

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Gerald S. von Halle**  
**July 10, 1999**  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Gerald S. von Halle, conducted by Ginger Miles on July 10, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

**Interview with Gerald S. von Halle**  
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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is tape one, side A, of an interview with Gerry von Halle, conducted by Ginger Miles, on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999, for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

This is a follow up interview of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum video interview, conducted in 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. First thing I want to ask is the full names of your parents and -- and siblings, and where they were born.

Answer: O-Okay. My father -- My father's name was Oscar von Halle. He was born in Rustock, Germany, moved to Hamburg. He was an architect. He -- He -- He di -- He left Germany with our family in 1933, as soon as Hitler came to power, and stayed in -- he left Germany and went to Amsterdam, Holland. We stayed in Amsterdam, Holland from 1933, throughout the war. He didn't see the end of the war. He was arrested while we were in hiding. My mother and I escaped, and he stayed in a Dutch concentration camp for some time, and then was transported to Auschwitz, and died in Auschwitz. My mother ba -- she was born, her name was Henrietta von Halle, maiden name was Cohen, she was born in Berlin. She -- After marrying my father, she moved to Hamburg. Same thing, in 1933, with my father, and my brother and I, moved to Amsterdam, and she survived the war, after having been in hiding for several years, and came to the United States in 1946, and died here in the United States. She was a -- She was a nurse during

World War One, treating German soldiers, and when she came to the United States, she became a baby nurse, took care of several important families, including Senator Javitz' children, she -- she was the baby nurse for them, and died here. My brother, his name was Hans dash Yurgen von Halle. He was born in Hamburg in 1921, moved to, with my family obviously, moved to Amsterdam in 1933, went to s -- high school -- to primary school and high school there. And he was one of the very first Jews, together with me, who were arrested in Amsterdam. The year was 1941, we were -- there were 250 young German Jews arrested, and underline the word German, only German Jews, between the ages of 16 and 21.

Q: May I ask you why do you think that it was only German Jews?

A: At that time the Germans had a system. They felt if they could get first rid of German Jews, that wouldn't disturb the Dutch Jews too much. The one thing they didn't want is any kind of -- I don't want to call it an uprising, but they didn't want any trouble. And by taking the German ga -- the Germans developed a system where they took one part of a group of Jews. They didn't just arrest Jews, it was always a group of Jews, it was first the German Jews, then the male -- male Jews between the ages of 16 and 21, then another little group, then another little group. There was always a group, so that everybody else still felt, "Oh my God, thank goodness they didn't take me." And this was the German mode of operation, one group at a time. Then they took people who were not married. It was young people if not married, then young people to a certain age, who were married. You know, it was always a group of people.

Q: It makes me wonder, between the German Jews and the Dutch Jews, before that time, did you communicate with the other Jewish community?

A: Oh yes, indeed, indeed.

Q: Could you talk about that a little bit?

A: Well the -- the -- the Jews of Holland were very liberal in their -- in their -- in their life, at -- it -- they -- we had perfect communication, there was no difference between the German Jews and the Dutch Jews. There was no anti-Semitism that I was aware of. I spoke fluently Dutch, so did my brother. And nobody ever asked, you know, where were you born. We were -- We were Jews, living in Holland. As fact, we were living next door to Anne Frank. Anne Frank and I grew up together, and our history is almost identical. Yo -- Which of course I have recorded previously, at the -- at the Holocaust Museum in -- in Washington and -- etcetera.

Q: The Frank family, were they distinctive in any way?

A: No, no. He was -- He was a businessman who started -- who was a successful businessman in Frankfurt. He -- He came to Holland, and to Amsterdam, and started a new business, and it was in that business of his, on the princinkraft which -- where the family and some other people were hiding. It was in his business, and of course the story is well known, I'm not going to go through that story. He was -- He was an average businessman, and the girls --

Q: And he was friends with your family?

A: No, no. I would not say they were -- we were friends. We were -- We knew each other, let's put it that way, and that's about -- don't forget the girls -- Anne was six or seven years younger than I was, and when I came to Amsterdam, I was 11, and Anne was five. And as an 11 year old boy, you do not have too much connections with a five year old girl. And even though her sister was, I think, two years older, but she also was much younger. So --

A: How about your pre-war recollection then, of anti-Semitism?

Q: None -- Well, except for the fact that Hitler came to power in 1933, in -- I believe it was January, and of course we had -- the Nazi movement was very active in Germany, and as far as that is concerned, we -- we were -- I wa -- I wouldn't say suffering, it was 1933, we were very much aware of what the Nazi movement was all about. And my father decided -- he was a very successful architect in Hamburg, he decided he didn't want his two sons to grow up under this regime, and therefore made the sacrifice of leaving his successful business, and went to Holland, where in Holland we were not allowed to work. Anyways, he was not allowed to work. You could live there, but you could not work there, that was the problem.

Q: How did you make a living?

A: Well, my father -- my father worked, you might call it illegally, for a Dutch bank, was a private bank -- it was a -- in -- in -- in Europe you have a lot of these private banks, it's not like Chase-Manhattan here, or so, it was just a littl -- little private bank, it so happened it was owned by a member of the family, that bank. And my mother, she took

in people to live with us, borders. She took in borders and so, between those two, we made a -- a -- just barely a living.

Q: Do you remember feeling poor, or were you glad to be in Holland, or --

A: No, we never felt poor. It is true that we did not have a lot of things that other people had, in other words, we didn't own a car, or you know, we f-finally were able to get a bicycle, my brother and I, each. And -- But I never felt poor, even though I think we were poor, but we never felt poor.

Q: And your experience in the Dutch schools was?

A: Oh, was perfect. I -- I loved it, I was good at it. My -- My best subject was Dutch. I -- I -- I got the highest -- the highest numbers in -- in -- in Dutch language, and I -- and I spoke almost without an accent.

Q: As you do now, so -- now, in going into wartime and the connections, your connections with the underground, with the Dutch underground --

A: Right.

Q: I know at one time you mentioned that the underground found you and your mother hiding in a haystack?

A: Well, no, that -- yes, we were hiding in a haystack, but we were on a -- my father -- my father, my mother and I -- that was after my brother already had been killed. We're taking about the year 1942, my father, my mother and I went to a farmhouse, in the southern part of Holland, a province of Limberg, and there was a problem there, there was another family that came, a Mr. and Mrs. Kahn, and Mrs. Kahn was a very attractive

young lady. Her husband was an accountant, and he looked -- I don't know how those two ever got married, he was the opposite from her, and she started an affair with the farmer, very -- wit -- I mean, a very silly thing to do, in -- under the circumstances, and the wife of the farmer found out about it, and she -- they had children, and in her despair, and I can't blame her, she went to the Gestapo and told them what the problem was, and so one day, while we were all sitting for ouch -- we were sitting down at dinner time, I look -- we looked out the window, and there were four or five Gestapo agents driving up and coming -- you know, running into the building. And Mr. Kahn -- Mrs. Kahn went out the back door. My father went up -- went up in the attic, and my mother went into the bedroom and I went into a bathroom. I mean, it's -- it's not a bathroom as we know it in America, it's you know, it's just a toilet, and there was a little ledge, and I was hiding behind the ledge. And they arrested my father, and they arrested Mr. Kahn, and my mother and I, we -- it's a long story, really, but she was hiding in a closet, and they -- they opened up every closet in the house and finally they -- to make a very long story short, there's much more to it, but during the night, I put up a ladder against the house and ma -- got my mother out of the window, and then we went into a haystack, and then after that, there was a young girl -- this was way past midnight -- a young girl of the Dutch -- of the Dutch underground, sh-she probably was no more than 16 or 17 years old, came on a bicycle to tell us that the -- th-the Germans were aware that they were -- that they had missed two more Jews, that's my mother and I, and Mrs. Kahn for that matter,



and so they were on their way back. So, we were in a haystack, yes, but only for about a couple of hours, until the young girl came, and we had to leave there.

Q: I wanted to ask you what your experiences all together were, with the Dutch underground, and if you were aided by any other philanthropic agency.

A: No. I had no -- I did not have much experience with the Dutch underground, as a fact, I didn't even know who that young girl was. I found out much later, that she was a member of the un -- I mean, a member of the underground, and the -- the person who had originally -- was helping us, and we were hiding in his apartment before we went down to the farmhouse, was a professor. I obm -- I went to college for one year, and he was one of the professors --

Q: Where did you go to college?

A: In Amsterdam. It's a engineering college, which I really wasn't interested in engineering, but my father thought I should be in -- in architecture, which I didn't want, and so I wound up in -- in engineering, which I didn't want either, but that's a long story. And so, I didn't know, I had no idea until much, much later, that Mr. -- that my di -- professor, whose name was Mr. Initout, was a member of the Dutch underground. He never told me. It was much later, towards the end of the war, and it was when we -- when we fled the farmhouse, we -- we went back to Amsterdam, and back to Mr. Initout, where we were originally, in his small apartment.

Q: Did he know you were coming?

A: Well, when I arrived in Amsterdam, I made a telephone call from that -- from the train station, and told them what had happened, that my father was arrested, and -- you know, and he was -- he -- he was absolutely great, without giving it a minute thought, he told us to come right over, which wasn't so easy because, remember, we were Jews, and I -- I look pretty Jewish, and we -- every Jew was supposed to wear a yellow star, which -- which we wore, but not after we went into hiding. And so here we're in Amsterdam without the Jewish star, and we were not allowed to be on a -- on a -- on a -- on a bus or - or tram, as they call it in Amsterdam, so we had -- we walked all the way from Amsterdam central, to Amsterdam west. As fact, he lived only a few blocks from where Anne Frank was hiding. So actually, Anne Frank, after we went into hiding, we -- known -- unbeknown to each other, we were very, very close to each other, in -- in distance.

Q: Is that when your mother and you began to live together silently in the one room?

A: In one room. We lived in one room from 19 -- we lived in that room for two and a half years. Never saw the light, never saw -- I mean, I saw light, but never saw the sunshine coming, never ch --

Q: There was no window in this room?

