

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Klaus Meier  
November 7, 1990  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Klaus Meier, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on November 7, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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**KLAUS MEIER**  
**November 7, 1990**

Q: Would you state your name and birth date please?

A: My name Klaus Meier, and I was born on March 29 in 1932. I was born in Switzerland, near the city of Zurich, where my parents lived in a kind of a community, socialist, agnostic, semi-religious, because they felt that the only way people can live together in peace and harmony is by each one giving what he can and receiving only what he needs for life. My father will tell his own story. My mother has passed away already, but he was seeking for a long time to find this justice between people. As I said, I was born in a little farm there which they had rented. And while they were living in community there, they got to...into contact with another community which started in Germany 1920. I want to give a brief history of this community because it's important. Everett Arnold, a son of a missionary in Africa, sent there by the Arnold family from North America had also had this great longing in his heart to find what the way of Jesus is, the way of justice, peace and love, which the prophets and the Tennah speak all about all the time. And after much searching and seeking, (clearing throat) passing through the first World War, he felt that what is told in Acts 2 and 4, that they were one heart and one soul should be lived and practiced to meet this need for justice and love and peace. He started in Germany 1920, and he was always on the look, this man Everett Arnold and his wife, on the look out for other people who had similar longings. So he got into contact with my parents on the little community in Switzerland near Zurich. My father (clearing throat) was ...uh...he rejected...he took part in the military in Switzerland, but rejected it. He couldn't see killing people as being just and so he lost his...all his possibility for higher paid work. And on this farm they were milking cows, working in a cooperative and so on. The community in Germany called Bruderhof heard about his stand of non-violence, his refusal of military service, his going to prison for this in Switzerland, and Everett visited my father in prison and later on had contact always tried to encourage him not to give up community. The problem was that in a socialist agnostic community like my parents were in...as my father says, there's always as many ideas as there are idealists, and unless you find unity in community it will break apart. The tensions are too great. So in this Swiss community, they didn't find unity. The question of education, how to spend the money, how to work, what to...what part to take politically, all these questions divided the members. Whereas in the Bruderhof, the community in Germany, there was a unity which was possible. You could feel it, but it was Christian and my father couldn't stand Christianity as preached by the big world churches, the Catholics and the Protestants. Well, when I was 10 months old, my parents...this community in Switzerland didn't dissolve exactly, but one couple after the other went..uh...because they were disappointed with the life of that community and joined the Bruderhof in Germany. And my parents joined that community in 1933, in February, a month after Hitler came to power. Right from the beginning...now this is what my parents tell me. Right from the beginning, Everett Arnold said to the whole community, to the members, "Hitler has come to power. Now we have to decide will we reject that nationalistic spirit? Are we willing to give our lives for what we believe or not? And on this question, some left. My parents stayed. On...I...I had three other brothers born to

my family in Germany. Andreas Meier, my second brother; Hansjurk Meier, and Daniel Meier. I do not remember any kind of persecution in Germany itself, but I remember fear. Just fear. And when I talked to my parents later about this whole question, they told me that already in 1933, there was six policeman who searched the community. Later on, in 1933, there was a referendum in Germany about whether....Hitler wanted to know if the German people support his policies. The members of the Bruderhof put little slips on the...on the voting papers, on the referendum papers, saying, "We respect the government, but we have a leader who is Jesus and we will not...we will serve only him." When the...5 days after this referendum which was in November I believe...uh...there was a big group of Nazi of Gestapo...Nazi soldiers and policemen came and raided the community. They took away books with red covers, proving that we were communists. They took away minutes of our meetings and...uh...so this went on. My father then was sent to take important documents to Switzerland out of the reach of the Nazis. My father was then sent with another Swiss man to the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin to find out what they had in mind with us. Everett Arnold always felt we have to go to top men to find out, and not to the second, third or fourth echelon in the power structure. In Berlin, my father went to the headquarters and they got in there which was also a fearful thing I think, and the man there told them that he had enough reason to dissolve the Bruderhof right because in one of our meetings, Everett had said that the Nazi state shows the character of all states, but it showed it clearest of being from the beast of the \_\_\_\_\_, which according to CHristian beliefs in the book of Revelation is the opposite of God's love. The beast of the \_\_\_\_ is the opposite of God...of God. So this Nazi man said, "Just for having said that, we must dissolve you because you are against everything which the Nazi government represents." Then...so I heard this from my father, and then I know that in 1934, the Nazis sent a school inspector into our private school which they had asked the children to sing the national anthem which they couldn't. We had not taught that. And they said, "We will close your school or send German teachers." This we could not tolerate, so we took our children to Germany. My father was instrumental in this. In Switzerland, our school children were rejected. They did not get permission to enter Switzerland. The Swiss government said, "Be obedient to your government. Why take your children out?" So they did not understand us. And for this...

Q: You recall...what part do you recall as how it affected you?

A: I was then...uh...2, 3 years old. I was not in this school children who left who were in Bruderhof. I stayed on the \_\_Bruderhof with my parents being Swiss and in some way protected from the...from the Nazis, from the German officials. But I remember then for myself as the death of my fourth...third brother, Daniel Meier. He was born in \_\_\_\_ on March 29, 1937. And I remember my father taking me to my mother in the Fulda hospital to see this little baby. And the 14 days after he was born, came the raid which... where the Gestapo...uh...confiscated and destroyed the community as such. They occu...they came in the early morning. I remember that. They surrounded the whole community and they told everybody to get into the dining room. Leave the rooms, the kitchen, the laundry. Just leave everything and be in the dining room. I don't remember getting and ask questions or so but I remember the picture and the fear which...which I had. And the governments...the...the Nazis

