United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with George Schwab
March 18, 2005
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PREFACE

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GEORGE SCHWAB
March 18, 2005

Question: Good morning, George.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: It's lovely to see you.

A: It's good to be here.

Q: George, tell me when you were born.

A: I was born in 1931 in Libau, Latvia.

Q: And, what was the actual date – the month and the day?

A: November the 25th.

Q: You have to think about it.

A: It's a few days ago.

Q: Right, in Libau?

A: In Libau? In the Latvian, it would be Liepaja.

Q: And, how do you pronounce it?

A: Liapia.

Q: Liapia.

A: And in Russian it's _____.

Q: So, it's very complicated.

A: Yes.

Q: With the changeovers. And, let me ask you some questions about your family, a little bit. Your father was a doctor.

A: Yes, he was a gastroenterologist.

Q: And, his name?

A: Jacob, ____ Jacob Aaron Schwab.

Q: And, was that unusual to be Jewish and to be a doctor in Latvia at that time?

A: Well, he studied-

Q: _____.

A: He studied medicine before World War I. He began his studies in Estonia, Dorpat, which was a very, very famous German university in Estonia, Dorpat, taught to in the Estonian. It's still in existence today, and for – then he studied also for a semester at Konigsberg University, and from – he specialized in Berlin for three years, Gastroenterology, and he returned then to Latvia in 1911 and opened his practice. And, during World War I, he was conscripted to the Czarist Army with a title of Colonel, rank of Colonel because of his profession, that being a gastroenterologist in the Army.

Q: Now, I know you're born in 1931, and you in fact, don't know your father for a hugely long time. Do you remember him as a kid and what sort of relationship you had?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: Tell me about it.

A: He was a softy.

Q: Yes?

A: But, my mother, she was a strict one. With him, I could get away with things, but not so easily with my mother. I have very fond memories of him. Sundays, we usually used to go out to a restaurant, my older brother, my mother, my father and I, and I always ordered the same thing.

Q: As your dad?

A: Yes, well, we all ordered what we called – it was Latvian version of a Chateau Brion, but completely different from what a Chateau Brion means over here or in France. It was a Latvian version of Chateau Brion. In summers, we spent some time at the beach together and we were at the Riga beaches, father came to visit. So, no, no, I have a fond and very warm memories of my father, yes.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your mother. Then, I'll go back to-

A: Well, my mother-

Q: Her name?

A: Clara, Clara Jacobson Schwab. My mother was a wonderful, wonderful person, but in contrast to my father, she was very, very strict in the upbringing and well, let's say, my father would say to my mother sometimes I would hear him say, "Well, just leave him alone." He'd said. So, she would say, "No, no, no, he has to be taught his manners, this and that, so on and so forth." But, I – also wonderful. Well, I wouldn't say wonderful, but strict governesses particularly a German governess who taught me a lot which I didn't like because I liked to rebel.

Q: Do you get that from you father a little bit, the rebellion?

A: No, I think it's more my personality, but I don't think neither my father nor my mother were rebellious types, no, no, and also not my brother, but I was – I was a talkaton. I could talk non-stop, and my mother used to tease me that I have her big ears because I listened to things I'm not supposed to listen to because everything interested me. So, on my days with my mother, which was usually Wednesday, I could determine what she would wear, and we would go and I would go to with her to my favorite cafes and I would pretend that I was drawing doing something, but I would overhear what my mother was talking with her girlfriends. So, the gossip in town, et cetera, but I didn't understand much of it, but-

Q: But, you took it in.

A: But, I took everything in because everything was I found very interesting, very fascinating.

Q: So, old would you have been when she took you on her little trips to the café?

A: Oh, it started rather early because I would say about five, started five, six, seven, eight, nine, yes because I also refused to eat for a while at home.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, and it was a problem, but by that time I must've been about six or seven, and I had an aunt who came from Riga, who had recently left Vienna, after Hitler. Yeah, actually, it must've been already '38 after the Anschluss in '38. I must've been about eight. She came especially from Riga after coming back from Vienna to Riga, she came especially to Libau. She said she is going to make from me Viennese sandwiches, and anything along those lines was of interest to me, and when she served me on the little piece of bread, piece of Wienerschnitzel or whatever, I said, "Well, I know what this is. It doesn't interest me." So, finally, my mother asked, "What would interest you?" And, I said, "I would love to go to Hotel Petersburg, and eat over there." That was a hotel in Libau, and had also a beautiful restaurant, also was private rooms, et cetera, and she would take me there late in the afternoon about

five, five-thirty or six, and I would always have my cocoa there, hot chocolate, and little sandwiches with hard boiled egg on top of it, a small piece of tomato, and anchovies, and whatever I – whenever I would get it I would sort of put it into the cocoa, into the hot chocolate and eat it. It was what I loved, but everything – with anchovies with everything. Some people complained actually, and the manager of the hotel came and said to my mother, "Mrs. Dr. Schwab", that's the way we used to address people, "There's some people who object to seeing your son put everything into the hot chocolate and eat it then." So, we were given a separate room, and for six months, I did this, and then I started eating again. I had some sort of disorder, whatever it was, I don't know, but for about six months, we went almost every single day to the Hotel Petersburg in Libau, and that's how I ate, and also I continued at home to put everything into hot chocolate. Hot chocolate, whatever I had was hot chocolate sandwiches.

Q: So, do you think you needed soft food? Is that why you think you-

A: No, it was just tasty.

Q: It was tasty.

A: It was tasty, and whatever else I liked were desserts – cakes, and cakes naturally are fantastic. So, I remember always also during the day, et cetera, sneaking in sometimes alone or with an aunt of mine or with my governess going to a particular café in Libau for just cakes. I just loved sweets.

Q: It's interesting because even though your mother was very strict. She realized that she needed to ask you what you wanted.

A: Yes, because it was a problem, and my father also. I don't know to what extent he knew what to do or didn't know because in those days, actually, if a father was a physician, he was not permitted to treat his son. You had to go to someone else, and the pediatrician, my pediatrician, was a man by the name of Dr. Rabinovitz, who was the father of the head of – later on – the head of intelligence in Israel, _____, and whose nephew was the Israeli Ambassador here, Rabinovitz in Washington. They all come from Libau, and the father, Dr. Rabinovitz was my pediatrician. So, I don't remember if I was taken to him for this or they just spoke over the telephone or what. This, of course, I don't know, but-

Q: But, you think it lasted for about six months?

A: It lasted – yes, that's what my mother told me after the war when we discussed it. It was, she said, many, many months probably up to about six months that we had to do this.

Q: Now, do you remember when you stopped using cocoa? I don't mean to drink, but to use it with your food.

A: Well, I would say by the time the war broke out, yes, when we didn't, yeah. And, actually, it was yesterday, I think, yes at the Holocaust Museum that I had some hot chocolate for the first time in years.

Q: Was it good?

A: Wonderful, I loved it. (laughs) I loved it.

Q: Tell me about your brother. What was his name?

A: Bernhard Boris Schwab, and for short we called him Bubi.

Q: Bubi.

A: Bubi, he was about eight, nine years older than I, and he – he adored me. He loved me very, very much, but I was sometimes not very nice to him. I would tease him this and that, so on and so forth, and sometimes he got angry at me I remember, running after me and sort of hitting me over my rear because I really teased him a lot. I remember once on a tennis court, after I annoyed him, but he was really wonderful, and until he was taken away, I mean, he took very, very good care of me when we were just the two of us and we were alone, yes.

Q: And, was he an easy going...?

A: He was easy going, yes. He loved to read. He devoured reading, and it's very interesting. The last two years of the Gymnasium, he remained sitting. He failed because he was interested in his own agenda just to read. He was interested, and he just kept on reading and didn't care about school, but this happened with me too when I went to school. One day, I remember coming home and declaring, "I know everything there is to know. I know how to count to a hundred." I knew the alphabet. "And, I'm not going to school anymore or if I have to go to school, I will simply not pay attention because I love to play with my games and toys, et cetera, et cetera." And, sure enough I failed every course save English because English was something - you were a wizard if you learned English and very, very few people because my parents were brought up with French, but I was brought up with English. I had British tutors and so did my older brother. So, I passed only one subject.

Q: English.

A: English, and that was English. I remained sitting, and what was – what happened was war broke out and the first thing in 1941, I thought, "My god, war broke out now. I will not have to go back to school."

Q: And, that was relieving to you?

A: That was very – that was a relief that I would not have to go back to school.

Q: Were your parents upset that you were happy about this?

A: No, no, actually, I've been thinking about it, and I don't remember having discussed this with my father, but they did not seem to be perturbed or anything of the sort.

Q: And, no one said to you, "You don't know everything, George, if you just can count to a hundred." I mean nobody – they just accepted what you said.

A: They accepted what I said, and they let me play, and I played a lot. I was fortunate to have a lot of toys, and I just – trains and trains, toys, all sorts of toys. I was imaging that I was a general – that was already in 1939, 1940 – on the _____ Line and a cousin of mine was the general of the Siegfried, yeah, he was Siegfried Lineland, and I was _____. We played war, and we had tanks and we had airplanes, and we had all sorts of toys. The cousin, this cousin actually is still alive. He's older than I am. He lives in Salzburg now. So, we often, whenever we meet, we talk about our days when we used to play war.

Q: Now, you were probably brought up in a fairly wealthy situation. Am I correct?

A: Yes, yes, and that was also a little bit embarrassing because about – thinking about it in anticipation of today, about fifteen years or so ago, there was a gathering of Latian Jews, and I, not thinking, I made the statement that I do not remember – there were no, I said, "Categorically, there were no poor people in Libau who were Jews in Libau." So, they snickered at me saying, "You don't know this. You and your family probably didn't know that there were poor Jews in Libau, but there were plenty of poor Jews in Libau." This came to me as a surprise. I should've thought it through, obviously, but I had never met – let's put it this way – one who was not, well, well endowed from this perspective.

Q: And, did you live in a big house?

A: We had a large apartment, very large, probably – well, not probably, it was considered the foremost apartment building in the city, yes. It had ten rooms.

Q: And, was your father's office in that building?

A: In the building, yeah, in the building, yeah.

Q: Did that mean that he came upstairs for lunch and you would all eat lunch together?

A: Well, yes he would – what we called lunch was dinner, and in the evening was supper, and we had dinner very late about two, two-thirty because my father between ten and twelve he saw patients in the office, or was it nine-thirty. Then, he also made house calls. Then, he would come for lunch, go out again on house calls, and then he

had office hours, if memory – memory serves me right, from four to six. But, he had so many patients that he sometimes did not come and have supper before eight, eight-thirty when I did not see him because I was already in bed or whatever.

Q: And, dinner when you would eat what we call lunch, but dinner in the middle of the day, were there a lot of conversation? Was this is a very perfunctory sort of eating?

A: No, it was always interesting conversation, and when I was finally permitted to join them, when I was sufficiently trained, I enjoyed it very, very much. But, then, when I did sort of things that were unacceptable at the table, I was sent back.

Q: And, where would be "back" to-?

A: To my room.

Q: Would you eat there?

A: I would eat there with my governess.

Q: I see.

A: But, when I was permitted to sit at the table – see, I try to make sure that I wouldn't really spoil things because I didn't want to be sent back.

Q: Right.

A: But, from time to time, I was sent back.

Q: And, was this your mother making the decision?

A: Mostly my mother, yes. My father thought everything was amusing. He did not contradict my mother, but I remember one little incident when my father came in – which very often happened. He was not there on time at two or two-thirty when we would have the lunch. He came in late, and he just paced in the dining room, and my mother didn't talk to him and he didn't talk to my mother which was unusual, and it still sticks in my mind. It happened once.

Q: And, tell me about your governesses.

A: Well, I had a nanny as a – when I was a very small child. She was Russian, Fanya, and I adored her. She was – I just could've sold my parents. She was – she was *it* so far as I am concerned, so far as I was concerned And then I was being prepared that I'm going to be a big boy, and the summer we were going to spend in Riga Beach, and when I will come back, I will have a governess and no longer my nanya, my nanny, and I didn't really understand what they were saying, and we always went summers to Riga spend time at the Riga beaches, to the resorts in Riga. And, when I

came back, she wasn't there, and I just didn't understand it. And, I remember crying, but then we had engaged a German governess, Fraulein ____ was her name. She was very strict, more in my mother's tradition than in my father's tradition which was leisurely. My mother was much more Prussian in this sense, and the governess was also in that tradition.

Q: So, this was not comfortable for you.

A: No, but I had no choice.

Q: Yeah. Did you actually complain to your mother and say, "Why are you...?"

A: No, I don't remember complaining to her. I even think I had a crush on her. She was, as I remember, very attractive. She probably was, I don't know, I guess must have been in her late 20s or so.

Q: Right.

A: And, I thought she was very attractive, and I actually tried to behave.

Q: Oh, really?

A: I tried. Whether I did or not, that's something else, but she taught me so, proper table manners. She taught me also had to greet people. We were also taught how to walk properly. This was part of our-

Q: Now, was this the major thing the governess would do was teach you how to act?

A: No, also with the homework, et cetera, and we would play games together. We would go out on walks and meet friends of mine, et cetera. We were there with the other governesses, yes.

Q: So, did you really spend any more time with the governess than you did with your parents?

A: Well, when I was in school, let's say I was in school – I would come home. There was my governess. In the morning, no she was not a live-in governess. I got-

Q: Oh, she wasn't?

A: No, she was not a live-in governess. She would come in the morning, but breakfast, my mother did not serve me breakfast. It was our housekeeper, and she was always there when I came home or would pick me up from school, and then we would come home. We would go for walks. We would do this. We would do all sort of things, yes.

Q: And, given the fact that your mother wasn't working, what was she doing during the time when you and your brother – when he was young enough – was being taken care of by a governess?

A: My mother used to be a professional cellist.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. She went to the famous Riga Conservatory which was a very, very famous school where as Isaac Stern once put it, you could go to any of these Russian violinists, it doesn't matter who it is, they all came out from Riga, from the conservatory. She was playing a lot, but not professionally. Every two weeks or so, there were chamber music evenings at our house. She would drag her cello, go to the homes of other people where they'd play, and evenings when they would go out a lot, there was an opera, there was a theater in Libau. There were people who would come to our house for card games, kind of gin rummy that they used to play, and then there were big events in the house where the men would play a game called _____, and the women would play gin rummy which they called in Latvia, Kunken.

Q: Kunken?

A: Kunken, K-u-n-k-e-n, it was a kind of gin rummy. I tried to mingle sometimes, and sometimes I actually succeeded and she did not say anything, but there was a very interesting incident that I remember. I loved dogs, but my mother did not permit us to keep dogs in the house. So, I would bring stray dogs to the house.

Q: Into the house?

A: Into the house.

Q: Yes.

A: But, we had several entrances, bring it in through the rear entrance where we had a very large kitchen and a maid's room, in between the kitchen and the maid's room, there was another little corridor. And, my mother hardly ever went into the kitchen. So, she didn't know what was going on, and I kept the dog over there in the rear and we also had a balcony. One day, there was a big card game at the house. The men were in one of the living rooms what we called _____, and my mother and her lady friends were playing canasta in the dining room, and the housekeeper came in and she was not called. Instead of addressing her as Frau Doctor Schwab or Mrs. Doctor Schwab, "It's either the dog or me." My mother said, "What do you mean? What do you mean? What dog?" "Would you please mind coming into the kitchen?" She got up, went into the kitchen and the dog went flying out. So, then, of course, I was called in. I said, "Look, I mean" I said, "It's not my fault. The dog simply followed me. I didn't bring it. I had nothing to do with it." But, I loved this dog so, and this is just an instant that does come back to my mind.

Q: So, the dog left or did they kick it out?

A: Yes, it left. No, the dog left, unfortunately, yeah.

Q: Did you hear your mother play cello?

A: Yes, oh yes.

Q: Did you like it?

A: I never liked the cello.

Q: Really?

A: No, but she also played the piano. We were forced to play the piano as children. I preferred to piano. I didn't like the cello. I preferred, of all the instruments, I preferred the violin, but my favorite instrument is still the piano.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah.

Q: And, do you still play?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: But, I was – before I hated it because I was forced to play it for something like five years. My older brother, too, and my mother would sit there and listen to us play, and correct us so on and so forth, but we had teachers who taught us.

Q: Now, I know a bit about why she was a disciplinarian. Being a musician, they go together in some ways.

A: You may have a point, yes.

Q: They're similar in some ways.

A: Yes.

Q: All right, we're going to have to change the tape.

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

Q: George, how much older was your father in relationship-

A: My father was about twenty years older than my mother, and it was interesting because my father was engaged several times before he met my mother, and he came back – and this was in Riga, he came back from an engagement with a cousin of his and going back to Libau because my grandfather was at that time sick apparently. And, on the railroad station, he saw my mother with a number of other young women seeing off somebody on a train that was going to Germany. And, my father said to his cousin, "This is the woman I'm going to marry." So, his cousin, whom I knew, he died about twenty year ago in South Africa, said, "_____ You're crazy. You're nuts. You just came from an engagement." He said, "I don't care, and I'm going to go to the train and I'm going to sit in the same _____, in the same compartment with this man and find out who this woman is." He got onto the train, didn't go back to Libau, got into the same compartment, and said apparently to my mother's brother, "Who is this woman?" "Oh, it's my sister Clara Jacobson _____ et cetera et cetera" The next station, my father got off, went back to Riga and then to Libau, and started sending letters to my mother, didn't know her age, and it was signed "Dr. Schwab." The appearance of Schwab is a German name. After two weeks, he sent a ____.

Q: No kidding?

A: A ____. Well, Dr. Schwab is probably Jewish, and then my parents said, and all of them, the sisters, my mother was the youngest – all the sisters and brothers said, "Well, let's take a look at him. Let's invite him and take a look at him. Let's look at him." So, two weeks later, they invited him and he came to Riga, and he came in and greeted everyone, and my grandparents' apparently had lined up the six sisters. There were six sisters and three brothers in the family. And, to see if my father would recognize the one that he wanted. The nerve that he had, he came in, and walked over to my mother and gave her a kiss. And, then said, "Look, I have to get some medications here in Riga for my father. Would you like to accompany me?" because he had there a ____. It was a what you would call here a driver ____.

Q: Yeah, I don't know.

A: A ____ in Russian, and they went out for a few hours to get the medication. They came back, and my father announced that they had decided to get married. My mother didn't even know anything about it, and that he will be back in two weeks, and everything can be ready. My mother said to me later on, she was so embarrassed to say no, et cetera, that she said to her parents, "Yes." But, her parents kept on saying, "Look, you don't have to go through with it if you don't want to." But, she made one condition to my father. He had a mustache. That he would have to-

Q: Take it off?

A: Take it off because she didn't like mustaches. So, what she did – they got married, and then he said, "Well, now we'll go to Libau." So, my mother was under the impression that he would stay in Riga and move in with the rest of the family because she was not interested in going to Libau. And, later on when she spoke of home when we lived in Libau, home to her was always Rega, which was very interesting. It was home. It was a very happy marriage I must say. They adored each other. And, I must say that I grew up in, despite the sternness of my mother, I grew up in a very warm home.

Q: So, she was affectionate as well as stern?

A: Oh yes. She was affectionate, but stern. There was no nonsense. There's a right way, and there's a wrong way, period.

Q: Now, this story that you just recounted, you heard from your mother I gather.

A: Not only from my mother, but I also from the cousin from South Africa. We were talking about, and he recounted it. And, also from an aunt of mine who – and some of my mother's friends in New York.

Q: Right.

A: Yes.

Q: Very lucky that they got along. It's a very strange story.

A: Yes, but they did, and there's still a woman actually in London who is a very close friend of one of the people who works with _____, very close family friend, but more my brother's age than my age, who said it was an idyllic marriage.

Q: It's an interesting story. So, how old was your mother when they married? Do you know?

A: She was around 17.

Q: Really? So, she was really a kid.

A: Sixteen actually, no 17, and on her 18th birthday, my older brother was born.

Q: Wow, now was that very young at that time?

A: Apparently not so young I those days.

Q: I see.

A: But my mother was the first of the sisters to get married. Some never got married. Two of them never got married, but she was the youngest. She sort of paved the way.

Q: Now, I understand you had a trolley car model?

A: Well, in Libau, we had trolley cars, and I loved going in trolley cars. My life's ambition was to become a conductor.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, and when we would go on the trains to Riga, my life's ambition was to become an engineer who drives a locomotive, or whatever you call them. This was my horizon. And, when the planes starting flying between Riga and Libau, passenger planes, I've never been on a passenger plane Riga-Libau, I wanted to be come a pilot. So, speed, in other words-

Q: Is very important.

A: -is very important, and where did I get it because I saw a lot of the American movies in Libau where you saw in New York, bridges going up, cars, all these things. It made a tremendous impression on me. I loved American movies. I loved Shirley Temple and I went around saying she was a cousin of mine. (laughs)

Q: (laughs) Did anybody believe you?

A: Well, these were kids. (laughs)

Q: It's interesting because I think that many of us, we know the movies went to Europe, but it's so interesting to hear people who were living in Europe in '30s who actually - the impression was very big.

A: Yes, Bobby Breen, Tarzan movies, Bobby Breen, Shirley Temple, these were-

Q: These were big things.

A: These were big things for me as a child, yes.

Q: Right. Did you ever want to be a doctor?

A: My father said it's not good to be a doctor.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. The reason – and my mother reinforced it saying that his was called out very often at night, at three o'clock at night, and he made these phone calls – he made these house calls, sometimes at three o'clock in the morning on an emergency, when I

would wake up and here the telephone ring, et cetera. I would wake-up. My mother usually accompanied him. There was a driver downstairs, and sometimes I went along, and I stayed with my mother in the car and my father went in. But, I remember one incident with a Latvian patient, my father decided to take in the car – the back seat in the car with my mother and him – between my mother and him, and I was in the front with the driver, and the patient was very, very sick and the patient's wife was also there and blamed the car.