A: There was a -- There was a window, yeah, you -- you could see the light, but you were never exposed to the sunshine. In other words, as you know, in this country, or in most civilized countries, if you're in prison, you're allowed at least one hour a day of exercise, and -- and being exposed to sunlight and -- and -- and etcetera, etcetera. We have not been out of that room for two and a half years.

Q: Wa -- Ya -- I -- I heard your story, and hearing it, I was so curious that there could be all these people coming to visit him, and him a member of the underground, and yet they -- are you sure they did not know, or did they just not tell that they knew that you and your mother were there?

A: Well, I can't -- The only thing -- I don't know. I don't know the answer to that. I know that his brother-in-law knew that we were there because -- and there -- I'm sure there were some other people that knew about it, who he felt he could trust. But the -- the sad part of the story is that four weeks, or approximately four weeks before the end of the war, he was caught by the Germans on one of his missions, he was on a mission, I don't know wh-what his mission was, and he was caught and he was executed. And so --

Q: How did you and your mother find out?

A: We -- There was, again, somebody from the underground who came to the house, t-to tell us that terrible news. His wife, incidentally, had died about a year before, but she died of natural causes. So I can't -- So we were just informed of it, and we had to, again, in a big, big hurry, to leave -- leave the apartment.

Q: And how was it arranged where you would go next?

A: That was another -- Again, I can't tell -- through the underground, now, I don't know much about it, they had a -- a name and an address for us, it was another teacher and his wife, who I'd never met, never heard their name mentioned, and that's where we spent the last four weeks.

Q: And by that time, were the professor's children teenagers?

A: Yeah, they were -- they had a boy and a girl. The girl was -- The boy was my age, and the girl was maybe two years older.

Q: What was your relationship, if any, with them?

A: Well, was a very good relationship. Y-You -- You can imagine living in -- in -- you know, it was a small apartment. They had -- There were three bedrooms, I believe, and one was occupied by the -- by the parents, one was occupied by the brother and sister, who had separate bedrooms, but because of -- because of us coming there, they had to share the -- a bedroom, and then my mother and I shared the other bedroom, and so it's been a --

Q: So they knew you were there?

A: Oh, yes. Oh yes, oh yes, they were -- you know --

Q: Did they bring you food?

A: Oh yes, yes, yeah. Well, of course, food in th -- probably the worst part of that entire war experience was the last six - nine months, where we had no food. There was no food. Now, you might say, how do y -- how do you exist on no food? Well, we ate what is called pulp, which is stuff that is fed to the -- to the -- to the cows. And that's what we ate.

Q: I'm curious to know more about your friendship with the teenage children, especially after their father died. Were you able to keep in touch?

A: Yes, yes, as fact, th-the daughter got married pretty soon after. She married a -- a minister, a -- a Protestant minister. And somehow over the years, we -- we lost contact and the son, I had brought over here, fo-for a visit, I wanted him to see America.

Q: How did you -- How do you mean you brought him?

A: Well, I -- I wanted him to see America, and so we somehow got together here in the United States for just about a week or so. And just showing him around, and --

Q: What year was that?

A: My goodness. I don't really remember, but it was probably, if I came in 1945, I would say probably in 19 -- early '50.

Q: And did you pay his way, or send him money, or --

A: It so happened, no, I did not pay his way, he came here. He worked -- He worked for a company which had sent him over here, it's just that he had quite a bit of time on his hand, and it was whatever he had to do for his company, it -- it did not take that long, and so I had a lot of time that I could show him -- I wouldn't -- I didn't show him America, but I did show him New York. That's -- That's as far as I could go.

Q: I -- It -- Is there anything else you want to add before we get to the liberation and after?

A: Well, you know, if I had to do that, I would have to start from -- from day one, and I don't think, you know, and I've done that, an-and it's on tape, and it's in the Holocaust museum in Washington. No, I -- I -- I just would say, like I said before, that the last six - nine months were horrible, just horrible. I mean, again, you might say, compared to

what? To the poor people who were in Auschwitz, it wasn't horrible. But I am probably one of the few people that know what hunger is. And I s -- when I say hunger, I mean hunger. We talk about hunger, about poor people in -- in America. Yes, that may be so, but that's not hunger. Hunger means you have nothing to eat. You c -- You can eat grass, or you can eat, you know, you -- you just have nothing to eat, there was nothing, nothing to eat. And -- And that was not just us, I mean, the Dutch people living in Amsterdam. And one of the reasons was, because Holland was -- the southern part of Holland was liberated already in 1944. There was one little pocket of Holland, the province of north -- north Holland, which had Amsterdam, and Rotterdam, and The Hague in there, that little pocket, it's a -- you know, it's a -- Holland is a small country altogether, but that little pocket was not liberated. Hitler already had committed suicide, and we were still under occupation. The entire cun -- The entire continent of Europe was liberated, except -- I mean, I'm only talking about days now, that little part of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and ha -- and -- and -- and -- and The Hague, were still under German occupation for a couple of days after Hitler had committed suicide, So we were the very last one, and that's why there was no food, period.

Q: Because there was no transport allowed through?

A: I can't tell you the reason why, all I know is we were absolutely starving, starving. And so, I know what hunger is. I would wake up in the middle of the night -- in the middle of the night, I would wake up and -- and -- and jump up in bed, because why?

Because I saw a piece of bread in my dream, and that gave me a complete nightmare. So, you know.

Q: Well, I'm going to turn over to -- to side B --

A: Ok --

Q: -- to talk about liberation.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: So I'd -- I'd really -- I-I know that I was very touched by your words, "I didn't cry for five years during the war, but when I saw Jewish boys, with Jewish stars on Canadian uniforms," --

A: Well let me -- we were -- we were liberated not by the American army, but by the Canadian army. Attached to the Canadian army, was a small de -- brigade, or whatever you want to call it, of the Jewish brigade. We were -- Now, after having been inside a room for two and a half years, and that does not include the time we spent on the farm, so we were finally liberated --

Q: How did you find out?

A: You knew it, you knew it. People were all of a sudden, you know, shouting and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- I mean, there was just joy all over, so you knew you could leave. And I would leave with my mother, and truthfully, we didn't ba -- we really didn't even know where to go. We were just walking, and -- and all of a sudden, we saw a Canadian soldier. And I can't tell you the feeling that we had, after having been under

German occupation, all you saw were Nazi soldiers, swastikas flying all over the place, and all of a sudden, for the first time in five years, we see an allied soldier in uniform. I -- I don't think I can describe it, there is no way that I can describe the feeling. And as we got closer to this Canadian soldier, I happened to see -- so I -- I went over there, and wanted to shake hands with him, when I saw a -- on his sleeve, the word Jewish brigade, with the Jewish star. Now, if you think -- I mean, we were so enthralled by the fact that we saw a -- an allied soldier, but then, to see a Jewish soldier in a -- in a Canadian uniform with the -- with the Jewish star, after five years of swastikas, I -- it -- it -- it just -- you -- I can't describe it. And as I -- as you just said before, after having lost my father, after having lost my brother, or it's in -- in reverse order, I might say, in order to keep my mother, you know, I never cried. But when I saw that Jewish soldier, I just -- I -- I couldn't -- I -- I just broke down. I was in tears, absolutely in tears. So that was the first day of liberation. And -- And then, we -- we had to look for a place to live. Now, we still -- we had a little money, which we didn't have on us, but there was a -- one of our neighbors, a very lovely, elderly lady, she had some of our money, that we gave her the day then when we left our apartment in Amsterdam, in 1941. And -- And every penny that we gave her was still there, which in itself is unusual. And we finally rented a room, not an apartment, just a room, in the old neighborhood I might say.

Q: Do you remember how much it cost?

A: I haven't got the foggiest notion. And we -- we stayed there, my mother and I, in one room. Well, we were used to that by now, after two and a half years. And about four



weeks later, there was a knock on the door, and Dutch police knocked on the door, are you, you know, at that time my first name was Gerd, not Gerald, or Gerry, as it is now. "Are you Gerd von Halle?" I said yes. "Is -- Are you Henrietta von Halle?" Yes. "You're arrested." We were arrested again four weeks, or six weeks -- four weeks I would say, after liberation. Why were we arrested? The Dutch police, after liberation, went back to the old files that they had, and when we came to Amsterdam in 1933, we were German citizens, and therefore, we were registered as Germans. And when the Dutch police after the war, wanted to round up all the Germans, they went back to their old files, and lo and behold, there are two more Germans, the von Halles. And so they arrested us, took us to a school where they had put all Nazis. And here, I can't -- I mean, I don't know whether you can picture that, but here we are in -- in -- in -- in the -- in a big room with all German Nazis. Well, thank goodness, after about six, eight, nine hours of telling -- you know, negotiating with -- with the police in -- or not negotiating, there was nothing to negotiate, I was just telling them who we were, and that we were not -- you know, we were Jews, and so they let us go. But that was just a --

Q: Did you recognize any specific people --

A: No.

Q: -- in the Nazis?

A: No.

Q: Did you have any kind of interchange or dialog conversation with them?

A: Darn -- Darn tootin', no.

Q: Were you frightened?

A: Well, I wouldn't call it frightened, no. I don't think we were frightened. We were -- It was a terrible, terrible feeling to be in room with basically, with your family's ex-executioners. I mean, I -- I'm not saying that these people in that room were -- executed my father and my brother, but they were part of the same --

Q: And how did you convince them you were Jewish?

A: Well, that's a good question, I forgot. I did the -- I did the talking. I don't -- I -- I -- I -- I really don't know, it's -- it's more than 50 years ago, I don't -- I don't remember what I did, but --

Q: I've heard this story before, that happened to people on -- upon liberation, the Jews were taken in --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- you know, until they could prove --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- that they were Jewish. [indecipherable]

A: I don't know how I proved it, but I don't think it was that difficult.