said, "Leave right away." But there was my mother 14 year old baby...and the weather was bad. There was some sick people. So we asked them to let us go when the weather is a bit better and we...so they let us stay there 1 day longer. And then I remember how with a bundle on the shoulder, we all got...they took us into buses and they took us to a train...I believe in Fulda. I'm not ...I'm not quite clear to which city. I think it was Fulda. And on the train, then they took us to the Dutch boundary and pushed us over the border. I've often wondered why my father went to the...to prison in Fulda for various reasons, the Nazis can't close the community as because they figured we were enemies of the state. But when they found out there were two Hutterian brothers and I have to explain this, present from North America, they changed the accusation into criminal bankruptcy to have a legal handle to get rid of us. Now I remember these two brothers. And they are descendants of ...uh...people that in the 60th Century in Austria, Switzerland, Moravia, which is today Czechoslovakia, began a life in community like we live it today. And they were persecuted by the Catholics to death. By the Catholics, the Protestants, the churches and the governments. They found refuge in Moravia because hundred years before this, \_\_\_\_\_, there was a spiritual awaking and there was more tolerance in Czechoslovakia than in the rest of the Austrian empires. And we Hutterians were persecuted. I think more than two thousand were burned, killed, decapitated or drowned, whatever they did, and they fled from Moravia into Hungary, then later on to Russia. They lost the community life on two occasions, and it started again. On hundred years ago, in 1874, they migrated to the United States because the Russian who had promised them exemption of military service, wanted to force them to do military service. But they refused and migrated. Now, two of these...excuse me, I have to go back now. Everett Arnold and the Bruderhof in Germany, when they heard in 1928 about that there were...that none of the Hutterian brothers had done military service in the world war; that they had been persecuted economically and with hate and in the United States for not being anti-German in the first world war, many of them were taken prisoners and two of them were taken to Alcatraz and later on to Fort Levensworth, and they died from exposure because of the treatment they got from the American military. After they had died, there were...they put the uniforms on and sent the bodies home. They refused to put the uniform on while they lived. This we heard in Germany, published in the Mennonite newspaper. And Everett and the Bruderhof felt here is a group that unanimously stick to their principles, even unto death. This is something we have to know. So Everett himself went in 1930 to the Hutterian communities in South Dakota, North Dakota, and I believe some over in Canada; visited them all and united with them, 1930. He came back in at the end of 30, I think, or at beginning of 31. Hitler came to power in 33. And in 1937, two of these American and Canadian brothers were visiting the community in Germany just the time when the Nazis...uh...confiscated the whole lot. When...the Gestapo searched everything, they met up with these two and they pulled out their American passports and said, "Sorry, we don't allow this. You cannot search us. We are American citizens." And there the Gestapo got afraid about propaganda in...in America and changed the accusation from, as I said, enemy of the state to criminal bankruptcy which my father can tell how that worked. So we left then Germany in 1937 and I...I thought a lot about why...why is it that all of us escaped without a single one dying in the concentration camp or in prison? And I don't really know the answer except that I believe God protected us. But I know from our side we did not compromise at

any point with the Nazis. We did not raise an arm in salute. We did not go along with his politics. We didn't try to...uh... sort of inch our way in and be friends. We all...not I. I was a child. But the brothers and sisters and always said clearly where they stood.

Q: How...how did it affect you at this point?

A: As I said, I was 5 years old. I was just afraid. That's all I know, and from...from Germany. At certain times, I was afraid. And other times, I was a child growing up in this community very much cared and loved for.

Q: Do you have any memories of what was going on in the community to your community that caused this fear in you?

A: Uh...I...I'm told that also before 37, there were different raids going on. And my father was away often for the community in Switzerland finding refuge for the children. Later on in 35, when the general conscription started, he was off trying to help people. His absence I feel I must have felt that as a child. This is...this is what I can say. But apart from...from this fear I'm talking about, I had a very protected childhood. It was in...within the community, it was protected.

Q: How did the community protect you?

A: I...bY the...I think it was by the...by the love and the confidence that God would led this...see this thing through.

Q: How did your community live at this point?

A: Our community lived on a farm. I'm not quite sure how many acres. They were farming. They were learning to farm because in the beginning 1920, they were all city people, professors and intellectuals, but they were determined to ...to agriculture, and the farming was difficult. The land was hard and they had a lot of work needed to establish a farm. We lived in community houses like the kibbutz do today. We had our own school and preschool and kindergarten. Children were educated in their age groups by members of the community. So the influence from the outside was very low or nothing.

Q: Was the community self sufficient?

A: It was self sufficient up to a point. We took...the community took in any kind of wayfarer...overnight gave him food and lodging. Asking them to work, which they did mostly rejected. We had many visitors, and economically we were doing bad. Not because...so much because of inexperience, but right from 1933 on, the Nazi government tried to strangle us economically. How this exactly worked, I'm not sure, but I heard that at one point they...they forbid...they didn't give us the license to sell our products. We farmed. We had wood tannery, and we printed books. And the sale of books and tannery was part of

the cash income, where as the farm was the food. We...we never sold food. We always just grew food for our own use. And when the...when police...uh...prohibited us from selling then this took away cash and that made it difficult. There was a time in Germany when we had friends outside Germany who gave us money, which was stuck in Germany. I forget what the term is. They didn't allow foreign...foreign currency to get out of Germany, so friends gave us that money and the banks in Germany would not give us the money. So they made our life more and more difficult. We took in children from broken homes and needy situations, which the German government of the Weimer republic had paid for. They gave a certain amount of money. Well, this was stopped. And so here we were with the children and not getting an help either. So this is what made the economic situation very difficult and more and more so. They forbid guests of staying overnight which we didn't listen to. We didn't accept that. And...uh... (clearing throat) so now I think I got to the point that we came to Holland, and my personal story.

Q: How old were you?