Q: For making him sick?

A: For making him sick. Well, these were peasants, obviously, and this is something that still sticks in my mind today.

Q: I understand that you spoke German more than you spoke Latvian.

A: Yes. Our – my mother tongue is German, yes.+

Q: Now, can you explain why that would be since you were born and lived in Latvia? Why your mother tongue would be something else?

A: First of all, we lived in Courland, which was once upon a time German ____ where you had the German and also subsequently the Russian aristocracy congregating over there. We were products of German culture over there. So, we did not grow up with Yiddish. In Libau, by and large, at that time I did not know of anybody speaking Yiddish. Let's put it this way. It's only in the ghetto that I learned about that. And, I remember my father saying, "That Yiddish" and my mother also, "was not a language. It was a jargon." A jargon. We used the French word in German, jargon. And, language is something that one has to be in command of. So, the first language was really German that we spoke. When I was small and my parents didn't want me to understand something, they spoke Russian which, of course, bothered me. So, I picked it up because I heard Russian being spoken all over the place. I went to Latvian school, and Latvian school of course we spoke Latvian. Our main housekeeper, we spoke Latvian. When we had another one, Fenya, she was Russian, and then my father in the building had a nurse, Maria. With her, I spoke German. So, I grew up with all these languages, but my language number one was German. Two, I would say, was probably Latvian at that time. Three, Russian, and English four, because I really liked it, and I made a point of really getting it under my belt.

Q: Right. How were you when you were in school with Latvian? Was it uncomfortable for you?

A: Well, I remember one anti-Semitic incident. We all had uniforms, and one day I was called on to recite a poem. We had to get up. I got up. I started to read it, and the teacher said, "You can sit down. He reads like a Jew." I didn't think I had an accent, but you didn't have to. You could be perfect and still be called a Jew for something. I complained. I went home. I complained to my father and my mother, and my father

immediately telephoned the director of the school. ____ was his name. This was a Latvian school. He was a patient of my father's. He came to the house and apologized to my parents that it would never happen. I was called in ____ office. He did not apologize to me. He turned the tables and said, "You have to be a good boy." I told this to my parents. "Don't worry. It's not going to happen again", et cetera, et cetera. In this class of about 25, there were three Jews, but when the teacher made this remark that I read like a Jew, everyone started to laugh. It was very embarrassing to me, obviously, and this irked me. But, otherwise, I personally did not sense any, what we would call today, anti-Semitism. In those days, I wouldn't have known the term, obviously. Next to our school was a Jewish School, and sometimes we had matches – soccer matches – not soccer matches actually snowball fights. So, we the Latvians would fight the Jews, the Latvians school and Jews, but did not have any overtones. It did not have any overtones.

Q: And, then you considered yourself a Latvian more than you knew you were Jewish.

A: Yeah, oh yes. I always knew I was Jewish. We grew up in an assimilated family. I knew about Passover. Once or twice I went to the synagogue with my parents in the High Holidays and I loved Passover because of the _____ matza. The matza was what they called-

Q: With horseradish on it?

A: No, it was cheese and egg on top, and don't ask me about menus, the finished product was absolutely delicious.

Q: Matza fried? Fried matza with eggs?

A: It was – no, you put egg on top of the cheese and then you baked it, et cetera, and then you put some cinnamon and sugar on top, and it was absolutely delicious.

Q: It sounds good.

A: Yeah. My mother was no good cook. She loved to bake, but had absolutely no talent when it came to cooking, and when she – I remember, this is an interesting incident, she once cut her finger in the kitchen doing something, and my father got upset and said, "If I see you again in the kitchen, the entire staff will be fired." Your place is at the cello and not in the kitchen.

Q: And, you heard this?

A: I heard this, yes.

Q: You heard this.

A: He was mad because it was a pretty bad cut. I don't know what she had done, et cetera, and later on when we came to the states and my mother had to cook for me, she would go and buy steaks, the best steaks that she could get, and a steak – I don't know a couple of dollars in those days. She didn't know – she would make the steaks, and she said to me in the diminutive jocular, I don't know what I do, but you can play football with it because it was all to her cooking. She just did not know how to cook.

Q: How to do it.

A: How to do it, but when it came to baking, she loved it, and she loved to bake. But, for cooking, et cetera, this – speaking, coming back to what you asked me before about these poor people. There was one schoolboy in my class, _____, and I became very friendly with him, and he invited me over to his house. Not far from where we lived, and he lived – it must have been a very large room with his parents, a table in the middle and a number of beds. We played. It must have been just underneath a roof between – I remember climbing a number of stories, a number of floors and then we got into a kind of an attic. I think they must have lived in an attic, and I thought it was the greatest thing because he was young and strong, and I was not. He was street-smart, and I was not. And, I thought of how wonderful it is to live like this, how wonderful it is to be like this because I was the exact opposite, and I just enjoyed playing with him, and I was invited. He died recently. He's on one of the photos that I have over here. So, this is I do remember that I had this encounter.

Q: And, did you go there often?

A: Probably three, four times or so, maybe more, more times et cetera, but not very often, no.

Q: Did it influence you in some way, the way he was?

A: Well, it became a kind of a role model for me to be smart, to be strong, smart, this and that. This also reminds me about school. School – you could, if you gave some kids protection money, they would protect you and you could have your commandos, and for a centime or two or so, you could "buy your protection" and they would become your protectors, and I had my allowance, whatever, maybe a quarter a week which I would spend maybe ten centimes a week to pay off these guys.

Q: What would you have to be protected from?

A: I don't know because there were school fights.

Q: Fights.

A: There were fights among the kids.

Q: So, they would fight for you?

A: Then they would help me. Yes, they would come to my help if need by, but I never got into – I don't remember having gotten into an actual fight, but just almost automatically.

Q: It's interesting.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you play sports?

A: I used to swim and tennis, yes. These were the two things.

Q: Not soccer?

A: I wasn't good at soccer. I wasn't good at any of the other things, but I was good at tennis and I was good at swimming, yeah.

Q: The friends that you had, were they more parts of the family, or where there a lot of friends from school that you played with?

A: Not from school. These were friends or friends of my parents and the kids with whom I associated with, with whom I played. My best friend was a chap by the name of Sasha ____. Sashenka we used to call him. He was also a role model, and the parents were the owners of most of the movie houses in Libau. So, we could sneak in back, et cetera, and watch then. He was very wild, and his language sometimes was off-color, and I would come home with the same language, and I was asked, "Where did you hear this word?" "Oh, yeah, Sashenka used it, et cetera." So, for a while I was forbidden to see him, but the relations were soon repaired between the kids to give you just an incident. He was wild. I was wild, but I always managed to play innocent. Nothing was ever my fault. See, so.

Q: So, you're very clever.

A: Well, I guess I had to learn.

Q: When you say Sasha was wild and you were wild, what do you mean by that?

A: In the middle of the city, they had a big garden where they lived, and he would throw stones across a wall to the neighbors aiming at people. He would instigate me to do the same.

Q: And, did you?

A: Yes, I did, too, et cetera and of course, there were complaints. "Ah", I said, "Forget about these complaints." Sometimes not using proper language. So, I came home and

I thought, you know, that to be a wizard. Like, knowing English is to be wizard, it's a term that we used in Libau was _____, wizard.

Q: _____

A: ____ very _____ actually, and yeah, so.

Q: So, you liked breaking out of-

A: Oh, yes.

Q: -the discipline.

A: Oh, yes, oh, yes, I certainly did. I liked it very much, but I was always sort of put in my place at a certain point.

Q: But, you clearly kept both in some ways. You knew how to be very disciplined, but you-

A: Yes, I could – I felt comfortable– let's put it this way. I felt comfortable in home circumstances with my mother's friends so on and so forth, but I also felt comfortable in the milieu of my Latvian friend and the impoverished, and the impoverished part.

Q: But, Sasha was not.

A: No, no, no.

Q: Sasha was-

A: Sasha was-

Q: In a privileged situation, too.

A: Oh, yes, very privileged situation, yes, very privileged situation. Where he picked it up, I can't tell you. He had two older brothers, more my brother's age. Where he got it from, I don't know, and that's where I learned, yeah.

Q: Now, when you hit – I don't know, it's hard to know when you as a child would start hearing things. The Nazis take over in Germany in 1933. You're two years old. I'm sure you're not hearing anything then.

A: No.

Q: But, suspicion is by the time 1938 hit.

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I was-

Q: Did you begin to hear-

A: Oh, a lot. There were a lot of discussions, and I will never forget when the aunt who came to Libau, she was going to make me these Viennese sandwiches so on and so forth, I remember still my aunt was saying to my father, the Anschluss was taking place in Vienna when Hitler marched in, that Jewish women were forced to take off their furs and to wipe and polish the cars. My father said, "You're dreaming. I don't believe it. German Culture, Deutsch Couture, they wouldn't do this." And, my father, to an extent, was a product of German culture, and during World War I, the German occupation, they behaved very, very properly toward the indigenous population of Latvia. So, my father dismissed it.

Q: Even though she had seen it.

A: Even though she had seen it, he had dismissed it outright, and I remember this very well, this incident.

Q: So, that must have been very meaningful to you.

A: Very meaningful, yes.

Q: Did you wonder? Could she just see-

A: No, look, I did not have an analytical mind in those days, I mean, in retrospect. Of course, I was short-sighted on my father's side, yes.

Q: It's interesting what people will believe-

A: That's right.

Q: And, what they don't believe-

A: Exactly.

Q: When they're told things.

A: Exactly, yeah.

Q: Okay, we need to stop the tape.

End of Tape 2

Tape 3

Q: Okay, George, besides hearing this about the Anschluss in Vienna and realizing that your father just doesn't believe this, do you hear about other things going on about treatment of Jews, about concentration camps?

A: Not that early on the concentration camps, no. The only incident that I remember about treatment of Jews was the one related to my father by my aunt.

Q: That's the only one?

A: That's the only one at that time, yes. I do remember very distinctly, the outbreak of war in September 1939 from the radio. We had radio which we could hear the entire world, and we heard the announcement from Warsaw when German bombers were arriving and bombing and everyone was glued to the radio, and of course, the discussions why people in the Baltics were safe because we were called _____, sort of buffer states, and if the Germans were to invade, the Russians would come in. They would immediately repel the Germans and vice versa, et cetera. So, that's why the Baltics will remain immune to the war, and after all, as it was pointed out, and here my memories were very keen because this was something new excitement. I liked exceptional situations, and incidentally my first book is titled, "The Challenge of the Exception" because exception I find much more interesting than the rule, the norm. This was very exciting, war. I didn't understand what it meant bombs falling, people running, et cetera. This was exciting. A nine year, ten year, nine year old kid, eight year old kid, et cetera, what did I know? I didn't realize, I mean, today I would say I was a little jerk thinking about it.

Q: (laughs) Right.

A: And, the discussions at the dinner table, supper, centered a lot about the war and what was happening, and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 23rd, 1939 where the two have come together, and after all, Hitler and Mein Kampfe was also saying that the reason – one of the reasons – why Germany lost World War I, and he will never make the same mistake, is fight on two fronts, and after Poland fell, I mean the war was still on with Britain and France, even though it was a kind of a phony war during the winter years until April, May 1940. So, everyone felt safe in the Baltics. We felt safe. Nothing is going to happen to us.

Q: Given you were so excited in some ways that there was a war, but death was not meaningful for you at this point, of course, did you in some way hoping that it would come to Latvia?

A: No.

Q: You wouldn't.

A: No.

Q: So, it was enough that it was someplace else.

A: It was someplace else, yes. It was excitement, but someplace else. No, I didn't think so.

Q: So, you're okay in 1939. It doesn't feel like anything is going to happen.

A: No, no, life was beautiful.

Q: Life was fine.

A: Life was very, very fine, very beautiful, very exciting. I loved to go to Riga. I could never understand why we lived in Libau in such a small city and not in Riga with 13 trolley car lines and Libau only two. More interesting cafes that in Libau, better gossip, I guess.

Q: How do you understand your father not going and having his practice in Riga do you think?

A: Because the family is from Libau. My grandparents lived in Libau. We all were from Libau.

Q: I see. So, he preferred to stay within that context.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Now, in June of 1940, the Russians occupy. Am I correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember the beginning of the occupation?

A: Actually, I remember it very well. I was on the Riga beach with one of my aunts and cousins and uncle, and my mother immediately came to Riga to the beach to fetch me, and I was in my aunt's apartment. This was already a day or two before it happened, in my aunt's apartment which was not very far from the Soviet embassy in Riga, and from her terrace, I could hear over the loud speaker Vishinsky, the notorious Vishinsky addressing the crowd, welcoming Latvia to the Soviet Union because the Soviets came in at the invitation of the Latvians, according to him, and from the balcony, from the terrace, I could also see how the Latvians were marching with big banners, and I assumed that on those banners were "Welcome Russia. We're finally liberated from the dictatorship of _____" Whatever. I only saw the placards, but not what was on the placards. So, these marches – yes, I, I was in Riga on that day and I heard his voice, Vishinsky's voice.

Q: And, your impression of this? This was very impressive and interesting?

A: Everyone seemed worried.

Q: They were-

A: Everyone seemed worried, yes, but-

Q: Not you?

A: Not me, no, no. I felt safe. I, some way or another, felt safe. I didn't – I never thought that I had to worry about anything, let's put it this way.

Q: And, when you say everyone was worried – your father, your mother, your aunt.

A: Well, this was-

Q: The adults?

A: Yes, the adults in Riga, but my mother took me a day or two later, took me back to Libau, yes. So, in Libau, we went to the beach as usual, to the tennis courts still in the first few weeks, et cetera. Finally, we were permitted to talk to Russian soldiers because the Russians had established bases in Latvia already in September, October 1939 as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, but we were not permitted to talk to Russians.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, but now we were permitted to talk to Russians, and I remember on the beaches, the Russians, also Russian soldiers, Russian trucks on all the beaches, and we could get these Russian insignias what we called _____, et cetera. So, we begged them, et cetera. But, soon after the occupation, we were all notified in our building where we lived that we had to evacuate, and evacuate it rather rapidly because it became eventually the headquarters of the Communist party for the Libau and the region around Libau, but we received an extension for a couple of months. First of all, they needed my father's expertise, and we had to find a smaller apartment which turned out in my mother's mind to be a disaster because we had to live in six rooms. How are we going to manage six rooms? My God...

Q: And, how many did you have before?

A: About ten. How are we going to do this? I had to double up with my brother. We had the same bedroom. My father was not permitted to put up – to have an office, but he was permitted to see private patients because, again, of his specialty. So, he had a

kind of a sitting room where his library was, but all the X-ray machinery, _____ machinery, all this was stored in the maid's room.

Q: And, could he use it?

A: No.

Q: He couldn't use it?

A: No, because he became head of the policlinic over there at a salary and everyone laughed at it in the family of something like 30 Rubles a month. We were not dependent obviously on the 30 Rubles a month. And, he started getting patients for which I don't think, I mean, he charged. I remember the admiral of the fleet _____or something along those lines, came and consulted my father and he even came to our house for dinner, the admiral, and I remember this because I admired his uniforms and the illustrious medals that he wore. That was in the new apartment that we had. In the old apartment, we had to take in a Russian soldier. Everyone had to take in Russian soldiers because Libau was a major base for the Russians, and Libau had three ports that never froze in the winters and that's why you had also a very big naval port in Libau where part of the Russian fleet was stationed. So, it was very strategic significance. Libau as a city, and that is probably why Libau was much bombarded by the Nazis in '41 when they invaded, and in '44 and '45 – and there was a lot of fighting in and around the city, and the city was about at least 85 percent destroyed in contrast to Riga which was not a strategic site, and there was relatively little fighting, and the city, by and large was preserved, is preserved.

Q: And, when this Russian soldier came into the original apartment, he lived in a room or what?

A: He lived in a room, yes. He came, but sometimes drunk, had very curious habits, not washing himself, but spraying himself with a kind of an autocologne that smelled terribly, but this was common apparently among the Russian soldiers. Different culture- different habits, et cetera, and people used to laugh. I remember my parents – the Russians loved music, and they would go to the opera, an in those days when you went to the opera very often you put on a tuxedo and long dress so on and so forth. So, the Russians wanted to show how well they can dress. So, some of the women – the wives of the officers came in long nightgowns.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, and I remember snickers about this. I certainly do remember this, but then they distinguished you had still officers from the old Czarist days, and this I remember my parents saying what a difference it makes from these _____, I mean the ordinary, from the old days. The aristocrats versus ____. You can see, of course, immediately the difference. Or, if they try to be like the aristocrats, you just have to scratch a little bit and you saw where they came from.

Q: Now, do you remember this soldier? Was he – did he have any relationship with you or not?

A: He was very friendly, very friendly. He would come. He would sleep. He would leave, but this was his room. He had the keys to the apartment.

Q: So, he didn't eat at your house?

A: This I don't recollect. I don't recollect him eating in the house. Maybe in the kitchen or so. I don't recollect this in the dining room. I don't recollect this, but we also had to – we could no longer have sleep-ins.

Q: What does that - Do you mean with other people coming in?

A: Well sleep-ins, I mean, because nobody was permitted to be a housekeeper.

Q: Ah, I see what you mean, right. So, you don't have a housekeeper.

A: No more staff, no, but a woman Fenya, this woman who didn't sleep-in but always come in to work. She kept on coming to clean up the apartment.

Q: And, that was okay?

A: That was still okay, yes.

Q: So, who started cooking, your mother?

A: Good question. I remember one incident – no, I think it was Stepha, no, Fenya who did some of the cooking, but I remember one incident in the morning when we lived in the new apartment, and I had to go to school, my mother would prepare the breakfast for me and said, "Let's do it very, very quickly, and we'll eat in the kitchen." And, I said to her, "I'm not a maid."

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, I said to her, and I remember that very distinctly, and my mother reminded me of this after the war. It seemed funny to eat in the kitchen, and this brings back a very funny story. My father had a cousin in Libau, _____ Rabinovitz, whose two sons lived here in the United States. One son used to accompany _____ a musician. He had Carnegie Hall in 1925 so on and so forth until ____ died, I think in 1929 if my memory serves me right. And, then he became a big _____ here in Hollywood playing behind mostly the piano. And, in 1936 or 1937, he came to Libau and begged his mother to come and live with him in Hollywood, leave Latvia, and he said, "Mother, I'm going to build you a house with a Hollywood kitchen where you can eat

in the kitchen." She said, "Eat in the kitchen? For this I should move to America?" To give you just an anecdote, but the mentality.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. "Eat in the kitchen? For this I should move to America?"

Q: Funny.

A: Yeah, and that reminded me of my little incident.

Q: Yes, and you were a kid?

A: I was a kid, yeah.

Q: Right. So is there a significant change when you had to move to the smaller apartment, or do things pretty much stay okay?

A: Well, it was much, much smaller the apartment. My father was working. He saw private patients, but could not use his X-rays or his laboratory, et cetera. That was all gone. Did we starve? Food became more scarce. Let's say a person could not buy more than, let's say a pound of sugar per month. I'm thinking of an arbitrary-

Q: Right.

A: -figure, but I do remember if we wanted to have meat, it also became scarce, and our new apartment was not far from the marketplace, and every person could buy so much and so much meat. So, I went online to buy a pound or a kilo or half a kilo, I don't remember, and I paid. So, we had – and, my mother went online. So, that between the two of us, we were able to buy enough for a sumptuous meal. To give you just one idea.

Q: So, there wasn't a restriction in terms of a family. It was a restriction per person.

A: It was. I remember this very distinctly, yes, per person. So, therefore, my mother went probably an hour later or so, and I went at nine. I don't know what time it was, at ten or she went at twelve, whatever.

Q: But, none of these restrictions were because you were Jewish?

A: No, no.

Q: This is-

A: Everyone.

Q: Everybody's in the same situation.

A: Yes, everybody's in the same situation, yes. Everybody was in the same situation.

Q: Now, are you beginning – forget the Jewishness part for a moment – but, are you beginning to feel the harshness of what war means, and what occupation means, or is this you think because they're communists and so-

A: They're communists and we were vitriolicly anti-communist, and in my class, almost everyone joined the Communist Pioneers. I did not because we belonged to the "Bourgeois Class" and we were – the class was being lambasted all the time. And, we were scared, but nothing seemed to happen, nothing happened until one week before the outbreak of the war.

Q: In 1941?

A: '41, exactly one week before the outbreak of the war, on Sunday, suddenly Russian trucks appeared all over the city telling you you have to pack your things and leave. We'll take you to Russia. We didn't know whether we would be taken, too, but a lot of the well-to-do people, a lot of the Jews, also Latvians, but proportionally more Jews than Latvians, were taken and shipped off to Siberia and to that part of the world in cattle cars, and this was just one week, exactly the Sunday before the outbreak of the war between Russia and Germany.

Q: Now, when you say that you were – and I'm assuming you mean the family – was vitriolicly anti-Communist, is that what you believed about the Communists or is that because the Communists saw you as Bourgeois and would not accept you? Or, was it both?

A: I think it was both. I think it was both. Again, I can't be a hundred percent certain, but I just know we were anti-Communist, and it was my decision not to join the youth movement. Again, my parents didn't say anything that I had to or so. My father felt probably significantly secure again because of his specialty as a gastroenterologist, not to be too worried, but still, and also the fact that he had prominent Russians now from the Russian Army and the Russian Navy as patients.