Q: So you then -- How soon after -- What -- What was your life like between this point of the apartment, you returned back to the apartment with your mother, and the time that you went to America, what was that like?

A: Well, I loved -- I loved Amsterdam. That was -- you know, I grew up there, and I -- I loved to spend time there, but I also realized that my future was lying in America. And

we had, if the war, incidentally, had broken out maybe two months later, we would have been in America, because our -- our quota number was due. We just missed it by -- by -- by -- by a month or two.

Q: So you had applied long before --

A: Oh yes, oh yes, except the German quota was -- was terribly over -- oversubscribed, so to speak.

Q: Did you apply when your father was alive?

A: Oh yes. That was -- We applied before the war, and -- but, you know, as I said, if -- if the war had broken out two months later, we would have been in America. It didn't turn out that way. And what did I do? Well, my ambition -- I always wanted to be a dentist. Now, obviously, I didn't have the educational background, because five years of my -- you know, from age -- the war broke out in 40 -- from -- from age 18 to age 23, I was under German occupation. And so, those are the years when your education really -- where you get your education. And I only had one year that -- it was even under German occupation, I had one year of that college. Thank goodness, because that's where I met my -- my savior, the -- the teacher who saved our lives. And so -- so what I did, because obviously I couldn't go to dental college, I didn't have the background, I didn't have the -- the original background for -- for college -- for dental college, I went to a dental laboratory, and although that took a few months till I got that lined up. And then when I came to America, well, then I came -- basically I came on a ship.

Q: Wait -- What -- Now, how did you decide to go and your mother to stay, and how much time was there in between liberation and your --

A: My leaving? The liberation took place in May of 1945, and I left for America in the end of October. So --

Q: And how -- Did you have family in the United States that helped you?

A: Well, helped me is -- is the wrong word to use. They -- I had two uncles here in the United States, and --

Q: Mother's?

A: My mother's brothers. And they lived in -- in -- in the United States. So I came on a troop carrier. When I say a troop carrier, this was a tr -- a troop carrier of the Dutch Merchant Marine. The -- The d -- The Dutch Merchant Marine was just about wiped out during the war, and they -- the -- the Dutch government bought -- I don't know whether they bought it or were given, liberty ships. And so these liberty ships wer-were supposed to be brought back to Holland, and so they had a troop carrier, with Dutch Merchant Marine sailors, who came to the United States, to pick up these ships, to take them back to Holland. And I was the only civilian on that -- on that troop carrier. And if you ask me how I got onto that troop carrier, I haven't got the foggiest notion.

Q: Was it difficult to say goodbye to your mother?

A: Yes, like -- Well, she -- I knew she would -- she would come, too, so it's not a matter that I wasn't going to see her. You know, I -- She came about six, seven months later.

Q: Why did she wait?

A: Because this troop carrier was -- was only men, there was no room for women, and so she couldn't. And she finally came on a -- on -- by plane.

Q: What were your expectations when you got on that carrier, of what America would be like, and what you might be able to do?

A: Well, like every foreigner, America -- America's the land that is -- where the streets are lined with gold. Now, the reality of course, is completely different. But everybody thought America is, you know, that's the land where you want to be. I -- I had heard a great deal about America, and I -- I had made up my mind that when I came -- when I come to America, I wanted to be an American. I didn't want for the rest of my life to be the refugee who can't speak the language, or -- or who speaks it with a very heavy accent. The -- The one thing that I wanted more than anything else, I wanted to be American. I wanted to be looked upon as an American. I wanted to speak like an American, I wanted to act like an American, and that was -- so when I came to this country, I paid special attention to how people speak, and --

Q: Before we go too much further into America, you first started out in a refugee center. And what was that [indecipherable]

A: Well, no, this came here mo -- in other words, when I arrived in the United States, I arrived in Hoboken, the ship landed in Hoboken. And there was the Steven -- Steven Weiss, Rabbi Steven Weiss had a refugee ce -- had a -- had a Temple on the west side of -- on Central Park West, and he had a refugee center, I believe it was somewhere around

67<sup>th</sup> Street, or 69<sup>th</sup> Street, on -- near -- near Central Park West, in New York. And, so I went directly from the ship to the refugee center, and --

Q: Was there someone to greet you?

A: At the refugee center?

Q: At the ship, or [indecipherable]

A: Oh, at the ship, my -- one of my uncles picked me up and took me to the refugee center.

Q: He lived in New York?

A: He lived in New York.

Q: But he couldn't put you up?

A: That's a hard question to answer. I -- I know he didn't, whether he could have, that's a different -- that's a different question.

Q: But you don't recollect any feelings about that?

A: No, not really. I was so -- I was so elated to be in America, that that never really entered my mind. So I -- So I arrived there, and -- and I -- and the f -- one of the first things -- there are two things that struck me when I arrived in the United States. The first thing was, when I arrived in Hoboken, oh my God, it was -- there was so much dirt on the street. And coming from Holland, where they -- where they -- where they wash the sidewalks -- not any more, not today, but I'm talking about in the -- in the 40's, th-they -- they -- they washed the sidewalks, and here I come to America, and -- and -- and -- and the dirt is all over the place. I -- That struck me as strange. And the second thing, when I

got to the refugee center, there was a radio, and I had never heard a commercial in my life. In -- In -- In Holland, you pay for the privilege of listening to radio, and there are no commercials, only in America. And here you hear that beautiful music, and then all of a sudden you hear about the -- the milk commercial, and the -- and the -- and the -- and -- and the McDonald's, or maybe McDonald's wasn't around at that time, but whatever commercials they had. And that struck me as very strange. I had to get used to that, every -- every five minutes, a commercial.

Q: You mentioned music, do you remember what kind of music you listened to?

A: Well, we -- we were, as teenagers in Holland, we listened to jazz. That was my -- That was my thing. My parents listened to Beethoven, and we listened to Cab Calloway, and -- and -- and -- and -- and you know, all the other people.

Q: Big band?

A: Big band. Oh yes, oh yes, we, you know.

Q: Did you get -- There -- There was such a different feeling actually, in America, the stories of, you know, dancing, and big bands, live performances, and did you get any of that when you came over? Did you have an opportunity to go to any dances, or --

A: I couldn't afford it. I couldn't afford it, but that doesn't mean I -- I couldn't listen to the radio, I -- I -- you know, one of the first things I got was a radio. Television, of course, came later. And so I listened -- I listened to the big bands, and I loved it, you know.

Q: And who was president at that time?

A: President was Harry Truman. Harry Truman, the -- probably one of the greatest presidents this country ever had.

Q: Why do you feel that way about Harry Truman?

A: Harry Truman, because Harry Truman, I believe, if I am not mistaken, was -- was the president who had a -- a sign on his desk which said, the buck stops here. And that's -- Harry Truman, if he saw it as -- as yellow, he called it yellow, and if it was black, he called it black, and if it was white, he called it white, and there was no fudging between black and white, it was just the way he saw it, and that's the way he's -- did it. I -- I -- Although, at the time, when he was president, I wasn't that impressed with him, but each year that goes by, and that's why I said, I think he was one of the greatest presidents this country has ever had.

Q: Because he was straightforward?

A: He was straightforward, and he was just honest.

Q: Now I know that in your interview at the museum, you said your first job was at Gimbel's, and I -- and I hear you again today saying that you wanted to become a real American more than anything else. What do you mean, or did you mean by real American?

A: Well, America, to me, at that time, stood for everything that's good in the world. I mean, here is a country that -- maybe too late for -- for my family, but came to the rescue of -- of Europe. They could have, if they had wanted to, they could have been -- stayed out of the war, and here they -- they -- they liberated Europe, they liber -- liberated the --



the Far East. There may have been some self interest in this, but the fact of the matter is, this was the country that stood for everything that I believed in.

Q: Do you still feel this in retrospect, or in looking at -- to see -- have you ever been angry or worried about the fact that America waited as it did, to liberate?

A: No. I -- I'll tell you what I was angry about with America, and -- you see, Mr. Roosevelt, I know he was a great friend of the Jews, the Jews thought he was -- he was next -- sitting next to God. I never felt that way, and the reason why I didn't feel that way, is because Mr. Roosevelt could have, very easily, bombed the -- the -- the railroad tracks leading to Auschwitz and other concentration camps. He could have bombed the ovens and the gas chambers very easily. And I certainly don't want anybody to tell me, "Yeah, but if he had done that, he might have killed innocent people in the camp." That does not hold water with me, for good reasons, and I don't --

Q: What is the reason?

A: Well, the reason is, these people were on their way to the -- to -- to -- to a gas chamber, and if they could -- if Mr. Roosevelt could have bombed those gas chambers, and if he had to do it twice or three times, and over again if they rebuilt it, so be it. So, my anger, if I have any, is not -- is certainly not with America, but it's with Mr. Roosevelt. And that's why I -- wh-when Mr. Truman came along, he was such a breath of fresh air, you know.

Q: So, how was it that your mother came by plane?

A: Well, there were -- I mean, this was not like today where -- where you have dozens and dozens of planes landing from -- from -- from -- from Holland, and then any other country, but there were some planes, and she was one of them -- she was on one of them.

Q: How did she get the money, or did she have it [indecipherable]

A: Haven't got the foggiest notion.

Q: Maybe from the money that --

A: I don't -- I don't -- I don't remember.

Q: -- the neighbor saved?

A: Yeah, yeah. My wife thinks that she got it from her brothers and then she paid it back to them. I -- That -- That may be so, and it may not be so.

Q: Were you there to meet her?

A: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

Q: Did you have any recollection of that moment, or --

A: No, it's really -- it wasn't that dramatic. You know, it's like -- like a -- a child going off to college and doesn't see their parents for six months, so when they come back, they're very happy to see their parents, but it's not that, my goodness, you know, it's not something that would have a lasting impression on you.