A: I was then 5 years. And I remember one of the Hutterian brothers carrying my little brother of 2 weeks....of 2 weeks of age in his arms, and my mother...we all had a bundle on our back and left. I'm very thankful that we could leave. Many, many others could not leave or did not leave in time. In Holland, the group called the Mennonites took us in very warmly. The Mennonites are a group that also started in the 16th Century and belonged to the so-called anti-baptist movement, and they started in Switzerland if I remember correctly, but fled to Holland whereas the Hutterians went to Moravia and Czechoslovakia.

Q: How many of you did they take in in Holland?

A: I think we were about 50 people. Let me say something. In 1933, we were about 120, but when the children had to be... had to leave Germany, we started a new community in Lichenstein. And members of the German community had to move over to Lichenstein to support this group of children. So that was also a weakening of the economic situation, to hold...to maintain two communities is much more difficult than one. So when the Nazis confiscated the place, I think we were about 50 people...children and grownups. Some when to the Lichenstein community called \_\_\_ Bruderhof, and the others went to England where we had already started a community because of the tense political situation in Germany. The young men who received military service in Germany escaped illegally across the boundary and went to Lichenstein. And in Lichenstein the government was very friendly to us, and gave us refuge. And when Hitler started to put his fingers out for these resisters in Lichenstein, they let us know about it, and they said, "Get out of here fast. Hitler is asking about...not Hitler personally, but the German government." So when this happened we needed to find a place somewhere else to go to. And this place we found in German...in England. So as we left Germany in 1937, there was already a community in England. We tried to get into England, but couldn't because they wanted an affidavit of support, the British government. So the Mennonites took us in for 2 months, and they...we slept in their church buildings, in their homes. They gave us toys. They made collection amongst themselves for

toys, for blankets, for food. Everything they...they simply supported us for 2 months. I remember very well we never had any roller scooters if...if that's what you call two wheels on a board and a handle. In Germany, we...we didn't have enough money for such things, but in Holland, there were nice, black topped paths and roads and we got these roller scooters with rubber tires. Not wooden, but rubber, and we scouted around. That was wonderful. Now (clearing throat) I'm told that I wrote a letter from Holland to my father who was in prison with the Nazis in Fulda, and in that letter I did...I didn't write, I dictated this to my mother saying, "If the government...German government doesn't let my father free, I'm going to come with the whole...and knock the prison down." My father received this letter in prison and everybody laughed about it. And then I remember when we traveled to England, we crossed the channel on a boat. And we were a group of 30 or 40 people...children, mostly children and...uh...some of our brothers and sisters from England came over to help us. And one of them was called Adolph Brown. He was a very huge man, 6 feet or more, and quite a...quite heavyset, and he took...he took care of me and my brother because my father wasn't there. And I remember crossing the Channel on a boat. Then we came to England. And in England, we had started this community called the \_\_\_\_\_ Bruderhof, near \_\_\_\_\_. I'm not quite sure geographically where it's situated. And this community was also a agricultural community, and we started farming right away. We built houses and in England then all, the whole community gathered. From Lichenstein, Germany 150 people about altogether. There was an increasing war fever because Hitler was doing his thing, and everybody was getting ready. And so it was a time of decision. And many English people felt that violence is not the answer to human problems, and so in the 4 years we spent in England from 37 to 40...or 36 to 40, the size of the community doubled with English...uh...men and women, married and single, old and young, who felt that a life in community without wages, working together, serving each other instead of expecting service, was the answer to our human needs. And so the community doubled in this size. We had this one community, \_\_\_\_\_. We had another farm close by, 5 miles, called Telling farm, and \_\_\_\_\_ Bruderhof, the third one. And I remember this time quite well. I was 5 to 9...9 years of age. And maybe what could help most for the...for my story now is that there was a time when in England when all the windows had to be black outed. I believe that was when the war started. And so we did this. We had built three houses in willow trees along the brooks. All these tree houses were taken down because the English people were afraid we would be signaling the German airplanes. Being Germans. They forgot we had escaped. They just saw us as Germans. The...I wasn't German. I'm Swiss. But they..they made us take all these treehouses down. They took...put concrete pillows in the meadows so we wouldn't let the German airplanes land and they even...uh...made ditches so that nothing could... They were very scared of us. And I...I'm very sorry for that because I...I don't understand it. They were so scared of us that this fear turned into hatehood, and on one occasion, at least, the surrounding...some of the surrounding population came half drunk, enraged, to burn the community down. The atmosphere in England was very warlike atmosphere. You either were for the English and against the Germans or you were an enemy. This kind of thing. The community supported itself partly also by having a merry-go-round, a vegetable ground, bread, butter, eggs. This was finished from one day to the other nearly, because they feared...rumors were going around that we were putting poison in the milk to kill English children. So this atmosphere



also I felt as a child living in England. We had many air raid practices, living in the 3rd floors of the manor house getting into the bottom. I remember packages of dried banana and some chocolate and nuts in case we were stuck down there. And I remember also that...uh...a German bomb dropped very close or on our property while we were in England. This all made an atmosphere of fear, which I also felt. But within the community I...I felt safe. It...it wasn't a personal feeling. It was a general...a feeling of...of...uh...of war. Now, I also remember that while we were in England, we were approached by a Zionist group and asked if we could train some Jewish people in the \_\_\_\_\_, preparation for kibbutz life. And I think 40 or 50 came and spent some time with us, learning to work in agriculture. And when I went to Israel now in 1985, I came to kibbutz Hasara, with my father and some others, and we met some of these who have been in our community 40 years ago, which was very interesting.

Q: Do you know where these people came from?