Q: And, let me ask you something – is part of the reason also that you didn't want to join not just ideological but the fact that they were also very disciplined and you were going to be indoctrinated on certain things, or you just didn't agree with them?

A: I just didn't agree with them, and I didn't – at that time, I tried to intuit myself into that situation. At that time, I simply thought that Communism was wrong. Why? I don't know.

Q: I see.

A: See? Of course, we were chased out of our apartment, but in contrast to the other ones, we were permitted to stay there another month or two, but I do remember my mother complaining, "How are we ever going to live in a six room apartment?"

Q: Right. That included a kitchen, right? (laughs)

A: It was the library, living room, dining room, two bedrooms, I had to double up with my brother, and in order to get into the – not into the, we had different – the toilet was in a different part of the apartment from the bathroom, and my parents to take a bath, they had to go through our bedroom, my brother's and my bedroom. So, there was not this privacy. So, wait a second, in Europe we don't call the kitchen a room, or the maid's room.

Q: Really?

A: No, so, actually to us, the library, living room, dining room, two bedrooms – five, and there was a kitchen – six, and the maid's room, actually seven, seven rooms, but it was – and the rooms were much smaller than we had originally. A little footnote about this. I was persuaded by – I don't know if the name means anything – Per Ahlmark, Per Ahlmark former Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, played a very big role in Jewish life since the '70s, '80s – very pro-Israel, very pro-Jewish, convinced Elie to go back to ____ and accompanied Elie to ____ and wrote about it for the Swedish press. It was he who persuaded me to go back and accompanied me too, and wrote a series of articles in the Swedish press about my return to Libau. Before we went into any of my apartments where I lived in Riga and Libau in 1990. We had the President's car and one his – another one his drivers, and also one of his deputies so we could get into any apartment. I said, "Per, before we go into any of these apartments, from the outside I will tell you exactly the layout so you will not think that I'm imaging or inventing certain things." Later on he told me, "George, I've never seen anybody who has such a memory", because I was precise on every single issue. For example, before I went into the apartment, I said to him, "We had central heating." You see? And, I told him exactly where it is, and I showed it to him which was still preserved. In Riga too where I used to stay with my aunt in a very luxurious, large apartments. At that time in 1990, my aunts, she was the only person. She had an atrium apartment. There were about three or four families living, and I showed him in the room where I used to sleep, et cetera, dining room, living room, sitting room, library, et cetera. He said, "You know this memory's absolutely" because, I found – everything I found to be fascinating, the big world. Now, I heard these talks about when my parents talked when they were in Paris and Berlin and went to the cabarets, this and that. That's what I wanted to do, and my aunt with whom I stayed, she was married to the Chinese envoy to Germany who died in 1935. Whose father was already ambassador in the days of Bismarck, the Germany, and when she would talk – and so I always thought of foreign policy. I didn't know what it was, but the lifestyle, I just loved it. I ate it all up, et cetera. The diplomatic life, what my mother would tell me about when they were in Berlin in the '20s, what was going on so on and so forth. For example, my mother loved to go in the subways. She said, "I came

here in order to see Berlin." My father had lived in Berlin because he had studied there. "I want to see Berlin. I go by bus." My aunt said, "But you have my car with a driver. What's the matter with you, Clara?" My mother said, "No, I am going to go in the subway. I am going to go in the elevator. I'm going to go in the buses. I want" She looked at her as if she was crazy, and it turned out later on, and my aunt told me that my mother knew Berlin better than she knew it.

Q: She did.

A: Yes, because this aunt had survived and died in Riga about 20 years ago.

Q: But, your memory of some of the details of what an apartment looks like is – I don't know. It doesn't seem typical to me that you as such a young child would have such very vivid memory of these rooms and the layout.

A: Yes.

Q: That's really something.

A: And, Per, as I said, who is very often speaks at Jewish events in the United States and in Israel, as I said, and very close to Ellie, and he comes with me all the time, every time I go back to Latvia, or almost every time. He has been with me.

Q: And 1990 was the first time?

A: 1990 was the first time, yes, and I think we had sent you some – Sheila sent you some material on this.

Q: Yes.

A: Of my first visit, how Per convinced me to go.

Q: Yes.

A: That's Per.

Q: Yes. O0kay, we're going to have to change the tape again.

End of Tape 3

Tape 4

Q: George, just to go back for a moment, you've referred to someone named Elie quite often. So, I assume you're meaning Elie Wiesel

A: Correct, Elie Wiesel.

Q: Because otherwise some people may not know who it is. Did you go to school when the Russians were occupying?

A: Yes, and it was for one year, but I still went to school, and that's when I really failed all the subjects.

Q: Oh, that's when you failed?

A: Yeah, and war was kind of a relief for me when it broke out. The first thing that came to my mind is, "I will no longer have to go to school."

Q: To school.

A: Yeah. Wait a second. Yeah, that was the year.

Q: That was the year.

A: That was the year.

Q: Did your father have to acquire some military status during this period of time when the Russians came?

A: Not in uniform, but when the war broke out, we could not run to Russia because it would have been considered desertion. It was considered that he had to be on the spot for his duties.

Q: So, does this mean that when people were told they could leave Latvia a couple of weeks or a week before-

A: No, the week before the outbreak of the war, these were the so-called "mass deportations"

Q: Yes.

A: Yes.

Q: You could've left then?

A: With the mass deportations? No.

Q: No?

A: No. These were forced deportations. The trucks arrived. “Family X – we’re looking for A, B, C, D – Family X you have to be packed what you can carry with you in two hours, and we’re taking you to Russia to work, work camp. You’re a Bourgeoisie. That is you belong to the Bourgeois class.” And, that was that. And, proportionally many more Jews were sent out than Latvians because he Jews were in certain of the professions, and also in many of the businesses.

Q: I see, and that was your father’s status as being a doctor?

A: That was our interpretation at the time.

Q: I see.

A: That was our interpretation.

Q: And, what is the major religion in Latvia.

A: Lutheran.

Q: Lutheran?

A: Yes.

Q: Huh. Now, is your brother taken in to be part of the army? I mean, he’s now what 18 years, 19 years old?

A: He just graduated gymnasium, and before the war the talk was after he would graduate gymnasium, of course, you couldn’t send him to Germany to study at the university. So, they were going to send him to England. Why to England especially Cambridge? Chemistry. He had some inclination in that direction. So, they figured that he would end up in England studying Chemistry. My mother later on told me that before Hitler came to power, it was assumed that we would – the kids – would study at one of the German universities.

Q: I see.

A: But, certainly, England, the talk of England came in only later on when Hitler was already in power that they would not be able to send him to study in Germany.

Q: Now, during the Russian occupation, though, your father isn’t earning a lot of money, really. The money that he has possessed, that the family had, was not confiscated as far as you know.

A: Well, my mother told me that we had withdrawn a large sum of money before the Russian occupation occurred from the bank, a considerable amount, but not everything should be suspicious, so only a part. And, we were able to exchange some of it into Rubles, but there were price controls in the Russian period. So, if you made 30 Rubles, you had to pay the rent maybe with three Rubles or four Rubles, but money was not an issue and wasn't – and I remember the snickers about the 30 Rubles that he was making, or 35 Rubles perhaps, but it was very low. It was in the 30s I remember, but it didn't matter to us personally.

Q: Right. So, are you – is there any apprehension that there's going to be a war coming to Latvia, that the Germans will do something that this won't stay-

A: No, no because according to the Ribbentrop Molotov Pact, Latvia and Estonia and a good part of Lithuania fell under the Russian sphere of influence and subsequently occupation, and that Germans would not dare attack Russia. This behemoth for as long as the war still is going on in the West. So, there were no fears of war.

Q: So, this deportation, this mass forced deportation, you think it had nothing to do with the Russians thinking there's going to be a war. They just did it.

A: That's a very good question, and that's still being speculated about. Stalin and Molotov were convinced, and I'm not talking now as a child. I'm talking about with my knowledge as an academic, where convinced that there would be no war with Russia – with Germany at this time. The lower downs believed that there will be because the Germans were sending spy planes all the time. In fact, the week before – two weeks before the outbreak or three weeks before the outbreak, we could see planes very, very high up.

Q: And, could you see them?

A: Yes.

Q: You could?

A: You could see them, yes which we assumed were not Russian planes.

Q: But, nevertheless, you weren't – the people you were around were not suspicious. You wouldn't be.

A: No, no.

Q: You were too young.

A: We were not suspicious. That was elsewhere, the war, not – it would not come to the Baltics. We did not like the Russians, but in comparison, of course, the Russians were the lesser evils.

Q: They still were the lesser evils even to you.

A: Yes. Well, the point is, later on in comparison to the Nazis.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: Yeah, but we were, the family was together. We really did not starve. We were not sent out. Friends of ours were deported, yes, but my aunts and uncles in Riga were not deported. So, by and large, by and large, we were satisfied. Of course, the press was a controlled press. My parents now spoke much more often in Russian in front of me for fear that I should not go to school and say something anti-Communist, and then be arrested because a child had said something. I sensed it of course, and I resented the fact that my parents did not trust me, and that was probably one of the reasons I did not join the Russian Youth Movement, the Young Pioneers because everything was now hush-hush at home for fear that I may squeal because I was a child.

Q: Right. So, you think you didn't join partly because you felt?

A: Yes, because I was vitriolicly anti-Communist like my parents, and I sensed it at home, what I overheard, what I understood from their Russian, et cetera, I kept my mouth shut, but nevertheless, they had to be cautious. I understand. I understand it now. I didn't understand it at the time obviously.

Q: Now, what language were you speaking in primarily now since before the Russians come you're speaking primarily German.

A: I continued to speak German with my parents, yes.

Q: You did? With you parents?

A: Yes.

Q: And in the street, with the kids?

A: It was Latvian.

Q: Was it Latvian?

A: Yes.

Q: And, could you speak a little Russian with the Russian soldiers that you-

A: Yes, oh, yes.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yes.

Q: And, this is not a harsh occupation except for the forced? Or was it a harsh, maybe it was?

A: I don't think it was a harsh occupation before the deportations. Freedom of the press, of course, was curtailed. Harsh from the viewpoint of physical harm, no, until the deportation, yeah.

Q: Right.

A: I've read that people were arrested for anti-Communist, anti-Bolshevik statements, so on and so forth. Yes, we heard about this, but the immediate circle, our immediate circle, as I understood it at the time, was not affected.

Q: Something radically different happens in 1941, however.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember the move into Latvia by the Germans?

A: Very well, I remember the outbreak of the war very well. Actually, what happened, the war, the Germans invaded on a Sunday morning, early morning. Saturday night, my parents went to sleep only at three or four because they played cards at our house. There were about six or seven ladies played Gin Rummy, I mean Kunken, and suddenly early in the morning, there was lots of noise, bombs being dropped et cetera on that Sunday morning, June 22nd, of '41, and now we had a terrace in the rear, a balcony not a terrace, actually only a balcony. And, we all went out to see what happened, and we saw German planes, _____ , flying very low where we could even say hello to the pilots and they sort of winked back at us because it was very low, bombing certain parts. We didn't know what was happening. We turned on the radio, no news. The news about the outbreak of the war did not come for hours because the Russians were taken by surprise. They didn't know. Subsequently, I read in the history books that Stalin thought that it was not Hitler behind this, the ____ went behind Hitler's back because Stalin and Molotov were convinced that the Germans were not going to invade, and now suddenly, they did invade. So, the bombings – this was very exciting. Again, our building was not hit. It was someplace in the center of the city. I did not immediately see any ruins, but as the Germans were moving closer, they occupied Libau one week after the outbreak of the war. My father took us to the hospital which was a little bit outside of the city in a safer neighborhood, and we stayed there for a couple of days until the Germans came in. But, during the bombardment, we also stayed one night in a basement in the center of the city in a kind of a policlinic, a small hospital, and there I saw a lot of the destruction already, and that became to dangerous to stay there in the center of the city because this was

being bombarded by the German Navy and subsequently by the Army. So, we moved to the larger hospital outside the city – well, it still was in the city district, but in the residential area right near the beach, and I distinctly remember when the Germans arrived, the Latvian doctors asked my father to accompany them to "welcome the Germans" with roses, et cetera, and my father went and asked about the Jews and the Lieutenant in the car, and I remember him coming back saying the Jews have nothing to worry about. We now have a common foe, and we must fight this common foe and the Jews are part of this war. In the naivety, fighting if you fight together we're civilized Germans, not racists, et cetera. Like in World War I, if you fight Communism, fine and good, and he was sort of assured, and in a certain naivety, he believed and made us rather believe that we have nothing to worry about, or maybe he just wanted to keep us calm as could be the case.

Q: So, how did you feel that he asked the Germans this question?

A: He came back.

Q: And he told you what he asked them?

A: Yeah, he told us and my brother, my mother and me et cetera, yes, and we all listened, et cetera. There was a kind of a command car that appeared and he was part of the welcoming committee that he was asked to participate, and in this context he asked about the Jewish question, and he was assured by this officer.

Q: That everything would be okay.

A: That, Yeah.

Q: Is this as if your father either knew nothing or paid no attention to what was happening to Jews in Germany? Did you have any idea?

A: Originally, I'm convinced. Again, this is my interpretation that he did not genuinely believe my aunt when she said-

Q: What had happened.

A: -what had happened with the Germans with the Jewish women polishing the cars with furs. Later on, my interpretation again, is that he did not want to worry the family. So, he always looked at the glass half full rather than half empty. That's my interpretation.

Q: Is it possible that he never asked the Germans this? He simply told you this so you'd feel okay.

A: I would – it could very well be the case. It could very well be the case, and then afterwards the same day, we took our baggage and we walked back to the apartment,

and the house was still standing and we saw the German occupiers on the street and they left us alone. We left them alone. I remember staring at them, and then we went back to the apartment.

Q: The same apartment, the smaller apartment?

A: Yes, but in the meantime we had also heard that a number of Jews were shot by Latvians because the Latvians were also vitriolicly anti-Communist, and in some of the German propaganda that leaked through, I guess, the Germans equated Bolshevism with Judaism so on and so forth. So, apparently, some people were shot even before, just before the German occupation took place in Libau.

Q: So, how long is it when things become rougher and it's no longer the same life for you?

A: Almost immediately.

Q: Almost immediately?

A: Almost immediately. I remember my father having to go to a gathering place every morning to be assigned for work. My father wore his red cross arm band. My brother going to work. A cousin of mine was shot dead by the Germans apparently, he had just married a Latvian girl before. She was pregnant, but I was lead to understand that she also had a lover, and I was lead to understand that she denounced him as a Jew and he was shot and my father was called on to go to the cemetery to identify the body, and he came back to the house and I was there, pale saying, "Yes it was ____ who was shot dead." He identified the body, and that was about a week to ten days after the occupation, and it was not long thereafter when my father was arrested, tortured and killed, yes. So, we immediately began to feel it, almost immediately, within days I would say, yes.

Q: And, when you saw that your father coming back, it must have been very shocking to you to see him looking-

A: Yes.

Q: He must have looked awful.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Then, I no longer thought in terms of me and the I, et cetera. I began thinking in terms of the larger picture that is our fate, no longer my school. I mean, this became irrelevant. It was not even a footnote in my life. Now, the issue became life and death.

Q: And, you're ten years old.

A: Yes.

Q: About ten.

A: Yeah. Nine and a half at the time now.

Q: So, the quick relief of "I don't have to go to school."

A: Oh, that-

Q: Was all finished.

A: That was finished. That was finished, yes.

Q: So, do you have trouble sleeping now when you're-

A: Now?

Q: No, I don't mean now. I'm sorry, now meaning at the point.

A: At the point, I don't remember having trouble sleeping. I slept. I lead an active life in so far as I kept up with the news, the latest news, what's happening all the gossip, the dangers, by the time the evening came around, I assume I was exhausted. I was still a kid. So, I seemed to sleep very well. My mother was assigned to go to work, and sometimes she was able to take me with her. This was she was kind of a seamstress, ironing. I remember her doing working in, I guess it must have been a laundry. If I think of it today, for the German Air Force in Libau. She was, and then at a certain point, she became the housekeeper, maid for the mistress, for the Latvian mistress for the head of the _____ in Libau, and my mother knew her from before the war because they used to meet at the same hairdressers called Mary's. I still remember. This mistress apparently had a liking, took a liking to my mother, and sent a long to the ghetto, but this was already in the ghetto period. But, before the ghetto period already, extra food and when she knew that things were going to happen to Jews, she would tell my mother, "You better bring George with you to the apartment." So, I would stay for the day at the apartment safe when my mother was cleaning or whatever, yes. But, things became in a sense chaotic, but there was within this chaos, there was still order.

Q: How – I don't know whether at the time you would know, but perhaps only afterwards when you talked with your mother, how did she take to doing this? She was never doing this sort of work in the house. So, all of a sudden, she's acting as someone's maid and she's ironing and she's-

A: She said to me circumstances dictate what you have to do. She took it very stoically. She took it very – but, she – I've never seen my mother in tears before. I've never seen my mother in a state of hysteria. When my father was arrested, she ran all over the place to her Latvian colleagues who did not raise a finger for my late father. Some

of the Latvian doctors, I guess you know jealousy, professional jealousy whatever, but nothing unusual. They didn't raise a finger even though it was an issue of life and death. She went to the _____ pleading for my father. She left no stone unturned, and at a certain point was told by the man who really killed my father that he'll be released but a wound has to heal, that guy apparently knocked out one of his eyes, and was told that they really needed him because of his specialty, but the wound never healed. So, they didn't want to release him in that condition. So, they decided to shoot him instead.

Q: And, that you heard later?

A: That I heard later, but a patient, a Latvian patient of my father's came with the news that his eye was knocked out. He heard it from I guess a Latvian guard in the prison or whatever, and I've also heard it from his fellow prison inmates, Jews who were later on liberated or I saw later, what happened to my father because they were eyewitnesses.

Q: Do you remember the day your father was arrested or weren't you home?

A: He didn't come home. It was toward the end of July 1941, yeah.

Q: So, he was working in the hospital?

A: He was not working in the hospital at that time, no.

Q: Or, he was doing forced labor, I guess.

A: Yes, but as a doctor, as a doctor he was doing this. This was the end of July, and then he was shot.

Q: So, how did you understand this as a young child?

A: Horrified, absolutely horrified, and you didn't – I didn't understand. I didn't understand why we had to suffer simply because being Jewish. I hardly knew what it meant before the war. As I said, I knew I was a Jew. I knew about Matza, Passover, about certain High Holidays, or when my mother and father fasted, or turning on candles commemorating the dead, et cetera, but otherwise I really did not know much about the significance.

Q: So, there's no logic here for you. I mean, nothing makes-

A: No.

Q: And, even if the-

A: What the logic was I'm suffering because I'm a Jew, but I didn't understand why I had to suffer because I'm a Jew.

Q: Right. Then, how do you understand death and murder?

A: I didn't analyze it. I did not, but I remember later on thinking – initially, I did not want to die, but later on after Stalingrad, et cetera, I did not mind. I thought myself because I know that the Germans are going to be defeated.

Q: So, you didn't mind the thought that you might die?

A: Yeah, I did no longer mind it.

Q: I see.

A: To see Germany destroyed, that was it.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. Because I remember in the severe winter, well – I remember in maybe it's later it's been cut now.

Q: No, you have another minute.

A: I remember it was a very severe winter, 1941-42, where I got frostbite in Libau, frostbite on my toes and my fingers, thinking perhaps if the Germans would win the war, there would no longer be a reason to punish Jews for whatever reason, and things would get better. So, for a moment, I even thought, however perverse it may sound today, but as a child, perhaps the Germans should win and then we will be relieved of this misery, of this uncertainty.

Q: So, confusion reigns in some ways.

A: Confusion reigns, but death was there.

Q: Yeah. Okay, think we have to stop now.

End of Tape 4

Tape 5

Q: Okay, George, I understand that you know something about the circumstances under which your father was arrested at the marketplace. Am I correct?

A: Yes, he went to work to the gathering place in Libau where the Jews were gathered and then the Germans would transport them to their outfits, and he saw the ____ trucks approaching, and he began to make signs to the people on the square, in other words, to disperse, and this was noticed by the SS people, and they beat him up terribly and threw him onto one of the trucks, and he among others were taken to the prison. That's where he continued to be tortured. That's where apparently his eye was knocked out, and apparently he was going around looking for his eye, et cetera, and couldn't find it, and begged – this is from eye witnesses that we have – begged to be shot, but they kept him alive.

Q: Tell me how you remember your mother was during this period.

A: She – I've never seen her before crying or being hysterical.

Q: But she was?

A: She was absolutely hysterical when it happened. She would say our ____ our dad, our daddy, how are we going on from here? We must do everything possible to rescue him, and she started running around and we still had some hidden diamonds and gold coins so on and so forth, and she bribed some of the Latvian colleagues especially one who used to be a neighbor of ours, Dr. _____, a neighbor of ours when we lived in the – before the Russians came in, in the same. There were two apartments to the same floor and he lived in one of them. And, he said, "There's nothing I can do." She went to some other Latvian colleagues. They said, "Well, there's really nothing we can do or help or say." She then went to the ____, but I don't think she did give anything to the ____ people in terms of gold coins or diamonds, et cetera. It would've been much too dangerous, and there was this one person who apparently knocked out my father's eye, Handtke who was tried after World War II in Hamburg where apparently I have the transcripts where this whole issue was brought up. He defended himself. I don't remember the details from the transcripts, and he finally said to my mother after several days, "Yes, we're going to release your husband once the wound" some sort of wound "he has will be healed, but the wound never healed so they decided to shoot him instead."

Q: And, how long did it take before she found out that he was dead?