Q: So, by the time she arrived, did you have a place to live and a job, and --

A: Well, let me t -- Would you like to hear the -- the day one, day one in America? So, here I arrived in the -- in Rabbi Weiss's refugee center, and now I was told, before I came to hol -- before I came to America, that the thing you have to do, if you want to get a job

in America, you have to buy the New York Times. And, so I arrived, I had five dollars in my pocket, and I arrived at that refugee center, went to sleep the -- that night, woke up the next morning, and now I needed a job, and I needed a job in a hurry. So, I remembered the New York Times, and I walked down from wherever it was, 67<sup>th</sup> Street, on Central Park West, I walked down Central Park West to 59<sup>th</sup> Street, and there was, and still is to -- to this very day, a kiosk, a -- a -- a newsstand. It's still there. And I went to ask the man for the New York t -- oh, I saw the New York Times lying there, and it was a nickel. So I put down a nickel, and now I was down to four dollars and 95 cents. And I took the newspaper and I went into Central Park, and I want to sit on a bench, and first of all, I was absolutely amazed, I couldn't believe it, the New York Times came in -- in four, five, six sections. When I left Holland, in those days, right after the war, the newspaper was one page. That was the newspaper. And here I come to New York, and -- and I mean it was two inches thick. And so I took it into Central Park, sat down on a bench, and it took me -- it took me 20 minutes just to find out in what section of the New York Times, do I find the wanted ads, the employment ads. And -- And finally I -- I did find it. Now, of course, I spoke very, very little English, just a year or two what I had learned in school. And -- And I tried to read it, and I couldn't find it because -- or I couldn't read it because everything was abbreviated. APRX, now what does that stand for? Approximately? I mean, you know, I had no idea. And so I said to myself, let me go to the next bench, there was a man sitting there, and I went over there, and I asked him, I said, "I wonder whether you can help me?" And what do you think he said? He says, "I

not speak English.” So -- So I was more or less forced to do it on my own, and I saw an ad by Gimbel’s on 34<sup>th</sup> Street, they are no longer there today, but in those days Gimbel’s was down on 34<sup>th</sup> Street. I went there, went to the employment office, and there was a -- a real New York woman, a l -- I was going to say a lady, but to me she was not a lady, she was a woman who said, “What do you want?” I said, “Well, I’m looking for a job.” “Well, we have -- we’re looking for ri,” -- this was just before Christmas, they were looking for Christmas help. “We have a -- We have -- We’re looking for wrappers.” I said, “Oh good, that’s what I always wanted to be, a wrapper.” I wanted to be a wrapper in -- in America. So I got a job. So they took me and put me in the -- in the toy department, and I’m wrapping toys like crazy, and all of a sudden, there is a hu -- I’m -- I’m handling a huge doll, which was made out of porcelain. In those days, plastic wasn’t that popular. And I dropped it on the floor in 5,000,000 pieces and the supervisor -- supervisor was coming -- running over, and he says, “You can’t work here. Go up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, the rug department.” So I was in the rug department, wrapping rugs.

Q: Hold on, [inaudible]. Let’s go to the next tape.

End of Tape One, Side B

### Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side A, of an interview with Gerry von Halle, conducted by Ginger Miles, on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999, for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is a follow up interview of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum video interview, conducted in 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible.

A: So, here I am in the toy department of Gimbel's, and then I learned my first lesson in America. Christmas came and went, and I'm picking up my paycheck, and what is in the paycheck? A pink slip. It says, "Your services are no longer needed. Thank you very much, and here is your check." Well, after -- after maybe a month or two in America, I'm unemployed, and I -- you know, I -- there was no Social Security as far as I was concerned, and so I had to do some fast working, and I, by luck, my uncle had a dentist, and I wanted to go into the dental laboratory business, because that's as close to being a dentist as you can get. And he got me a job on 41<sup>st</sup> Street, in the Herald-Tribune building, and there I got a job doing basically, at the bottom of the ladder, pouring casts. And I wanted to -- I really wanted to advance myself, and I was held back in that laboratory. And after about six months or so working in that lab, I -- I realized that I would never advance there, and I wanted to learn the business, and learn it in a hurry, so there was, again through connections, I found a laboratory, a one man lab, and I told him what I wanted, and he says, "I'll tell you what. I'll let you work for me, if you pay me." Instead of him paying me, I had to pay him, and I was willing to do that. I had saved -- you

know, I worked at Gimbel's for two months, and -- and the -- and the dental laboratory for six months, and so I -- you know, I had saved a couple of dollars. So I was -- I actually paid him for the privilege of working for him. But I learned a great deal, and I then opened up my own dental lab, on --

Q: After how long in America?

A: I would say probably the whole -- the -- about a year and a half, or maybe two years, or something like that.

Q: Before we go into this career that you -- you managed so quickly, when your mother came to America, did you and she have an apartment together?

A: Yes, 236 East 82<sup>nd</sup> Street. We had -- Actually, we had a -- we had two rooms, tiny, tiny, tiny, little rooms, one was a bedroom that just was big enough to hold a b -- a -- a bed, and a living room which had a couch and a -- and -- and a table, you know, and so on. And so my mother would sleep in the bed, and I would sleep on the couch, and -- and --

Q: Did she work?

A: She got a job almost immediately, through a pediatrician which my uncle knew, she got a job as a baby nurse. Her very first job was in Cedarhurst, Long Island, I remember, and people loved her. She ha -- She was a lovely, lovely person, and a fabulous, fabulous baby nurse. And so this doctor, who recommended her, this pediatrician who recommended her to these people, when she was finished with that job, he had jobs lined

up for her, one after another. So she hardly ever was at -- in the house, because she lived, obviously, with the people where she was the baby nurse.

Q: How did you communicate with each other?

A: By telephone. And, you know, I would, on -- on Sundays I would, if -- if I could get there, I didn't have a car, obviously, you know, if I could get there by --

Q: Would this have been 1946, this time?

A: I would say it probably was 1940 -- yeah, the end of '46, probably, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you meet other people who -- other survivors?

A: Yes, yes, indeed I did. Some of my -- I made friends here. I met one couple who were neighbors of mine, next door neighbors from Hamburg, not from Amsterdam, from Hamburg, where I was born. And so I became friends with them, and through them, you know, and of course, all my friends were -- were -- were refugees, and -- and --

Q: Did you -- I know you -- you were first in a refugee center that was started by a rabbi. Did you --

A: Yeah, Rabbi Weiss, Steven Weiss, yeah.

Q: Did you -- Did you go to Synagogue?

A: I, to be very honest with you, my mother came from a very religious home. Excuse me. She came from a -- you know, a home where they kept kosher and so on. My father didn't know how to spell the word Jewish, although he w -- you know, h-he -- he was Jewish, and -- and -- and -- and been Jewish for -- you know, I have a family tree that goes back over 300 years, al -- all the von Halles, and -- and they were all Jewish. But he

didn't -- didn't observe anything, and so I didn't. I wasn't trained in -- you know, even though I was Bar Mitzvahed, it was sort of by rote.

Q: So when you came to America then, religious life, or community was not --

A: Was not important, not important to me at that time, not til -- until after I got married, which I'll talk about.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: So -- So then I -- I -- I formed my own dental laboratory, and I ru --

Q: Where did you find the money?

A: Well, first of all, I did it with a -- I did it with a partner there, one of the people that I met in that first dental lab, where they wouldn't let me advance, there was a man who, he was American, he -- he and I went in -- in business together. The -- The name of the dental lab was von Halle - Geiger Dental Lab, on Eighth Avenue. That building on Eighth Avenue is no longer there, there is a motel there now, or whatever. And so we -- we were -- we were operating that lab, mostly I was operating it, he -- he was a smart boy, he -- he kept his -- he kept his job and did this on the side. But it worked out all right. But I -- After a couple of years, I realized that I could always make a good living in a dental laboratory business, but the money is really on the side of the dentist. He makes the money and the laboratory is -- just makes a living. And so I realized that if I wanted to advance in America, and make, quote, money, that was the wrong business, at least the way I saw it. And so one day -- well, let me actually -- let me -- when I started the laboratory business, I was single, but then I -- these people -- these friends of mine that



lived next to me in Hamburg, came up to me one day, and said to me, "Gerry, how would you like to have a blind date?" A blind date. And I thought about it for a minute, and I said to them, "I tell you quite frankly, I would prefer somebody who can see." So -- So I -- So they -- So I went on that blind date, and I came home that night -- we went out -- I -- I think we went out to Yonkers, New York for -- for -- for a place to eat, and I came home that night and I said to myself, "I think I'm going to marry that girl." I took her out a second time, and --

Q: What did you do when you went out to --

A: We went out, the four of us. W-We had dinner in Yonkers, and -- and -- and that was it, and -- and they had a car, I didn't have a car. So they drove us back and forth and, you know, dropped me off. And second time I took her out, I called my mother after that, and I said, "I met a girl and I think I'm going to marry her." And her comment was, "Yes, yes, yes, yes. I -- I have heard that before." And I took her out seven times, and we got engaged, and that's my wife of 47 years.

Q: Wow.

A: I don't know how much longer she's going to keep me, but for 47 years it's been --

Q: And what is her full name, or befo -- before she married?

A: Her name -- That's funny that you're asking a question like that, because her name was Gerda -- I -- her name is -- is Gerda, same as my name. G -- My name was G-e-r-d, her name is G-e-r-d-a, so there's Gerd and Gerda, except I changed my name when I came to the United States, when I took my citizenship's [indecipherable]. I just added --

but -- Gerd, I added a - l in between, so that made it Gerald. And her name is Gerda, and her maiden name was Freudenberg. Now, I'll just tell you one little funny story there. When I got engaged, one of my friends called me up and said to me, "Gee, Gerry, I hear you got engaged." I said yes. "Well, congratulations, what's her name?" "Her name is Gerda." "What's her last name?" And for the life of me, I could not remember that name Freudenberg. I could think of Schwartz, and Levy, and Cohen, and I could think of all the Jewish names, but Freudenberg, I could not, for a million years could -- could I remember it. So anyhow, that's just an -- an aside.