A: Where they came from? No. But I think...no, I don't. And from Europe, from Germany, Austria, probably I think. Then the community also took in Jewish orphan children from Austria, from Vienna. We had friends who asked if we could help and we...I'm not sure of the number. I hear about maybe 12 children. And one of them, Lotta Berger, who came Vienna who had lost her parents....they were killed...came to us and she is still with us today. She married. She became a member and she married under the family, a very good friend of mine. And (clearing throat) so we lived there in England. And then in 1940, and in 1939, because of the antagonism of the surrounding people...the government was friendly to us, but the people were very afraid of anything German. So the government hinted to us it might be better to leave the country because if the tension grew, they would have to intern us for our own sake. Another thing which happened to us in England was because of this war fever which could be compared to what happened in North America with the Japanese and the West Coast after Pearl Harbor, this kind of psychosis or whatever it is, made it that the...the police said, "No Bruderhof member could pass the radius of 5 miles outside the community." And when somebody did that they, this was illegal. They got us...we could get permission to leave further than 5 miles, but we had to get permission every time. This was another thing I remember. I remember the German airplanes flying overhead. You could hear by the noise of the motors that they were German airplanes. I don't...I cannot explain it. I was told this. And they...they bombed Coventry, of course and Birmingham and many cities. In our community, we always represented that we have to love the enemy. Not only the fellow man, but also the enemy because only love can break the vicious cycle of violence. I kill you. You kill me. This kind of thing can only be broken and this is what I understand is God's will for us actually, that we should love people and leave the revenge to God as is spoken about many times by the prophets especially. So then when the government hinted that it's better for us to leave, my father was sent to North America in 1940 to find out if we could come to North America or Canada, because we are brothers over here. And in Canada they wouldn't let us in. They had enough trouble with those COs, conscientious objectors living in Canada. Our brothers in South Dakota offered us a whole farm, ready with housing, machinery and everything. So my father went to the...came to New York, came to Washington, lived in the

student union down here in Washington for 3 months and from there traveled with another brother to Canada, South Dakota, trying to find the help that we could immigrate to the United States. The government was very much in favor. My father breakfasted with Eleanor Roosevelt. She was in favor of us coming, but she said her husband needs to make the decision. There was different Senators who tried to help us, but there was a \_\_ election campaign of President Roosevelt, and we were advised it's not good to come at this point. Wait til January or February after the inauguration. As I think about this, the question comes why? Well, we all have clothing like I have it now. Black clothing, beards, which in those days were very rare. We don't salute the flag. I don't salute the flag. I have respect for the government, but I can't pledge allegiance for instance. It goes against my conscience. And so all these things made the government aware that it might not be a good moment to come in. And then my father went to the Mexican government to see if he could go there. It didn't work out. And then the Mennonites again helped us to find a place in Paraguay, South America, which is in the heart of South America. We didn't know where this place was. We looked it up on the map. Now, my father was in America. I was still in England in the community. And when we heard we could travel to South America, Paraguay, we started reading books about the place because we'd never even heard of it. And we read about snakes and jungles and monkeys and...uh...diseases, all kind of things. And then the British government made possible for us to sell everything, get the value of it, and they made it possible for us to take everything we needed out of the country. And I and my family with...together with, I think, 70 of the community, we were on the first group. We left England in 1940 I think. 39 or 40, I'm not quite sure. We went...traveled in buses to Burn, to Liverpool, spent the night there in a hotel which I remember from...went to the third floor. There was big beds and everything, but there was always the danger of bombers, of course, in the night so we had to be ready to...to run down the stairs and into the shelters. Nothing happened that night, and I remember getting on to this ship called \_\_\_\_\_, which the British government used to bring meat in from Argentina specially. And they had one class, which was first class, and then it was a freight ship actually. So 80 of us got on this ship and then everything was black out. And I remember the ship sailing or steaming or whatever you call it...criss-crossed their way sub...uh...submarine attacks. This was at the height of the submarine war when the Germans more or less controlled the ocean around England. So it...that was also dangerous, and we were aware of this. I was 9 years, and I remember how on this ship then, I once had...I had a flashlight and I took it out in the gun ware and shone it, and everybody came and really hushed me up because that was a dangerous thing to do. I wasn't aware of what I was doing, but there was great fear of anything like that. We had a very nice time on the ship. I enjoyed it very much. They gave us very good food in the first class, and there was a big library and films and everything. I was aware of the situation but not to the depth of it. As a child...I was a 9 year old, I enjoyed it also very much. We crossed the Equator and came to Rio de Janeiro, the first city we saw in full lights at night. It was a wonderful sight. Then we went to Buenos Aires, transferred from the oceanliner to a river boat, and there I saw my father again. He had gone through Brazil and Paraguay and looked at different possibilities and met us in Argentina, but you couldn't come on the ship because we were only...they'd only...uh...pass us through...cross Argentina. We...we couldn't...this was under police escort and we were put on a bus with all the luggage and police escorted us