A: The first news as I remember, came from a former Latvian patient of my father's who came to visit us with the news that he had heard, and then also some of the people who were arrested together with him, some of them were released who saw it, and others were also shot relatively speaking at the same time.

Q: And, did your mother then become very practical about trying to figure out how to help the three of you survive together?

A: She relied heavily on my older brother who had leadership qualities which she did not really, nor of course I, as a child. So, she relied very much on my brother, and together with whatever help I could give, we manipulated the situation to the best of our knowledge.

Q: Your brother is about twenty years old in 1941. Am I correct?

A: He was about nineteen.

Q: Nineteen?

A: Nineteen, yes.

Q: And, your mother, must have been-

A: In '41, she was born in 1903. Thirty, 23, 33, 43 – 38.

Q: Thirty-eight?

A: Thirty-eight.

Q: So, very young woman.

A: Yeah, and she was obviously spoiled from her old home, and my father spoiled her very much. So, she was not very street smart or anything of the sort, but it is sometimes the circumstances that forge an individual, yes.

Q: So, does she now go to work?

A: Yes, was forced to go-

Q: Was forced, right.

A: To go to work, and then after working for a while with the Air Force in Libau, - Libau, that's where the _____ was, the war port, where I occasionally went along. Then, she was taken by the former mistress – by the mistress, the then mistress of the head of the Gestapo, this Latvian woman, her name was Mrs. Krohnberg and I was led to understand that after the war, she managed to get to Canada and she died in Canada about ten, fifteen years ago or so.

Q: Kronberg

A: Krohnberg, in Latvian I guess it would, the husband would be the Krohnbergs in Latvian it would be Krohnberga, for the woman.

Q: Now, is this before the ghetto?

A: This was before the ghetto, yes.

Q: In Libau.

A: In Libau. Yes.

Q: So, your mother has a couple of jobs, and are you still living in that smaller apartment?

A: No, in the meantime, several times we had to move. We moved in to one apartment near my school for a short time. Let me get the sequence straight. Oh, my – we moved into the servant quarters of the Kessel Villa, K-e-s-s-e-l, because my brother married the daughter, but this was already a war marriage, had no legal validity to the best of my knowledge. So, the front part was occupied, the main part of the villa was occupied by Mrs. Stein who was Latvian. Her husband was Jewish. So, she lived there with a daughter, and Mr. Stein, the Kessel's – the husband was already killed, Mrs. Kessel and her two daughters, and my brother and I and my mother, we lived behind the building what used to be known as the servant's quarters. We lived there for a while until we had to move from there and moved to another quarter which was near my school where we were in three rooms – one, two, three. We were one – my brother and his newly acquired wife, myself – we lived, slept in one room. My mother slept in another room, another woman – Mrs. Boop slept in a room that was in Mrs. Boop's apartment. Yes, she was killed during the war, and two young women slept in another room. So we were about six or seven people in this small apartment of about four or five rooms, excluding the kitchen. And, from there, well an announcement came that we will be moved to a ghetto – we'll have to move to a ghetto which is in a part of Libau, a section of Libau that I did not know very well, and there in the ghetto this was in the summer of '43, we were assigned to a flat in a basement that had a kind of an outhouse, the toilet was a few steps – we had to go about five or six steps, right off the entrance, rear entrance of the building, and there including the kitchen there were one, two, three rooms. So, two rooms and where people could sleep. In these two rooms, my brother and his wife, and my mother and I slept, in this basement apartment, and in the other room there were about four people who slept, and we shared the same toilet. We shared the bathroom, the bathing facilities, and we made the best of this situation. I was working for a while in the ghetto in the garden, vegetable garden, and then I was "asked, invited" to become the commandant's runner in the Libau ghetto. The commandant was not a bad person actually, Kerscher. He closed his eyes to many things especially when people brought in some extra food to the ghetto. He did not make a big deal out of it, but of course, we also managed to give him things that is not only the Schwabs but other people with means before the war who had saved a gold coin here, a diamond there, a fur coat, whatever, gave it to

him, and this reminds me even before we moved into the ghetto, there were collections of gold coins. This in order to try to release Jews from the prison to bribe the Germans, et cetera. So, this was – I remember people coming around for specific arrests that were made and collecting, because we were told if we gathered this and this and this and this, we would be able to get that person out of prison and so on and so forth. But, this brings me back to before the ghetto, way before the ghetto. Immediately after the revolution in 1917, Lenin needed hard currency, and opened up the palaces. You could buy everything and anything for very little money. And, we had antique – an antique for example living room that came from one of the Czarist palaces. We had a chandelier a cobalt with gold chandelier that came from one of the palaces that my grandparents bought and some of it gave to my father as a gift after World War I, immediately, and some that my father bought including some art works from famous Russian artists that he bought when he was serving in Russia, and right after the revolution that he bought and brought it back to Latvia. So, in addition to the Persian carpets and the Grand piano, et cetera, this was very exclusive furniture that we had from Czarist palaces including a number of chandeliers. I remember two in particular, and all this was taken by the Germans before we came even to the ghetto. And, not only the German _____, but also the German Navy. There was a certain Inspector Ulmann of the German Navy. Incidentally, the old – where we lived before World War II, the building that became the headquarters of the Communist Party during World War II became the headquarters of the German Navy for the region, and this Inspector Ulmann came very often to our apartment, and with a crew would take a lot of the things from the apartment, and then of course, we also had people from the ____ coming with their crews to take, and there was one guy from the ____ by the name of Strott, S-t-r-o-t-t, who was a collector of stamps, and my late brother had a huge stamp collection and he traded stamps with all over the world. There was actually an exhibition here in Philadelphia in memoriam for my brother, a big stamp collection, where it is all described and I have a photograph with my late mother, still. She was already sick and we went to Philadelphia. This must have be in 1963, when there was this big exhibition in Philadelphia. And, he took, and I'm sure he took it for himself because he was an art collector, and then we had to two Leica cameras, one German and one Russian Leica, I remember, and we gave one of them to one of the Latvians who came to the house to look for things. I think, and I would have to establish this, I'm not sure, but one of the Latvians was a notorious murderer by the name of Cukurs. He had several fingers missing. I don't know how come, but I remember fingers were missing, and for some reason I associate him with the name Cukurs who was a deputy to Arias, the famous Arias, commander of Latvians who killed Jews with a vengeance. And, this man with the fingers came and looked for things, and I remember very distinctly my mother giving him one of the Leicas because we had two still hidden in the apartment. This is when we were still living in the apartment to which we moved during the Russian period.

Q: The smaller.

A: Yes, the smaller apartment. So, these are some of the things that suddenly come back about the furniture so on and so forth. Now, how did we get up to this question?

Q: You went back from the ghetto, but I would like to stay in this period for a moment, and ask you what was probably a peculiar question. Was there anything like a funeral for your father?

A: No.

Q: Nothing?

A: No, we never saw him again.

Q: Because you never-

A: Nothing, never saw him, no, no.

Q: So, did your mother go into mourning in some way?

A: You couldn't mourn in the sense in those days you would wear black for a whole year, et cetera. This you couldn't do. There was no way of doing it. You had to go in the morning to work whatever, and then they would come back and in the evening hoping to find me still there, alive, et cetera. So-

Q: So, there's really no time for any-

A: Shiva or so on, no.

Q: There's no way to do that.

A: No, I don't remember – we didn't even know exactly the date, but this was irrelevant, but I don't remember a Shiva.

Q: And, do you remember yourself responding in way like your mother because you lost your father, or did you not understand what it really meant to lose your father?

A: I understood. I missed him very much, but I didn't understand what it meant that he was shot, but then I had some sort of an inkling because when he came home from the cemetery where he identified my cousin that the person was suddenly dead, and my father was arrested. What I couldn't understand is that I'll never see him again. This I do remember, that I may never see him again. This I do remember very, very distinctly, yeah.

Q: How did you – was there a notice to go into the ghetto?

A: Yes the bekantmachung

Q: And, what is that?

A: The bekantmachung means a kind of an announcement.

Q: So, it was a public announcement?

A: It was a public announcement.

Q: Like a poster?

A: Yes, yes, by that and that date we had to move in, and then we were assigned the living quarters.

Q: So, do you even as a child begin to feel that your life is getting more and more constricted, or you have no-

A: Oh, yes, not only this, but I was at a certain point coming to this, even going back before the ghetto when we had to wear the yellow star and had to deliver our radios and other things right after the occupation, and we were not permitted to go on the sidewalks as Jews. We could only go right off the sidewalk, and I remember it was in the winter, going and a fellow student, a girl, came in my direction. We were in the same class, and we walked and I wanted to say hello to her, and it happened to be a girl I fancied as a child. Veltina was her name. She sort of looked away, and I felt embarrassed that I was a Jew, that I had to wear this and I could not go on the sidewalk. It was something strange. Why should I feel embarrassed? But, I remember feeling embarrassed that I am who I am. It's a very strange sensation that I had, just as strange as the same winter when I thought maybe a German victory would be helpful to us. Let the Germans win. Logical, perhaps for a child, but for an adult, obviously not.

Q: Did you ever say anything to your mother or your brother that you were embarrassed, felt ashamed?

A: Not in this context, in a different context. The children in the ghetto didn't like to play with me because I didn't speak Yiddish. I spoke German, and they used to call me kind of a yeke. I did not speak it, and I remember going to my mother crying saying, "The children don't want to play with me because I don't speak Yiddish", and I remember my mother saying to me, "George, there's really nothing I can do about it. I don't speak Yiddish either. We have to make the best of the situation." And, it is in this context that I began to acquire Yiddish because this became the lingual _____ the accepted language in camp, et cetera.

Q: I see.

A: So, just like I acquired Russian, I acquired a smattering of Yiddish.

Q: The Jews that you are meeting in the ghetto, were they not of your economic class because the Russians had sent out most of the Bourgeois?

A: They didn't send out most of the Bourgeois. They sent out a good number, but I assume, but in those days I didn't think in terms of classes, et cetera. I didn't think in terms – I didn't think in these terms, but in retrospect, I would say that they came from a milieu from which I did not come, period. I mean, that's how I would put it now.

Q: And, did that make you feel uncomfortable because they were so dissimilar in terms of background?

A: No, I felt – I felt bad that they would not accept me and at the same time, I was envious because they were stronger than I was. They were better athletes than I was. In many ways, they were far superior to me. So, I was envious actually, and they spoke Yiddish which I did not. So, I was envious too. But, as a child, you can acquire language very easily. So-

Q: So, how quickly did you acquire Yiddish?

A: I guess I still probably have a vocabulary of about 150 or 200 words. So, I could get by. In other words, with my limited vocabulary, I could get by, and but also interesting because the Yiddish we speak in the Baltic countries is different from the Polish Yiddish. For example, I'm now the Vice President of the Sholom Aleichem Foundation even though my Yiddish is almost non-existent as is Belle Kaufman's Yiddish almost non-existent, the granddaughter of Sholom Aleichem, who is still alive at 93 and is our Chairman. When we have the annual meetings of the Sholom Aleichem meetings in New York commemorating his death because it's according to his will, when some of the Yiddish actors read his writings in the Polish Yiddish especially in the _____. Yiddish, I don't understand 95 percent. If somebody reads it with a Baltic accent, not an accent, but pronunciation, I understand fifty percent because the Yiddish is more akin to the German. To give you just one example, when you say – in German you say ____, in the Baltic Yiddish it would be ___, and in the ____ Yiddish it would be ____.

Q: So, it's quite different?

A: Quite different. So, I just I have difficulties with this, yeah.

Q: Did you mother learn Yiddish in the ghetto also?

A: I don't think so. I don't think so. This was not a problem for her. It was a problem for-

Q: For you.

A: For me, yes.

Q: I think we need to change the tape.

End of Tape 5

Tape 6

Q: George, let me just go way back for a second just so we get a context for your family. I assume that your father did not become very wealthy because he was a doctor in Lativa, that there was money in the family before.

A: Yes, there was money in the family before, but he also did very well, and I remember my mother telling me that he would come home and take out from his pockets lots of money saying, "You have brought me a lot of luck, Clairehen, Claire. Look how well I'm doing in my practice." So, independently of his parents, but my grandfather was a big merchant in the grains – import and export – and, we had at least one warehouse that I was aware of with elevators in front of it, railroad tracks, right at the pier, because he exported a lot to England and elsewhere, but one of my relatives told me that we had another warehouse on the other side of the pier exactly facing it. This I don't know. Maybe they sold it very early on, but I only knew of the other one because it was not sold until the late '30s, the other one. So, maybe the first one they didn't bother talking about. But, I did not know until I heard about it over here that there was a second one. Also, to give you a little background, what I found out over here is that when the governor of St. Petersburg came to Libau, he would always come to Libau and play bridge with my grandfather, and they were very good friends, but I would think that the big money came from my grandfather. But, my father did very well in his practice, in his practice, yes.

Q: And, was your mother's family a well-to-do family also?

A: Not as well-off as my father's family, but in the six sisters, three brothers, they all went to universities, the three brothers. The six sisters all went to gymnasium, and there you had to pay in those days and music conservatory. My grandfather owned an upscale delicatessen store, and my mother tells me he brought home the most delicious things everyday from the delicatessen something like ____ in Paris, and my grandmother, the big money apparently came from my grandmother who came from the Russian city of ____ and her maiden name was _____. She came from a very, very well-to-do family, and each daughter, and there was a large family, each daughter received a house or a villa as a dowry.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah, so, and she had six sisters and three brothers and all were educated this and that so, you had to have some means in order to do this.

Q: Right.

A: And, in my father's family, the mother of my cousin over here studied at the University of Geneva in those days before World War I, and Grenoble in France.

Q: Interesting. It seemed important to get a bit of that background which we didn't get before. Now, let's go back to this not so great situation in the ghetto. How did you become a runner for the commandant? Do you know?

A: My German was good.

Q: Clearly.

A: Yes, it was my native tongue, maybe I don't know. It's an interpretation. Maybe this was one reason why I was "invited" to become his runner. A second reason perhaps, it's my interpretation again is because I came from a certain background. I don't know if this played a role, but in addition to being a runner for him - when I would have to, when I would get a pass that nothing should happen to me while I brng a watch which was repaired in the ghetto to, let's say to _____ or to SS _____ who was the head of the SS in Libau or to Inspector ____ of the _____. So, and I could communicate with the staff over there whatever it is in German. Perhaps this is a reason, but again, as I said before, it's pure speculation and I do not know the facts.

Q: So, the job that you had to be a runner was primarily going from inside the ghetto outside delivering.

A: And, also keeping count of the inmates. When we moved into the ghetto, we had something like 823 people survived out of community of close to 8,000. And, when – in the morning when they left, they were given a tag, a metal tag so I had to give them the metal tags as they went out to work in columns, and in the late afternoon, I had to collect these tags and hang them up. So, I remember the numbers, and you could see immediately if somebody escaped or what. The number, you associated that with a name, and that is how you kept tabs.

Q: And, did you have to write down the person to whom you gave the number?

A: No, everyone had his number or her number.

Q: I see. So, that was their number.

A: Yes.

Q: What was this like? You were a kid doing this work for this German.

A: You didn't think along those lines. You thought about how to survive in this milieu. At times, we had basketball games arranged. There was a school for children which I attended on occasion. It didn't last very long because we were not very long in the ghetto. But, by and large, there wasn't much time for self-reflection. At least, I do not recollect. I do recollect being concerned on how to survive, and under the circumstances, we were still lucky because I had my mother and I had my brother. We lost our father, but there were others who had lost more than just a brother and a

father, et cetera. So, in the circumstances, I – I still felt "good that I had my brother and my mother".

Q: And, they, I'm assuming, were also working.

A: Working, yes, my mother was working for the ____.

Q: Oh, that was where she was working for the ____?

A: Yes, and my – well, she was already working for the _____ way back in '41.

Q: I see.

A: But, for a short time between let's say August and September and October when she was working for the Air Force because when the big action came, she was already working and December was a very big action, she was already working for the mistress because she had the letter from the ____ that we can not be touched. ____ is what we called...

Q: That December of '41.

A: Yeah, '41, that was December yeah, were thousands were rounded up and killed in ____

Q: So, after that there was about a thousand Jews left, I think, or maybe 900 Jews.

A: Well, when we moved into the ghetto in '43 there were about 820, yes. I remember because I was in charge of the big board with the tags. So, I knew how many Jews came into the ghetto and how many-

Q: How many?

A: Yeah, and who stayed in the ghetto because those who stayed in the ghetto I did not give a tag in the morning. So, you could see the people for illness or whatever.

Q: Right. How long are you there in the ghetto?

A: From the summer of '43 until – wait a second – no, '42, summer of '42 to October '43 because Yom Kippur was very late that year, and we were shipped to Riga the night of Yom Kippur and there was a song composed by one of the inmates "Yom Kippur Bai Nicht, Als Men Sogt Den Malchet, Gebracht Uns Aher In Kazet"

Q: Could you translate that?

A: Yom Kippur Bai Nicht – in the eve of Yom Kipper, when one says the Malchet, the prayer, Gebracht Uns Aher – we were brought to Kaiserwald. It's a very loose translation from Yiddish.

Q: When you picture being in the ghetto in that period of time, do you remember whether people who – how were people with each other?

A: I must say that with very few exceptions, they were very civil, very polite, but this was our general upbringing in Libau. Later on, I met types I never met before, but in Libau, I had not met types, such types before. So, among ourselves, we were very polite. We were very well behaved to the best of our ability, and this goes also for the "less fortunate" people because I think that even the less fortunate people before the war, there was a common level of behavior that embraced the, I would say, what I knew of the Jewish community, but as I proven wrong about saying that there were no poor Jews in Latvia, maybe I just didn't was not in touch with other elements. But, after the war and during the war when I spent with many of them from many other levels, I would say that there was very civilized and – under the worse circumstances- civilized and cultured approach to things, to human beings, to fellow human beings, et cetera. You rarely heard of a Libau Jew stealing something from another Libau Jew, rarely. There were exceptions, and they were caught ant they were punished. This even went on later when we were in the concentration camp. Among ourselves we were very civil, and it didn't matter whether – from which class you came. At least, I had not encountered this, and I'm speaking now - strictly speaking from my perspective.

Q: And, the____ in the ghetto in Libau, did you know those people?

A: Yes, Mr. Israelit and Mr. Kaganski who was an attorney. I told you the woman in California who should be interviewed, his wife. Yes, I knew them. Mr. Israelit, he was a banker before World War II. He spoke broken German, but was a very nice man. I knew his daughter. She was a classmate of my brother's in the Jewish gymnasium. I knew other members of the family, very dignified family. He was the number one person, and the number two person was this Mr. Kaganski, highly educated, very cultured, spoke a very, very good German, very handsome man. We had no problems with our leadership, and I hadn't heard major complaints about them from any of the ghetto inmates.

Q: Was there Jewish police also?

A: There was a kind of a Jewish police, but of course they didn't have weapons or anything of the sort, and it was, I believe, this Jewish police had caught two thieves stealing things from the store in the ghetto, some bread or so, and they were incarcerated, and I just don't remember know what their fate was. I believe they were shot for what they had done. But, this was such a rare exception. It was an exception that this should happen among us Libau Jews. This was sort of almost unheard of.

Q: And, what rumors are you hearing about what's going on? Through 1942, there's a huge number of Jews between '41 and the end of '42 that are killed that are massacred.

A: Yes, we heard vague stories, but we did not know details, but what we did know, there were technicians among the former Libau Jews who were technicians already then, and they managed some way or other to construct a radio. So, we knew what was going on in the world. We heard about the German defeats at the front, which was wonderful news to us and gave us inspiration, and when we didn't hear good news or anything, we used to talk about the _____ one says rumors. Rumors about his, et cetera. What are your source? _____ agency _____ says it's a rumor, but it was known as _____.

Q: So, were you under the impression, were people under the impression between these rumors that one says ant the radio reports that the Nazis were going to lose soon? Was that-

A: Not soon, but that they were going to lose. This was a foregone conclusion after especially Stalingrad, after January '42, and then of course, we heard about the famous Battle of Kursk a tank battle which was later where the Germans were decisively defeated. And, of course in Stalingrad where the German Field Marshal gave up, surrendered with something like 90,000 troops. This was vitamins to us, really. I mean we couldn't have been happier. And, then we also heard about some British general that was Montgomery chasing the Germans all over Africa until they were thrown out of Africa. This, of course, was very good news, and that the Germans were having – were being beaten not only in the Stalingrad front, but in many parts of the Soviet Union.

Q: So, tell me how you remember who you were? You're ten, eleven years old, in 1943 you're twelve, right? Because you were born in 1931.

A: Yeah, but I was born late.

Q: Late.

A: Yes, so eleven and a half or so, something to that effect.

Q: So, are you more grown up?

A: Well.

Q: Because, you're still a kid.

A: I'm still a kid. The fact that I didn't have to study was- (laughs)

Q: I know. (laughs) You thought this was a great-

A: This was a great boom. What did I feel? The essential thing in ’42-’43 when we were in the ghetto. It was a, relatively speaking, stable period. We came in 800 some odd people, and we were taken to the concentration camp, roughly the same number. So, there were few killings between the period between the time we got into the ghetto and went to Riga Kaiserwald to the concentration camp, but it was still the fear everyday.

Q: Yes.

A: You don’t know what to expect, and you always had to be on the lookout, and incidentally, something very interesting. Across the street from one of the streets in the ghetto, you had buildings where there were lots and lots of Russian POWs, and they were begging for bread. They had it much worse than we, and we were able to throw them some bread because in the ghetto we still did not really starve.

Q: I was going to ask you that.