Q: Now you said that your religious life changed during this time.

A: Well, my religious life changed because my wife, although my in-laws were really not r -- that religious either, but my wife was. Not that -- you know, she was -- she went to Sunday school, and you know, to Friday night services with her grandmother and so on, not necessarily with her parents. And so, basically, when we got married, and then -- and then later on, the children came along, we -- we made sure, that is my wife made sure, and I followed, and -- and now we're Temple members -- we're Temple goers. Last night I was at a Temple, and we're -- we're -- we're -- we've been members of this Temple for 36 years, and we're regular Temple mem -- Temple goers.

Q: Has this been an important part of your life?

A: Yes. It has been an important part of my life, and I'll tell you why. When -- When -- During the war, when I lost my brother, who was my very, very best friend, and was a tragic thing, I -- I -- I can't even start to tell you. And then later on I lost my father. And

then we -- And here we're in hiding, nobody can help us. As a Jew in occ -- under occupation, you can't pick up the phone and dial 911, and have the police come and rescue you. 91 -- 911 were the Nazis at that point. And so, here you are, desperate, and every day you didn't know whether you would live another day. I all of a sudden realized there's only one person who -- who can probably help -- possibly help me, and that's God. So I prayed to God, in whatever language it was, and so I became -- God, I -- I believed -- I sh -- believed in God, the first time I ever thought of God. And so when -- when I got married, and my wife wanted to take us to -- to Temple, it wasn't -- you know, I was perfectly willing to go.

Q: You'd been preparing for that for a long time?

A: Yeah. I mean, I didn't -- I -- I-I couldn't speak he -- I couldn't read Hebrew or anything like that, but I -- I -- I was -- I was Jewish, I felt Jewish, I -- you know, like --

Q: Did you learn Hebrew?

A: Y -- My wife does. My Hebrew I don't want to brag about. It's -- It's not too good.

Q: Speaking of your -- your praying, and your awareness of -- of a higher being, I -- when I heard your story, there were certain times when it almost seemed as if luck, or else a supreme being was looking over you and your mother. For instance, when -- when she hid in the closet --

A: That's right.

Q: -- and the put the suitc -- they looked in every closet, but that one, and then you moved her under the bed, and they were stacking everything on top, and she was right there.

A: Right.

Q: Have you thought about th-the role of luck, or God, in --

A: Well, at that pa -- very particular point when this happened, you don't think of anything, you're just thinking of -- of how do I -- you know, how do I save her, how do I save myself. My father already was arrested. You don't think in those terms. Later on, when you have time to reflect upon it, that's when you start thinking in terms, not when it happens.

Q: And have you thought of -- had time to think about that?

A: I think about it -- if I tell you that there is hardly a day that goes by that I don't think about my brother, because he was my best friend, and there's hardly a day that goes by where I don't think of him. My father, too, but I -- I was closest to my brother. You know, ma -- obviously I think of my father, too.

Q: Plus his -- the brother's death seemed so --

A: Oh, it was a -- i-it was the most gruesome, I don't even want to go into it. It was the most gruesome, gruesome way that anybody could die. It -- It -- you know, it's one thing to be sh -- you know, to have a shot -- be shot, I mean, which is not exactly nice, either, but the way they -- he was in -- in -- in Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, and

that was about, I think, about the worst of all of them, if th -- if you can make a distinction between concentration camps, which you really can't.

Q: Does your -- When you think about your brother, does your sense of justice, or your attitude toward certain political events that have occurred in this country, and in the world, do you think that experience has an effect on your response to current events?

A: I must assume it has. I mean, I -- I'm not aware of it, but I-I'm sure, anything that you live through has a-an affect on -- on -- on your outlook, and -- and on your attitude.

Q: What year was it that you got married?

A: 19 -- I should -- na -- '51.

Q: '51, uh-huh.

A: 1951.

Q: So, now that was --

A: Six -- And which -- that was about -- that was about five years after I came.

Q: And that was also when --

A: Or -- Or six years.

Q: -- when Joseph McCarthy began his notorious McCarthy hearings. Do you --

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Did you relate to those hearings at all, or watch them?

A: Oh yes, I watched -- I watched every day, and I was absolutely furious at his tactics.

Q: Not frightened?

A: No, not frightened. After all, yo -- Well, fr-frightened in -- in a -- in a -- in a different sense. I was frightened for -- for America, not for myself. I was frightened for America, until -- and I was disappointed, I might say, in ma -- in Mr. Eisenhower, President Eisenhower. I thought, as president, he could have done much more than he did. Harry Truman would not have allowed this to go on, I can a -- I can assure you. Eisenhower, in that respect -- ah, he was not a bad president, but in that respect he was wishy-washy. And I was not happy about that. And so --

Q: We haven't discussed -- I haven't heard much about your relationship with the rest of your family, say like when you got married, did your uncles come to your wedding?

A: Yes, they -- I have to -- I have to think for a minute. The answer is no. The answer is no.

Q: So, were they living right in New York City?

A: At that point, no. One was living in California.

Q: Oh.

A: And the other one was living in South Carolina.

Q: Had they left --

A: Or in Florida.

A2: Florida and -- and North Carolina.

A: Fine, okay.

Q: Had they left much earlier from Germany, or --

A: Germany? Yeah, they left in 19 -- they -- they left about 1937. One -- One was a doctor, and the other one was a lawyer.

Q: So I know that education had -- is a regret, that you have mentioned.

A: Indeed.

Q: Is that still true?

A: Oh yes, yeah -- well, is it still true? At -- At this point, don't forget, I am what, 76.

You -- You don't think that much about education any more. But oh yes, obviously, it ha -- it had an impact on me, because if I had the education, I probably would be a dentist.

Not that I would have, you know --

Q: And after you got married, did you change your occupation, or your business?

A: Yes, I did, I did. As a matter of fact, one day, and I'll tell you how I changed my occupation. It was -- I told you that I could always make a -- a living, and maybe even a good living in a -- in the dental laboratory field, but to make money, I realized that I was in the wrong profession. And so one day, my wife and I, we lived in a -- in -- in New York City at that time, in a fourth floor walk-up. We went to a party where there were five couples, in -- plus us. And we were the only ones that came by subway because I didn't have a car. All the others came by car. And I came home that night, and I sat down wh -- and I talked to my wife about that, and I said, "You know, it's strange. All of these people can afford a car, I can't afford a car." And then I started to realize why they could afford a car. They were, all of them, were in the sales field. All of them. Different sales field, you know. And so what did I do? The next morning, on a Sunday morning, I get up,

I get the New York Times again, and I'm looking sales. Zillions, and I mean zillions of ads for sales help, and so on. And there were a couple of ads I cut out, and one of them happened to be with an investment firm in Wall Street, and -- who were willing to train and then employ you. And so I went there, and they accepted me, and they trained me, and then you had to make sales. Well, that was very, very difficult. That was a different field. Now, you're dealing strictly with American public, and it's you, by yourself, and you know. So --

Q: And your language by this time?

A: And the language, well, my language, I -- I -- I mentioned to you in the beginning, this was one of the key things for me. I wanted to speak English like an -- like an American, not like -- not like Mr. Kissinger who, after 60 years, still can't speak proper English, although he's -- he is probably th -- one of the brightest people, and one of the people I respect very, very much. But I didn't want to sound like Mr. Kissinger, and so I -- I paid a lot of attention to -- to the language, and I -- you know. So, I worked for the investment firm, and it got to the point, after a couple of months, where I just didn't have any -- you're not -- I was not on a salary, I was on commissions, and it almost got to the point where I felt I had to leave the business. So, in that -- in the meantime, we are no longer living in -- in New York, we were living in Teaneck. We had bought a house for 19,000 dollars, or 21,000 dollars, and I didn't have the down payment, so I borrowed 2,000 dollars from my mother and 2,000 dollars from my mother-in-law, and that's how we bill -- bought the house in Teaneck, New Jersey, and so, after business really -- I thought I



had to quit, I started, in the basement of this house in Teaneck, I built -- started to build a laboratory, the physical parts of a laboratory, with the benches and all of that. And then one day --

Q: Like a dental lab?

A: Back -- Back into the dental lab. I had to make a living, you know. So, then one day, or one month I should say, all of a sudden I had a very good month. I was top salesman in the company, and from that point on, I s -- became one of the top salespeople in -- in the company, which was a nationwide company.

Q: What was it?

A: The name of the company? First Investors Corporation, at 120 Wall Street at that time. And then I was -- then I was promoted to group manager, which means I formed my own group, and then I was promoted to vice-president of the company, with an office in Newark, New Jersey, and another office in Morristown. That was small office, then. The office in -- in Newark, I had a s -- I had about close to a hundred salesmen. As fact, I had a hundred salesmen. And everything -- And I stayed with the company for 17 years. And then --

Q: Wait, before we leave Newark, I -- I just -- I've heard so much about the Jewish community, was there a large Jewish community in Newark?

A: Yes, a very large community, but not --

Q: But you chose not to live there?

A: No, no. The Newark -- The Jewish community in Newark, the people were born there, but by the time 1950 came around, they started moving out of Newark.

Q: Why was that?

A: Well, I assume -- I assume that Newark, th-th-the -- the population shifted, and somehow, I -- I can't put my -- exactly my finger on it, but the -- the mix-up of the population shifted.

Q: You mean with Blacks?

A: It became a minor -- Blacks, and -- and -- and -- and so on. And it became a mu-much more dangerous city to live in.

Q: Do you -- Would that be around 1954, it says that was when Brown versus the Board of Education, the Supreme Court ends longstanding practice of separate but equal public school facilities?

A: Right. Right, right, right.

Q: Do you remember [indecipherable]

A: Th -- A-A-And don't forget, these people had children, and the -- and the educational system -- the educational system in -- in Newark was not up to standards, just like the -- like today, the educational system in New York City is not up to standards, and that's where we have, you know, a lot of controversy o-over that subject.