from the oceanliner to the river boat, so that nobody could run away and get into Argentina. So we traveled up this river, Paraguay Parana, 4, 5 days at least. Third class. It got hotter and hotter and hotter and hotter. We ended up in Asuncion, Paraguay, I think at Christmas time, which is south of the equator; therefore, it's the hottest time of the year. And then we transferred to another boat and went up the Paraguay River another 4 or 5 days til we came to \_\_\_\_\_, which is very close to northern...to Brazil in the northern part of Paraguay. There we got...uh...unto to a train without bump...without cushion bumpers without...it was a freight train. We couldn't drink water. It all had to be coffee. So I was trying...I was remember the part of Paraguay Asuncion. The...the food on the living conditions on this boat was very bad. We were on the bottom of the boat. I think there were three or four tiers of beds, or bunks, and I remember now, there are no lights on this river. The Captain has to steer the boat by the seat of his pants, as one says. The river rises and falls and the sand banks come and go. It's wild. And the boat gets...the boats gets stuck sometimes on sand banks and ...uh...so we were the only one that traveled in the bottom of the boat. The next groups and there were maybe 10 more, they traveled first class or second class for safety's sake. So we got up to this Chaco station...uh... \_\_, and there we took the train 144 to kilometer 144. Now you can imagine. There were young babies, mothers, expecting mothers, fathers, everything...old people, young people, on this train traveling 144 kilometers into the bush. Another name for the Chaco is Green Hell. And I can't confirm it is...it is Hell. Many sand storms; hardly any water; very hot, and very inhospitable; poisonous snakes. You name it. Tarantulas, diseases. All this is there. And kilometer 144 we had to wait. We were heading toward Mennonite colonies, and if you remember I said that in Holland, Mennonites had helped us. When our immigration to the United States was not possible, again, Mennonites helped us find this place in Paraguay and they alerted their members there to...we are coming and so kilometer 144, we waited. It got dust. Some horses wagons were supposed to arrive to fetch us. They didn't come. They didn't come. But in the end they came. I think there must have been 20 wagons. Horse wagons from 2 horses to a wagon with wooden wheels, metal rimmed. We put our baggage on and everybody got on and we started off. It was so dusty you choked and could hardly see anything. We drove...we went through the night and stopped for a couple of hours. Around midnight, scared of snakes, but no...nobody got bit. And the next day, we arrived at this colony in the Gran Chaco of Paraguay called Sanheim, where Mennonites who had fled from Russia and who had come from Canada I think to avoid public education by the government. They wanted their own schools. They'd come to this place in the Chaco in 19...in the 20s, so by 1940, they were quite well established. But they told us about many difficult hardships which they experienced there. Now, when we got there, they had prepared a banquet for us in their church. Long tables, white table cloths, coffee with milk and sugar, home baked bread with butter, and home made cheese, and I can still taste it to this day if I think of it. It was so good. The families slept in the school houses which the Mennonites had. It was holidays and...uh...I remember we stayed about 2 months. And while we were staying there, the...the...my father and others looked around for a suitable place where the community could settle, where we could start building houses and live a community life again. And they traveled around. This I hear. I...I didn't do it myself. They traveled around. It was very difficult to find any place, because wherever you go, you needed water. And the water in that

Chaco part is all brackish water, very hard, but bitter and to find a sweet water well was a rare thing. The other thing that concerned us as we lived there for 2 months, we heard that the whole Chaco is a military area under the...under the government of the military institution, which we also didn't like too much. Now, I remember as a child...oh, yeah. When we were there, my...let me think. I have three brothers...four brothers live in Germany, and in England a sister was born in my family, Verena, and then another sister, Hannabeth, and the third sister was born in the Chaco right there in the Mennonites...there with the Mennonites. They had a hospital there. Our communities had brought 3 doctors who had joined the community in England, and they came out with us and this doctor was there, and helped my mother in...in the time of delivering. Other children were born there. So I would like to say that in this whole process of fleeing for conscious sake, there were quite a few things to consider. Pregnant mothers, little babies. These things. I remember meeting Indians in the Chaco. They were so-called wild Indians with loin cloth and...uh...the feathers they had in their hair, but they were all very friendly. And as I was told, these Indians also had a type of community life. They...if somebody got something, they brought it to the oldest woman in the tribe, and she would then distribute to each one as you needed. They cared for each other and helped each other. And for this reason, we felt quite close to them. My father tells me that he met some of the...of the leaders of the \_\_\_\_\_, of the Indian tribe, and they gave us some land. And my father asked him, "How much do we pay?" And the Indian said, "One dollar." And then the brothers asked shall we sign a document, the Indian said, "No. Shake hands on this. That's enough. We feel...we feel something from you which doesn't require any legal documents." In the end, we decided not to stay in the Chaco. It was too difficult. The agriculture \_\_\_\_ was too bad. It was too hot, and then this military question played also into it. So then the brothers went to what is called East...east Paraguay, \_\_\_\_ Paraguay, and there along side some other Mennonite colonies, we found a big...not an estate, a big...uh...cattle ranch. I think four thousand acres or something like that, maybe more. And the man wanted to sell us and we bought part of this. And we called it...it was called Priwara, which means Spring. So when this became clear, we all got on a truck and they drove us out on the truck to the train station. We got back to kilometer 144, drove to Kasaro, got on a boat, and went down 2 days I think...2 days and a night, to a place called Protorosario, which means Rosario Port, and there again Mennonites fetched us with their horse wagons. We drove 60 kilometers inland to this new place which we had acquired. There were no buildings on this place. It was nothing. It was just wild woods...uh...plains, swamp, and while the members of the...the men of the community start to build houses, we children stayed with the Mennonites in their schools, in their homes...I think again for at least 1 or 2 months. And then finally we could all move up to the Primiwara, and start our community life again. As I think about the whole thing, from the sake of conscious, my parents started from scrap just about every 10 years. In Switzerland were scrapped and they went to Germany, they started from with nothing, with the Bruderhof, and the left that, went to England. So and that is a difficult thing, to start with nothing, everything 10 years is quite something. Now in Primawara, we started building houses. Uh...In that country, there is a lot of timber, so we had to get timber. You cut the trees yourself. You can't buy it. You cut the trees in the forest. You bring them out what they call \_\_\_\_\_, which is a contraption consisting of two enormous wheels 6 feet high, big wheels with an axle, pulled by 12 oxens and the log maybe