A: Yes, we really did not, at least, I don’t think we starved, no because from with our Latvian people, we could deal for this. We could get that, and we still had a diamond here, a dollar there, so on and so forth. We could still do business, so to speak. We could still bring in. So, I do not really remember starving. That we had our pre-World War food obviously is not the case or even the food that we had during the Russian period, but we had enough bread. We had some butter. We had sometimes a piece of salami. We had even sometimes I got hot chocolate. So, I don’t remember starving in the ghetto, let’s put it this way.

Q: But, you remember these Russian POWs starving.

A: Yes, and how we threw bread over the fence. Yes, I do this. I do remember this very distinctly, yes. They were much, much worse off than we were at this particular moment.

Q: And, do you feel as if you lost your childhood, that you respond in some more adult way because you had no opportunity to really be a child except perhaps playing some games?

A: I didn’t think in these terms that I’ve lost my childhood. At that age, I don’t think that you think along these lines, but what is interesting, I think, and I often think about it, how I survived because later on I had to witness hangings so on and so forth because I’ve never really seen anybody hang, but this goes to late ’44 early ’45 in Stolp _____. To me, this was a kind of theater. I was observing. I was living. If I were to put in today’s terms, I was – I was an actor in a theater. I was living something which was not real, and yet it was very real. I was an actor, and at the same time, I felt that I was a spectator, and whatever was going on was interesting to me for better or for worse. It was something of an experience – warped in today’s terms, I would

say yes, but again from a child who is ten, eleven, twelve, et cetera, it's a different because – but, this was really my personality before the war. Everything seemed to interest me except school.

Q: Yes.

A: I don't know if I answered your question.

Q: No, it's an interesting answer because there's some ways in which that may account for how good your memory is because you're observing so much-

A: Yes.

Q: And so hard.

A: Yeah.

Q: And, it's a kind of schizophrenia.

A: Oh, I wouldn't be myself.

Q: I don't mean in mental illness terms.

A: Yes.

Q: But, a kind of distance.

A: That's right.

Q: Do you think your mother and brother was doing the same thing or wouldn't you know?

A: I really couldn't answer because I just don't know. I don't know.

Q: Because, I'm just trying to get, you know, it's – it's interesting to try to figure out who you really – I mean, I can't see who you were at the age of ten looking at you now, you know, as you speak. So, trying to get a sense of what a little boy is doing in a circumstance like that is –

Man: George, _____ your microphone is _____.

Q: I, sorry...

Man: I'm sorry. I couldn't hear what you were saying.

Q: Ok. You couldn't hear what I was saying?

Man: It was coming out, but it was-

Q: I see.

Man: _____

Q: I was saying...now I don't remember what I was saying.

Man: Sorry.

A: What a ten year old child-

Q: With a ten year old child, it's difficult to visualize a ten year old child, and to try to figure out who he is in those moments, and it must be difficult for you to even explain it, but I think-

A: It is difficult, but to me it was a big spectacle that in a strange, I would say today, in a warped way was interesting to observe, and at the same time, I was part of the action that is part of the theater, watching out, when will I be next to be shot?

Q: And, you did think that, "When will I be next?"

A: Yeah, because everyone thought so, "what will the next day bring?" "What will the next minute bring?" yes.

Q: So, in those circumstances you slept okay, too. You didn't have nightmares. You didn't have-

A: No, I did not begin to have nightmares until after the war.

Q: I see.

A: I don't remember-

Q: When it was safer.

A: What?

Q: When it was safer.

A: When it was safer, yes. I don't remember having nightmares in the Libau ghetto, no

Q: And, when you were going – when the Libau ghetto was then liquidated and you were then sent to Kaiserwald, everybody went, the 800 some odd people went, do you think?

A: Some people escaped from the ghetto, and were hidden by Latvians who we call now the Righteous Gentiles, and most of them survived the war.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. Most of the others were sent to the Riga concentration camp, Yom Kippur at night, 1943, and we were taken to the cargo terminal and in cattle cars we were shoved in and interestingly, we were told we were going to Riga. And, Riga just rang a bell, something clicked. I loved Riga before the war. The ____ the commotion in Riga, it was a big city for me in contrast to Libau which was sort of a sleepy, smaller city of some 70,000 inhabitants. Riga at that time had close to half a million people. It was the city of my dreams as a child. So, I imagined Riga when I was being transported, I was thinking of the Riga beaches, the summers we spent there. I was thinking of my aunt's apartment, the parties. I was thinking of the cafes, of the Riga Zoo, wonderful, wonderful memories. And, then we were told we were coming to Kaiserwald. Kaiserwald was the most exclusive suburb in Riga at this time. Kaiserwald means the Forest of the Kaiser. And, one of my aunts and my granddad had a beautiful villa there, Kaiserwald, gorgeous. So, I thought, "Kaiserwald, well, who knows?" et cetera. In a sense, I mean, obviously here we were in a cattle car, and at the same time I was daydreaming about the beautiful life that I lived in Riga. (laughs)

Q: Right.

A: Which is very strange, but I remember this very, very distinctly, and looking forward to going to Riga.

Q: We have to stop the tape. Is it okay?

End of Tape 6

Tape 7

Q: George, can you tell us what it was that you brought with you? Did you have luggage? Did you have special clothes?

A: We were told that we could take with us what we could carry. So, I still – we still had our pre-war clothes. We were dressed warmly.

Q: Was it cold?

A: October, it was beginning to get cold, yes. So, we were always prepared. I remember mother saying it's better warmer because we could always take off. So, we were very warmly dressed. We each had a suitcase and some other things so on and so forth. So, we were transported, and I remember we arrived in Riga. It was still dark, probably very early in the morning next day. Suddenly, the doors were slid open. SS men beginning to scream and also some of the non-Jewish prisoners in very strange garb, namely in concentration camp garb screaming, "Out, out with you dirty Jews, out!" And, beating us, beating us like crazy, and then we had to run from – which wasn't very far, maybe fifty or sixty yards – to the camp from the railroad track. And, there we were told to throw all the luggage and to take off the coat, and throw it on a pile, and my mother didn't want to do it, and I remember saying to my mother, "But, mother we're told that we're going to get it back. So, let's put it there." What do you expect of an eleven year old kid? That's what we were told, and I believed. So, reluctantly, my mother and my brother also took off the coat, and inside of course, were diamonds and some gold coins whatever. And, needless to say, we never saw the coats again. Then we were chased into a barrack, and next day, we were "deloused" but we didn't have any lice in Libau, and we went through a shower, and coming out of the shower, we no longer had our old clothes. We were given new clothes that didn't fit me. I got a coat that came down to here. I received some wooden shoes. What do they call them?

Q: Clogs.

A: Clogs.

Q: Wooden clogs, yeah.

A: Clogs, some sort of a shirt, et cetera - not as yet concentration camp garb. And, everything was quick, quick, and you had these especially some Polish and also very notorious German criminal _____, some of the Polish criminals, _____, beating us together with the Germans beating us to run here and there, and then we were directed to a certain barrack where we're going to sleep now. I'd never seen before bunk beds with straw mattresses and straw pillow, and at night I remember, the straw would come out and it was very – there were no sheets or anything of the sort, a kind of a blanket even in the winter. It was very cold which as an ordeal especially for me who – for everyone who had not experienced anything of the sort because until then, let's

put it this way, in comparison to the Libau ghetto, Riga was – Riga Kaiserwald was hell, and the Libau ghetto was, in comparison, paradise. The beatings, the screamings, Appel, for the first time I heard the word Appel, the count, in the morning, and to make sure that I look older, et cetera, at the count, I always scratched together the sand and stood on my toes to be taller than usual. So, and I was a little bit taller than the rest of the kids in my age group. That was probably one of the reasons why I was not immediately selected for being shot. My brother after a few days was taken to a kaisernierung, to a camp outside the camp where he worked in their reichsbarn which had happened to be a very good kaisernierung. The people were treated relatively well. My mother was assigned to a job in the concentration camp, in the tanklager, and sometimes she managed to convince, I don't know how that I go with her to the tanklager, not to remain in camp because if you remain in camp you never know what can happen. There were safer days. There were less safer days. It was a very, very severe winter, the winter of '43 again in '44, and we were working on this tanklager again, in constructing railroad trucks, and there were a lot of the-

Q: Railroad tracks?

A: Yes, railroad tracks, sorry, tracks because it was – you had a lot of gasoline storage et cetera, and trains came in where you loaded the gasoline, et cetera, for the Air Force, for the Navy et cetera, and so it was a storage, a dump, and also part of the tanklager was also a repair shop for German cars or whatever, but I was working a lot outside building and repairing of the tracks, railroad tracks.

Q: Is this when you were still in Kaiserwald or when you joined your brother?

A: No, that's still in Kaiserwald. I did not join my brother until probably it was, must have been November or so.

Q: The following-

A: Well.

Q: Oh no-

A: A month or two months later, or maybe even three months later.

Q: Let me ask you something. When you get into the camp, are you separated from your brother and your mother?

A: I was together with my brother for the first three days until he was taken to this kaisernierung and I was alone. My mother was on the woman's side, and there was a fence between the woman's camp, but I could see my mother almost anytime – in the morning before work or when she would come back because you could see the women's camp. It was just – the distance was like from here to the camera. So, it's just a few feet.

Q: Did you talk to each other?

A: Oh, across the fence.

Q: And that was okay?

A: That was okay. In the mornings, I remember I was starved all ready, but I didn't suffer all that much from hunger, but I remember I would say to my mother, "Momika, I'm so hungry." So, she would give me her portion. I said, "But, did you eat?" "Yes, yes, I am full." She would say, but she was not, but she threw me her portion because in the mornings we would receive moldy bread, some sugar, some kind of a marmalade, and this was very bad because – this was bad because we all got diarrhea from it, and a kind of a coffee that didn't taste like coffee at least to me as a child. It was terrible, but it wasn't enough for me. So, I asked my mother, and she very often was able to throw me her portion, and I ate, and I remember at that time, there was a Mr. Kaufman who was a friend from before the war. And, I went to him and I said to him in German, "Mr. Kaufman, do you happen to have a slice of bread? I'm very, very hungry." He said to me, "George, I wish I had I could give you, but I don't." And, I'll never forget this. He died in New York. He was the first chairman of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia, and he always remembered this, and I remember this particular incident as well. But, it was done still. It was still Herr Kaufman, Mr. Kaufman that I addressed him. It was not Max or sort of the way we're accustomed to here. Yes, and then, interestingly enough in this Tanklager, which was a tough place, there was a German guard by the name of Hoffmann, the beast par excellence, beat the Jews like anything. He came I think from Romania or some place from that area, but he liked my mother, and would always address her as Frau Dr. Schwab, and when he was patrolling, he would say, "You can go into this shack" where there was a stove and what we confiscated. We used to call it organizier, we organized something. We stole something – potatoes so we could slice and put it against the oven and roast potatoes. That became a delicacy. So, and he permitted me to go with my mother. So, we could go in. We could warm-up, et cetera. We would have our potato so on and so forth. One day, we were marching toward the Tanklager again in the winter, and my mother told me she had a terrible case of diarrhea and she doesn't know what to do. _____ in German. She went over to him and said, "I really have to step out." He said, "Go ahead." He slowed down the column, permitted my mother to attend to what she had, and then she rejoined the column. Why did he do it? I don't know. My mother was gold blonde, very fair skinned, bluish-grey eyes, looked like a thousand Aryans. Actually, she was told and that was still going back now in Libau, if she wanted to be saved to be taken to Germany, she could be saved. She said, "I'll be delighted if I can bring my sons with me." They said, "No, you can not." Then, she said, "Then I stay with my sons." And, that was still in Libau, because they distinguished sometimes the genotype from the phenotype, genetically Jewish versus the appearance, and if your appearance was "Aryan" especially Nordic, which my mother was, then you could manipulate, but she was actually asked.

Q: She was asked?

A: Yeah, and there are other incidents like this after the war, immediately where people in Berlin did not think that she was Jewish because the way she looked when she came to look for me, but maybe when we go into this, we can discuss it later.

Q: Now, is your brother living in this outer camp?

A: Yes, he was living in this outer camp, and sometimes there was communication and you could ____ had little pieces of paper or whatever, and you could communicate. And, he communicated with my mother that it is possible to bribe the commandant Kohler of the reichsbahn where my brother was at to bring her and me to the reichsbahn, and my mother said yes she is going to send for some gold coins and fur coats. It was something in because certain of the things we managed to give to a Latvian patient of my father's who was a head of a bank by the name of Abelit. His name was Abelit, and he did come through, this Abelit, and sent the things to Kohler and Kohler instructed my brother to get a message to me that I should be in the camp on those three days and he will send a car for me. And, indeed, but not for my mother, but for me. And, my mother said, "Absolutely you go. It's ___ and don't worry about me. I'll be all right." So, I went and joined my brother, but I was not the only one in the car. There was apparently a few more who had similar deals because he could be bribed. He was one who could be bribed. And, then my mother, we learned later, also went to an out camp to work camp called the SS _____, the SS vegetable garden for the SS et cetera. So, that's where she was, and then I saw my mother very briefly. We had word that she would passing the reichsbahn. I don't know how we got the word, through whom, but that at that time was a convoy that we should be at the gate or whatever, and we actually saw our mother for maybe two minutes. We were just able to-

Q: And, did she see you as well?

A: Yes.

Q: She did?

A: Yeah. When I came to the reichsbahn it was in comparison to Kaiserwald, paradise. The food was slightly better, no beatings. I had an attack, I suffered appendicitis. I was there in the camp hospital for a couple of days until I got better. Incidentally, I was also in the Kaiserwald, had an attack there. And, a colleague of my father's, Dr. Sik in Libau was the head of the hospital over there. He said, "George, I'll take you into the hospital." And, he kept me there. On the third day, he said, "George, you better disappear because there's going to be inspection today and we don't know what can happen. Do the best you can. Nothing is going to happen to you. Try not to work too hard or bend too hard." And, I left, and sure enough some of the sick ones were taken away and shot. But, the reichsbahn in comparison was not all that bad, food-wise.

Q: Who ran it?

A: It was run by the German reichsbahn, railroad.

Q: So, they-

A: And, the commandant, you could – you could talk to him. He could also scream.

Q: You could scream?

A: He could scream.

Q: He could scream.

A: He could scream, yes, but by and large, I don't remember major beatings or so, for example in the Kaiserwald, I remember having received once a smack in my face from the commandant Oberstrumbahnfuhrer Sauer. I saw stars in front of me. I was supposed to clear the snow from the walkway, and I perhaps didn't do it as quickly. So, he came out and said to me, "Hey, you Jew boy, why aren't you working?" I said, "I'm working," And, he slapped me. I fell maybe ten feet away from the slap, and I just stars in front of my eyes. This did not – was not the case in the reichsbahn, and in the reichsbahn what was my task, I began to "help my brother" he was an auto electrician. He knew about a car electrician as much as I know about the Chinese language, and I was his assistant, and what we did, what we all did for example when we had to screw in something, we would screw it in not all the way. It was our way of, "sabotaging" the German war effort. We would always try to do things not a hundred percent, eighty percent. Hopefully, something will go wrong. But, when an SS man would come, and inspect, go around the big halls and inspect somebody would scream out _____, _____ meant six. For some reason, I don't know why six which meant inspector be careful. So, we all immediately-

Q: Got very serious.

A: -got very seriously this and that running around, _____ this was a code word.

Q: Did anybody ever get caught for not doing things right?

A: I don't remember this. I don't remember this, and then we had a wonderful Jewish couple, German Jewish couple who were working there too, and he and his wife were the elders of this kasernierung Steinhart, Edith Steinhart. I forget his first name. They were lovely, lovely people, and they were so to speak belonged to the German Jewish group in the camp, but were very good towards us. There was a couple from Vienna, lovely people, Maier was their name. Mr. and Mrs. Maier I remember, lovely, lovely people from Vienna. There were two German Jewish couples who were a little bit on the rough side, who became much rougher in Stolp, more to say about it. So, one was

Kentcourik from Lubek the other was Grunwald, or Greenwald also from Germany, but I don't remember from what part of Germany. And suddenly, we knew that the Russians were advancing in the direction of Riga in the late spring of 1944. Suddenly, we come to the camp, return from our work which was only may about 200 yards from where we were living, and that we all had to appear at an _____. That was in July 1944, and there was this SS doctor from the camp, Krebsbach and his deputy, Wisner and Kohler standing and we're in this large hall and we were told to get undressed, get in line, and then there was a selection – left, right, left, right, left, right. My brother was sent to the left, and I was sent to the right. But, my brother said, "Don't worry, Kohler is there. He knows what we have done." So on and so forth, "we can do more, don't worry." My brother was sent to the left. I was sent to the right, and I never saw my brother again. My mother saw him still in Kaiserwald, and knew that he would be shot, and he said to my mother, "Don't worry mother. We're going to take some of the Germans and Latvians, our shooters with us." My mother felt that she could have rescued him and begged him to come to the fence, but he wouldn't come. He didn't want to upset my mother. So, he didn't come to the fence to see her again, and that was the last we heard of him.

Q: So, he was sent back to Kaiserwald, and then they were going to shoot them?

A: Yes, and then from Kaiserwald, they were taken the Rumbala forest where they were killed, yes.

Q: Shot?

A: Yes, but it must have been at the very end of July or the very beginning of August, 1944. The ones who survived, I came back to the barracks, we came back to the barracks, and I kept on – my brother was sleeping in the bunk bed next to mine. I said, "Bubbi, Bubbi, where are you? Bubbi, Bubbi, where are you?" And, I had a hunch that this was it. That I wouldn't see him again, and he was taken probably to be shot, and I was alone now. It was at this stage that Julius Goldberg, who was in the same barrack, et cetera, he said, "George, I'll take care of you. For as long as I will live, you will live." And, Julius Goldberg was strong like an ox, very athletic, a yachtsman before the war, very handsome fellow, at that time probably in his late 20s I would think. But, he slept over there, and I slept over here, and fine. A week later, we were taken to a ship. We were being evacuated because the Russians were coming close. We were being evacuated, boarded the ship. That's when we were taken to Stutthof in August 1944. And, it was a, I guess a troop carrier, what, I don't remember what it was before the war. Maybe it was a liner or so, but at that stage of the game there were bunks all over the place, troop carrier, I guess. It was full of concentration camp inmates. So, I was looking. Maybe I would see Bubi. Maybe I would see my mother. And, we already had concentration camp garb by that-

Q: You mean striped uniforms.

A: Striped uniforms, and I was looking up, and a woman was looking down without hair. I didn't know who it was without hair, and suddenly I heard a familiar voice saying, "Georgenka." My mother's voice. She was looking down. She was without hair. They had taken her and shaved her hair, and there was my mother. So, for the next three days we could see each other on the ship, and the interesting thing is that while we were going through the bay of Riga, the Russians were shooting at the ship, but missing us by a hundred or two hundred yards, and we just sailed through it, and the artillery shells would fall, go over the ship, fall on the other side maybe a couple of hundred yards from it, and we finally arrived near Danzig. We were put on the little railroad cars. What do they call them? The schmalspurbahn, the German. It's not the regular, it's-

Q: Were they half cars?

A: Half cars, and not as wide. The railroad tracks were not as wide – lorries, kind of lorries, it's almost a sort of a choo-choo train, et cetera. So, we were transported to Stutthof in August. That was Kaiserwald, however bad it was, was paradise in comparison to Stutthof. We were beaten. We had to work also on the railroad tracks over there, not far from the gas chamber and crematorium we saw. We already knew what it was. The chimney burning all the time, burning the bodies. So, we knew and the issue was how to survive there. Food was almost non-existent. We were all emaciated. We were all starving, but and I no longer saw my mother. I no longer saw my mother.

Q: I'm afraid we have to stop there and change the tape.

End of Tape 7

Tape 8

Q: George, we ended with your saying that you no longer were able to see your mother and coming into Stutthof, the Kaiserwald was paradise in comparison with Stutthof. So, could you explain what was going on?

A: Well, the beatings were almost non-stop now. The food was even worse than in Kaiserwald. When we worked on the tracks, we were beaten all the time by the Germans and by the non-Jewish couples, even though I learned what a louse means in Kaiserwald, and began the practice of delousing myself – the hair and over here and so call in the garb that we had. Now, we were full of lice in Stutthof. The facilities were terrible. Sanitary facilities in Kaiserwald were also bad. For example, the toilet was a kind of an outhouse. It was a square pit, and was – on top of this what was constructed were columns. Columns was a wooden "bench" maybe six or eight inches and you would have to lift yourself up, that I never fell into the pit was a miracle, and incidentally, there were some kapos that were so bad that they were thrown into the pit by the Jews, non-Jewish couples. But, in Stutthof it all over shadowed Kaiserwald from every point of view, especially the beatings. Now, the interesting part was that the reichsbahn requested that the same people be spent to Stolp. So, I was part of it.

Q: So, you got out of -

A: I got of Stutthof.

Q: Let me ask you something, George, when you say – what were they beating you with? Do you remember?

A: First of all, they would slap you, but then they also had whips – whips. They would beat you like you would beat a wild horse when you want them to run or something to that effect. It didn't matter if you were young or old, et cetera, and the infirm were immediately taken after the appel to be shot, cremated.

Q: And, how were you strong enough to withstand this kind of treatment?

A: I always made myself older, and I always made myself taller, and this was street smartness in a sense. Now, why was my brother taken?

Q: And, not you?

A: And, not me. Again, I resorted to the same tactic, but my brother used eyeglasses, and anybody who needed eye et cetera was already concerned infirmed, which we did not know, or he would've hidden the eyeglasses. So, he was taken. I did not need eyeglasses. Yes, I was emaciated, but everyone was emaciated, and however much I suffered from hunger pains, I suffered less than others because my father as a gastroenterologist, et cetera never permitted us to eat huge portions of anything, never permitted us too much, too many of the fatty things. In between meals, we could have

a fruit or something. He was strict about that – a fruit or so, but no _____ as we would call it, maybe a piece of this or that, et cetera nothing. A meal is a meal. That's when we can eat, but everything in moderate proportion.

