopped. But we knew now where the custom office, where the German custom were. So we crawled and then we waited. He give us instruction when we get there we should remain in the forest until in the morning but never take for 60 or 80 kilometers be it bus or tram, whatever it is, because Gestapo is checking everything. Since it was a beautiful night we decided we walk a little bit to make headway. It didn't take long we were stopped by Gestapo men, two Gestapo men. And then the one who stopped us, the other one said to him, "What do you want? Can't you see they are our people?"

Q. So he you were Gestapo?

A. Ja.

Q. What was the reason he thought you were one of the Gestapo?

A. No, not only Gestapo, but Germans, you know, and employed, you know, because we had the same hats and then the trench coats and all. I had the experience more often the brothers would mistake me for Gestapo man. They said, 'You look the same and behaved the same way as they do," you know, so --

Q. So you actually served as a protection for you as well?

A. Ja. And then we decided now we still obey the order there and we remain in the forest. And in the morning when we woke up we were actually sleeping in the park, city park. So we took off heading -- we walked for 60 or 80 kilometers, and then we went to Vienna and Holland. Holland, the brothers knew already the address, you know, where they could contact us. And suddenly I was contacted by a brother who was for this undergoing work headed in Dresden what did it before me, introduced me, and I was doing it, mimeographing the Watch Tower with another brother and then delivering to the brothers. And then I had when two brothers in Salzburg were shot, I got the assignment since Himmler, the Gestapo chief had the brother and sisters arrested, to reorganize there. The brothers were very much in fear of this, you know, and to meet anyone. And when I contacted the brother in Braunschweig. It was Hitler's birth part, you know, and I ask him to introduce me in Salzburg so I could start because it was the organization feature procedure, you know.

Q. In other words, now you were in charge of all the Austrian work --

A. Ja.

Q. -- all the underground work in Austria?

A. Ja. Ja. And then there were others like Hansey (phoenetic) also was traveling with me. She was actually doing underground work, too. But when I send her home, you know, she didn't know, she just -- that's in the last years' yearbooks dated. He said, "The brothers asked me to visit," and this was a mistake and I was arrested. In reality, it was my assignment. I stayed for ten days there. Young brothers received the papers, you know, to report to the army and they were desperate what to do. So sometimes until 4:00 in the morning I stayed. I had the latest information, you know, to help them with the Watch Tower neutrality. And I wasn't arrested there, I was arrested later on, on another trip. It was -- I wanted to leave at 6:00 in the morning and then Mussolini’s coal transport led this train, this 6:00 train, fall out and had to wait until 9:00. And suddenly I was surrounded by six Gestapo men who came on this brother who was released by the Gestapo. And they said, "He has such a faith you could kill him you will never get a word out of him." But now he done pale like chalk, white like a wall, you know, so there must be something fishy. Then they turn to me and say, "What are you doing here?"

I say, "Aren't I allowed to see my uncle?" And they grabbed me and led me outside. There were two more sitting in the car. And they said, "Your uncle? We will find out." So they took me right away to the prison and then they took me to the Gestapo. And the whole day they interrogated me. They had me stripped in the nude. They wouldn't even let me go to the toilet. They followed me. And then in the meantime since I had the slip, I had the -- my suitcase, you know, at the railway station in the locker, they had found it because I put this already -- I wanted to leave in my pocket. So they got this and now they wanted to know there was a bunch of keys who they belonged to and then magazines, some packages were still left, and they said, "Ja, we have to find out where all those go. We will get this out of him." But they didn't get out of -- not one word out of me. On the magazines, packages I had codes. They would never find out. And the keys I wouldn't tell them. The brothers gave me keys because you don't realize it was war and completely every house had to be darkened, you know. Those tar papers had to be on the window. Not the lightest -- not the lightest light could come out, no street lights or nothing. How could you come when you arrived in a city like Innsbruck or what, how could you come in the nighttime without noticing -- without finding anything if you wouldn't have a key? You wouldn't even know where. The brothers didn't know when I would arrive, you know. So they wanted to know where I got all this and I wouldn't tell them. Then they said to me, "Okay. When we come to Kratz, that was the capital of this part of the country, "...you will talk. When you come under the wheels you will talk like a waterfall." That means for sure, no? We said, "Would Hitler go with you? If you would betray Hitler he could hang you or shoot you. What you think what Jehovah God will do with me if I betray my brothers?" Do you know what this head interrogator said? "We can kill these men. You will not get one word out of them." And then we went to Kratz and they put me there in a cell. I heard one scream on the side was beaten and he said, "Be quiet or you get another beating." And I saw the mattress there was full of blood. Somebody might have been beaten up. And they give orders they should not lock it. They will take me overnight, you know. And then they had to arrest for fourteen days Communists so they didn't have any time when I would reconnect myself when it got time finally so I had mostly night times interrogations. When I came back to the cell the tears would rund down, I broke down, you know. But when the key was rattling in the keyhole I wiped my tears and prayed to Jehovah for strength and it was all right. They could try whatever they wanted, they could not get one word out. For instance, one day when they had beaten this brother where I was arrested ruthlessly, and they called me in. And I said, "How could you beat this brother when he had the head injury? He had quite a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on his head injury. He had quite a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on his head and he cannot remember the things. They

were lying pigs. I guarantee you none of you will leave this room alive.

Q. They said that to you?

A. Ja. What I said now, "If it is Jehovah's will we will die. But if not, no matter what you're going to try and even have our head, we will perish. I I thought how they will fall over us. You see every time was that I give a witness to Jehovah, that I entrusted in Jehovah. And, you know, now I thought, "Now they will finish us." What happened, the one in charge of the interrogation in a very soft voice gave orders to be led to our cells. So here in Bible says Jehovah's name is of strong power and the righteous one runs into it in his security. One of those brothers takes any credit that he was courageous, it is Jehovah who is the healer, who keeps us holding us up if we just obey his commandments and try to please him and never give in to compromise.

Q. Now, what was it now you're speaking of right now?

A. This was the year January 14 --

Q. 19 --

A. 1940.

Q. Forty, okay. So that's when you were picked up. Okay. From there were you sent to a camp or series of camps?

A. No. I was now expecting that I would get a court case. And I awaited anyway with all this treason, all this having connection with foreign countries, it was on this alone death sentence, you know. So I was -- really I thought when they have me my head will roll anyway, uh-huh (indicates affirmatively). So then the court case came and then the one -- they send one to defend me from the party, from the government. And he said, maybe to help me innocently since this other brother had head injury, they thought if they would investigate maybe this other this one who is accused here they might find the same conditions. When I heard that I said, "Please. I don't need to defend. I will defend myself." So the judge agreed to that. And I thought, "Now I will deliver a witness for Jehovah's name." After I had finished, you know what the Judge said? "As you can see from his discourse, we have here one of the most dangerous antagonizers of the set and I am convinced the family where he was arrested, and this they are here, the court case at the court, they are innocent and he is the one who betrayed and deceives them with his sect. Now, as we can see out of his defending we have here this men is so dangerous he should not be left free. Now you realize if you would stand before this special court today you would be executed. And they said, "I sentence you to ten years penitentiary and this should tart the count after the war is over." That means I wasn't starting with my sentence that should start 1945, but they didn't know when the war was over, 1945 when the war was over, that's why I was sent to the camp.

Q. So they thought they were going to win the war and after the war was won you then would start serving your ten years?

A. Ten years, ja.

Q. I see. So now you went to a camp. What camp did you go to?

A. It was on the Dutch border. Emslander is what it is, actually one camp that was the most famous on cruelty, Esterwegen. This one -- this continued after 1938. So I was sent to the same thing, you know, to cultivate swamps, you know. And this was Börgermoor, camp number 2. And I was -- Ashemdorgerham was camp number 2 and Börgermoor number 3. And, for instance, camp number 5 were Russians, camp number 6 were Poles, and so on, you know. So when I came there I get a nice reception. And as soon as you go from the trucks down the beatings starts. Then you have all the signs, "Any resistance will meet brute reaction," you know, that means with any force they will break you. And then there was a kind of registration. We said, "Who shall we report to if something happen to you?" And they said nothing will happen to me. And the one said, "We will see how quick it goes." So -- and the criminals, they are running the camp actually and they have any power. They can do whatever they want. If they kill you they report one died. So it's everything, but you don't feel you are in their hands. You feel you are in Jehovah's hands. That's why you are confidence. But one thing: Unless Armageddon comes you will never get out here alive. It was…

Q. So what was the year now you were sent to that camp? Was it 1940?

A. Ja, 1940.

Q. Now --

A. Approximately in the middle of 1940, June, July or -- autumn.

Q. June or July. So \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was one. Now, what was the day in the camp, that camp, like? What was it that you were required to do?