30, 50 60 feet long is balanced under this axle and the oxen pull it out of the wood and then you cut it up by hand. You can imagine this was all a lot of work for everybody. We built four big halls, a roof, no walls, no interior walls, and with just curtains separating the different families and there we stayed until we could build better housing. We started right away with agriculture, which is basically all we knew. We start with tannery, wooden tannery. In Paraguay, there's some wonderful woods, exotic woods, which make beautiful vases, sugar bowls, candle holders, things like that which people buy. So we went into tannery and agriculture. We started our own school there, and I remember that there were 3 woods. It's hot in Paraguay. It's sub-tropical country, and...uh...summer it goes up to 100, very humid. Every day a thunderstorm, and winter it goes down to 32 degrees, 33 fahrenheit. There was a little bit of ice, no snow, but cold because we were not used...having hot weather all the time...to this cold weather. So in this place called Priawara, there were three wood islands. The first one...the first one we cleared and built a dining room, communal kitchen and a store house. And the second little wood which was maybe 100, maybe 200 yards away, was the preschool and the kindergarten (clearing throat) and in the third one we cleared...and I remember with machetes we cleared the cactus on the brush, and then we...there we built some school houses, school rooms, where all the children were educated. We had our own teachers which we always wanted. We...we feel that in this community life, we want to have certain values. Values of love, peace, justice, and we...(clearing throat) we know that the teachers have to have the same values as the parents for a school to be...uh...wholeheartedly going in one direction. So this we had our own school with our own teachers. It was difficult, but other people died so simply by being able to live, it was a great...a great thing already. In Paraguay we stayed til 1960. I lived there for 20 years. I also lived part of my life in Uruguay, and also a country in South America, Montediveo. (Clearing throat) While we were in Paraguay, there were some revolutions. There're always revolutions somewhere going on. And we were on the...on the battle line...uh...different parties winning and losing. They always asked us to help them supply wagons with horses to carry the ammuntion and the soldiers. We always refused this. If a soldier's hungry, we give him food. If he's hurt, we'll help him, but we will not take part in furthering military objectives in any way. And this was dangerous. My father, again, was...he had to meet these officers and they threatened to kill him more than once by not...by refusing to help. But I feel that by holding on to values which one has, it's the best thing we can do. If one starts compromising, it gets...one gets on slippery ground very fast.

Q: What was the government's reaction...

A: The Paraguayan government was...is a Catholic government complete. The whole country is Catholic. They took us in because they needed people on the...on the land working agriculture. Paraguay is a country which lost...I don't know exact the figures, but they had a big war with Bolivia, Argentina and Brazil, and they lost enormous amount of people there, especially men and boys. So they needed people to come to the country. Not business people in the cities, but on the country. And therefore the Paraguayan government gave us religious freedom. We were not Catholics. They gave us complete authority in our villages. No policeman had any business there. They gave us freedom of school...of teaching children

how we wanted, and they freed us from military service...uh...for generations. And this...this was...this made us very happy that this was possible. So the government was very friendly in that way. And we worked hard. We started an industry of...uh...wood saw...sawing logs, and this tannery and printing from...We worked together with a speaker, an organization from the United States, which helps third world countries improve cattle...uh...corn, soybeans. Different things like that. They came to us, and we had some very good agronomists amongst members, and so they had a station on our land where they experimented to improve peanuts, corn, soybeans, and so on. So we worked with them, and that also helped us, of course. In the beginning, the cow...we needed milk for the children. The cows were all wild cows. They gave half a cup of milk if you were lucky. So we needed to improve the dairy, and this took year but it got improved eventually. For us children, it was actually a nice time. We never suffered hunger. We...we didn't get to eat meat, but we had bread. We had beans. This is fine. One doesn't need to live in big luxury to feed comfortable. We had the school there. We were cared for. There was a lot of sickness at first. Eye diseases....uh...tropical sores, hookworm, malaria. All these things happened. But...uh...standing together and helping each other and supporting each other made it possible to get over this time. Now, the...the school was all in...in English I think. I'm not quite sure. In Germany, we spoke only German. In England we switched over from German and English. In Paraguay, it was German and English and then English I think and Spanish, so I grow up in three languages. That's why...that's why my spelling to this day is a little wobbly as Pooh Bear would say. So we had this school there, and we had 9 years of school to the 9th grade, and then I was asked with another boy...another boy from the community, to go to public school, to go to high school but you had to need, you need Spanish for this. So he and I went to Asuncion, the capitol, where some other people were studying to be teachers. Uh...Mainly teachers actually we needed. We went there to what's called the Kindergrotto, 5th grade, which is the...the last year of the primary school. In Paraguay, they...I think they use a French system. Six years primary education, six years high school, and then six or seven years university. That's how the system works. So we were quite old,...uh...but we had to do this last year's primary education, kindergrotto. We didn't know any Spanish hardly, and we had...we had a heck of a time. (Laughing) Even in the State-run schools, they hardly had any...any...uh...notebooks. No textbooks, so the teacher dictated. I remember writing everything down as fast I could. They speak very fast, and then I went home. He...my friend and I and asked help of an older man from the community who was studying to be a teacher. He tried to decipher what we had written down so we could learn it later. And I stayed in this community in the...the Bruderhof house as we call it for quite a number of years trying to get this education. This Bruderhof served a number of functions. In Paraguay you can't just.. uh...order something and UPS brings it. It doesn't work like that. It doesn't work like that, so all the buying and selling went on in the capitol and then you had to organize transport from the capitol to the colony. And especially in the beginning years, we had to buy sugar, the soap, the wheat. Everything had to be bought in the capitol and then transported to the colony.

Q: Okay. They're changing tapes.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