Q: So, this was helpful to you?

A: This was very helpful because I could never gorge myself with food, because many of the people and that's what I first learned – poor people gorge themselves very often believing that they had to put on layers of fat that would protect them from the natural – from the winters or whatever, and this I only learned subsequently. I was not conscious of it before the war, but only after the war people talked about the food habits in the camps, and those were my habits. However hungry I was, as I said before, I was not that hungry. The day of liberation, as I'll tell you a little later, I mistook soap for bread and I started to eat soap, but this was already on the day of liberation which is still to come.

Q: So, are you in Stutthof for like a month, two months?

A: No.

Q: Not even that long?

A: Not even that long, probably not more than ten days or so the first time around.

Q: Now, you turn 13.

A: I turned-

Q: In 19-

A: Later on, I guess in 19- wait a second. I had a birthday I remember, and this was in 1944, was I 13 in 1944? I guess so, but this was in November, much later. I was still now 12 in Stutthof.

Q: So, when is there this sort of semi-Bar Mitzvah party?

A: That was in – that was later. That was in November.

Q: In 19-

A: '44.

Q: 1944. So, we're still in 1944.

A: Yes, we're still in 1944, in August, 1944. And, suddenly we were transported from Stutthof to Stolp.

Q: Right.

A: In passenger cars, railroad cars.

Q: Passenger cars?

A: Yes, and the feeling was that the Nazis didn't want to show to their own people that you transport prisoners – this was our interpretation – prisoners in cattle cars. That was our interpretation. Whether this is true or not, I don't know. And, that turned out to be a work camp, living right on the premises in the reichsbahn right near the railroad, the main railroad station there. There I became a carpenter, and I know as much about carpentry as I know about Chinese hieroglyphics. That I didn't chop off a finger or something or other is still one of those miracles because I have no sense for these things.

Q: So, what was your job?

A: Helping to repair cattle cars, transportation, et cetera. Sometimes you needed a board, so you had to do this. You do that. Don't ask me what somehow or another, and managed to do what was expected.

Q: You weren't building furniture.

A: No, no, no I wasn't building furniture. I was not an artist, along those lines. No. I was a plain, plain worker.

Q: Right.

A: The food was manageable over there, and people who worked right near the tracks were able to organize sometimes potatoes, carrots, because they would fall off from the railroad tracks and smuggled into the camps and you could begin to trade a little bit here and there. So, you could augment the poor food that we got with some of the extras, but a few months later, some people did the same thing, organize some food, and they were caught by the Germans. And, now, the Germans wanted to teach us a lesson that theft is punishable. And, what they did was hang the people, and we were forced to march to see the hanging, and then march around the hangers to see them. How did I survive this one? When it was announced hanging people, I didn't understand what it means, how a person can hang. Again, it became interesting to me to look at the person hanging. I didn't understand that this is involved with death. I did not put two and two together. How can a person hang? And, only while hanging did I realize that the person was hanged and it meant actual death. I did not connect this before. So, to me again, it was a kind of a spectacle. Theater of the Absurd, if you want to call it, or something along those lines. Sick! But I remember the context very well because I think about it and how could I have reacted the way I reacted? And, my answer is, folly of youth, did not understand, and number two, and perhaps even

more important than this, curiosity because everything interested me especially that what I didn't understand. And, this happened three, four months before our liberation when the Russians were already on German soil, and also during this period in Stolp, the German Jewish couples began to behave atrociously to the Eastern European Jews. When somebody was caught organizing something internally or so, he had to receive twenty lashes, and the German Jewish couples were only delighted to mete out the punishment. One of them was Kentcourik who was particularly brutal. For some reason or other, both of these couples Greenwald and Kentcourik liked me, maybe because I spoke their type of German, and left me pretty much alone this and that and were actually nice, but they were absolute – excuse me for using the term here – bastards. And, I'm jumping now forward for a minute. I was in the same hospital, after, right after the war as Kentcourik, and I came out of the hospital and was brought back by the British to the rehabilitation, to the rehabilitation barrack in the DP camp in Neustadt in Holstein with one of the British Red Cross cars, ambulance cars, and Kentcourik – I informed the other guys who were there, fellows, many of them that I was liberated with that Kentcourik was coming out. "Oh, Kentcourik is coming out. We'll beat the hell out of him," and Kentcourik came in thinking that's he's coming in as a great hero, and chairs flew into his face, this and that, so on and so forth. He was taken back to the hospital seriously injured. He survived this, and after the war he had two daughters, moved with his two daughters to Lubeck where he died subsequently, but I don't remember what happened to his other one, Grunwald, but that was the fate of this German Jewish couple Kentcourik.

Q: George, when you're walking around, how long did they make you walk around these people who were hung? Just once? Twice?

A: No, no, no, we were standing at attention walking, I would say about for an hour or so.

Q: So, it's a long time.

A: Yeah, for us to be taught a lesson. So, they were hanging there.

Q: Do you think you also took this kind of position – not just, that it wasn't just curiosity and interest in something new – and ignorance because you were a kid, but also a way to protect yourself? Or was that-

A: You can interpret it as such. It was a protective mechanism perhaps. You could – I didn't think along these lines, but I can see this, yes, I can see this.

Q: Was there-

A: But, not conscious.

Q: Yes, I understand.

A: There was no conscious.

Q: That I understand, and was there an affect after looking at this for an hour that broke this sort of curiosity?

A: Well, I've been thinking about it ever since this particular episode. Hanging, et cetera, and when I watch the History Channel, and I see some of the – some of the things when Mussolini was hung with Clara Petacci, and how they used to hang Russian prisoners, the German and so on and so forth, this always comes back to me, this scene of how I had to watch these people being hanged. It's something that stays with me.

Q: Stays with you.

A: Yes. Well, I guess you can interpret my reactions to many of the things in psychological terms as self-protection et cetera. The whole approach being the theater of the absurd, but looking at it with today's vocabulary and understanding et cetera, but at the time, of course, I did not-

Q: Right, you didn't have that.

A: I don't have this vocabulary and know this understanding.

Q: But, it must have been scary. At some point it had to be horribly scary.

A: Absolutely because I could be next. Yes, you never knew. Yeah, and, in Stolp I was sleeping in a bunk right next to Julius Goldberg. Again, everything straw, this and that, lice, delousing was an every evening activity. Bathroom facility better than Stutthof and Riga, but still – there was water. You could wash yourself in the barrack which was a converted – the barrack was actually not a true barrack. It was for a steam engine that was converted into a kind of a barrack where we could sleep, bunk beds. And, then, the Russians were coming very close and they were going to evacuate us, but before then, about the Bar Mitzvah. It was Eugenia Goldberg who was a nurse, and persuaded the SS woman to let her do something for me. And, she "baked" something from potatoes which was the most delicious thing I thought I'd ever eaten because I was so starved – a kind of a potato pie. She explained it to Sheila Robbins, maybe she would be able to explain it to you what it was, and then the SS woman was present. I was permitted to come in from the man's quarter including Julius Goldberg, her husband.

Q: Oh, it is the husband. They are related. That's what I was going to ask you.

A: Yes, yes, that was a wife.

Q: Okay.

A: Wonderful, wonderful woman, and songs were sung by inmates including one of the songs sung in English, Lambeth Walk, I remember and the SS woman actually enjoying it too.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. It was "very festive" under the circumstances.

Q: That's quite extraordinary.

A: Extraordinary, yeah. So-

Q: So this was your 13th.

A: Yes, I guess it was, yes. It was my Bar Mitzvah I guess, end of '44. I'm confused with the dates sometimes a little because sometimes I was made older, sometimes I was made younger. So, I have to think about. It was nothing unusual in those circumstances.

Q: But it was in Stolp

A: It was in Stolp, yes. Now, it was not long thereafter, a couple of months actually, I think it was in March, beginning of March or end of February when we were sort of dumped into cattle cars again, and we were returning to Stutthof But, because the Russians were already nearby and my mother was already liberated nearby which I didn't know. I found this out only after I met her, we spent about a week in these cattle cars with hardly any food, no facilities to speak of, in the corners we had where the stench was absolutely incredible. Finally, we came to Danzig and we didn't manage to get to Stutthof and we were brought to another small camp Burggraben, and we marched. It was a long march from Danzig to Burggraben. It was very cold, I remember. It was about easily, easily ten, twelve miles in our circumstance to march. We arrived in Burggrabben. It was knee deep in mud. There were no German guards. It was no man's land between the Russian front and the German front. The Russians would shoot their artillery across our heads, and the Germans would shoot their artillery across our heads.

Q: And, you're in the middle.

A: And we were in the middle. For about a week to ten days I would say with hardly any food, hardly anything to drink.

Q: You were just sitting there?

A: Sitting there.

Q: Watching?

A: Watching what was happening. Watching what was happening. Suddenly, German trucks appeared. This was in March '45. We're hauled to those German trucks, and they took us to Stutthof back.

Q: Oh, you did get to Stutthof.

A: Yeah, the second time. Now, Stutthof the first time was paradise in comparison to Stutthof the second time. Rampant typhoid, hardly any food, Russian plans attacking us, didn't know that it was probably a camp or so. The ovens burning all the time, hardly anything to eat, people dying left and right, being shot left and right, Germans unleashing their dogs, police dogs. And, the police dogs biting people including Julius Goldberg was bitten like mad. His feet swelled up, and we were there for about two weeks, maybe a little longer give or take a week or so when suddenly the order came, "Evacuation." We're going to be evacuated by boat. And, again, we were hauled off in these mini-train, these mini-railroad tracks, not the regular ones to barges in Danzig, or near Danzig, barges. And, then we were taken on these barges on the high seas – the Baltic, the North Sea. For the trip, we received a loaf of bread and some water. That was it because we subsisted on sea water during the trip, salt water. SS Guards were guarding us, and if you had to step out, you had to do it over the railing and into the water on these barges, and you could see the SS Guards pushing people with their shoes into the Baltic or into the North Sea. I remember very distinctly I suddenly saw a German coming, passing me. I thought, well, this was my end, but it passed me and didn't do anything. And, we were down, et cetera. To climb up we had no strength left or anything of the sort, but Julius despite his illness, I mean he was as strong as a bull. I've never seen anything like it in my life. And, suddenly we were told that we had arrived in Hamburg, but I don't think it was Hamburg, but this is what I remember, and that we had to get out very quickly for Hamburg because the Americans were in Hamburg. It was actually the Brits, not the Americans, and then, we were taken back to the high seas, and at night the German guards abandoned us, and we were told that we were in minefields.

Q: On the high seas?

A: On the high seas, minefields, abandoned and we didn't know what to do. On our barges, were Norwegian POWs, and they collected the blankets we had still from the camp, and made sails out of them. And, came close to, very close to the shore that we later learned was Neustadt in Holstein, about 25 miles or kilometers from Lubek, and the decision was made – this was about four o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, May the third – that we would wade to shore and walk in the direction of Hamburg where the Americans are, and we'll be liberated. Julius was immediately for wading and was taking me along. I said, "Julius please, please let me die. I have no strength. Please leave me alone!" I remember Julius was stone. He said, "Nope, you're coming with me", and took me by the collar and dragged me. We had to go down, and actually in this very cold May in the North Sea, early morning, and I knew a little bit how to swim from the Baltic. I grew up on the shores of the Baltic. I knew,

et cetera, but I had no difficulties wading to shore, and we all lined up and people took a long time because there were several barges of people, and there were people still there who didn't want to leave, and left very slowly, and suddenly, units of the German Navy arrive because it turned out that this was a U-boat school in Neustadt in Holstein, a huge U-boat school. Units of the German Navy arrived.

Q: Okay, I've got to - Hold that thought because we have to change the tape.

End of Tape 8

Tape 9

Q: George, I want to go back to your scene with Goldberg. This is the first time that you've said, "I want to die. Leave me alone." You've never indicated in any of the ways you told your story that you wanted to die. Why now?

A: By now, I really felt totally, completely, totally exhausted – completely and totally starved because we were subsisting on sea water. How long can you subsist on sea water? I just wanted to sleep because we were crowded in like herring, but he wouldn't let go of me.

Q: That's really something.

A: Yeah, and then when we finally waded there, when the German troops arrived from the ____ marina, from the naval units, they started shooting at random. People were still on the barges, wading toward the shore. People who were sitting, who were too weak to get up were shot immediately. It was the day of liberation, incidentally. And, now another march. We were going to march someplace, and I said to Julius, again, "Julius, please leave me alone! I want to die." And, he was all swollen from the dog where he was bitten. He said, "No", and again he pushed me. And, the march was not a long one, a couple of miles, and we arrived at this huge complex, a German U-boat school. There was a huge soccer field, and there were thousands and thousands of people there from other camps. And, we were told that there is a ship by the name of Cap Arcorna that we're going to be put on that ship, and we will sale for I don't remember where. I was semi-delirious and I was really starved, and in the shuffle in these thousands of people, I lost Julius. I wandered around. British planes were overhead and shooting, and the Cap Arcona was offshore, but there was another ship, the Athens, and we were supposed to line up and get onto the Athens to be taken to the Cap Arcorna. And, I wandered around still, and suddenly, I see a pile of things, and I was in a delirious state by then, a German guard looking at it, guns – all sorts of things, and saw there what I would call today – it was soap, but I mistook it for bread. I picked it up and I started to eat it, and I couldn't. I couldn't bite it. I couldn't eat it. It didn't taste like bread. So, I threw it away, and I walked over to the guard and said to him, "May I have a slice of bread?" He said, "Why don't you walk over to this tank? This is a British tank. You have been liberated, walk over and you'll get something." So, I walked over to the tank. The British, I decided to speak English, I said, "I'm very, very hungry. Can I please have a slice of bread?" So, they gave me these cookies, a number of cookies to eat because they didn't have bread, but it was some sort of cookies.

Q: Cookies or cracker?

A: Crackers.

Q: Was it a cracker?

A: Those were crackers rather, not cookies, you're right, crackers. And, we were free, and I saw the Athens there. In the meantime, just then, the Cap Arcorna was sunk by the British. Most of the people drowned, most of the prisoners drowned. A few survived included Sam Bressler and his father ____. And, some way or other, I saw Julius again, and I saw people stealing goods from the German storage places, food. They had huge gallons of marmalade, I guess for the soldiers, for the Naval people whatever, and people hauling, people eating all over. Many died by overeating immediately.

Q: Right.

A: Immediately, I was too weak to even carry that much, but Julius and I and some others went into a barrack and took over the rooms. The bunk beds was clean, everything. And, that's where we decided we're going to be for the night, and we were basically free, but it didn't mean anything to me being free. I did receive some crackers, something else, et cetera. So, my basic hunger was to an extent satiated, and then I went out myself and I organized something also one of those cans I managed to bring back. Suddenly, there's a knock on the door and several Poles walked in, looked around, and said among themselves, and by then I knew some Polish because I lived with Poles at the camps, "This is our place and out you Jew! Out! You out!" He didn't say Jews, and the Jews said, "You better get out or else." And, Julius was in the forefront as sick as he was. Those days are over. They left quietly, and we stayed there. Now, while we were still on the barges, we heard the best news of all that Hitler was killed fighting the Russians. He was killed in Berlin. It was very, very late April. It must have been about the 29th or 30th of April, just a few days before we were liberated. We were liberated on the third of May by the British. And, the day Germany officially capitulated, I collapsed out of total weakness and I was taken to the hospital in Neustadt in Holstein. The many, many other prisoners from Libau, from Riga, from German Jews that I met subsequently, Czech Jews, so on and so forth were all there, and I stayed for a good number of weeks. I think four or six weeks I stayed there.

Q: Did you also collapse because of the appendix?

A: No, it had nothing to do.

Q: Nothing?

A: The appendix was finally taken out in Hamburg, September or October 1945. I had an attack, but by then I was already on the Warburg Estate in ___. No, it was general weakness. I luckily did not suffer from diphtheria, typhoid or any of these illnesses because as soon as the Germans occupied Libau, my father said I'm going to give you certain injections against certain illnesses. These were not only injections over a number of days, I remember once he cut something. It was a kind of a special type of a razor, and he had something – there was something on the razor, and that was enough. I guess it was against typhoid or something or other, and then several other

things, and my mother escaped all of this, and I escaped all of this. I didn't have typhoid. I didn't have diphtheria, and some of the other illnesses associated, but especially typhoid and diphtheria.

Q: It's quite extraordinary.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, he must have had some suspicion.

A: He must have had some-

Q: That it was not going to be good.

A: So, he wanted to make sure at least to immunize us as best as he could.

Q: Did he immunize himself as far as you remember?

A: I would think so, but I don't know. I would think so, yes. He immunized the rest of the family. So, why shouldn't he immunize himself? So, this was basically the liberation.

Q: It doesn't feel like liberation.

A: Which doesn't feel like liberation, and yet I was liberated.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, and thanks for Julius. If not for Julius, I don't think I would've made it.

Q: It sounds like it. It sounds like you would've just dropped.

A: Yeah.

Q: And, what do you think made – because he promised you he'd take care of you?

A: He promised me that-

Q: He would take care of you.

A: Yes, and this was nothing uncommon when a kid was left alone. An older person would sort of volunteer.

Q: Right.

A: To do it.

Q: And how old was he do you think?

A: Julius at that time was probably mid or late twenties.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: And he had a wife.

A: Yeah, that was Eugenia.

Q: Right, and did she survive?

A: She survived. She's still living in Israel.

Q: She is now?

A: Yes, she's still living in Israel – wonderful, wonderful person.

Q: When do you go to Warburg Estate in Hamburg, and you don't know yet. The first few months you don't know whether your mother's alive, right.

A: No, I had a feeling that she's alive, but where, what, when, et cetera, no. Before I go to the Warburg Estate, a group of Russian officers arrived with British officers trying to convince me to go back to Latvia, go back to Latvia, go back to the Soviet Union, et cetera. The answer – my answer was a categorical no because we made a pact, a family, never go east, go back. You go. We have relatives in England, the United States, and we're given a name so on and so forth to remember, but never go back, and I said, "Categorically, I'm not going back." The British officers still tried to convince me to go back, and a good number did go back. Some of them are now in Israel. After horror – after spending horrible times in the Soviet Union in Latvia until the '70s, and I refused to go back. Then, the Brits became suspicious of me that I wasn't Jewish, despite the fact that I'm circumcised, and put me, brought me, took me to a Latvian children's home where only Latvian was spoken, where some of the leaders were former patients of my father, where they talked about Tievzeme in Latvian, the Fatherland, how eventually we'll all go back to the Fatherland, et cetera, but this was a little bit strange to me because we had Latvian guards. Some of the Latvians were innocuous. Others were horrible. I believe this guy Cukurs, especially Cukurs. I didn't feel comfortable there. They also wanted to introduce me – they had with a woman. This was in ____. She wanted to introduce me to General Dankers who apparently knew my father. General Dankers was one of the sympathizers, Nazi sympathizers who managed to get to Lubek. He headed Latvian troops, so on and so forth. But, which I did not know exactly, but General Dankers just didn't sound right that I should meet him. In Lubek, she wanted to take me because apparently he knew

my father, but when we needed the Latvians, they didn't come through those who were in the position to come through. One day, when the head, this woman, went to Lubek for a day or so, I decided to run away, and I ran away and I ran all the way to the DP camp in Neustadt in Holstein. _____ the DP Camp." But, this was a second time around, not the first time. The first time I was brought back to the – I'm sorry. This was the second time around because the first time after a few days I had a relapse, and I was taken back to the hospital for another twelve days. The second time, it was when they took me to the Latvian children's home, and after a few weeks, I ran away. I came to the camp which was in this U-boat school, and I went to the bunk where I had originally brought back, the rehabilitation bunk, and I've got a bed so on and so forth, and what were the people doing? Playing poker. Playing poker. Playing – what you call it? They call it 21? – Blackjack, blackjack, and making piles of money. In those days, the exchange rate was one dollar to 600 Marks, and I don't know how I got a few Marks to play also. I figured, "Why not?" And, I had a very good memory, and after a few days, I saw this and I knew every card that had gone out and so on and so forth. I began to play, and I piled in tens of thousands of Marks which translates into dollars, maybe it was twenty or twenty-five dollars, but in Marks, it sounded enormous amount, and then I decided that it's time for me to see the world.

Q: And, you're what? 14?

A: No, thirteen.

Q: Thirteen? Okay.

A: To see the world. I had plenty of money because the official rate if you went to a railroad station was still actually two or three Marks or four Marks for a ticket let's say to go to Hamburg. Now, I'm an adult. I've seen it all I felt. I would love to live the life my aunts, my uncles, and my parents. To see the world – Berlin, Paris, night clubs, dancing, et cetera, that part of the world, and Neustadt was just a DP camp. So, I packed a few things that I had with my money, maybe by that time twenty, thirty thousand Marks which for Germans was an awful lot of money, got it all, and I decided to go to Hamburg. The reason being that we were told that we also had family in Germany, part of the family came from Hamburg, and part of the family came from Dresden. And, obviously, I didn't find anybody in Hamburg, and I didn't expect to find, but at least I got to Hamburg. I didn't think it through would I go to a hotel? Do I need this? Do I need that? Et cetera, no.

Q: And, how did you get there? By train?

A: By train.

Q: Okay.