Q: I'm sorry, go ahead. You -- You surely have had -- started having children now in this --

A: Yes, we -- well, we waited. We waited five years. And that's what you call really planned parenthood. We waited five years and after five years of -- of marriage, we felt we could now afford to start a family. And so we had our first son, Robert, and then, after th-three more years, it -- it -- it doesn't sound very romantic, I might add, but after three years, we decided we -- or -- well, actually, after two years, we decided we really would want another child. And -- And exactly three years later, we had another son.

Q: Born the same day?

A: N-No, but same month, and --

Q: And your -- your children's -- children's names?

A: Yes, the -- the oldest is Robert, and the younger is Peter. And -- And that made me very, very happy, because you must remember, my family, the von Halle family, and I mentioned to you, I have a family tree that goes back to 1672, all von Halles, and here we're wiped out, at least my part of the tree was completely wiped out. I am the -- I was the only male surviving. And so when Robert was born -- or -- or when I got married, I -- I felt, now there are two von Halles. And when my -- when Robert was born, we had three von Halles. And when Peter was born, there was four von Halles. And --

Q: I'll -- I go now to the other side of the tape.

A: Oh --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is tape two, side B, of Gerry von Halle.

A: So now we -- we had two children. They really were -- well, of course, every parent says that, but they were really great children, easy, not difficult to bring up, no problems. And --

Q: What years were they born in?

A: I'm afraid you were going to ask that. If my wi -- If my wife were here --

A2: I'm here.

A: Robert was born in --

A2: '57.

A: '57, and that means Peter was born in '60. And they were both born in March.

Anyhow, they -- they grew up. First they lived in Teaneck, then we moved to West Orange, and they went to West Orange High School. And then they went -- And then we moved to Short Hills, and -- and then they left the house and went to college. Robert, the oldest, went to Northwestern.

A2: No, he went to Duke.

A: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Robert went to Duke, and then later on went to Northwestern, to graduate school. Peter went to Northwestern undergrad. And the only interesting thing about those boys of mine, when they were about in their last year of college, Robert came to me and said to me, "Dad, I don't even know what -- what you really do for a living." I mean, they knew what business I was in, but they really didn't know. In the meantime I might say, I -- after 17 years with the investment firm, let me just -- I'm skipping around a little bit. After 17 years with the investment firm, I decided I wanted to be in my own

business. They were very good to me, but I wanted my -- have my own business. So, in 19 -- oh, 40 fi -- in 1954, I believe. No, it probably was later, I -- I left the firm, and I started my own business, with a -- with a partner, and the firm became known as von Halle - Goldman associates. And again, the beginning was very, very difficult, but I -- I realized that. Every -- Every beginning is difficult if -- nothing -- as they say, nothing is for nothing. And so I started my own business, which was in the investment business, but also in the insurance business. And we -- As I said, a very tough beginning, but then we - - we worked, and we worked and -- and -- and we did all right. And after about five years with my partner, we decided to split, even though to this very day, we're very close friends. It wasn't a matter that we couldn't get along with each other, it's just that he had different ideas about how to conduct business than I had. And -- A-And so then the firm became von Halle Associates. Now, coming back to my two sons, who were in college, the oldest was in Duke, and he came up to me one day, and he said to me, "Dad, I-I really don't know what -- what you are doing, you know, wh-what -- what you -- what do you do all day long?" I says -- He said, "Can I come to your office and -- and see what you're doing?" I said, "You're welcome any -- any time." So he came down to my office, he sat down, and after a half a day, he said, "Dad, that's a nice business of yours, but not for me." And out he went, never saw him again in my -- in my office, of course, you know. Three years later, my younger son, Peter, at Northwestern, said the same thing to me, basically. He says, "Dad, I really don't know what you're doing. I'd like to spend the day with you in the office." I said, "Peter, be my guest." So he comes down, and he stays all

day, and he says, "This is a fabulous business, Dad. I like to work for you during the summer." This was just, you know, when they had summer vacations. I said, "Peter, here's a desk, and let me tell you couple things about the business." Well, my son Peter is like a sponge. You tell him something once, and you never have to tell him again. As it turned out, Peter, after he graduated college, he wanted to come into my business. And I said to him, "Peter, you cannot come into my business until you have a job on your own." Now, he graduated in -- in -- in Northwestern, in Chicago, and in -- I said, "You get yourself a job in the industry, and after a year, we'll talk about it." So, after -- So, he got himself a job, learned a great deal. After six months he calls me up, he says, "Dad, I want to come, you know, join you." I says, "Remember our agreement was a year? It's only six months. Wait another six months and we'll talk about it." So, six months later, after a year, he calls me, and he joined the firm. Today, my son Peter is exceedingly successful, even more successful than I was, and today he owns the firm. He owns the firm. I still -- I still work there, you know, not -- not from nine to five, but f-from --

Q: Where is it?

A: It's here in Clinton, New Jersey.

Q: Wow.

A: Clinton, New Jersey.

Q: How did you know to tell him to wait a year and work somewhere else, or why did you tell him?

A: Why? Because I felt anybody -- I didn't want him to feel that, you know -- he had to understand what the world is all about, and what business is all about, and i-i-i -- he has to be knocked around, if that's what it takes. And I felt that's the way I wanted it. I didn't want him to feel, "Well, I work for Dad." First show that you can do it on your own, and then you can come talk to me, and then we'll -- we'll see where we go.

Q: Before we leave your sons, your children, I've talked to all survivors about how and if and when they talked to their children about the Holocaust. Have you spoken -- From the time you were young, did you speak to them, or did you feel you need -- you needed to protect them?

A: Y -- That's a good question. I have not spent a great deal of time talking to them about what I went through. I -- I -- I can't even give you the reason why I didn't. I didn't do it deliberately, maybe it's just my nature, I -- I became -- I -- I -- it wasn't because I wanted to protect them, it's just that I didn't talk very much about it, not that they didn't know what -- what my background was, and -- and -- and -- and so on, and so on. I mean, they knew that my brother got killed, and that I was in a concentration camp and all of that. They knew all that, but I didn't make a -- I didn't make a big point.

Q: Because they haven't yet asked?

A: Well, they -- One of them -- Well, I do a lot of public speaking around the country, and -- and as fact, two years ago, I -- I was at a Temple in Washington, D.C., we had 2,000 people there, and that was a lot of people. But anyhow, I do a lot of spe -- public speaking, and so --

A2: They saw the tape --

A: Oh yeah. The -- My -- My kids did see the tape, yeah, so they know my story.

Q: Did you watch them as they watched, or [indecipherable]

A: I don't even recall, I don't recall that. Maybe I did and maybe I didn't. I -- I -- I'm not sure.

Q: How did your commitment to begin to speak as a survivor, how did that happen?

A: Well, I feel very strongly. The Holocaust is probably the world's worst Holocaust, I've -- there's no other word for it, that ever happened in -- in -- in the history of mankind, I -- I think. And here we are, this is 1999, almost 2000. The survivors are of an age where they may live another five years, 10 years, or 15 years at the most, and then everybody is gone. And then everything is secondhand, third hand and so on. I'm one of the sh -- genuine survivors, and I feel it is my duty to my people, and to -- to the world, so to speak, to talk about what happened in plain -- in plain language. And that's why I do it, I -- I -- you know, I -- I don't do it, I -- I don't get paid for it, and I wouldn't want to get paid for it, it's -- it's -- this is what I've -- I -- I feel I have to do. I owe it.

Q: Do you speak in -- in -- to both Jewish and non-Jewish groups?

A: Oh yes. The 2,000 people in Washington, D.C., a thousand of them were Jewish, and a thousand of them were Gentile, yes.

Q: Do you think that the fact that the man, the professor who saved you was a non-Jew, I guess he was a Christian --

A: He was a Christian.



Q: Do you think that that has --

A: A religious Christian, because --

Q: Did his -- How did you respond to his religion, or his religiousness?

A: Very, very, very well. He -- He would read from the Bible every day, to his -- to -- you know, to his -- with his wife, sitting around the table, and the children, the two children, and my mother and I. And I learned a great deal. You don't have to -- The Jewish religion is not the only religion, there -- there are many other religions, and -- and they all have something to say, and they all, you know. And of course, I feel very good about the Christian religion, because remember, Jesus sta -- was as a Jew. He was a Jew, and -- and so I -- you know, I -- I have no problems.

Q: So you actually did get to have some family life, even when you were in hiding?

A: When I was in hiding, well family life is the wrong thi -- well, my --

Q: Why [indecipherable]

A: -- originally, at -- down at the farm, I had my mother and my -- my -- my -- my father and my mother with me. When I --

Q: I mean with the professor.

A: Oh, oh, with the professor. Yes, we were -- yes, we were -- we ate together. In other words, when I say we were in a room together, when -- when we were in a room, when we ate, we -- you know, we ate together.

Q: Was that one of the highlights of your day, to spend time with that family?

A: Yeah, there wasn't very much else to do.

Q: I wonder --

A: I did -- I did some -- I -- I did -- I'll -- I did some drawings, you know. I made a drawing of my -- of Mrs. Initout, and so on, and so on, so that's the only -- and I -- I read, although there wasn't that much to read.

Q: So you read the Bible some?

A: Yeah, yeah, I -- I wa --

Q: [indecipherable] available books.

A: I was familiar -- I was familiar with the -- I mean, not that I -- if you -- if you were to quote -- ask me questions about it, I -- by now I probably have forgotten a great deal about it, but --

Q: I -- I know that this is going to maybe sound like an odd question, but do you think that living that closely with a woman, your mother, has affected your awareness or perception toward women in general?

A: Well, let me say I -- I -- I like women. That's -- If that means anything. No, I don't -- I really don't think so. Not that I -- I mean, I -- I think I'm pretty much level headed, I have no -- I have no -- I -- I -- I love women. I married my wife so many years ago, so --

Q: Is your wife a survivor?

A: Yes.

Q: From the --

A: Well, is she survivor, the answer is -- is -- is no. She -- She was -- She came here in 1939.