A: So this house which we had in..uh...in Ascunio, the capitol, was a building which we rented and later bought. And this study was the young people studying, mainly to be teachers or going to secondary school, high school and maybe could be compared to high school. We also had some people there. We had a...store, where we sold tanned goods from the...from the community in the country. And we sold quite of these tanned things out of wood. Mainly tourists, Americans who came through brought these. We also made there orange juice, concentrated orange juice and sold it there. And this capitol also, all the business was transacted. As I said, sugar, flour, soap, matches, all the things we didn't make ourselves. Cloth. All the things we didn't make ourselves had to be bought somehow and then transported up to this colony which we had. To get from Ascunio to the colony took about 2 days...a day, a night and a day. One night traveling with a little river boat, maybe...yeah..to \_\_\_\_\_ and then a day's travel with a horse wagon from the port to the colony...to the community. While being in..in Ascunio, I remember a time of revolution which happened every now and then and there was wild shooting. They have...uh...metal telephone on power poles, sheet metal and you could...they were like sieves sometimes at the end of these revolutions. You know the bullets going right through them. This all made me...made one remember the times of Germany, England, so this kind of thing went on. We...I stayed in Ascunio, together with the other people for the whole school year, because things started in January and ended maybe in October and then for the summer holidays I went back to my family in the community in the country. Another important thing that...that happened to us was since we had three doctors on the pharmacists and the helper on the pharmacy who came with us to Primaware, this community in Paraguay, when the...when the surrounding neighbors found out that we had three doctors, they came flocking because there was not a doctor in a hundred miles circumference. They had no where to go with their disease and there's plenty of tropical diseases there. Leprosy, \_\_\_\_\_, hookworms. I tell you it was terrible. So these people all came for help. We...we did what we could, but also lacked help. So very early in the game, then we sent people to North America, brothers and sisters to go to visit big pharmacological places here in the States and beg for medical equipment, medication, money, whatever to start to help these people down there. And bit by bit we built a hospital. I think at the highest point it had maybe 30 or 40 beds. The doctors did all kinds of operations. Uh...People came when the children were born, hookworm treatment...uh...Saturday night brawls. All this kind of thing came to the hospital, and we did what we could. We asked payment insofar as the people could...could pay, but I don't think we ever insisted. We didn't go to court to demand payment. That we never did. Some people paid with eggs or a pig or a cow, but we have to realize that in Paraguay the people living in the country are very poor. They don't have any money. They have very few things. And so we just helped basically. We just helped. But food...sending people to the United States...the people coming here found other people interested in a different way of life where the rat race is cut out. You know running after money, spending it, having to spend it. Day and night keeping going ...and this kind of frenzy some people didn't want anymore. And they were looking for a different way of life altogether. So when we sent people up there, they met some who were interested and they came to visit us in Paraguay which is very important because we were very isolated in



the country, and we never wanted to live for ourselves, for our own edification, for our own salvation. That is not our purpose. Our purpose is to show everybody that people can live in peace and justice and harmony together. That this is possible right now. And we are...I am not better than anybody else. I've got the same inclinations, temptations in my heart, but the question is where do I call it...where do I say stop? And living in community, having this goal of love to each other...a true love which admonishes which helps. This kind of love is what actually every human being longs for. And so we did never wanted to live for ourselves. We wanted...we hoped that we can be a witness to other people that the life and brotherhood is possible. To Catholics, to Protestants, to Jews, to Moslems, to Agnostics, to Atheists, it doesn't matter. To bums to rich men. And so when these people came from North America, they asked many questions. Why you do this? Why you this? And this is good for us. We need to see what we're doing also through other people eyes and...and see if we are still true to what we want to do. And so this was good. In 1954, I think, well we had people then in the States traveling all the time, meeting with interested people. There was an intentional community movement in the United States in the 50s, and so we visited these people and some wanted to join and some said, "You're too far away in Paraguay. Why don't you start a community up here?" So in 1954, we started a community in New York State near...between Kingston and Poughkeepsie. There's a little town called Roseton, near Newport, and there we bought some land and some houses and started Hutterian Bruderhof where people could come and see if they were ready to join or if they wanted it all, and so this was very good. (Clearing throat) Now back to Paraguay. I went to school and then I went to University. I was training to become a doctor, a medical physician. And as I said, there were different revolutions going on so when I was in first, second year in medicine, there was a big upheaval in the university and South American altogether and also in Paraguay. The students are active social movement. They...the young people protest injustice, the political oppression. And so the students were always in a... in a revolt, you know, in a stir, in a commotion, asking for justice. But one day the police came and closed the university down because the government didn't like this social upheaval. They called it communists. And...uh...so the closed the university down and the Brother decided that I should go to Montediveo in Uruguay to continue with the studies. And so I went down there and finished up later on. And it was in Uruguay, the little community called there called Eldorado, about 10 miles out of Montediveo, where the...where we started another little community. It started just with a few people working in a dairy farm and then we felt it's better not to be employed, but really start a community so we did that. We bought, I think, maybe 20, 30 acres with some housing on it. We sent families down there. Because we wanted to be near...near a place where people...where we could talk to people and meet people. We didn't want to live for ourselves. And also in Ascunio, we didn't find enough places for the young people to be educated in different things, and so this community in Elarado, near Montediveo, Uruguay was supposed to be another center for young people to go to and train. Maybe I should say at this point that in our community we, the children born into the community are not members. There's no automatic birthright membership. The young people they are born there. They grow up and we try to give them as good education as we can which varies. In Paraguay it was very limited. Here in the States, we're very grateful for the education into high school which is free of charge. But this wasn't so in

Paraguay, so...so these children as they grow up, they...they get educated. They get to know what this community life is all about, but then we're very interested to let them experience how other people live so they can come to a decision seeing both sides of the picture, so to say, and come to a personal decision. If you want to join in the Bruderhof, it cannot be for..for the parents' sake. It cannot be for brothers and sisters. It can't be for a good life which we now have. We have a good life now. It can't be for any kind of...uh...comfort. It can only be for the sake to show the people can live together. And we found that if we do what Jesus said, it happens. Now, I want to go back to the time in Germany. When my father and I and a group of others visited Israel in 1985, we knew that the question of the Holocaust would come up and there our Jewish friends asked, "What do you think of the Holocaust?" And my father answered after a moment of silence...I was there. I heard it. He said, "The Holocaust is a judgment on the Christians. Because (clearing throat) all the Germans who did the killing were nominal Christians. Catholics and Protestants. And I know that Jesus did not say kill your enemy. He didn't even say kill the handicapped. He didn't say kill the imbecile, the mentally handicapped. He said love your fellowman which is told in the Tennah by God himself. So this...this love is what we need, and so therefore we said in Israel and kibbutz Hasara in 85, "It is a judgment on the Christians because they did not do what they said they were." (Clearing throat) And then my father went on to say, "But if we Christians and you Jews don't take a lesson, don't learn from this Holocaust experience, the Holocaust will come that takes all of us." And I think the present day world situation is just about that.