A: That was not a problem. I bought my ticket. I went to Hamburg, and I remembered going to a police station saying, "I looked for so and so." I spoke German, and I didn't know. So, I was taken to the Warburg Estate in _____, a suburb of Hamburg which the Warburg family had temporarily given over to – I guess there's a joint distribution committee of the American Relief Unit to turn it into a children's home, just a small children's home. I arrived there, and I was told, "Yes, I belong there." So, that's how I arrived. It must have been late summer or early fall. I remember a few weeks later, getting an attack, appendix attack. I was operated on. I was all alone. I was scared, in the Altona Hospital in Hamburg. I spoke German. I told them that my father was a gastroenterologist. I spoke German to them. They were very nice to me, but I was still very much afraid. They were Germans. You don't know what they can do to me. I thought at that time, and I always reacted very poorly to ether, and I remember throwing off the mask in those days, but before the war my tonsils were removed also under ether and I reacted very poorly in Riga, and I threw off the mask, which I did again, but next thing I knew I came out of the operation all right. I stayed for a number of days in the hospital. When I was brought back for further recovery to the estate. Now came the issue – there were several issues. First of all, to find mother, and then I wanted to go to Palestine because there were people from the Jewish Brigade in uniform and out of uniform, legally and illegally, Hamburg to train us. Not only to teach us Hebrew, the history of Israel, the history of Palestine, Jewish History, also Hebrew, mathematics, so on and so forth, but prepare also for Alijah Bet which was illegal immigration. And, the war to an extent, it's only in retrospect that radicalized me. Why did I suffer? I suffered because I'm a Jew. Is there anything really to be ashamed of being a Jew? No, I was ashamed when I met the girl that I fancied on the street, and, you know, shame came over me that I could not really talk and I really felt inferior which I never did before. But, this was a kind of a reaction I guess to my timidity at the time to having felt ashamed that I reacted the way I did, and was prepared to go to Palestine, prepared to take up a gun against the British because they were so horrible also to the Jews not permitting the Jews to come in, giving maybe 1,500 certificates a month, and there were hundreds and hundreds of thousands and Jews who wanted to move to Palestine, so on and so forth, but this comes a little later. When it's all started, and my mother and brother, especially my mother said, "You go west, never go east." You must remember your relatives in America, and in England. In London, remember your Uncle Robert, Robert Schwab. I said, "Yes, of course. He visited us in Libau. I remember him well." Remember to write simply Robert Schwab, Director Shell Oil, London, England it will arrive because he was one of the heads of Shell Oil, but I had forgotten that he was the director of Shell Oil. So, I wrote, "Robert Schwab, London, England." It all went through military mail because you could not write. It went through the Joint Distribution Committee. It never arrived. To my cousin in Salt Lake City, I wrote, "Mr. David Alder." He was married to my cousin Anna Alder, who's in this photograph who went to America, and there I wrote to Mr. David Alder, Director Shell Oil, but he was not Director of Shell Oil, and it arrived to the local manager of Shell Oil in Salt Lake City, letter after letter. He disregarded it, but one day he decided to look up in the phone book in Salt Lake City who this David Alder was. It turned out that he was the owner of an insurance company in Salt Lake City, David

Alder Insurance Company. So, he called David Alder and asked him, "Does the name George Schwab mean anything to you?" He said, "Yes, he is my wife's cousin." So, this was a first contact. I wrote to my other cousin in West Hartford, Broskin, it never arrived because it was just Dr. and Mrs. Broskin, Hartford, Connecticut. It never arrived. But, this man, this one man, immediately contacted my uncle in London and contacted his sister, his wife's sister in Hartford, Connecticut. So, they were already now in touch, but my mother knew to write the correct. So, she independently got in touch, and this way we connected. We were able to speak on the phone, on the military phone once a week.

Q: And, she was where?

A: She was liberated in Lauenburg, it is on the map over there, already in March, and she worked as a nurse in the Russian hospital. Then, she heard later on in May or June that there are a lot of Jews in Lodz, and maybe I am one of those who she could find in Lodz or get some information. Turns out that she arrives in Lodz, gets off a trolley car and somebody says, "Frau Dr. Schwab in German. Frau Dr. Schwab. Frau Dr. Schwab." "Yes, yes, who was it?" It's is Mrs. Dorbian the son comes now several times had come to Latvia. He's my age. We were together in _____. It was his mother. "Do you know that George is alive in the British zone?" She didn't ask, "Where? When?" She was so overwhelmed, she ran back to Lauenburg, picked up her few things that she had, and went to Berlin almost penniless, comes to Berlin and Berlin was a second home to her because she had been very often to Berlin before the war especially in the '20s and early '30s. And, decided she was going to go to the Joint Distribution Committee. She went to the Joint Distribution Committee. They wanted to test her, "Who is she?" She didn't speak Yiddish. She looked like a thousand percent Aryan. So, they were suspicious because many wanted to do things, and she got away with no results, but she went back to the Joint several times, and then there was a woman who said to her, "You know Mrs. Schwab, I believe your story. I'm going to help you." And, with the help of this person, she was able to write to the United States because again, everything had to go through military mail, and through them she found out where I am which the Joint was able to connect me then by telephone to my mother because the Warburgs, the Joint Distribution Committee and the American and the English Relief Unit were sort of the heads of the so-called children's home in the Warburg estate, were able to connect once a week. My mother went to the Joint in Berlin, and I was, of course at the Warburg Estate, and it was pre-arranged what time we would be talking. So, we started to talk, and in those days, it was not easy to go from Hamburg from the British zone to Berlin because you had to go to the British Sector or the American sector because we had to go by way of the Soviet zone, and it took months before I was brought to Berlin. But, in the meantime, when my relatives found out that I was alive, they started bombarding me with packages and money, and every single letter was five dollars, ten dollars, twenty dollars. Sometimes I received a package a day. I didn't know what to do with cigarettes and coffee, but they wrote me they coffee and the cigarettes are not for you, but we've been led to understand that there's a lot you can do with it in Germany. So, that's for that purpose. Now, it may sound very funny, but it's true. I felt that I was

now an independent young man. I've gone through the camps. I'm going to live the life of my parents, aunts and uncles. I am rich. I have now all this coffee, et cetera, and among other things, I managed to get myself a driver with his car. He came to the Warburg Estate. He always picked me up whenever I needed or wanted. I had my wine table in the Alhambra in the ____, it was a kind of a red light district I went to in the evenings. For two cigarettes, I could get it at my age because it was my card l'dentitie.

End of Tape 9

Tape 10

Q: Okay, George, so you're now describing yourself as the reincarnation of that little kid who knows everything. Now, you're a big person and you're all of what? Fourteen?

A: Not yet.

Q: Not yet fourteen.

A: Not yet fourteen.

Q: So, you have money?

A: Yes.

Q: You have – what made you go get a car and a driver? I mean, where does that come from? Is that really-

A: Yes, I don't know how come that I got that driver with that car. I don't remember, but they used to come around to Hamburg to _____, and they had a car, and I started out by saying, "I'll give you a pack of cigarettes if you can drive me here or there." And, then they offered that anytime I wanted, I could have the car with a driver. There were two brothers, and they owned a factory on the other side of Hamburg, in Harburg with 200 people working, and they offered me, incidentally, to buy the factory for ten pounds of coffee and 40,000 cigarettes.

Q: That you should buy it?

A: Yes. So, I figured, "What do I need a factory for?"

Q: Oh, really.

A: Yes, I did, ten pounds. I mean, I didn't have at that moment, neither 10,000 – 40,000 cigarettes. Which meant, I don't know, 400 or 4,000 packs of cigarettes and ten pounds of coffee. First of all, I didn't have it. I had maybe a thousand cigarettes or maybe two pounds of coffee, which was a lot in Germany at that time, but then I figured, "Well, I could ask my aunt, but what am I going to do? I want to have a good time." And, I had now access to the Alhambra. With two cigarettes, you could get in any place.

Q: And, your age, it didn't matter?

A: It didn't matter with two cigarettes. That's what we called a Carte D'identite, and identification card.

Q: And, you had your own table?

A: I had my own wine table there, and it was very interesting, fascinating because you had a kind of a telegraph system there with tubes. If you sat at table fifteen, and you wanted to dance with somebody at table eighteen, you wrote a little bit, "Let us meet in the center of the dance floor, fifteen." And, I just had to write "Eighteen" and it would arrive by tube, and then we would meet or something or other. I knew about as much about dancing as I know about the ballet dancing (laughs), but I learned, et cetera, and because one of the things that I remembered very well became the rage in Latvia before the war in the late '30s was the Tango, and a particular type of Tango Naturno. It was one dance, and the Lambeth walk. People went crazy tangoing and Lambeth walking. So, I was sort of going to live their lives.

Q: I see.

A: There's a German expression Kleiner Mann Was Nun? It was a novel written by, I forget the author's name, "small man, what now?" In other words, looking at it in today's terms, at that time, I didn't know about the author nor about the novel Kleiner Mann Was Nun, and I in the evenings were not really supervised as much at the Warburg Estate. As long as we were there in the morning for hitamulut is what they called it in Hebrew, the exercises, callisthenic exercises, appearing in class, doing some homework. We didn't take studies very seriously. Much more interesting was when we learned a little about how to smuggle arms, and this and preparing for Alijah Bet, not to sit with this dry stuff mathematics or, so, who needed it. Anyways, in the meantime, Julius Goldberg met up with his wife. She was liberated in Cologne – in Kiel, sorry, in Kiel. And, she was in one of the barges that didn't come to Neustadt in Holstein but went to Kiel. And, then he became Norbert Wollheim's driver. Norbert Wollheim became the head of the Jews of the British Zone. And, Norbert was headquartered in Lubek, Germany, and Julius would drive him when he had to go to Kiel, to Hamburg, or to ____. So, usually when Julius had to drive him to ____, he had to go by way of Hamburg. So, Julius would come to ____ with Wollheim, pick me up, take me to _____ to the DP camp where I met Yosele for the first time, Yosele Rosensaft, Manachem's father, for the first time. That was in '45 still. And, then would drive me back either to or at times take me all the way to Lubek where I stayed at the Wollheim home with his first wife, beautiful woman incidentally, and that's how I reconnected with Julius. This is how I reconnected with Eugenia. They were living in a DP camp in Kiel at the time, and I visited them also in Kiel if Juluis picked me up. I saw Eugenia for the first time since the liberation. And, in the meantime in Hamburg, I did this. I did that.

Q: Are you still playing cards?

A: No, I didn't play cards. I didn't need to. I made my money in Neustadt in Holstein playing cards.

Q: That was enough?

A: It was enough. I had plenty of money.

Q: And, are you still getting money from relatives?

A: Yes, getting money in every single envelope, I had at any time, I had at least a hundred dollars in cash.

Q: Really?

A: At any time because in every single envelope there's five dollars, ten dollars, sometimes twenty dollars coming from especially from my cousins in West Hartford and Salt Lake City, and sometimes I would get two or three letters a day – a week from each of them. In every envelope, there was five dollars or ten dollars or twenty dollars.

Q: Do you have a lot of self-confidence now?

A: Yes.

Q: You do?

A: Very much so.

Q: You feel very sure of yourself as a kid there, right?

A: As a kid.

Q: I'm not talking about right now.

A: Oh, I thought right now.

Q: No.

A: Ah?

Q: No.

A: I didn't think of it in those terms, but the answer is yes.

Q: Because you seem to have a way of getting around and figuring out things and...

A: Yes, because I was living the life of my parents and my relatives.

Q: Do you take any – do any of the other kids do what you're doing that you're with? Or are you alone?

A: I was pretty much alone.

Q: You were pretty much alone?

A: I was pretty much alone.

Q: I have tell you, I can barely fantasize it at your age.

A: No, I was pretty much alone, yes. I have a photograph with my drivers in Hamburg.

Q: Yes, we'll show that.

A: You have them.

Q: Yes.

A: So, what was your question?

Q: Well, it's just that it's a kind of self-confidence. It's not clear to me exactly where it comes from, but you obviously have a fantasy of what life ought to be.

A: Just fantasy as it was.

Q: And, you wanted to live it.

A: I was living a fantasy, but I fanaticized before the war because I found it very, very exciting when they talked about when my mother and father were for the first time in Paris in 1928 at Maxime's when the dinners my parents attended in the private home, the private residence of my aunt in Berlin, for the diplomatic core, where Hindenburg would say to my aunt, "You are my Garbo. You have to sit next to me." et cetera. She was very strikingly beautiful woman. She basically looked like Garbo, and the whole lifestyle that we lived was a kind of a fairy tale which I never lived again because I didn't have any means. But, as a child I at least fanaticized right after the war and whatever I could, I did. Then, came the day when I was brought to Berlin to meet my mother.

Q: Wait a second, on the telephone didn't you ask her about nightclubs in Berlin?

A: No, it was – that is coming. I'm coming to this one. In the car, I was taking by the Joint finally in May 1946 to Berlin. I was thinking, "Do I really want to go and meet my mother?"

Q: Interesting.

A: Am I going to live the old lifestyle again with governesses who are rigid – a certain rigid approach? Because now I'm a man of the world. I had my own car. I had

money. I was able to do as I pleased. I'm not so sure that I want to see my mother again especially if she would insist on the same type of rigidity, not the walls, but rigidity to which I was accustomed to. So, when we arrived finally late in the evening, my mother lived privately, not in a DP camp, we lived privately in Berlin, I was brought up and the person – her name was Selma from the Joint Distribution Committee from the Bronx, lovely, lovely woman – and I saw my mother, and I gave her pro forma, a kiss, and she gave me pro forma, a kiss, and the first thing I asked her was, "Tell me, mother, what is the nightclub situation like in Berlin?" I wanted to show her who am I. She looked at me and said, "That's a very interesting question that you're posing. Did you know that until now, I was here all alone in Berlin, but now that you are, we'll be able to explore it together." She disarmed me on the spot, and I was satisfied with the answer and was looking forward to a life in Berlin.

Q: So, did it turn out to meet the fantasy?

A: It turned out, yes, but rather than going to nightclubs, we went to some very interesting cafes. We didn't go to a cabaret. I don't remember, no, because I don't think I could get in in those days, but I dragged my mother literally to two to three movies a day, two to three movies.

Q: A day?

A: A day, sometimes from on movie out into the second. Later on in New York, my mother said, "Well, when you came and you had a problem." But, she was really wonderful. For example, she decided to sleep with me in the same room. I had nightmares, and she would jump up and calm me down from the nightmares, "Everything is fine, George, we're together." And, I went back to sleep, but lasted for months and months and months. And, then she said, "George, I'll do everything possible in my life to make life as wonderful for you as possible for you to forget these horrible years." And, she did it. But, then when she saw that she had a problem, she said, "George, let's go, there's a DP camp. There's some sort of a school, and you may meet interesting people there." And, I was always interested in meeting interesting people. I didn't cherish the idea of a school, but let's go and look at this. And, lo and behold, I went to this school where Renia was my classmate. I was the youngest in my class.

Q: Schlachtensee.

A: Schlachtensee, exactly, I traveled everyday by elevated from where we lived privately in Berlin to Schlachtensee camp and then I went back because in Hamburg, we were all juvenile delinquents, and we didn't take classes all that seriously – spitballs. We used to shoot spitballs at the teachers. So, I thought we'd do the same in Berlin which to an extent we did. We were not _____, and didn't have schooling for how many years? Four or five years. I was a semi-literate buffoon with high falooting ideas.

Q: You lived a very brutal life.

A: I lived a very brutal life, yes. That is true, but there were some very attractive girls in the other class including Renia, and her two girlfriends, Tunia and Rachelka Feigenbaum.

Q: And, Renia, Chris's-

A: Chris's sister.

Q: Chris's sister, Laks.

A: Laks.

Q: Renia Laks.

A: Yes.

Q: You were close in age with here.

A: She's older than I.

Q: A little by a couple-

A: Three, four years older than me.

Q: I thought it was less.

A: No, and I was the youngest, and they used to go the ____ to all these places, and I wanted to tag along because after all, I have from the basis of my experiences, and Renia would dismiss me as this little jerk schnesel, "He wants to go with us." And, the other young ladies, attractive young women laughed at me, and I felt very insulted, and I say to Renia even now, "I still haven't forgiven you." (laughs) We have a good laugh over it, but at that time, I took it very, very seriously. They just sort of dismissed me as, "This little jerk wants to join us ladies" going to the ____, going to the Fifth Avenue of Berlin, to the exclusive places where they went, et cetera, as if I was a zero, so to speak.

Q: Did you and your mother talk about what had happened to each of you when you separated?

A: Over the years, yes, we talked a lot.

Q: But, not in the beginning.

A: Not at the beginning. She wanted me – she desperately wanted me to forget, to involve me in other things, to involve me in other things.

Q: She was really smart with you, wasn't she?

A: Yes, she disarmed me and she became more like a pal going with me to the movies. Later on in New York, she would say, "I thought I was going out of my mind at times", she would say to me. So, but, these were also formative years. These were also the years, where I became very much involved in betar. I don't know if you know anything about betar, the revisionist outfit. I went in eventually to the Stern gang. I was really radicalized, but this is a chapter in itself post World War II.

Q: And, I think we want to take a break now. Did you like being in classes with the Jewish Brigade?

A: Yes because there are certain things I learned which I did not know before – the geography of Palestine, the history, the Alijah bet, the British policies towards the Jews, the ____ which I did not know anything about in Russia that led to the establishment of the first ___, the first ____among others, how the Jews turned this wasteland into a thriving community. We saw pictures of Tel Aviv, wonderful, and I was very anxious to go to a warm climate because during the war in the winter years when it was freezing cold, I swore to myself that if I were ever to survive, I will go and live in a country that has a warm climate. Never again do I want to experience winter, and here I am in New York.

Q: You are, right? (laughs)

A: Yes, and then of course we began to study Hebrew, too, and I picked up a smattering of Hebrew, the alphabet, sentences here, sentences there, so on and so forth, which was good because later on I joined the Stern, and then I studied in Israel for a while in the early '50s.

Q: Did you want to go to Palestine?

A: Yes.

Q: Before leaving Europe and you wanted to go directly to Palestine.

A: I wanted to go directly to Palestine, if need be, fight. I wanted to – we were being prepared in Hamburg for Alijah Bet, illegal immigration because of the-

Q: And, you were being trained to fight.

A: We were being, not as yet trained to fight, but we did smuggle some radios, this and that that we managed to pick up. Nothing very dangerous so far as guns or so, not at this stage of the game, a little later, yes.

Q: And, does your mother know that you're doing this?

A: My mother didn't know a thing.

Q: She-

A: No, she was in Berlin.

Q: So, this is before.

A: This is before, yes.

Q: This is in _____

A: Yes, this is in _____.

Q: Right.

A: So, life on the estate was wonderful. We had socials. I was always looking forward to the socials, the dances, and with certainly what they call in Hebrew _____, the folk dances where the girl has to come and pick you up rather than you to the girl, which I liked very much, and I – no it was very nice, actually.

Q: So, when you went to Berlin, and you're going to the school Schlachtensee-

A: Schlachtensee

Q: Schlachtensee, do you still want to go to Palestine? Or are you giving that up a little bit?

A: I am – my mother began to talk to me, and she always said even out of context to me a man without an education is no man. It didn't register very much. I thought myself of being highly educated.

Q: Right of course.

A: The illiterate that I was, and then she loved to read books, and she would say to me, "I don't understand George, how anybody can go through life without reading a book." I said, "I'm not interested, period. I wasn't interested in studying. I wasn't interested in reading. I was interested in enjoying life, what life has to offer. Then, she said, "Look, until age 21, I'm in charge of you", but she didn't put it – she put it in very diplomatic, polite language, "and before you can make up in your mind if you want to go to Israel, but I want you to come with me to America where you can get an education. Here in Europe, and you see what Europe is like, we will be lost. There's an opportunity. At least you'll get an education." And "Where are going to in America?" She said, "New York." Well, New York was interesting. I remembered the films, the speed, the size, the skyscrapers, some of the films. The idea was intriguing

provided, of course, that eventually I can go to Palestine, to fight if need be. She said, "That's fine, after 21." In the meantime, she would have me, obviously, for six, seven years, I guess to brainwash me. So, we decided that we would go to America, and my cousins provided the visas, and actually they paid for us to go second class, business class on either the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth, and the Joint promised that tickets would be issued for us for to go on the Queen Mary or Queen Elizabeth. We would go by way of Paris to Marseilles – yeah, Marseilles I think it was – embarkation and – no, not Mar – I don't remember the port, and the Joint "pocketed" the money.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, but my cousin said later on, "Let's forget. They used it for others." And, we went on the SS Marine Perch which was a troop carrier. That was in March 1947. We left Berlin together with the Lermans.

Q: This is Miles Lerman.

A: Chris Lerman.

Q: And Renia Laks, who is the sister of Chris.

A: Chris's yeah, and my mother and I. We all went together to Bremin. We all sort of lived together. Aboard ship, Miles and I, we were bunking together, and my mother was bunking with Renia and Chris. So, the twelve days, we were also together aboard ship, and then we landed in New York. And, I was very disappointed because I was told in Berlin, the night before, you can already see the lights of New York. So, the night before, I stood on the deck looking for the lights of New York, and I didn't see any. It was a clear night, and I believed it, and then we docked on 42nd or was it 44th Street and Twelfth Avenue, and these were shacks. I was so disappointed, and it was a misty morning. I didn't see any skyscrapers. I just saw the West Side Highway. This was my first shock of the new world.

Q: You thought it was all a fake.

A: No, I didn't think it was a fake, "Where is it?" et cetera, and we were awaited there by some relatives who took us to Brooklyn actually, Borough Park where we stayed for six weeks, and my mother didn't like it. So, we moved to Manhattan. But, I loved it in Brooklyn in the meantime. I was registered there in the New Utrecht High School in Bensonhurst, and there I fell into an interesting group of Jewish activists, so on and so forth, and one thing led to the other, but this is now coming to the United States, already in the United States.

Q: Brooklyn doesn't have many skyscrapers in comparison with Manhattan.

A: That's right. Brooklyn didn't have any. There was a Hotel St George, I think that was about twelve or fifteen stories, but nothing like the Empire State Building.

Q: How was your English then? Was that okay?

A: Pretty good. It wasn't good, but I would say it was pretty good. I understood, sometimes. That's an interesting story about going to school. It was obligatory of us to get a high school degree, and I lived in the district in New Utrecht, and it was an uncle by marriage that took me to New Utrecht, to Brooklyn, and in Bensonhurst, and I was overwhelmed by the most gorgeous teachers in the world who looked to me like seventeen, eighteen, but where actually – they were actually seventeen, eighteen, but I figured they must be in their late 20s or 30s because they had manicured nails. In Europe, this was forbidden for students. No lipstick permitted, no powder, no mascara, or anything. So, I thought that they were all teachers. I said, "My god, this is going to be interesting."

Q: And?

A: And I registered. I was registered and I started only to find out that they were all students, wonderful, one more gorgeous than the other, especially the Italian girls. They were young, they're absolutely gorgeous, and I skipped a lot of grades. Hebrew from - they tested me and put me immediately into Hebrew six, the last semester. So, I got credits as a foreign language. English, I started with English one. They put me in the most fundamental course, but was transferred shortly thereafter to English three. So, I managed to skip a number of grades. History – World War II history, I didn't read about it, but I knew more than the kids in class. In short, I graduated high school, which I would have never been able to do in the gymnasium in less than two years, New Utrecht High School. To my mother, this was heaven. At least, I have a degree now. Now, let's see where we go from here.

Q: Let's stop the tape.

End of Tape 10

Tape 11

Q: Okay, just a couple of things about what people's impressions of Europeans were like when you came. So, the people thought that you lived a very primitive life, I gather.

A: Yes. First of all, I heard the first time the term "coot"

Q: "Coot"

A: "Coot" and I came home to my uncle and aunt, and I said, "The girls say that I'm a coot. What does it mean?" Cute, but as I understand it, and never knew the word cute, that I was cute. They thought I was cute, et cetera.

Q: Well, that's nice. That must have made you feel very good.

A: Yes, I was delighted, and I sort of reciprocated. I don't know what term I used, but then it was very interesting. I had a science teacher who in one day said, "Look how advanced we are and how backward Europe is. In Europe, the people don't even have eyeglasses." I raised my hand and said, "Not so, my brother wore eyeglasses. There were eyeglasses. I saw many people with eyeglasses." "Oh, you're dreaming. Certainly not in those days before the war, maybe now here and there, but there were no such things as eyeglasses." And, he had eyeglasses and some of the students had eyeglasses. We have eyeglasses. Then I remember some of the friends that I made over there, I visited their homes in Bensonhurst and in Borough Park, and they said to me, "Look electricity." I said, "Yes." And, they were surprised that I was nonplussed by it because they said, "In Europe, you don't have this." I said, "We had electricity." So, they were thinking that I was spinning, or running water or things like these, and when they asked me how I lived, and originally when I explained, they thought that I was fibbing. So, I decided to shut up, and just listen and not say anything because what I encountered here were I guess middle class people who had no inkling what another type of lifestyle may be, and my mother did the same. Only among her friends, she had plenty of friends here from pre-war Europe, we knew at our homes, the homes of my relatives, et cetera where the surroundings were sumptuous. So, in this milieu, I kept my mouth shut because they just didn't believe me.

Q: Did your mother speak English when she came here?

A: Her English was not as good as mine because she grew up with French, and English, she did not participate directly in the tutorials that my brother and I had in Libau, but she was a voracious reader, started immediately to read the newspapers, started immediately to read some of the easy novels, English novels, and picked it up, picked it up.

Q: Did she play cello when she came here?

A: No, she actually thought of getting a job at Radio City Music Hall because the person at that time, his nickname was Pipke. He was a friend of the family way back in Latvia. What was his name, and he was the head of the music of the orchestra in Radio City Music Hall. He converted ____ and my aunt, I remember, telling the story before the war, and I saw Pipke in a train going from Berlin to wherever she was going, and suddenly Pipke is there with a big cross, and I said, "Pipke, what are you doing with this cross?" And, he said, "Well, this and that. So on and so forth, et cetera, et cetera." But, my mother went to see him, and he knew that my mother played, but she said, "Look, I didn't play for years. It could take me" et cetera, and then he said, "I can offer you something for maybe thirty dollars a month in those days or so. She figured because we were living on an allowance from the Joint at that time, and my mother didn't want to keep on getting money from my relatives. She wanted to be independent and we did not – later on we found some moneys back that we had in Europe, but it was a few years later. So, it was tough, but she said for thirty dollars, I can't make ends meet, et cetera. So, she declined, and I guess he was just as happy that she declined. I assume, but he was prepared to give here – but, she had a very rare cello, my mother, by name – by a man named Schweitzer who did many, many cellos, but only two cellos for women, and my mother had one cello of the two which were taken by the Germans, and she got it from my grandparents when she began the music conservatory, this cello. I often claimed, and I don't know if I'll ever see anything by it, but the Germans confiscated this as well, this cello.

Q: So, did she end up working?

A: Yes, she actually for a while, she always loved to stitch maybe a pillow or something, and she was offered something if she wanted to do even at home, if she wants to do some stitching on men's jackets, working piece work. So, she took this and made sometimes a hundred dollars a week, which was a lot of money in those days in the late '40s, but once we started finding some of our funds back, not the major ones, et cetera. So, things began to be easier. The first couple of years were difficult years, yes.

Q: But, then it got easier?

A: Then it got easier.

Q: When did you join the betar?

A: Through the friends that I made in, at Utrecht, New Utrecht. It was a very heavily Jewish group over there, quite radical, that accorded with my tastes, and I became very active in betar in the Borough Park Chapter, and then the issue became whether to join ____ or the Stern, and there was a tremendous discord over one issue – the bombing of the King David Hotel. The issue was to forewarn the British or not forewarn the British. _____ insisted that it was right to forewarn the British even if they would not take the warning seriously. As it happened in the case of the King David Hotel, but so that the innocents will not suffer. The Sternists argued that all

Brits are our enemies, look what they're doing to us, hardly permitting any Jews to migrate to Palestine, and we are not going to forewarn the Brits. And, I was so radicalized over the issue of Jewishness, even though I knew relatively little what it meant, that I joined Stern, and there we seriously trained for all sorts of things including assassination. Interesting, before I quit Stern, that was a chapter in itself because I was nearly shot for it – before I quit Stern, we were going to assassinate Sir Gladywn Jebb. Sir Gladywn Jebb at that time with a British rep at Lake Success at ____. Why were we going to assassinate him, like we assassinated Lloyd Moyne in Egypt in 1944? Assassinated Bernadotte? Because, not because he was not a nice person. He was actually a very nice person, but he represented Britain, Britain's policies toward the Jews in Palestine. So, he was a target, but for various reasons, I quit the Stern group. There was a court proceeding.

Q: You were court marshaled?

A: In a sense, yes, court marshaled for quitting, so on and so forth. But – and we were trained here on a farm in Jersey. Does the name Josephson mean anything to you? Josephson wrote the book, "The Robber Baron's", his brother, I think it was Murray, brother's name, prominent Wall Street lawyer, and his wife. They let us – their estate gave us for basic training. We were trained by Sternists hiding here in the United States. The Brits put the price 5,000 pounds in those days, for their heads, and we were trained. We smuggled arms, ammunitions. We learned assassination tactics. We learned all sorts of things on the estate. The FBI and together with Scotland Yard began to discover what we were doing. So, we had to empty out or ____ what we called storage place of guns, ammunitions, in the Lower Eastside. We dumped it all in the East River. Some of my colleagues were caught. I was not caught dumping some of the stuff in East River. But, an interesting incident happened that affected me very greatly. Our headquarters was on Second Avenue, around Eleventh Street, 149 Second Avenue, and there was a ____ right nearby, a little sort of a synagogue which a ___ where students could study the __, and I went there in order to say kaddish for my father, and I come in and the Rabbi said, I said to the Rabbi, "Can you please help me? I don't know how to put on ____, how to put on all the rest. I want to say kaddish for my father." "What happened to your father?" "He was killed during the war." He said, "They were right to kill your father for not having taught you the Jewish ways." That turned me off. I go now, Yom Kippur, once a year to say kaddish to a synagogue, but otherwise I don't go. It's wrong maybe because of one stupid Rabbi having said this, but it affected me emotionally very, very much, this little incident. It wasn't so much a little incident.

Q: It's a big incident.

A: It was a very big incident, and it was right near our headquarters here in New York on Second Avenue I remember, but the reason I decided to quit Stern because after the State of Israel was created, established, Stern decided not to disband, continue as an underground movement. Arrogated to itself the right to kill fellow Jews, if they,

especially the leaders, if they did not agree to the idea of the Shtei gadot l'jardein meaning two sides of the Jordan, but it's the old tradition of Palestine.

Q: Greater Palestine.

A: Greater Palestine, and that was can assassinate those Jews, and after having suffered what I have suffered, et cetera, kill a fellow Jew? As young as I was, I had enough brain, and as uneducated as I still was, I had enough brain to say, "That doesn't sit right." – was reason number one. Number two, after the state of Israel was declared to be a sovereign state, the ideological head, somebody by the name of ____ who entered parliament in Israel, too at the time, took us into a Marxist-Leninist mode that this is something that we should strive for, we must strive for. It is the ideal world. By having lived in a Marxist-Leninist Totalitarian System, even if I didn't understand it very much, and the hush-hush talks et cetera so that I shouldn't understand, this also did not sit right. So, at a certain moment, I decided to quit because the movement had become my life.

Q: It had?

A: It had where we used to clean our arms and ammunition in my apartment, in my room, and my mother happened to be home and suddenly knocked at the door, and said, "George, may I please see you?" And, I came out, and she said, "What are you doing there?" I said, "No, we're just playing some games." "Are you doing something with arms, revolvers or so?" I said, "Yes, mother." She said, "You know, my suggestion is at least close the window so the neighbors shouldn't hear what you're doing." So, she knew suddenly what it was all about, and I told my mother that when I'm going to be 21, I'll go to Palestine to fight. She said, "When you'll be 21, we'll talk about it, but in the meantime you must also get your education." So, I was combining the two. Anyways, there was a court marshal of me in a basement on Fifty-First Street, Thirteenth Avenue in Borough Park basement, where I was threatened with my life if ever I were to give up the idea of the two sides of the Jordan, traditional Palestine, if ever I were to approach another member of the Stern group that I knew, if ever I were to disclose anything that transpired here in the United States, and our cell structure, so on and so forth. I promised, of course, I wouldn't do anything of the sort, and they said, "Fine, these are our warnings." And, this came to me as a terrible shock because the movement had become my life, and my closest friends I could no longer see, spend time with, or even talk, and I remember traveling to Brooklyn every morning going to New Utrecht from Manhattan because I loved Brooklyn, and from time to time I would see some on the subway, my buddies, they looked away as if I was a traitor. The way the girl looked away when I had the star, and that affected me enormously because the movement was part of my life. This withdrawal, for six months I had difficulty sleeping I remember, and then it went on. In the meantime, I entered college which I wasn't very much interested, but the Stern group said that we had to go to City College, why? In those days, City College was excellent, because you had a special professor there, Hans Cohen, the father of the study of nationalism, et cetera, and he was

teaching there, and some other courses, but especially nationalism, what it's all about – implications, et cetera, et cetera. So, I took the exam and I managed to get in. It was an eight hour entrance exam in those days, very tough, but I managed to get in, and I worked at the same time to help out. I didn't want – I knew that my mother was struggling even though she never said a word, et cetera. So, I wanted to make some money on the side. So, I worked in the library. I worked as a runner for a friend of mine, here in the jewelry district who opened a business. So, I managed some way or other always to earn between ten and twenty dollars a week on top of studying et cetera. So, but I did not have to depend on my mother's meager income. Then, I – at the beginning, it didn't interest me very much, the studies, but suddenly, something clicked and I began to read voraciously because my mother kept on saying always, "You know, a man for me, is not a man without an education." And would say to me, "How can one really live a life without reading a good book." The literature Pushkin, Lermantov, Thomas Mann et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. This is part of life." Because they used to discuss it at dinner tables as a child. It didn't interest me. Characters, who cared? The character's in a book. Ideas were ridiculous. But, suddenly, something snapped, and I couldn't stop reading, and I began to read a lot, day and night, and what interested me particularly was a history of World War II, and one thing led to the other, led also to literature, led to philosophy, led to even an interest in the sciences. For a while, I thought of studying medicine. I met a young woman who was going to study medicine. Her father was a doctor. She was interested in medicine. So, I figured I would also take some courses, and I took courses along those lines, but I reacted very poorly to formaldehyde. Pus developed under my eyes and we had to dissect pigs and rats, and from all the formaldehyde, I began to get rashes here on the side. So, I really had trouble, not that medicine interested me, but I decided to have something in common with the woman that I thought I fancied. But, so much the better that I didn't.

Q: So, you got yourself a PhD in Political Theory, yes.

A: Well, first, yes, Political Theory because I majored originally in history, then Political Science, and then PhD, actually PhD in Political Science because I had majored in History and I always felt when I became already sort of semi-educated that you can't be a good Political Scientist without a thorough knowledge of History especially the Western Tradition from Antiquity to the Present, and you could not be a good historian, without an understanding of political relations between and among states, and international relations, so on and so forth.

Q: So, this must have made your mother really happy.

A: She unfortunately didn't live to see that I got because my first PhD was rejected as a dissertation, which subsequently was published and is now cited all over the world, and opened up an entirely new field of study in the English speaking world. So, I had to write a second dissertation, and that hurts me very, very much that my mother did not see the success subsequently. The second PhD got me into foreign policy.

Q: I see, and then in the ‘70s, you founded the National Committee on American Foreign Policy.

A: American Foreign Policy with the late Hans Morgenthau. So, and which I have been now President for the last twelve or thirteen years, but I was one of the founders, yes.

Q: And, you married in ’64.

A: Sixty-four yes, a Latvian Jewish girl who lived in Sweden during the war. Her maiden name was ____, a prominent Jew in Sweden, head of the Well Jewish Congress in Sweden, who opened negations _____ with Himler, and as a result was able to rescue Jews from ____ Concentration Camp _____. You know the story, and then made some deals with Himler over not blowing up camps in the west, especially _____ which was successful negotiations. So, he made a contribution to history, especially Jewish history, no question about it.

Q: And, the two of you have three boys, right?

A: Triplets, triplet sons. We had a fourth one that unfortunately didn’t make it. So, yes, and they’re all thank God, healthy and successful. So, I really can’t complain. I count my blessings.

Q: Well, I wish we could go on, but it would take us another five or six hours. So, I think we have to do that at another time, and I really want to thank you so much for being willing and able to speak with us. It’s really been a pleasure.

A: My pleasure and my privilege to have done this.

Q: A privilege for me. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you. Thank you very much.

End of Tape 11

Tape 12

Q: What's this picture, George?

A: Oh, this is a family – of the Schwab family taken about 1908, 1909, thereabouts, and here on the right-hand side, that's my late father in University uniform. The woman next to him, she is a born ___ from ___ from the famous Rum family, the Rum Publishing empire as it was known, and also related to the ___ villa. The man with the beard was my great-grandfather from my grandmother's side, who was ___ and so of Lithuania. My grandmother's sitting next to my grandfather. Yes, this was my grandmother on my father's side, and next to her was a cousin of my father's ___, yes, right here. And, my grandfather, of course in the center sitting next to my grandmother, yes. It was in their villa in Libau having probably tea in the afternoon and the table clothes were saved by a cousin of my father's in South Africa, and I have it now at home in New York City. The people in the rear are two of my aunts, Yeta who was killed in Libau, the mother of Mania and ___ who was so helpful to me and to my mother her in the United States in sending me all the money and parcels, and this was my uncle – one of my uncles, Leo, next to them.

Q: _____

A: No, to their ___ Leo Schwab who was killed in ____ in Lithuanian. He was director of Shell for Lithuania. So, this was a family photograph used by Ivor and ____ for the book, "A Century of Ambivalence" written by _____. It was the Jews of Russia and Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present.

Q: What about this photo?

A: This photo was taken in the dining room of one of my aunt's who lived in Riga and was married – this aunt who is here on the right hand side, ___ and her husband Oscar at the other end of the table. Yes, that's right. And, it was a family get together, family dinner which was usual, nothing unusual that was in her home in Riga.

Q:

A: This was my late mother, and this was my late father, yes, and other aunts and uncles.

Q: And, this photo?

A: This photograph was taken circa 1936. It was a wedding reception of a relative of mine, not by blood with her German Jewish husband who came to Latvia after Hitler came to power. They married and came to the United States. They're sitting there in the front row, and this is my father, and this is my mother attending the wedding in Libau.

Q: So, this is about five years after, four years after you were born?

A: Roughly, yes, roughly four years after I was born.

Q: And, who's this?

A: This was a picture. I'm in front in the white suite accompanying, well, saying farewell to my cousin who holds me, Mania. She was on her way to London to embark I think it was either the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth, the maiden voyage. She came to the states, moved to Utah, to Salt Lake City where she married her husband David Alder, who was originally also from Libau. My other cousin is at the extreme right who's still alive now in 2005. She's close to 90, and who with her cousin – her sister, helped us greatly after the war, sent us all the packages and moneys to Berlin and to Hamburg, and we remain very close with them. After the war, here my cousin in the center, she unfortunately died about two years ago, yes.

Q: And, you were wearing?

A: These were all custom made clothes. We didn't go in and buy clothes in stores. I had my seamstress twice a year who would come to the house and do my winter and my summer wardrobe, and this same was the case - my mother had her own seamstress who would come twice a year for a couple of weeks and do her summer and winter wardrobe, and you can't see we also had custom made shoes. We did not go into a store and simply buy shoes.

Q: But, you can't see your feet.

A: You can't see my feet.

Q: Okay.

A: This is my late brother, Bernhard Boris Schwab in basic training. This is a Jewish group from the school, basic training with these Latvian officers. I don't know if these Latvian officers were Jews or not, but the group was from the Jewish School in Libau. It must have been about 1939 or 1940.

Q: Okay, George.

A: This was in Riga in 1940. It was nothing unusual. It was a get together with some friends and mainly members of the family. My brother is right there. My uncles and aunts and some people who I really don't know. My aunt is also there – one, two, three, four, five of my aunts. My mother is not there, and one of my mother's brothers is there, the upper right – no, to his – yeah, that's Isadore, and in front of him is my grand aunt Marta Shifton , and the others were sisters and mainly sisters and friends, family friends, yes.

Q:

A: This is me.

Q: Wait to tell you.

A: Oh sorry.

Q: Oh, it's all right? Go ahead.

A: This is me, not long after the liberation. I think this is the first photograph taken. It must have been two months or so after liberation, where I'm still as I look at it pretty emaciated and that of course is during World War II, during the tough days of World War II, but also with a certain sadness in my eyes, I see, really not knowing the direction I want to go, I guess.

Q: Okay.

A: This was me in Hamburg, _____ on or near the Warburg Estate, and what I'm wearing is what I got in one of the parcels from my cousins, from my uncle in London or my cousins in the United States.

Q: And, who's this group?

A: These are friends of mine, and I'm in the front kneeling. It was right near the red house on the Warburg Estate. These were people, also, kids in the children's home on the estate.

Q: Okay, this picture.

A: That's me in front of the car that I used to have in Hamburg. I don't see my driver there or his brother, and I paid in cigarettes or coffee, and I was driven to wherever I wanted to be driven in the Hamburg area. I didn't ask them to drive me let's say to Paris or so, but in Hamburg, I rode in style.

Q: And, who's this?

A: To the left to the gentleman in his hat, is my driver. The one who is behind the wheel is a friend of mine, and I stand in front of the car, and the car is in front of the white house that was the main house of the Warburg Estate, and that's where I used to reside, in the white house for a while. I never resided in the red house, but for a while I also resided in the guest house.

Q: That's quite a coat.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Okay, George.

A: Yes, this was taken at an outing in Berlin, Berlin Zoo when we visited, and I am there. That's me, yes. Two of the teachers are on the picture. Here, yes, this is one of the pictures, and the man with the hat was another of the teachers accompanying us. The others were all students from my class including Renia then known as Laks, now known as Renia Gelb who lives in New York City.

Q:

A: And, then there are the two women with Renia. This one – yes, no, this one – yes, and then Tunia Rybak, and Rachelka Feigenbaum, next to Renia, to the right of Renia. These were the three ladies who used to go nightclubbing in Berlin, et cetera, who sort of dismissed me outright when I wanted to tag along thinking that I was too young, perhaps not all that sophisticated at the time or whatever, but that was the "normal life" at the time.

Q:

A: This was in Berlin 1947, Summer '46.

Q: When was this exactly?

A: This was in the summer, late summer of 1946 in Berlin.

Q: That's a correction.

A: Correction, yes.

Q: And this picture?

A: This was in the Schlachtensee DP camp in Berlin, 1946. I'm on the extreme right, yes.

Q: And this shot.

A: This was taken aboard the Marine Perch in February 1947 on our way from Bremin to New York. On the extreme left, you have Chris Lerman. That was Miles Lerman, my late mother Clara Schwab. This was Renia Laks, Chris's sister, and that's me.

Q: You're wearing a baseball hat.

A: Yeah, also the jacket and the hat I got from the states, and my mother's coat is also from the states.

End of Tape 12
Conclusion of Interview