Q: From?

A: From Germany.

Q: So you're both German?

A: We are both German Jews, yeah.

Q: Trying to think. There are so many things that happened since the McCarthy era that -- in current events, I wonder if any of them affected you directly or indirectly, such as the Korean War?

A: Well the Korean War, I think, was a fouled up -- we had no business doing what we did in Korea, get involved in -- in -- in that -- in that thing. I -- I don't want to call myself a -- a student of the Korean War, but I -- I feel that -- I -- I think we made a mistake getting involved in the first place.

Q: And I guess, during the time that you were -- your sons were young, was the beginning of the protest -- the movement in the United States, Civil Rights protest. Did you -- Did you have any feelings about racism, did you relate at all to that movement, or did you see it as totally separate from what you experienced in the Holocaust.

A: Well, it's -- it's -- it's completely -- well, you ca -- I can't say completely, it is different from -- from -- from the experience that we had. Our experience was one of, if they catch you, you're dead. The Civil Rights movement was one of oppression of people, not systematic killing of people. That -- That -- That is not to say that they didn't -- that not m-many Blacks were killed, but they were not killed by the government, more

or less, they were killed by people who just hated them, and so it's -- it's hard to make a -- a connection between the two, although I'm sure you could. I'm sure you could.

Q: I know that there were lots of Jewish young people who were involved in the Civil Rights movement.

A: That's correct. Right, right, and who -- and who --

Q: Do you think that that -- that may have been part of their understanding of --

A: Well, I think the Jewish people have always had a strong feeling about Civil Rights, and you know, being -- being an oppressed people from -- from way back, I mean, whether you go to Russia, and I mean, you know, the Russian -- the -- the Jewish people have been oppressed for -- for -- for -- for -- from -- from day one, actually. But -- So I -- I think the Jewish people have a -- you will find their -- their voting pattern in -- in -- in America, is one of liberalism. That is not to say there are no -- there are no Republicans, Jewish Republicans, but it's -- it's -- they're -- they tend to be on the liberal side.

Q: Vote perhaps more related to issues than to economy?

A: Yes, yes, I would say so, yeah, yeah.

Q: And the Vietnam War, was there some --

A: Lesson to be learned?

Q: Well, did you respond in any way specific, that --

A: No, I did not. I -- Well I -- No, I did -- I did not respond to it. I probably would have responded to it, if -- if I had been drafted, or so, except I was past the draft age, so it didn't affect me directly.

Q: How about your sons?

A: My sons? That's a different -- yeah, yeah.

Q: How were they affected?

A: Well, I -- I -- How were they affected, well, I think they were --

Q: Were they old enough to be --

A: No. In other words, I was too old, and they were too young, so -- so we were -- but it's -- it has affected the united -- th-the -- the -- it has affected the entire country, and not in a good manner -- in a -- not in a good way. It was a -- We lost a lot of, lot of people, and we killed a lot of, lot of people. And when you get to that combination, it's -- it's not -- it's not a good thing.

Q: Just to go back a little bit. In the early 60's, where were you when President Kennedy was shot? What were you doing?

A: Well, I was -- I was standing at a -- at a candy s -- at a candy counter, in -- in an office building, trying to buy a piece of candy when that word came out, and of course, I don't think there's an American today who doesn't -- I mean, of -- of age, who would remember, who doesn't know exactly wh-what he did and where he was. I -- I was shattered, I was absolutely shattered, I -- when I saw the funeral -- and I'm not a person who's easily -- who will shed tears easily, because I was brought up that men don't cry. Whether that's right or wrong, that's a different story, but that's the way I was brought up. But when Kennedy's funeral, I -- I shed lots of tears.

Q: What do you think he represented to you and to the country at -- at large?

A: Well, you see, I think -- I think JFK is really larger than life. Why? Because number one, he was so extremely handsome. He -- His mannerism was -- I mean, I've never met another person who had his mannerism. And I thought he did a good job. Now, I want to be honest with you, I did not vote for him. But I -- I -- H-He -- He represented -- you know, he had a beautiful wife, and had beautiful children, and -- and -- and -- and he was, you know.

Q: The country was sort of concerned about his Catholicism, weren't they?

A: Yes. He -- As -- As -- As you obviously know, he was the first Catholic to -- to be considered for president, and he -- he w -- handled it extremely well, extremely well. He didn't ma -- He didn't -- He didn't go round the bush. He says, I'm -- I'm Catholic, but I also want you to know, my loyalty is number one to America, and number two to the Pope. The Pope is not going to tell me how to handle my job. And -- And -- And not in those words, but that's basically what he said.

Q: Do you remember why you didn't vote for him?

A: I am not what you might consi -- I -- I am the exception to the rule, I'm -- I'm not what you might consider a liberal. Now, that doesn't make me -- I'm a s -- I'm a centrist. I feel there are three -- three parts to -- to a political system. There is the -- There is the left, the right, and there is the middle. And I don't belong to the left, and I don't belong to the right, I belong to the middle, which makes it very difficult sometimes.

Q: In what way?

A: Well, makes it difficult because you really don't know -- sometimes the candidates don't, on either side, don't fill -- fill your bill.

Q: Well, do you think if Kennedy had lived today, that he would have been so honored?

A: So honored as -- as --

Q: As what he was when he died?

A: No. I don't think so.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: But -- But -- But that's not -- that's not to say anything bad about him. I mean, a president being murdered becomes a -- gets into a -- his own stratosphere. It's -- It's a different -- It's a different situation. If a -- If a president dies of natural causes, well then, he just dies, you know. We c -- You see, we can look at Roosevelt because he died. We can look at -- We can look at Truman, he died of natural causes, but Kennedy, he was assassinated, and that puts him into -- you -- you know.

Q: What about another president after him, called Nixon? What did you think of his handling of --

A: Nixon -- Nixon, I -- I -- I liked Nixon's foreign policy. I thought he and -- and -- and Kissinger opened up China, and I think that was a very important step. What did -- didn't I like about Nixon? When he was -- forget about as a president, when he was in the house, and -- and -- and he was sort of a sidekick to MacArthur -- Joseph McCarthy. You know, he -- I didn't like that aspect of him, he w -- and there were other things, and then of course, towards the end, when -- when the -- when he did the -- the -- the --

Q: Watergate.

A: The Watergate thing, I mean, he was completely out of bounds.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, but he was not a -- he was not a bad president, especially in the foreign affairs field.

Q: You liked the way he handled Vietnam?

A: Well, Vietnam really was Mr. -- that's really where Johnson was more involved in -- than -- than Mr. -- Mr. Nixon.

Q: Mm-hm. Although Johnson would not agree, but he's not alive to speak.

A: Yeah, yeah [indecipherable]

Q: Was the Feminist movement of interest, or affected you in any way?

A: None whatsoever.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: No, I didn't -- I -- Let me -- you know, now we're really getting into politics. The Feminist movement, I -- I liked the Feminist movement when they started, but then I saw the Feminist movement go to extremes, and especially -- the Feminist movement, when they got to the point of Mr. -- Mr. Clinton, and his affair with Mrs. Lewinsky. That's where the -- That's where the Feminine movement lost me. Because you either -- you can't -- you can't -- th-th-they more or less -- more or less condoned what -- you know, this whole affair. And that's -- that's when they lost me. I thought they would stand up



and vote for women. Vote for Mrs. Nixon. Mrs. Nix -- Mrs. Clinton, you know, be with Mrs. Clinton, who was the -- the hurt party. But the women, they -- the --

Q: Did you not consider -- I'm wondering if you did, cause I -- I -- as I was reading, I was thinking, this is -- a lot of the perspective was that this whole circumstance was private and personal, and that it was being used to downplay any accomplishments that he might make, or speak out. He spoke out -- He's spoken a lot for women.

A: Yes.

Q: So did you -- did you ever consider that side that said it was a ploy on the other side to discredit his accomplishments?

A: Well, Mrs. Clinton called it a ex -- the Right Wing conspiracy. Now I -- I can't talk about that, because I don't know what -- whether there was a conspiracy or not, except if you're asking me about the women's movement, I -- I -- I really feel that the women's movement should have stood up for women, and that in this case, it was Mrs. Clinton they should have stood up for, but they stood up for Mr. Clinton, and that's where I tho -- I think the Women's movement went -- went off the track. But otherwise, I think they did a v -- they did a fine job.

Q: I want to talk about Israel, if you have any feelings about it, but let's take a short break, while I --

A: Okay.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape three, side A, of an interview conducted with Gerry von Halle, conducted by Ginger Miles on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999, for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is a follow up interview of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum video interview conducted in 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Now I'm -- I'm relating to an article that you've just looked at in "Nation and World," that was there April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1998, and it's a statement that Netanyahu made about the Holocaust, saying, "This is the lesson of the Holocaust, this and only this. That the existence of the Jewish people is tied to Jewish sovereignty, and a Jewish army that rests on the strength of Jewish faith." And I wanted to ask Mr. von Halle's opinion about this.