Q: Have you been back to Germany?

A: Yes. I went back in 88 once. We had gone again to Israel, invited by the kibbutz movement to visit them. We stayed there 3 weeks and then back to Germany. And I remember going to the train station there and I had all these memories coming back from 1937. (Crying) So I remember that. We have a little...I hope it doesn't matter if I skip around a bit. So this was the answer my father gave about the Holocaust. Now for the last few...since 1 year we have started a community in Germany again in Bernba, near Frankfort, in the \_\_\_\_\_. And we went to this...we went to this village and we bought a property which used to belong to the Catholic Church. It was a children's home. It was very well suited to community life. It had plans for three or four more big buildings, community-type buildings. And so we bought this property and then a resistance developed from the inhabitants of this small village of Bernba, 400 people maybe, which was so...uh...strong against us coming and against us extending that a Lutheran...Angelical minister in Bernba said publicly in a church, "Have we forgotten what happened 50 years ago? That we are so antagonistic and hateful to people who are not fit into our system?" She was referring to 1937...uh...to the whole Nazi time where foreigners, Jews...uh...second class citizens were simply hated and exterminated. She...she said, "Is...are we there again? Have we not learned?" There was a real confrontation there and we..we don't know what to do. We invite the neighbors to come and see and talk. We sing together, but there is a real little circle there that wants to get us out of Bernba. This caused an uproar in the newspapers. Television companies came and made, you know, televisions and...uh...programs which were broadcast all over Germany. So we think again this attack on us in the end served something good. People hear about the brotherly way of

life.

Q: Is the community still in existence?

A: Yes. In Germany, we are still holding on. We don't know how to go, but we're still holding on. We have no permission to build. We have no...we can't do a thing because the village authority hasn't given permission yet. But we hope it will mellow. We heard that the place we bought in Bernha was a real Nazi center for Nazi, you know, so maybe their spirit is still there. Personally, I don't think that the Nazi spirit or this hate spirit can be eliminated by killing the people who represent it. I heard that Cohan was killed...murdered yesterday or two days ago. And he was...he was very right wing and...and hateful to other people, but I don't think killing him kills the spirit he was serving. And this is...this is what we think all the time. And it...on the \_\_\_\_ Bruderhof, I remember that the brotherhood which we called the Committed Members, they wrote letters to Hitler, to Goring, to the Gestapo, to the Nazi officials in Kassel, stating our situation very clearly. We respect the government. We are not intending to overcome it with violence, but we can have nothing to do with certain values they uphold. So we want to love the enemy, but without killing him, without hurting him. This is...this is what we aim for. But this is a struggle for every person. I...I can be committed to a goal, but it still is harder for me to work towards, because I'm just a humanbeing. So here I digressed a little. (Clearing throat) Now, let me think a moment. So we started a community in the...in North America and we...(clearing throat) in 1960, then we decided to close down all the Paraguayan communities and all come up to the States. We went through a difficult time in our communities which I maybe can explain best by saying our Hutterian forefathers from the 16th Century compare a community to a lantern, a glass lantern with a candle in the middle like they used to have. And the community is a lantern, but the important thing in the lantern is the light in the lantern. The lantern serves only to let the light shine out. And this light for us is Jesus as love, justice and unity. That is the light. And we lost this light. And...uh...(clearing throat) so the things that destroy community life---self-will, selfishness, egotism, huddling, back biting--all these things that destroy community life came in. And in 1960, we went through a time where we (clearing throat) everyone was faced with the question what do I want with my life? Do I want to serve love or do I want to serve myself? And on this then (clearing throat) a large number left us. And the rest we came together in North America here, and then we started the community in Connecticut in Norfolk, Connecticut and that's the northwestern corner. And we were...we bought an old place...it is a castle. We don't like castles, but this was a place where a hundred people could find lodging right away. And so we bought this place and 50 acres and in a feel for different groups, we moved up from Paraguay to North America. Because we needed to...together to find the way to work for the values we had set. And as humanbeings, we have goals but we always liable to...to move either to the left or to the right and lose the way, but we are determined to find it. And so that's why we came together in North America again. While in Uruguay, I met my future wife, Elana. She was there studying music. She's part...she's a daughter of the family of the community. She came down to study music, and we got engaged down there. And we were engaged for 3 years, because it was in this...this whole time that we closed one community after the other and moved up to the States so there was

no time for a marriage. But when she came up in January 1962...I came up in November 1961...(clearing throat) we decided to marry. And when I say we, I mean my wife and I and the whole community because all such actions are take...the decisions are made together. And so we married in June... 24th of June 1962. (Clearing Throat) We had a...it was a wonderful occasion. Then we had two children in Connecticut and then we were asked to move to our community in Pennsylvania which had also started. Maybe I should say here that (clearing throat) when we decide free willing...when I decide free willingly to become a member of this community, I declare my readiness to serve wherever it's needed. So I can work in the shop making toys for children. I could clean bathrooms. I could work in the dining room. Where...wherever I'm needed. I don't want to fulfill my gifts specially. I'm here to serve. And so in this sense my family moved to the Pennsylvania community, and I worked there in the shop. I worked in the school. And then in 1972, we moved again to the Connecticut community 1973 to be with my father, my mother, and the parents of my wife. They were getting older. My father-in-law, \_\_\_\_\_ and so we...we came together to support them as children in this time. So now, what else?

Q: I guess if that's the end of it, that's the end of this tape.

A: I think that's the end of the story. I would like to say that we are very eager to meet people from all kinds of backgrounds, to talk, to exchange and...and to see if maybe they also free willingly would like to join with us to give this witness of brotherhood. That is the purpose.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you very much.

Conclusion of Interview