A. We had -- we had -a pensum to cultivate the swamps so it would be a productive land. So got the pensum, was twenty cubic meters, ja, depending how deep you got to go. And sometimes you got to dig until you hit sand. And the first sand is like a rock. Maybe you get half an inch or inch with the spade, you know, so you had to work on it. And then until you got to dig until you hit loose sand. Sometimes you have to go four meter deep or sometimes you have these black moor oak. It's like a rock. You can no use ax on it, it's just too hard, you know. But they don't consider that. At 3:00 in the afternoon they check if you are able to make it. If not then it goes on the spotplutz, on the spotplutz. That means crawling. And they hit you with rifles, rifle butts, and so on. So half of them they go into their reviewing we call hospital in the camp. It was a revel, you know.

Q. Now, were you the only Jehovah's Witnesses in there doing the digging in that ground?

A. No. There were -- for instance, there were six brothers. And we were cooperating with each other and this way we should make the thing because we were helping each other. And it's interesting in this respect. There was one of those, you know, hypnotists, what they are, entertainer. And we helped him. He was such a little man, you know. And to thank us one day he stood there and he screamed, "Jehovah's Witnesses making propaganda. Jehovah's Witnesses making propaganda." We shook him and foam was coming from his mouth. I think he didn't even know what he was doing. So we could see completely used by demons or demonized.

Q. After helping him?

A. Ja, after helping him. So I realized even in the gas -- gas cell when I was brought in was a demonized doctor. When I saw him he had pierced his eyes out, you know, with, you know, those -- I think pencil. And it was looking ugly. And I felt so sorry I wanted to witness to him. He looked at me, and then he said, "I am a doctor and I can cut my leg off but it wouldn't help me. Only when I am blind. That's why I pierce my eyes. But they said only the eye water run out and I will see again. But only when I am blind I am not going to be thrown into concentration camp." So he did this. And then what he said to me, "I smuggled blades in here, razor blades, and you will cut my eyes out." Since I didn't do that he jumped in my legs and reported things about me that I could have been executed for, the lies what he told them. They don't believe a Witness, they believe such as kook righter, you know. And I asked if I could get out of this cell because this man is not normal. And then when I was in the camp one day there was a notice there Professor Doctor Schmidt being executed. Do you know what he did? For fear, you know, to come to a camp he accused himself of being involved in communist activity, and for this he was executed. In the camp where I was, I just was in here because they cut \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of my back when I done that.

Q. So what time did your day begin?

A. Our day begun 6:00, you know, a bell. And then -- but in reality they threw us out already 4:00 in the morning or even before sometime. As I said those gangsters they are running the whole camp. They have all the power. You can do nothing with them, you know.

Q. Uh-huh (Indicates affirmatively.) So then?

A. But as long as it's daylight, you know. They wouldn't let you in the dark because of fear somebody escape.

Q. Okay. Very good. Please like to tell us if any other people in your family were in the concentration camps.

A. Yes, my uncle. He was in concentration camp in Everettsberg) and Sachsenhausen. And when he came there they would ask, "Who is the carpenter?" "Who is the bricklayer?" He was a farmer. He said, "I can do brick laying," you know. But he didn't know what he was getting himself into. You have to shut off -- I lost my voice now. (Pause.) What he himself got into. He was assigned to fix up the crematory and, you know, everyone who was involved there, he never got away. That means when he had finished a job he will be thrown into the oven and this way outside nobody got to know what's going on there. So the brothers had a good organization. They contacted his sister which she was in Ravensbrück next to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp but was outside as a servant, the camp leader's wife. And she approached the camp leader's wife and said, because she was contacted by our brothers, that her own brother is there fixing the oven and that he will be thrown into it next. So she approached the husband and they got away from there. They wrote a letter to me when he said, "Jehovah delivered me by means of an agent using my own sister." And you know, she -- she was working in a dairy store. And one of the Gestapo came in one morning and said, "Heil Hitler." And she said, "Good morgen," good morning. And then he said, "Don't you know how to greet? I wish you a nice beautiful good morning. You come along." That's the way why she was arrested. And she was sitting for nine year. Can you imagine just because of the greeting?

Q. So what was the camp that she was in?

A. Ravensbrück. Czechoslovakia was tough, too. The women did the same work as the men. They did the same hard work. But later on sisters were used outside the camp. They were logisted in the camp, ja. And then so there were -- they had entrusted occupations because they trusted them. For instance, the camp leader's wife, Boidy (phonetic) was her name, "You train the children the way you feel it's right." So she actually didn't very much problems. But then the sisters would mimeograph in the pigs' sty for the men's concentration camp books and Watch Towers that are brought from Sweden.

Q. You mean they actually --

A. By Dr. Kersten. It was Dr. Himmler's, the Gestapo chief, Himmler's doctor and was the only one who could relieve him of his pains. He would for instance come and say, "Sisters, what shall I bring you from Sweden?" You know. So in Sweden when he came the sisters would pack the suitcase. He was not checked because he had this very important entrusted position. He was not a Jehovah's Witnesses but he was very favored for everyone. Then they would unpack and they were caught. And four five sisters were executed and Broidy, she was outside the barbed wire outside the camp. And they said, "We will get you, too." Within one month she was down to a skeleton because every day she was in fear the Gestapo could come and do away with her. But we met her after the war. She survived. Even have the opportunity…

Q. Can you tell me of anyone else in your family that was in prison or concentration camp?

A. Ja. My mother was in prison, and due to sickness she was so severe sick she was released early. And then there was a necessity on the farm of her parents. Also my cousin. I met him in Börgermoor camp. He was transferred from Ashendorgerham to Börgermoor and then he was transferred somewhere, I don't know where, to inside somewhere, I lost track where. But he was released in 1945.

Q. Well, what happened to you now toward the end of the war? What actually began to take place with yourself?

A. Toward the end of the war in January I was again asked to -- for Hitler's last hope, the so-called fork storm and I refused again. So this officer in command, he got mad about me, and, "I know that you're a Jehovah's Witnesses. Nothing can be done with you. Take off." And then he called me back and he say, "I guarantee you because of your strong faith nothing will happen to you." So I couldn't believe him saying such a thing, you know. And then we found ourselves in the death march on the day to Dachau and we were --

Q. How many people were with you on that death march?

A. A couple of thousand. And those who grew weak were left on the road, you know, and -- because they said, "None of you will be given into the hand of the enemies, although none of you will survive," ja. And -- but then they got sudden rescued by the U.S. fighting troop. This was a front where we were walking, and they were observing it all the way. But they tried to feed us but no food would hold anymore. So they gave us morphine shots and then they sent us out to pick. But after that I had many health problems, and I found out that I had two holes in my lung but I could recover with help. And I took privileges again and could serve the capacity, however, and now I am the presiding overseer in the Riverview congregation in Vancouver, so --

Q. We want to thank you very much for the interview and the time you have taken to share this information. At this time we would like to introduce to the Museum your wife, so maybe we can take a few minutes and interview her. Would you please like to tell us who you are?

A. I'm Anna Schoen, and I'm coming from Germany. And my parents' name were Neuslan (phonetic)and I lived in Bavaria.

Q. In Bavaria?

A. And Bavaria was my first group from Nazi Germany that brought him to power with the help of the Catholic Church. and the Bavarians were the first witness who started to hate Hitler. They brought him up but also brought him down. They didn't care. There was not very much "Heil Hitler" to hear. People liked to breathe in the morning, good-morning…He was -- he was not popular there anymore. And many, many people like with the Communists, we were just Nazis outside but not inside.

Q. What do you remember and how old were you in 1932? What were some of the things you saw happening around your hometown and so on?

A. I was just a child. But my mother was a Jehovah's Witnesses so the fear was always there. The Gestapo came to our house and searched \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Then when we went to school I always believed what my mother told me even if I never attended a meeting. But I was always scared because of the greetings for -- in school they made you sing. It was -- we lived under constant fear. It was big, big pressure on the family. And my mother was sentenced to three months because of an action \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ distributed pamphlets in the city. And we children didn't really know if they could come home again. So there was total pressure on us. And then my father always said, "Hitler will make war." And it came true. And I can -- today I can say as an old woman whatever my parents told me came true in every respect. And I believe sincerely that the future will come true too, what the Bible told us. And the only hope what we had was the promise of a new earth and a new heaven in which righteousness live, and that kept us going.

Q. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively). You're saying that your parents provided in your home help for Jehovah's Witnesses who would come to your house?

A. Oh, yes, for all people. My parents were the most hospitable people I ever met. Our house was open to anybody regardless of religion, regardless of political, regardless of race. As long as they were decent people. Our house was a camp all our life. I would say, "our house." I mean our living quarters was always open, especially after the war when the prisons and the concentration camps opened. Our house was a camp. People met in our house who marched through the city. If there's any Jehovah's Witnesses they were taken in. All our neighbors took them in. And husband and wife they haven't seen each other for six, seven, eight years, they found each other. We had experiences and experiences and experiences. That went on. It was after -- like after Armageddon.

A. What about in the back?

A. In the back?

A. When the bergers were in the prison camp.

A. Oh, yes. My mother -- in the Hitler time we were in very great danger. We had contacted some prisoners who were working outside the camp, outside the prisons. They were only left with guards to work shops and picked up to the prison at night. But we gave them food or money and visit them constantly. We had connection with the prison. And we were -- after the prison was open hundreds of them knew about it, even if we didn't know the hundreds, maybe only knew a handful or a dozen. But it was fantastic, absolutely fantastic what happened. And because the communication and transportation was laying down after the war, people walked through the cities, walked home or you had the U.S. Army there, hitchhiked. So everybody stopped and many citizens ask if this was Jehovah's Witnesses. Also many people came to us, you know. And it was history-making experiences we had firsthand.

Q. Uh-huh (Indicates affirmatively.) What did -- how did you feel when you heard that Hitler attacked Poland when World War II started? What was it that you saw change in your home town?

A. When Hitler attacked Poland, actually whenever he attacked anything we were always upset. We were worried. We thought he's going crazy because you cannot -- God gives us a free will to life or death. You cannot rule a nation totalitarian. You can never make people think one way. Everybody should have a choice. But when you rule with totalitarian measurements it will never ever work, no matter what it is. We only have to serve Jehovah with our own free will out of our heart. That's the only way.

Q. When did you meet your husband?

A. My husband? As I mentioned before, I contacted some Jehovah's Witnesses while I was working in a bank and they put a safe in our basement in the war. And they contacted them secretly. And when one or two of them were sentenced to death, but the death sentence was not done yet, and he was -- those two brothers were also on the death march which was to Dachau for the execution. And when they were captured by the Americans they said, "We know somebody in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and they brought -- and they brought you. And they came to us. And like so many others --

Q. So that was the first time --

A. That was the first time I met --

Q. And how many years afterwards did you get married?

A. Fourteen years? I went to Canada to my parents. My parents were in Canada.

Q. I see. Well, we would like to thank you both again for taking the time and sharing with us your experiences for a part of history that many people would like to forget.

A. Yes.

Q. But a part of history we can work from. So we want to present it from that standpoint. Thank you both very much.

A. You're welcome.

A. Ja, she was still thanking Jehovah for it, celebrate one day after that when you were like completely upon Jehovah. That's why we thought unless Armageddon comes we would never come out of. We know that.

Q. So, you were in with Jewish prisoners, with Communist prisoners?

A. Not Jewish. I don't recall. A couple came, was transferred because they had a court case. And they said in Mauthausen on the Austrian border, there is an unwritten law a Jew did not live longer than six days. They put them in a basket with those, you know, pieces of -- well, you use the planer, you know, the shovels. They put them in a basket and throw gasoline is what they told me. Maybe they don't have to bring that -- you know, some Jews might be offended.

Q. Those things actually happened?

A. Ja.

Q. You're very familiar with that. So what type of prisoners were in --

A. Intelligence. For instance, one he was so smart in falsifying passports he offered me, "I will make you a passport and you can do everything with it." And he was -- actually he said, "There is no safe that is safe before me. Fifteen minutes I can open any safe." Do you know what happened? The Gestapo got him. They used him because see, they wouldn't use you, you know. They use such hardcore criminals. They can do everything with a man. For instance, the one who threw me this New Testament, you know, the Greek scriptures, you know, the camp leader ask him, "you know, guard, would you -- I need for my cooking pot and I need brasso copper." How do you say plate at the bottom, you know? And then he said, "But where shall I get the copper plate? It's not in the releases." "I didn't ask you where it is," it was an electrician there, you know. But he said, "If I don't have it tomorrow you're off your job." So he said, in other words, he asked me to steal it, to break in, the camp leader.

Q. Hum. How were the Communists treated in the camp you were in or in any of the camps you were in?

A. Actually they were treated all the same, you know, uh-huh (indicates affirmatively.) But I -- it's actually got worth getting in.

Q. How were you able to talk to the other prisoners as well, or didn't you have time for that, about your particular faith?

A. Oh ja, sure. You could talk; ja. There is one occasion as I mentioned before we were six brothers so we could do the job, you know, because we were cooperating with each other. And there was one, you know, those showmanship notices and so on. We helped him because he would never finish. And, you know, one day he would scream, "Jehovah's Witnesses doing propaganda," and foaming in his mouth and said be quiet and all this, you see it completely dominized. We were helping him and then he turned out you see how the demon work. I saw in the camp how. Before I didn't realize how the demons work.

Q. Hum. What was an average day in the camp that you were in like? What time did it start? Where did you go? What happened during the day?

A. Began 6:00 to work. There was I would say carts where we were put on, you know. And then -- and this wasn't at the time when we got up. It was criminals that were in charge, you know. They would throw us out 4:00 or even before screaming all the time, in the beds and all, you know. They were fully in charge of everything. When we came from work it was the same with them. They had all the power and could do whatever they want.

Q. So you got up before 6:00?

A. 4:00, not later.

Q. And how much did you get in the way of food? How many times a day?

A. In the morning there was, was slice of bread and the black coffee. And then they would \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ already when the apple, you know, and they checked where he has in his sack the slice of bread and says, "No wonder he pass out. He was over eating." They were beating him.

Q. And then you only ate one time a day?

A. Ja. This was the breakfast one slice of bread. And you had to spare it, you know. And in the evening when you kept it you only got soup, one slice of bread sometime.

Q. So what time did you work until in the evening? What was your time?

A. Before it got dark because then they were scared of -- if one escaped you got to stand there until they got the one. They would beat him, you know. Sometimes how they in the mood, you know, one they would beat all the way unless it was gone, you know. And then another one they would say, "You \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, " and see this one treated him like a hero. Just what mood they were in. But this was when one escaped you stood and you would stand one day and then they would charge the dogs and all them, you know. And then they finished him off. But we were mistreated because of the one too. And then the so-called holiday time, Christmas time they were drunk and made all the things, nighttime out on the Lausenstrausen.

Q. You know while they were doing these things they still celebrated?

A. Ja, sure. They celebrate, ja,

Q. So then what would you say that -- what was it that was able to keep you alive during all these years of mistreatment?

A. Only complete reliance upon Jehovah. And that's when for instance the power says persistence in prayer; ja. It's actually I would feel one of the strongest suit of armor parts. Without Jehovah's help, without prayer we cannot stand. I recall one day there was a situation -- we don't have time. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. And I say, "Please, Jehovah, don't let me die as a coward. I don't want to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on your holy name." You prayed, you know, when you feel that's it, you know.

Q. So when the war was over and you were released where did you go to after you -- I need a little bit of your help. What did you begin doing after the war?

A. Ja. So our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ brought a -- visited us, you know, and said, "Josef, it's going on already," you know. And then there was a service meeting and he said, "Josef, you go tomorrow to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ deliver talk, public discourse. And I said, "What kind of discourse?" He said no, it was this brochure, protectional destruction. And then I said, "When do I have to go?" He said, "After the meeting tonight you take off so you will get there the next day." Ragensport was the capital of upper Bavaria. And then so I take the train. Then when I came there the next day in the evening asked this brother in charge, I said -- Vagasa was his name -- he actually said to me, asked me, "Josef what you're talking about?" He said protection and destruction, that that what my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I give the last week, he says. So I had to collect myself and then find something but we had other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ so I could take advantage of this then we had before \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I could even read some of this, you know, to be lost. But to have a great audience with when there are one hundred fifty people that you can bring something that makes sense, you know.

Q. So, in other words, you became engaged again in your Bible educational work just as soon as the war ended and continued on?

A. Ja, uh-huh (indicates affirmatively).

Q. And when did you marry then your wife?

A. It was here in 1958.

Q. So, it was a number of years?

A. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively.)

Q. So what did you do from 1948 until you married your wife in 1958?

A. Ja. I was an assistant in congressional, the Watch Tower, serving there was the school servant. And then I was -- in other words, for the congregation on the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ send me to another congregation which was fifty kilometers up in the mountains, you know, didn't do so well. So I was the presiding overseer there at the time the congregation suffered to call and I help them to --

Q. How long did it take for your health to be restored you because you were -- you were in quite bad shape you said?

A. Ja. I had two holes in my lung and physically I didn't realize it was, but I was wondering. And then I was in a sanatorium six months and they wanted to operate but I didn't agree on this. And then actually I was living a very simple life and cured myself with cold water treatments, several things, in jumping glacial river between the floating ice, you know, and then I went to bed. And so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and you try everything, you know. And finally the one that the health department took x-rays and it was wondering they asked Mitsy, you know, ask her did Josef go to this miracle doctor," because he couldn't figure out anywhere what's going on that I got so well.

Q. Well, we would like to thank you very much for the interview. We appreciate it very much, the information you shared with us. Thank you very kindly.

A. Uh-huh (indicates affirmatively). Thank you. (Thereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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