A: Well, you must remember, we're t -- he's -- he's being quoted in conjunction with the Holocaust. As a Holocaust survivor, and I'm quo -- I -- I talked about it ear -- early on, that when we were in Europe, we were alone. There was nobody to help us. Mr. Roosevelt didn't think it was necessary, or prudent, or whatever reason he had, to help the people in the concentration camps directly. By that I mean he didn't feel he should -- he could, or he should or what -- for whatever other reason, bomb the railroads tracks, bomb the gas chambers, and -- and etcetera. Now Mr. Netanyahu, what he is saying is, the Jewish people, by necessity can only -- should only rely on their own strength. I've been asked many times the question, can what has happened in Europe, can it happen in

the United States, and my answer has been, "Under the right circumstances. Under the right circumstances, it could happen here, too." What do I mean by that? If -- It all has to do with economics. If the economic situation in the United States gets so bad that people are desperate, people always look for a scapegoat, and the scapegoat, easily, are the Jewish people. Have been al -- through the centuries. And therefore, when Israel was made into -- into existence, I felt very, very good. Why did I feel good? There is now one country that you know has your interests at heart 100 percent. And if the situation ever came where you would have to leave the country, there is one country that will accept you, and defend you. And how do they defend you? By armed might, if -- if need be. Don't forget, let me talk about, my wife came to the United States, on the steamship Saint Louis, not the last one, the one before the last one. The last one, there were several hundred German Jews, left Germany after Hitler was in power already, trying to get to Cuba, had Cuba visas. At the last moment they -- Cuban government refused entry. Then they went to Miami. We're talking again about Mr. Roosevelt. I'm -- I -- As -- By now, I guess you know, I'm not a great friend of Mr. Roosevelt. Mr. Roosevelt didn't feel it was necessary, or for political reasons, to admit those, whatever were, three - 400 German Jews, and sent them back to Europe. Now, if the -- if this -- if -- if there had been an Israel, these -- this ship could easily have gone to Israel, and these Jews would have been saved. So, when you ask me a question about what Mr. Netanyahu said -- and I'm not a friend, incidentally, of Mr. Netanyahu, I don't think -- I think Mr. Rabin was a much

better Prime Minister, but I agree with -- with the quote, yes. And that's strictly from a Jewish point of view.

Q: Have you been to Israel?

A: Yes, several times. It's --

Q: Were your expectations of the place the same as the reality of being there?

A: Well, again, a -- I'm speaking as a Holocaust survivor. It -- It -- You know, I'm probably one of the proudest -- well, no, maybe -- I'm -- I'm a very, very proud American. I -- I -- I can't tell you -- I'm probably more aware of being an American than a native born American, because of everything I went through. So, I'm a -- I -- I'm a very, very proud American. And whenever I go on a vacation, I'm -- I'm out of the country, and I come back to the United States and say, "Ah, feels good. Feels good to be back." I forgot what I was going to say in the -- in the beginning.

Q: About Israel.

A: Oh, Israel. Now Israel, I feel -- it feels good to see a country, where everybody in authority is Jewish. In other words, the policemen are Jewish, the -- the courts are Jewish, the -- the -- the army is Jewish, the Air Force is Jewish, the -- the -- you know, whatever. As a -- As a Holocaust survivor, makes you feel good. Now, does that mean -- now, coming back to the United States then, fa -- after I'm -- was in Israel, as I said, I said, "Ah, feels good to be back in the United States." Because, this, after all, is my country. But I have certain emotional ties to Israel, yes.

Q: Do you think that you, as -- as -- as a Holocaust survivor, has a stronger tie, probably than most?

A: To whom?

Q: To Israel.

A: Oh yes. Na -- No. A stronger tie? No, I don't want to necessarily say that. As you know, Jews have very strong emotional ties to Israel, and that's probably because of the Holocaust. In other words, you don't have to be a Holocaust survivor to be emotionally a-a-attuned, and -- to -- to Israel.

Q: Well just as a survivor, when you watch films like "Schindler's List," -- did you see that?

A: I di -- I did -- I did see that, yes.

Q: Did you -- How did you respond to the film?

A: I don't -- I thought it was an excellent film, but I -- y-you see, having gone through this whole thing, it doesn't affect me probably as much as it would affect you or anybody else, who hasn't gone through that experience. There was nothing new in that film that -- you know, that I hadn't ex -- either experienced, or -- or something like that.

Q: That brings me to the subject, cause I know you didn't speak with your children, did you speak with your wife about the Holocaust, or with your friends about it, or [indecipherable]

A: No, not with my friends. Well, yeah, my wife. I -- I speak with my wife about it.

Q: You still talk about it?

A: Yeah. Not on a -- you know, I'm not hung up, I'm -- you know, don't forget, by now, it's 50 years later, I'm an American. And sometimes I look back on it, and it almost feels like, did I really go through all of that? I -- I'm -- I'm so Americanized that yes, I -- I -- obviously I -- I -- as I said, there's not a day that goes by that I not think about my brother. So it's not that I forgot about it, but --

Q: Do you feel that -- Have you been aware, or -- of -- of anti-Semitism in America, to this day?

A: Not really.

Q: No?

A: Not really. I have never -- I mean, you read ab -- I read it in the newspapers, of what happens, you know, swastikas on a -- on a -- on a -- on a -- on a synagogue, but personally, never. Not -- Not -- Not once.

Q: Most of your -- your friends are Jewish?

A: Most of my friends are Jewish.

M-Most of them are American born, although I have -- I have some friends who were born, you know, former refugees. As a mer fact, you know, I don't know whether you realize it, but actually -- and I'm not saying that as a -- actually, I'm not a refugee.

Actually, I'm an immigrant. You can only be a refugee -- people who left Germany before the end of the war, they are refugees, they -- they fled the country. In my case -- and I always call myself a refugee, but technically I'm not a refugee, I'm -- I'm an

immigrant, because I left after the war. I didn't have to leave, I could have stayed in Holland. But -- I mean that's just from -- from a technical point of view. People -- People ask me, you know, I -- I -- I always talk about it -- myself as a refugee, yeah.

Q: Were people afraid when they left that -- not only that they wouldn't be able to make a living, but that it might happen again? Why do you think so many people left Europe?

A: Because there was nothing left. Their f -- Their -- Their families, you know, most of their families were gone. Those who survived, they had nothing, there was no reason for them to stay. And in our case, we always had wanted to co-come to America.

Q: Your relationship with your mother, we haven't discussed much, on the way -- when you -- when she got over here. I guess -- How long did she live?

A: She lived -- She died about --

A2: 1987

A: 1987. So that's --

Q: Mm-hm. So she died --

A: So she's -- That's -- She -- She lived -- She lived many years here.

Q: So she got to see your children, and know your wife and your family?

A: Yes. Oh yes, oh yes. She -- She wa -- She knew my wife, she knew my children, and no, she never knew my grandchildren, no.

Q: Oh, so you -- you have grandchildren, we didn't talk about that.

A: Well, I was telling you that when I came over, I was one von Halle, then I married, there were two von Halles, then I had two sons, we were four von Halles, and then -- then

the children married, so there were six von Halles. My oldest son had two boys, so now there are six, eight von Halles. My younger son had three boys, so now there are 11 von Halles. If Mr. Hitler would know about it, that he -- that he missed this one Jew, who now produced 11 others, he would be very unhappy. He would turn over.

Q: Is there -- I know that you -- you have -- you go back and forth between Arizona and New Jersey, as well. Your life in Arizona, do you speak there, also, do you --

A: Yes, yes. Well, when I say -- after -- we lived there for 15 years. I mean, w-we stayed there six months of the year, and six months we stayed in New Jersey. But, it's funny, you were just asking that, we just -- after 15 years we just sold our house, and we're now -- we're going to be in New Jersey year round. That doesn't mean we -- we can't go to Arizona, you know, on vacation and -- and rent a place for -- for a month or two, you know, but my -- we're no longer -- I no longer own the house since -- since last March.

Q: And your famil -- your sons are in the area?

A: My -- My son -- well, the one that's in the business, who -- you know, my son now owns my business, he lived in mut -- in Ridgewood, and my other son lives in Chicago.

Q: Is there anything else around the Holocaust or your life since, or something you've learned from speaking to other people, or speaking with audiences, have you been shocked about anything that they didn't know -- that we didn't know?

A: Yes, yes. The average individual, now of course, it depends on whether you're speaking to Jewish people or non-Jewish people, it makes a big difference, but the Jewish people are pretty well aware of what -- what happened. The non-Jewish people know the



word Holocaust, and -- but they don't really know the details. I mean, when I say they, not -- you -- you can't put a blanket s -- you can't make a blanket statement, but in -- in general, their -- their knowledge of the Holocaust is much more limited than -- obviously, of the Jewish people, yeah. No question about it.

Q: Is there anything else that you'd like to add to -- before we close?

A: Not really. I -- I'm -- all I can say is I'm -- I'm a very -- I'm a very -- you know, I -- this is my third country. You know, I was born in Germany, I grew up in Holland, and I've lived in -- in -- in the United States for now over half a century. And to me, I -- I -- I feel -- I feel so proud to live in this country, and to be an American, and I -- I -- I couldn't be any happier in -- in any -- in any which way. Th -- America has been great to me, has given me all the opportunities that you could ask. Yes, you have to grasp them, and you have to go for them, nobody's going to put it on -- on a -- on a silver platter, but whatever opportunities I wanted, I -- I -- I got, and so I'm grateful. And I might say to you, and I will never miss an election [indecipherable], and I feel all Americans, my fellow citizens should -- should -- should realize what it means to be able to go to the polls, and -- and -- and -- and vote. I don't know whe -- I -- maybe that doesn't belong into this -- into this tape, but I -- I feel --

Q: No, it's very important.

A: I -- I feel very strongly about that.

Q: How -- How the Holocaust has affected you politically, and your beliefs, and -- is the purpose of these follow up interviews.

A: Yeah.

Q: It's very important. So if you feel that voting is one of the most important things --

A: Very, very, very, very important. And you have to be aware of what's go -- you know, we Americans have a tendency of -- when we read the newspaper, we start off with the sports pages, which is fine, I mean, there's nothing wrong with reading the sports pages, long as you don't forget to read the first page, too, and know what's going on, you know, in the judicial system, and -- and -- and every -- everything else in political system.

Q: And behind that belief is what? Why, why is it important to vote?

A: Because the alternative is so terrible. Because if you -- if you don't vote, then you're leaving the decisions up to people who have an agenda which usually isn't for the benefit o-of the whole country, because they are -- there are always people who will, you know, the more extreme, and I'm not saying on the right or on the left, m-more extreme, your -- your -- your opinions are, those people will vote, and if you don't vote, your voice won't be heard, and detrimental to our system.

Q: I'm trying to think if there's anything else that we've left out, that you're going to think once I leave.

A: I think we -- we pretty much covered it, we pretty much covered it.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview

