United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Charles Siegman
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PREFACE

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CHARLES SIEGMAN
July 24, 2003

Q: Welcome.

A: Nice July day.

Q: Indeed. Tell me your name.

A: My formal name is Charles Siegman, my birth name is Charlie Sigmann, or Jechiel Sigmann, I was born Jechiel, the Hebrew name, and that itself is a introduction to where I come from. People always ask, how does a good Jewish boy get the name Charlie from Holland. And the story is that my father had to register me. In Holland, all children had to be registered by an official roster of names. And when my father came, he asked what's child's name, he answered Chiel, which was the shortened name for Jechiel. And Chiel was not on the list of names, and he had to choose an official name. So the first Ch was Charlie. That was a Dutch name, and so my name became Charlie. And when I came to United States, they changed it to Charles, because Charlie looked like a child name.

Q: Right.

A: But [indecipherable] re-registered or became a citizen, I finally made it to Charles Jechiel Siegman, so --

Q: And were you called Jechiel at home?

A: Yes, Chiel, yes.

Q: Chiel?

A: Chiel, or Jechiel [indecipherable]

Q: And when were you born?

A: October 13th, 1935.

Q: And you were born where?

A: In a little suburb town of The Hague called Scheveningen, which was a fishing town, but it was a really an adjunct town of The Hague, and eventually my parents moved to The Hague in 1940.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So -- but it was a little -- known for its fishing fleet, in fact, and in the war, the name Scheveningen was the shibboleth term by the Germans and the Dutch, because the Germans couldn't pronounce the sra sound of the guttural ch of Dutch, and they said S-Shravening -- Shaveningen. So when the soldiers who were dressed in Dutch uniforms, German soldiers, the early stage of the war, were asked whether you're, you know, friend or foe, and say Scheveningen vischenschuit, they said Scheveningense vischenschuit and they were shot. So that's the part of the town, anyway, it's a small town.

Q: Sin -- since you were such a young person during this period, having been born in 1935, it would be good if we could try to distinguish between what you actually remember, when we talk about the experiences, and what you were -- what you were told, so we can get an idea what your memory is versus what you're remembering from other people's, if you think we can do that.

A: Correct. Yes. Difficult to identify every --

Q: Yes, no, no, I understand, right.

A: -- part of the element. This definitely is a blend, what I recall now, or I relate now, is a blend of what I recall -- what I think I recall --

Q: Right.

A: [indecipherable], as -- what I've heard, which I have seen confirmed, in fact, what I have -- things have re -- recors -- subsequently confirmed in writing, so I guess I attributed it to my recall as well. And what I've read, and heard, and talked with my brother and sister, or others. But as I've mentioned to you, otherwise, my recall is spotty, and more in the sense of mental imprints, like [indecipherable]. Some absolute I recall, I -- I fix in my mind to this day I could see certain pictures, and I don't have a running --

Q: Right.

A: -- [indecipherable] a commentary, nor the chronology thing.

Q: Right. [indecipherable]

A: Definitely months, or periods which I have no idea what happened when, or whether anything happened at all in a three month period.

Q: Right.

A: But I know episodes, and episodes kind of tell my story in the context of the Holocaust, or Shoah.

Q: Right. Let's get a sense of your -- your family before we get into your particular tale.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Who was your dad, and what did he do?

A: Right. My father was born in Poland, Przemysl, established Jewish little community, and he moved to western Europe, I believe first to Germany, then to Holland, in the 20's, before he was married, in fact.[indecipherable] long time settler, and was another refugee coming from eastern Europe, or from Germany to Holland, lived there for many years. He was not a citizen ever, he was stateless, he was Polish nationality. But for Holland he was called stateless, but Polish nationality, I believe. My mother came originally from Zborow, which people think wer -- was Hungary, could be Ukraine, cause the countries this -- have shifted management over time, and was raised in Switzerland. At a very young age she moved to Switzerland. Her parents were -- grandparents, parents were one of the early settlers of the east European families who moved to Zurich. Again, that family, that group of families, I was told, could not move to Zurich, didn't have the right to move to Zurich, they moved outside of Zurich, to -- they had a lot of restrictions. And my parents were married in the early 20's -- in '22, and the wedding had to be held in Frankfurt, because a large number of members of the family couldn't receive visas to go to Zurich, where the -- typically, the bride's family town would be the wedding. I have the wedding picture of that wedding with me, which is a nice memento. That also has a Shoah story about it in fact. But anyhow, my father lived in Holland, and he was a postage stamp dealer, had a postage stamp store, had a wholesaler type of business, and had the store and lived origin -- he originally lived in Amsterdam with my older brothers were born in Amsterdam, and then moved to Scheveningen, and he had a store in one of the main streets. So he was a middle class person, nothing, no -- not an activist, not a Socialist, not a pervert, or what have you, and belonged to the east European community in Scheveningen.

Q: Ca-Can you explain what it means to own a postage store, that's not stamp collecting, or is it?

A: Yes, stamp -- no, stamp collecting, postage stamps.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: Stamp collecting, or providing postage stamps to other stamp s -- th -- used to be many more small stores in Europe, to this day there are more than United States, who -- that specialized in particular items, so there -- now, also there are few postage stamp stores in the United States, most probably have s -- some Bethesda. But that was the job, to collect stamps from the other countries, and organize them by country, and know the dates, and the value, and they sell them to dealers, or to customers. So, postage stamps. He had his own, apparently a very personal, good postage stamp collection as well, which he gave over to someone, acquaintance or a friend, we don't know exactly who, before the war. It never returned after the war.

Q: Do you have any recollection of going into the store?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: No, no, no, not at all, no, no. I -- but I do know that he dealt with postage stamps.

Q: Right.

A: Whatever that meant, as a child, but oh -- but I-I see them around, I mean postage stamps were very popular, much more than today --

Q: So you recall in the house seeing the postage stamps?

A: I saw, yes, yes, yes.

Q: And did your mother work as well?

A: No, I believe she was home, as far as I recall. And we -- as -- we are a family of five children. I was the youngest, born in ’35, and my sister in ’33, and my brother in ’31.

Q: So ma -- so Leah is born in ’33?

A: Y-Yes, ’33 --

Q: And Leo is born --

A: -- Leo was born in ’31, and my two other brothers who were killed during the war, in Auschwitz, they were born in ’26, and ’24.

Q: So that’s Aron --

A: Ah -- yo -- jos -- Josef --

Q: Jos -- Josef?

A: -- was born in 20 si -- 1926, and Aron -- Erik, was born in 1924. So they were substantially older than I wa-was. As a child there’s a big difference, obviously.

Q: So during this period before the war, between -- before the war comes to the Netherlands, between ’35 and ’40, what is your memory of that household?

A: It was a household that was living, I would call middle class life, going to do certain activities, like with fam -- family oriented activities, and Scheveningen was a resort town, so there were a lot of visitors, and to this day it’s still a resort town, the beach, and -- so it was an active household. I don’t know much about the social life of my family, so I can’t

relate to that. But so I know from the child [indecipherable] I do recall two personal incidents which are interesting in their own right, but the fact that I recall them, but also the interesting feature is that both of these little child events -- childhood events where I was actually was saved, kind of -- that's all I recall. The first one was I was lost in the beach. So the family went to the beach, that's [indecipherable] a kind of standard activity, it was probably on a Sunday, and I was lost, that's not unusual. And the police picked me up, and I do recall that I was sitting on the policeman's lap, with a policeman's cap on my head, waiting [indecipherable] was apparently relaxed enough, till they found -- till I was found, I think my brother came to pick me up, and then reunited with the family, so I was saved. That was what -- what -- what do we do. Second episode which I recall, was I took a walk with my sister [indecipherable] or Leah, and walked through a -- most probably a shortcut through a park, and was hit by a wooden swing, that time the swings were wood, and I was apparently unconscious. I had a sort of a scar right over here. They tell me that had it been a m -- centimeter or two above, I would have been brain dead, centimeter below, I'd have been blind, because I had a big, heavy impact. I had stitches. Those days you had stitches with like staples, I remember that. And I remember the gift coming home to soothe my return, was a wind-up crocodile, which I wound up and I played on the dining room table, back and forth. So these are kind of vignettes which I recall, but they kind of illustrate I'd led a child's normal, quotation mark, child's life in a home environment.

Q: Do you remember your parents at tha -- i-i-in that period when you were [indecipherable]

A: Yes, again, I remember them as, y -- know, se -- senior adults.

Q: Right.

A: I was the baby of the family, and I don't remember any story or event that kind of left a mark with me, but I knew my -- my mother was a housewife, and remember cleaning the house, and taking care of the household events. The hou -- I mean, the household, as far as I recall, I have heard was kind of gran -- rather normal. We had a lot of visitors, I do recall people coming by, and we confirmed -- subsequently I met certain people, relatives [indecipherable] I visited when I was a little child with my parents, and down the line. And that was a kind of -- it was a f -- a close link to families.

Q: Right. Was it a religious household?

A: Yes, was a religious household.

Q: I see.

A: It was re -- we were raised -- ra-raised as observant Jews. Synagogue --

Q: Was that --

A: -- attending --

Q: Was that unusual in Holland, or --

A: No.

Q: -- not so much?

A: Not really, no. First of all, Holland has two or three communities, the more -- can't say native, but more Spanish, Portuguese Dutch are oriented, people had a number of generations. They had their own synagogues, and own community. Then there were the east European Jews who came in, who were not always well accepted and integrated. But in Europe in general, there was much more traditional conduct by people affiliated with synagogues, and went. My parents were fully observant, a kosher home, and active in Zionist organizations. My brother -- my older brothers, Josef and Aron belonged to what later became Brei Akiva, but precursor of those that were active in that, and I do kind of have memories on Shabbat afternoons, they were leaving to their groups. All I really remember of my two older brothers in a mental, visua -- visual image, is two lanky, tall boys with berets -- common people used to wear berets, and weeker pants, which were rolled up at the bottom a little bit, leaving, coming and going. But they were kind of active in youth organizations. So it wasn't, again, in the broader sense, that description were a normal family, as people would have liked to live, and were not allowed to live.

Q: D-Do you recall your little friends that you had during that period [indecipherable] family and your --

A: I do not recall friends at all --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- in fact, I mean, in part because we had a sizeable family and had two children -- my bro -- siblings were close enough in age, I suppose. So I do not recall from before the war, anyone by name, or so. That's a -- whether I had it, I just don't know, I mean, never discussed that with my brother or sister at all.

Q: Did you go to a nur -- was there something [indecipherable] to a nursery school, or --

A: No, I do recall starting school in 1942. I was only half a year in school. We went to what's called then a public Jewish school, it could -- what's called nowadays day schools, most probably. They were Jewish schools, and this was bef -- my brother went before that -- I had to go, cause at the time already when I was going to school, I had to be enrolled in a Jewish school, it wouldn't -- now the Nazis did not allow --

Q: So that was late already.

A: Late already.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I do remember for going to school, and in kind of the courtyard, singing, playing, and I was supposed to be a good boy, called in Dutch, witte boontje -- bon -- boontje, that was a white bean, that's description of being in -- a goody-goody boy, or so. But the school period was a very tense period. People -- there was all kinds of talk going on already around the house and in the school, murmurings. What it meant, I had no idea. I knew that something was brewing.

Q: This is in '42?

A: That was '42.

Q: But you didn't know what.

A: No, but there was something unusual, was nothing -- it was like something was involving -- and I sensed, I di -- I do recall sensing -- to the school year was both disrupted obviously, I was -- it couldn't last very long, several months only, but it was not a normal school experience, because the people in the classes were eventually in doubt. People came, and people left. And I si -- this I -- this I did sense, that was an indifferent -- not -- not that I had been in school for many years, so as what I did go to a pre-school, I don't recall. But it was not a stable environment, and this I had sensed right away, both at home, where there were murmurings, and most [indecipherable] parents whisper amongst themselves something, you know, something that's serious. What exactly it was, I don't recall. Was as bes -- I -- and was probably children brought into discussions. And of course I was too young, because I was a child.

Q: Do you have a recollection of 1940, when the Nazis occupied?

A: No. No, no, no.

Q: So you don't --

A: No, wa -- w --

Q: Is -- is there a transition for you at all?

A: The big transition really was when I was in school and I felt that -- I mean, for it -- I think it was big discussion which school I should go to, whether I should start y -- with school. I re -- kind of there was general discussion, I was on -- certainly going to go to school. Because that already in -- was -- was probably the fall, I assume school began in the fall like over here, was come to the end of our freedom, because people -- there were deportations, and there were round-ups and there were sh -- transports taking place, so there was some discussion whether or not I should start school. In retrospect it appears that my family, my parents were almost, I think, you know, how to deal with the family situation of how to -- not escape, but wh -- w -- to find means t -- how to survive. So if

they have to -- if I hid -- if they would place me in hiding, or what have you, then you don't start school, necessarily. But anyway, I did go to school, and that school environment, I sensed there was something in the air, what I don't -- couldn't specify.

Q: But the kids didn't talk with each other, that you remember?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, not --

Q: Do you remember seeing troops? Do you remember seeing any soldiers, or --

A: Noth -- I can't -- ca-can't -- I'm looking [indecipherable] at my mental photograph file there, no, I don't recall soldiers. There were soldiers on the street, but wa -- I may have treated them as policemen, or so, so --

Q: Right. So you never saw anything that made you frightened, or --

A: No, no, no, again I that -- in that respect my parents protected me, kept me, you know, do things -- I wore the --

Q: A star.

A: A star.

Q: And you remember that?

A: On the clothing, yes. But again it didn't impact me as it would have done later. It was a, you know, decoration that something -- that the -- only Jews were wearing it, I may not have been sensitive enough.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: Okay? But I had to wear it, yes. But that's, you know, you wear your sweater, you wear your jacket.

Q: And do you think that the same protection and feeling of being -- you're pretty safe, was true for your -- for Leo, and Leah --

A: I don't know how far hi -- how hi-high it would went, right, then because an -- a -- a child in general is left out for these sort of discussions, and the youngest, I was a young child, was not -- was not a party. I was -- I was almost six and a half, seven, right? So I was [indecipherable] a party to these discussions. I don't really know how much my brother -- my brother I think even more.

Q: Leo, or the older --

A: Leo, Leo, Leo. The older brothers definitely.

Q: Yeah, I mean --

A: But I had very little ongoing contact with my older brothers, except as being older brothers, but not on a playing se-sense, and I don't even recall which grade they were -- they were, you know, adults, and they were adults already. By 1942 my oldest brother was -- '24 to '42 -- ah -- was 18 years old, and [indecipherable] was 16.

Q: Right. So they were much older.

A: They were much older. So the contact between a seven year old, and a 18 or a 16 year old are --

Q: Big difference.

A: Big difference.

Q: Right. Now, do you re -- do you know how many months you might have been in school? Was it a few months, or --

A: I think we were in school three, four months.

Q: Before you went to Westerbork?

A: Before -- no, before Westerbork, I was -- we were already -- our family was split up. In -- in November, December, I think, our family started splitting up.

Q: 1941.

A: '42. '42. 1942.

Q: '42.

A: We end up in Westerbork in '43, and in Terezin in '44.

Q: Uh-huh. Okay.

A: [indecipherable] '42 now.

Q: Okay.

A: So [indecipherable] say it was -- that's why th -- you say whether or not I would go to school was [indecipherable] issue, cause by '42, in the fall of '42, later developments with Dutch Jewry oc-occurred already, deportations, shipments, round-ups. We were not last, but we were not first, either.

Q: Okay, so --

A: So the family planned to [indecipherable] our situation, and what wa -- was happening -- what happened was that my mother and two older brothers, Erik and Josef -- Aron and Josef, they went to one location, my sister to another, and my brother and myself to another. And bro -- those locations were strange in retrospect, but made sense at the time. There was a notion that certain people are less likely to be rounded up, or perhaps even immune, exempt. So if you stay, even with Jewish families that have that character about them, you are protected. So the notion was that my mother and her brothers, who were of working age, they were put into a -- a mental asylum, because the thought was that they don't need -- they're not going to be prom -- people at -- either accepted or believed the case that there were the people being shipped for work. So, they're not going to take people who have mental problems, they'll leave them alone, spend your energies elsewhere. My sister was placed in another type of home, and initially with, I believe in her case, a pregnant woman, who again they thought wouldn't be taken, or a woman who had just given birth. That was sort of conventional wisdom at that time, and so we were separated from our parent, and the parent itself -- my father stayed at home.

Q: Your father at home, your mother in another place, where is the [indecipherable]

A: My -- my fa -- my -- my mother and my two older brothers in another place, and my sister in one place, and my brother and I in another place.

Q: And where were you then?

A: With my brother.

Q: No, I know that, but --

A: To -- to this family, I think to -- to a woman had just given birth.

Q: And what were you told about -- I mean, it's very odd for a little child to be separated like that.

A: Yes, I'll see you later, you know, we'll come back. Now, what is interesting is that people had -- ma -- see I -- the reason my father stayed at home apparently, was to kind of settle affairs, his belongings, and who knows what, and come -- and contact with family outside of Holland, I believe, which eventually materialized somewhat for that, and to make arrangements for everybody. So, not clear whether our arrangements were temporary or permanent. My parents were the ones who were making those decisions, and I was obviously not privy to those at all. So they have a sense of being in diff -- sure, things were different, but whether it's permanent or temporary, I had no sense of that at all. And my brother was there, so maybe that acted as a sense of stability for me. And the days went. There also was a conventional wisdom, which was [indecipherable] based on fact, that round-ups took place late afternoon, evening. So in the morning, my father, he went to synagogue, and we went to synagogue too, we met my father every morning at

synagogue. So that respect, things were normal. So we met, and he patted me, chatted me, kissed me or s -- what, and it was a daily event. And my last image of my father is sitting on his lap, he with his tefillin on, and next day I came he wasn't there. So then we knew that he was deported.

Q: And you knew that, or you knew something?

A: We knew something.

Q: You knew something.

A: Right, yeah, my brother and I knew something, right. And --

Q: And this is 1942?

A: '42, December '42.

Q: December '42. So right at the end of the year.

A: That's end of the year.

Q: So you are staying with this -- in this family [indecipherable]

A: Family, right, now that didn't last --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- not di -- no, not -- not two, three months, not -- very short period. That family sofe either couldn't keep us, or what have you, and we were put all three of us in an orphanage.

Q: I see.

A: Because again, the view was that the orphanage is a safe haven. They aren't going to take little children, little orphans. And meanwhile my mother and two brothers were rounded up, my father was rounded up and they move -- they were shipped to Westerbork in the end of January.

Q: Of '43.

A: '43.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And middle of January they were deported to Auschwitz and killed there three days later. We were rounded up a little later, in February, I guess.

Q: In -- in February.

A: Right.

Q: Okay. I think we have to stop it to change the tape.

A: Okay.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Charles, your parents were sent -- th -- your parents, your two older brothers were sent to Westerbork in January of '43.

A: Three, right.

Q: And in February, you think --

A: We -- yes, we arrived in February.

Q: You arrived in February, and were they sent out --

A: They were sent out of west -- out of Westerbork on the 18th of January.

Q: Huh, and -- and when did you find that out, that wh -- that was the transport?

A: Well, through the red -- subsequently, in recent years, I've tried to trace down through the Red Cross, that -- curious to find out what --

Q: Right.

A: -- formally happened, any documentation. Took a long time, oddly enough. It's very strange that the record keeping was so uneven. After the war -- I mean, now moving --

Q: Yes.

A: -- on to a different subject matter, after the war, people tried to find out what happened to their relatives. And in our case, we were more or less told by relatives and others, that our parents were deported and sent to Auschwitz and that was the als -- we had no documentation for that. As a child I did not pursue it very much, but later on as an adult, I tried to pursue it, especially when I read about that the Red Cross had tracing of a sort. And the first few answers was -- is all we know is that they were deported to Auschwitz, we don't know when, where. Later on they gave us a date, but no formal document confirmation. In year 2001st, I got a Red Cross notification with documentation. Now, it turns out that in the Dutch registry, in the -- the government has a regis -- gazettes of a sort, they had ready -- in 1951 printed names of the fate of various people, and they send us a copy of those 1951 items, but nobody who we addressed -- now, had we known that it was in the registry, I would have gone to the Dutch registry, but no one ever hinted that it is available. So the first time I actually had confirmation of my parents death and departure dates, which initially came really out, that was in year 2000. A long time. And in fact, the Yahrzeit celebration -- commemoration, not celebration, commemoration of deceased, was an unknown item for us, we had no idea which day to commemorate. So -- you may be aware that the rabbinate in Israel selected one date of the year for those people that did not know when their immediate families were killed, or died. And they selected the 10th of Tevet, but -- so we observe that day as our Yahrzeit day. So the f --

took us till ni -- year 2000 to find a actual date, which turned out to be the 15th of Shavuot, so --

Q: And did Westerbork have deportation lists, or they didn't?

A: Did they have -- I -- yeah, I'm sure they had, but -- there's just what happened after the war, a lot of people made confusion, a lot of people made efforts, di -- they hit a roadblock, and they kind of called it quits, or so, and nobody came notifying us. I mean, this is a problem, it's a two sided way, be -- those who knew, didn't know us, and we didn't know who knew, okay? So you ask me how do I know the dates, now it's in black and white and confirmed, and it's from lists -- a big list in the Dutch registry. I have a copy of the registry here with me.

Q: Now, did your mother arrange for the three of you to go to an orphanage? Do you kno -- do you know how that was arranged at all?

A: I believe it was probably through my father.

Q: I see.

A: Cause he -- th-they were picked up and -- in beginning of January, I believe, the first week or so, and then they were -- must have been a week or so in Westerbork, and so we were -- was probably more through my father. The -- these -- there were a lot of ad hoc arrangements during that period. Some were planned, and some were, you know, you had to improvise, and as -- when one option kind of reached it's end of contini -- continue, like me being in these private homes, where people thought was safe, they found a next tier. So we lasted another month in these different places, compared to my parents and my brothers. And then you ask me, you know, did I know what was happening to me, the answer is no. I was, know, placed. I was with people. I was most probably being fed, and taken care of, and that took care of me. I did know that i -- used to go to the synagogue in the morning, routine, that stopped. And my brother knew more, he knew that -- what it meant. That once he didn't see us, that he'd been dep -- rounded up and being deported. So it must have --

Q: And he -- he didn't tell you? Do you remember -- any recollection?

A: I don't really.

Q: You don't.

A: I don't really know. I don't know that part.

Q: So not seeing your parents, I mean --

A: Yes?

Q: Being in this different place --

A: Yes.

Q: -- this woman's home --

A: Yeah, right.

Q: -- and seeing your father every day, would give you the sense of --

A: Of some normalcy, also, right --

Q: Some normalcy, right.

A: Exactly right.

Q: And then it stops.

A: Yes.

Q: And now you're in an orphanage.

A: Yes. With other children.

Q: With other children. Do you feel -- you don't feel insecure?

A: I apparently don --

Q: You don't remember?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Yeah.

A: But again, you can keep in mind, if you rec -- reconstruct, if you're among a lot of children, suddenly, you are busy, you play, you eat, and you're taken care of, and you start forgetting. It's like, you know, little children with babysitters, when the mother's -- parents go on vacation, may cry beginning, and subsequently settle down, and -- not that it was so nor -- I'm -- not that it was all shipped away. I don't recall being shipped away. But that was circumstances.

Q: Right.

A: So I did not attribute it to, you know, imminent danger, or -- except my parents no longer were visible with me, I'd -- I -- my mother had less contact, because while I was coming to the synagogue in the morning, was my father.

Q: Not your mother.

A: Not my mother.

Q: I see.

A: And not my older brothers. So definitely I must have sensed things were different, but whether that is permanent, or whether that is dangerous, or [indecipherable] I don't think a child could catch it immediately, because nothing terrible was happening to me. I wasn't being beaten up, or on the street, or something of this sort. So I mean, I was under somebody's supervision and auspices, and that's how I -- I took it, I suppose.

Q: Do you know whether this was a Jewish orphanage?

A: Yes.

Q: It was a Jewish orphanage?

A: I believe it --

Q: So all the kids were Jewish?

A: -- I believe it -- I believe it was a Jewish orphanage. I believe so.

Q: Yeah.

A: But again, based on this assumption, that certain categories of people are going to be bypassed for the round-ups -- the round-ups notion obviously came very known in the Jewish community. People's friends and relatives were being picked up, and people swen -- started going into hiding, or escaping, or what have you. Some tried to make provisions. Then they tried to find ways which regarded what are -- where could we or our children be safe? And the idea of splitting up families was not a illogical step, that if some people can't make it, other could make it. And very often, you can't have a place for seven people, you can have a place for two or three. So you had to split up on practical grounds. So, did it hit me that something was affecting me, you know, lifetime orsat, I doubt it, it was kind of incremental, another step or so. But di -- bottom line was, you know, I was separated from my parents at that age, and that was it. And then separated from my brothers and mother, and that was it. And I was with my little -- older brother, few years older, and a little older sister, and that we were together. And then I followed what was -- not instructed, where I was told to go, where to go, and move, and I moved along with the -- the flow.

Q: And you were a good kid.

A: Apparently.

Q: Yeah.

A: Okay. But in February when we were rounded up, I do recall the round-up part in particular. We put on the train, and it was a round-up place in Amsterdam, the Schouwburg, I think it's called. Schombu -- Schomb -- Schouwburg, it used to be a theater. That became the round-up place for all the Jews in Amsterdam.

Q: But now I'm a little confused.

A: Yes?

Q: Were you now living in Amsterdam? Because they [indecipherable]

A: Oh, the orphanage was -- the orphanage was in Amsterdam.

Q: In Amsterdam.

A: Oh yes, the orphanage in Amsterdam.

Q: But your father was not living in Amsterdam.

A: In The Hague.

Q: In The Hague.

A: Hague.

Q: Which is fr --

A: He was rounded up in The Hague.

Q: I see, okay.

A: He was rounded up in The Hague, and my -- I don't recall where the mental institution was --

Q: Right.

A: It was probably as -- out -- they didn't have institutions in the cities, it was probably in the outskirt, someplace. And -- but the round-ups don't -- they took the collected people and assembled them, and they brought them all to Amsterdam. That was the collection point. And then f --

Q: Right. And you re -- you remember being taken out of the orphanage?

A: I remember the -- being in the train in Amsterdam, and people scurrying back and forth from the window. In fact, one of my relatives was one of -- see the -- they had a -- the council of Jewish -- Jewish council had to do a lot of the paperwork for the round-ups, both identify and do the works. I do recall people scurrying in front of the window, and mut -- this relative of mine who I knew, waving to me. I could see it now, I mean -- and then we were put on the train to Westerbork. That was the next stop, the next movement, in February, sometime.

Q: February '43.

A: '43. Turns out that had we arrived under normal circumstances, we -- they had a procedure in Westerbork when people arrived, the next Tuesday, or the following one, people were picked -- designated to go to the next stop. That time, '43, the destination was Auschwitz. One after the other, every week or two, there was a trainload --

Q: On Tuesdays, right?

A: On Tuesday, right.

Q: Yeah.

A: When we arrived in Westerbork, we would have designated to go the next shipment, but -- like everybody else, it wasn't exceptional. It turned out our good fortune was there was a scarlet fever epidemic in Westerbork, a certain barracks, so they put the camp in quarantine, they wanted to protect the German soldiers, they don't want to get sick. So this int -- this -- they halted the shipments for a week or so. That week was critical for us, because while we were there, during that quarantine, a very good friend of our family's in Amsterdam, Mrs. DeYoung, informed, by telegram most probably, Westerbork authorities, the Jewish people, or the council people who worked there, that documents from our family in Switzerland, with Honduran passports, and also, I think, Palestine visas were made available for us and our parents and brothers. Unfortunately for them it came too late. But that week of window saved us, because then we put in different category of person, because we had Central American passports, and they treated that a little separate, and the Palestine visa part, they also had some benefit for awhile, because they wanted to exchange German prisoners for British citizens or what have you, and it put us into a different classification of detainee, and then we were in this new category, and we were put into different grouping. But without that week of scarlet fever, I wouldn't be talking to you.

Q: You would have been sent immediately on the train --

A: Yes, we -- the norm -- right. The reason why -- we wouldn't be any different than anybody else. That was the pattern, people came, and left.

Q: Now, did you know, cause you're now a little bit older, you're eight --

A: Yes.

Q: Right? Or seven and a half? Seven.

A: Seven.

Q: Seven.

A: Seven.

Q: Were you told -- this scarlet fever quarantine --

A: We were -- no, n-no, we were told --

Q: No.

A: No, but we -- I was told about the papers, something.

Q: You were told that?

A: Yes, yes, yes. The other thing which I was told, I -- again, is our parents, from the train send a postcard. That was very standard to drop postcards, and if they were lucky, other citizens would pick it up and put it into the mail. And was given to my brother, he -- my brother became the oldest person of the family, and I was told my brother had had a postcard from my parents, from what -- what it meant, I didn't know, but it was now wishing us well, take care, and in fact gave us the name of a relative in Switzerland if you need help. And at the end of the postcard our brothers wrote in Hebrew [indecipherable] see you. So I -- this I recall, my brother telling me walking somewhere in Westerbork, and telling pos -- not that -- I don't know, he tells more later, but the -- that we got a postcard from our parents on the train, wherever it is. Whatever that meant for me, I don't know how to re-interpret it, but that little bit of information was given to us, but then we put into a new category of people -- not that we knew that we were different there [indecipherable] cause we didn't have the sense of this timetable which we know now. People didn't know, necessarily --

Q: Right.

A: -- that -- came very rapidly. Now, moving people arrived, stayed, were registered, and then they were shipped out to death camps.

Q: How do you picture Westerbork in your mind?

A: Small barracks, little wooden barracks, I recall, and we were put under the guidance of a s-s -- orphanage equivalent, a per -- one family was designated to take care of children who were separated from their parents, or lost their parents, or what have you. And we put in that group, a man named Birnbaum, Mr. Birnbaum, originally from Germany

apparently, and that was his task. He had a number of children as well, so I became friendly with his child, or he'd like me to play with his child, so I hung around his house more than the standard barracks most of the day. And I kind of took care of us, collectively. But that status helped us, because we not put on lists. There is one episode my brother related to me, which I obviously was not aware of. They didn't always trust those documents, [indecipherable] they were -- were suspicious, and the fact came from Switzerland helped a little bit, but they called my brother in, and was asking him what do you know about Honduras? Do you speak Honduran [indecipherable] knows what. So he was called in, and he was primed by someone, I think a Dutch lawyer, what he should say. And he was told that his mother's in Switzerland, to kind of confirm it, the source came -- that came from his mother, rather than relatives. She was Swiss born, somehow. Was -- lived in Switzerland many years, and apparently -- he told me recently again, that he was called in, and they asked him this question, you know, how'd you get these things? My mother's in Switzerland. And they accepted, asked what -- where's your father, and he didn't -- wasn't given any prompting for that, so he somehow answered, he's dead, and they let him go. But again, I mean, those are kind of intermediate steps where our status was even being questioned, and had they determined that it was a fake, it wasn't -- we weren't really, you know, Honduran citizens, or whatever, the passports were not -- we then would have been shipped, that interval. So we spent the year in Westerbork among children.

Q: So you lived in a barrack with children?

A: Lived in a barrack with children, yes.

Q: Do you remember the food?

A: Very little. Was a s -- I remember a little more the food about Terezin --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- than the food in Westerbork, but there was food. I was, I think, not preoccupied with no -- being, again with -- in a group of children, that -- wa -- which probably helped me in various stages, that eventually yeah, you played, and you spend your time, and wha -- wa-was fed, and that was it. My brother was a little more advanced, so he most probably had to kind of keep his ears out what's happening, and he was therefore more perceptive. But I was not drawn into that orbit at that stage of the game.

Q: Did you notice children coming and going --

A: Coming and go -- yes, yes, yes, yes, I noticed that there.

Q: But that didn't necessarily affect you, because --

A: No, because I was there, you see, and as long as I stayed next morning there -- I didn't -- I mean, it's -- again, under the circumstances, my age, had no reason for me to think

about the instability of the situation. I mean, as an adult, you think my gosh, you know, look what happened, were you scared, were you -- there's no -- no reason. I mean, the saving feature was that I hung around with children, cause I was a child, and I was placed with -- in a children's home, effectively. He was the guardian of a number of children, lots of them.

Q: This Birnbaum?

A: Birnbaum. And I was even better off, I was put in close contact with his own children. So I was playing and maybe eating at his table, who knows what? There were family units in these camp situations, so that kept a little sense of normalcy. Not having my parents somehow did not hit me during that period.

Q: Was there something like a school? Did you have classes at some point?

A: They have both there and in Terezin, they had little groups of study groups to keep people entertained and educated a little bit, and teaching, you know, Jewish subject matter, holidays, songs, and both -- some songs, in fact I do recall the music to this day. And --

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: Wh-What -- what do you recall?

A: There was a round music in fact, Sim Shalom, with the prayer. It was a round. [sings a few lines]. And we sang that, okay? And another one, Shomer Yisrael. Now, they're interesting in retrospect, those two songs, which also in Terezin, the -- exactly the same songs were taught, I recall, is quite remarkable, because both of them are the prayers of hope. We didn't know the translation as much, but the teachers kind of were injecting hope on this place, peace on Israel. Another one is God is the watcher of the remnant of Israel. So, those two songs I remember to this day, but I didn't have -- it turns out that -- that people used to sing them subsequently too, so I don't know what I would --

Q: I see. Sing a little bit of the second song?

A: [sings a few lines of Shomer Yisrael] It was a choir rounding song, or so. And -- so we had instructions, we had learning in both Terezin and ams -- and Westerbork. Westerbork I remember more concreteness that I know the loft where we went up, the third floor of the caserne, third tier, not [indecipherable] floor, had three layers. We went up, and we did our little studying, whatever it had to study, you know, instruction, the stories, holidays, about Israel, Palestine. And there was a watchman in front of the door watching, because we're not allowed to have formal classes, and the watchman in [indecipherable] I remember the watchman, and whenever the SS guards, or their equivalent came by to inspect the place, we got the warning, and we started playing

cards, or games, or what have you. Very, very similar to the story about Chanukah, where people -- one reason why people played dreidl, because they -- because at that time also, people were prohibited to study the Torah, and with guards coming by, and then people improvised games.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so we went through that in 1943 and '44. But there was instruction, but not formal.

Q: Could you read? Did you have some instruction [indecipherable]

A: I had some instruction, well I had very little formal education --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- with three months or so, at best, in Holland, I -- yes, I learned how to read, maybe even before at home, I don't recall where. But I remember I read Dutch.

Q: Yes.

A: And my vocabulary obviously was limited. Was -- didn't develop, I didn't have more -- I spoke Dutch among the Dutch people in Westerbork, obviously Dutch. And in Terezin also. But I didn't read books in the normal sense of the term. But there was instruction. People spent again, their time. They devot -- there were former teachers who were idle, so they had some to do, and people took on responsibility to keep the kids occupied, and study with them. So that was familiar things, but not when it came back after the war I had handicap when [indecipherable] do some arithmetic or anything of this sort.

Q: Right.

A: I didn't have the same background as other children.

Q: I -- I read that the weather in Westerbork was horrible. Do you have any recollection if that's true?

A: Yeah, well, the weather was raw. Dutch weather is not, you know, the most comfortable weather except in the spr -- summertime or so. It's a variation of British weather, wet, cold. I can recall episodes of cold -- periods, but not as a personal suffering part, that it was ca -- always cold, always ya -- again, in retrospect I just don't recall how we survived both the deprivation and weather conditions, both in Westerbork, and Terezin, which is even colder, because we didn't come with, you know, baggage of clothing. Must have had some bags, and as we moved up in age, we grew. Now, I may have taken my brother's clothing, but [indecipherable] my brother get? Now, we didn't grow that much. We were stunted in our growth, most probably, but we still grew. So the question mark still is, where did we get our clothing? We may have gotten it from other people who left, and the children's home may well have supplied us. But we didn't certainly have our own

wardrobe to take care of us, particularly in cold weather. So every so often I do reflect, how did we manage in cold weather in general, with limited clothing, and not having our own clothing, nobody -- no parents, nobody to provide. But I -- I sp -- I assume that these people like Mr. Birnbaum, and subsequently in Theresienstadt the woman who took care of us, kind of assembled material, and that there -- that was part of their job, to make sure the children under their charge have clothing. And where they got it from was probably from people who had to -- we-were transported and left, and then it redistributed. So I don't know how bitter the cold was for me personally. But it -- I do know it was drab.

Q: Were you also limited where you could walk? Could you just stay around where this barrack was?

A: Well, here again see, I in some sense was a beneficiary of being a young child. I had no reason to parade in the large areas like most norm [indecipherable] and I was in this Birnbaum family, in their -- and was probably nu -- wherever I slept in the barracks, in the morning go to the Birnbaum's. So that was my routine, so no reason for me to wonder.

Q: Right.

A: So the restrictions that existed most probably did not impair me, because there was no need for me to wander around. So that respect, being young was a blessing.

Q: And were you required to have a Jewish star on your clothes as well, do you remember?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: You did?

A: Yes, yes, yes. But that did not necessarily, you know, impact me dramatically because that we had -- that [indecipherable] was on my sweater, and I wa -- it was cold you wore a sweater, you wore that with the yode star on it. So again, in looking back on it, being a sm-small child, or a very young aged little boy protected me, gave me my own little area of protection, that I did not face a lot of the other things which I would have faced four years later.

Q: Right.

A: My brother had more exposure, both in Westerbork and in Terezin, because as you move up the ladder of age, you get -- you're drawn into these other restrictions. So I can't say that I felt, you know, restricted or inhibited, like most children in today's environment most probably wouldn't feel restricted if they cannot cross the street. You know, if you ask them 20 years later, did you feel dil -- were you a prisoner of your neighborhood? I don't think they would express it in these terms.

Q: That makes sense. We're going to have to change the tape right now.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: Okay. Is there anything else that you would remember from Westerbork before you get sent to Terezin?

A: Not much ta -- of detail, kind of that could mention -- that I have mentioned. I [indecipherable] come back subsequently.

Q: Right, okay.

A: No, I think that's -- the time passed, and then we were --

Q: Now, you're a year --

A: A year, we --

Q: At Westerbork --

A: -- yes.

Q: -- from what, February --

A: February to February.

Q: -- fe -- February.

A: Right.

Q: So in February '44 --

A: '44

Q: Now, does somebody come and tell you tomorrow you're going to go to another place? I mean, how --

A: Not to me, Leo.

Q: Not to you?

A: Not to me, again. I was -- I don't feel bad being left out. No, but we were told that ending up in west -- in Terezin -- see, in Theresienstadt-stadt, as you know, was a place where they -- that st -- sent people -- a s-second holding place, holding pattern. Primarily people who had certain privileges stay -- privileged status, and our status kind of held, and therefore Westerbork was a place to -- transits, spot to get people out, and so we were there in some sense too long, we didn't belong in Westerbork because we're not transit people, and we were not transit to get transported, so they moved them to a new place,

which -- Theresienstadt, which was designed for our kinds of people, all kinds of privileged people. I had no idea that I was privileged obviously, but that settled in later. But -- so I had no sense that that's a new regime, you know, for me. But my brother and sister were there, of course, must -- that must have been very reassuring, to have my brother and sister with me on an ongoing basis. That was my anchor of family stability, and the rest was activities throughout the day, or evening. So when I was -- when we were going to Terezin, we were put under the auspices of a social worker from Amsterdam, also was being shipped there with her husband, her name was Malka Weinmann, and her husband Paul Weinmann, who -- they placed some children under their responsibility. And we ended up in the train, which again I do remember the physical feature of the train, it was a compar -- a European compartment train, was probably third class, but it was not the cattle train, which people unfortunately were subjected to as well. Was a commercial type of train with compartment, and we sat there, my brother, my sister, myself, the two Weinmanns, two elderly people, Rosens, elderly people, and another girl Alicia Farber, who was separated from her parents, so she was all alone as well. And we had this train trip to another place. And in the train, I was -- was probably playing on the floor, with whatever we had over there, and Miss Malka Pollaczek had a suitcase which I opened up, as a curious child would ordinarily do, and I played with whatever she had over there, I inspected it. And it was a big t-tin can there, and I asked her what is this all about, what is this for? And so she tells me, we'll use that at happy occasion. Turns out it was used for a happy occasion, subsequently for my brother's Bar Mitzvah, close to -- to the following year. But that -- that scene of the train ride I remember like a photograph, sitting there, and we moved onto -- from Westerbork to Theresienstadt.

Q: Do you know how long it took?

A: Several days, I believe.

Q: And did they wein -- the Weinmanns have food that they brought with them, so that you could eat?

A: They brought some food, yes. They brought some food and provisions. And I assume -- I assume now that we also had our little bags -- people allowed to bring along one suitcase, or some bag or so. So whatever we had -- what it was inside our bag, I have no clue, nor does my brother really remember. I asked him. But people had their belongings. And when we came to Theresienstadt, we were placed with the Dutch population. They was s-segmented, they compartmentalized the people. Sometimes different groups met all across th-the borders, in some sense, but we were among the Dutch. That again, in retrospect most probably helped because again, Dutch language was the language we sp -- I heard, and people spoke. Not that we knew people -- I don't think we knew many people over there, but some -- turned out we had some relatives of my mother as well, whom we dealt with, my brother more than I. And we were put under -- she became our guardian, Malka Pollaczek. And she, in fact, was put in charge of the children's home in Terezin as well, which came to my advantage later. The Dutch compound, we were put in the caserne, that -- not -- not barracks, barracks were flat, usually, and caserne was pretty

impressive stone buildings with courtyards, and surrounding were -- originally were made for quarters for soldiers. And they used it for the people who were put into Theresienstadt, in detention purposes, and they multiplied the number of people in the -- those casernes were multiples of what the soldiers were in, was very crowded. Had three tiers, beds -- three bunk beds. And men were separated from the women. And I now went with my brother, and my sister was -- what -- was accessible, I went to visit my sister.

Q: She was in a different place?

A: Also in the same Hamborg caserne, that's where the Dutch were. And they were [indecipherable] pretty impressive stone structures. And in that respect you look at it now, it looks like, you know with the courtyard, with kind of tiered, round hallways. But all of that was very crowded, and not very, you know attractive. But people always say that Terezin is an attractive place compared with the other concentration camps, and they're absolutely correct in that respect, but it's not a place recommend for a vacation.

Q: Right.

A: Or for a pleasant journey. It was -- had it's own drabness all the time, of the stench and the physical environment. So again, I do see a visi -- a vision of a -- of the scene of brown wooden bunk beds, three tiers, and lots of people, and crowded, and noisy. But it was not a calm environment. Bedbugs, lice on the beds, killing at night was an activity, you know to s-swipe them, do away with them. And then had get -- got a new routine in Terezin. Now, Terezin I remember a little bit more, because I was older, so I have more mental images of Terezin. In ret -- in comparison to everything else, it was spacious. Was -- okay? Because you had these big courtyards, and then from caserne to caserne there was another walkway, and when you moved down from there -- there I did walk outside of the caserne for a reason I'll tell you in a minute. So you had a sense of not being totally confined to one building, or one narrow area. And that kind of tri -- helped the physical benefit from being that -- not [indecipherable] confined. But it wa -- once you're in the barracks, it was very crowded. But I was basically confined to that quarters for line-up, for soup, for the meals, and for daily activity. And the learning study group I mentioned before, the study group was up in that loft, up to the left, if I recall correctly, where we -- I went on a basis. So I didn't, again, wander around much till later in Terezin. And a lot of the parts of Terezin I never stepped across, because I had no business to be there. I may not even allowed to be there for all I know. So you stuck where you belonged, and where I had some reason to be. And my reasons to be, to go to visit my sister, or go to the study place, the first stage of my stay there. And spent the time there.

Q: Let me go back for a moment. Do you remember your arrival in Theresienstadt?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What was that like?

A: We had to walk a long distance from the train. Later, I think they extended the train tracks, because when -- eventually right outside of Hamborg caserne, there was a fence, and the train tracks that was visible to my -- later on I saw people come and go, those [indecipherable] my activities during the day. But I don't think in our time we got that close. We had to walk, I think a half an hour [indecipherable] what. But there was a parade of people marching, and I followed the crowd, and I moved along, and my legs held up, and that was it. So it didn't leave as an impression of a torturous rite. I don't know what id -- had no idea what I was in for. See, adults in all likelihood have more uncertainties and more concerns for -- they knew who they left behind, what they left behind, rumors, all of that. So they're walking with a different attitude that I -- I was a child again, not -- be -- being protected and being ignorant helped. So I walked. But I did not, you know, find that, you know, gruesome or onerous. I may have been tired, as a child, but moved along, you know. I was prodded along, and that was it. So I -- that part, in some sense I skipped easier than settling into the place.

Q: Was there a registration process at --

A: There was a registration process, which I don't recall being involved, maybe Miss Malka Pollaczek took care of, maybe my brother took care of it. Vaguely I recall something, standing on lines. Lot of line standing in Terezin in general. Lining for food, was a line always. Morning line-up sometimes. Evening I think also. So there were lines, so -- but at the -- the registration p -- part, again I -- I -- being a child, you -- I take it for granted you stand in line, or you do it, what you were told to do, so -- so it never left a big impact on me, or impression, as other people find that -- was very cold when we arrived in February. And again, as I mentioned, for how we survived overall cold with inadequate clothing, in all likelihood, pretty impressive. Course I went -- we visited in 1996, Terezin, was also February, by chance, and was bitter, bitter cold with a winter jacket, and with gloves and a scarf. And tell my wife that not see how I could have done that so many years before, but I did.

Q: Right, right. Did you see any brutality when you first arrived? Were people screaming?

A: No, no, no, no, no --

Q: Nothing.

A: I don't recall anything like that.

Q: So while it was crowded, it was not a hysterical scene to you.

A: I don't -- I didn't -- I don't recall any of that, I mean I don't know whether there was or there wasn't.

Q: Right.

A: So, I mean I can't be a witness for that. I more recall was the daily routine.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: The food line-up, I recall. All of us had a ration card for the month, and each of us had a little metal bowl and a spoon. How I, as a young child in 1944, held onto that without losing it -- I believe I didn't lose it, I still wonder. Because nowadays a lot of school kids can't keep their lunch card for one day, or other tickets, or so, and that mu -- mean -- it was [indecipherable] my survival. In order to get food you need the bowl, you need the card. And I never lost the card.

Q: Where -- where would you put the bowl? Did you tie it on a belt or something, or you don't know?

A: Carried it with me, or put it back in the barrack when I wa -- was through.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But I have again these images of walking around at the -- at the serving time, with a spoon and a bowl, and lining up. And there was a strategy of where to line up, and when to line up, because the main meal often contained like a barley soup. And if you came early you got the water, if you came at the end you got nothing. If you want to get water and barley, which had the most substance, you had to be positioned in the right time of your line-up, the people positioned themselves, and I recall always people jockeying for position where to go, partly because of what you get. And I was part of that jockeying.

Q: And you knew that?

A: I sensed it, yeah, I knew this, I knew that, I was [indecipherable] to become -- after awhile I become streetwise. And I was again told -- but that was part of my job, to be there on time, at the right time, the right place to get a better serving. There were times I came late. There were times I came too early. But every can't be in the middle, obviously. But that whole -- not tension, that whole -- at -- at -- attention, too, and focus on getting your food or so, became part of your daily routine.

Q: Right.

A: You know, have your bowl and have your food and have your line-up. Like it was a time consuming affair through three times --

Q: And what -- what did this ration card look like? Did y -- did someone cl -- clip off --

A: Clipped off a piece -- I think they were --

Q: They clipped off a piece?

A: Yes, piece of paper I think that little sections to --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- to clip [indecipherable] make it 90 little coupons, and took -- each day took three.

Q: And did you get the soup outside, or inside?

A: Outside, outside.

Q: It was outside --

A: In the courtyard.

Q: -- and you ate -- and you ate outside.

A: I think ate outside, and sometimes inside. But they out -- the courtyard was it -- a place where again, you saw [indecipherable] one photograph, that was the kind of scene you could remember. All Jewish people in -- interned people who were there, with coats and the star on their jackets were serving the food, and then [indecipherable] people who knew who you were, you know? And it was a daily routine. The food wasn't very much food to eat. With black bread, with cok -- grain coffee called ersatz coffee, which kids got too. The barley soup, several times a week there was horsemeat, and vegetables. Now, one vegetable which lasted for me after the war, as well as a -- we called a [indecipherable] initially, is a -- something which young people don't know, now we call them green beans, but they were used to call string beans. Now, string beans had a lot of strings in the one they served. You ate, and you had your mouth, basically you had the feel of those greens, whatever you got, and then the mouth full of these strings, which you couldn't chew, you couldn't digest, and you spit them out, or so [indecipherable]. That was my concept of eating string beans. So after the war, when it was served, I couldn't eat them for awhile. Because they also, still in 40's, they still had some strings, not as much string or so. So that was the kind of food, was not very wholesome, but it kept me going.

Q: Were you hungry? Do you remember being -- feeling hungry?

A: I don't recall feeling hungry, but was pretty standardized meal, no, you know, special features.

Q: Right.

A: Pretty routine, but you went -- that was, again, became the norm, and you -- you took what you got and you went on line in order to get your food, that was -- you came every day, you ate this, and --

Q: Right.

A: -- your rations were adequate enough to keep going. I wasn't working, so I was kind of, you know, wandering around most of the day. And -- but the -- the food item was an important part of the day. And having protect your bowl and your ration coupon was an occupation, apparently.

Q: Did your brother work?

A: My brother did --

Q: Was he old enough?

A: -- he was old enough, he was put in some work activity, like messenger.

Q: Really? Uh-huh.

A: He served as a messenger. Deliver internal -- they had -- see, Terezin was organized as a functioning concentration camp with certain activities, with some semblances of normalcy, and the -- again, the Jewish council had to administer a law from the detail, not the [indecipherable] principles, and people were assigned work, and were assigned to do certain activities. So my brother did work as a messenger, kept him busy, but I basically wandered around the camp.

Q: Your sister, too?

A: My sister a little less, I think also -- she also did. My recollection is that, you know, I played soccer with a tin can, that was my toy, kick the tin can. That was really my outdoor activity. This woman, Malka Pollaczek -- Malka -- married [indecipherable] Pollaczek, Malka Weinmann was moved to administer a children's home in relatively nice quarters, in fact, was one very attractive building that they converted to a home for children, and she was the administrator for it. And after she moved to that place, she found the means to bring me to that place as well if I wanted to, or -- or so. Of course it was a little better condition, better food they served, lard as part a supplement of the food. Where there was [indecipherable] only for children, as we were, loose children at the children's home. And given that we ate kosher, we -- I remember we had a discussion, my brother, my sister and I, whether I should go to that home and -- because the attraction was eating lard. And so first of all, I -- I di -- wasn't eager to separate anyhow, but that [indecipherable] she approached and she thinks it's good for me, I'll be better off, nicer physical environment and better food, that [indecipherable] my interest, so we consulted a rabbi, the rabbi said yes, go ahead, under the circumstances. Go there and eat there, because you have a better chance of survival. So in answer to your question, whether the food was ample, it really was a consideration for me to get better food, with my interest, or so. So I moved to the children's home quarters, and -- but I did go visit my brothers. That was further away from Hamborg caserne, so I had to cross over one -- a big courtyard to get from here to there, and I wandered during the day, whenever I felt like, or [indecipherable] it is. So I had had more space than before, and I did wi -- as a functional walk, I didn't explore the town, or so. So life moved on, and --

Q: Can I ask you something?

A: Sure.

Q: Since you were religious --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and as a kid you understood that --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Did it bother you to have the non-kosher food, I mean that it star --

A: Yes, yes --

Q: -- it both -- it bothered you when you were -- didn't --

A: -- but yes [indecipherable] consideration -- we -- many people who were in these camps, although the food was not prepared under kosher auspices, ate what they could eat, which was not -- definitively not kosher like. Pig meat if they had given it, or horsemeat, or this sort. So -- and all I could do then, eat the horsemeat. I mean, the soup may have had horsemeat content in there, but it's -- now a lard was definitively food from -- not to be eaten, and this we knew, I was raised that way, so it became a issue. That's why I had to -- we had to debate it, or discuss it. And I remember that discussion [indecipherable] no, of what should we do, and then we consulted the local rabbi over there, and [indecipherable] rabbis there who gave me a ruling that it's permissible, and I should go, and it's in my interest to do so. So I knew enough about that as well, my brothers knew more -- my brother knew more, my sister knew more. So it became a legitimate discussion issue, but --

Q: Maybe I didn't ask the question in a way that was understandable. I meant when you actually ate there.

A: Oh.

Q: Did that bother you, or did you say since they said it was okay --

A: After awhile -- no, after awhile -- but no, after awhile it was okay, yes.

Q: -- after it was okay -- it was okay.

A: Yes, I don't think I had a great abhorrence. And most probably kids don't really know what they're eating anyhow, once it's served.

Q: Right.

A: No, the issue was the underlying principle.

Q: Yes.

A: You know, so no, that. I'm sorry, that was your question. I did not sense it was, you know, just didn't taste good, or th -- I didn't put up a battle subsequently of saying no, I don't, that's not for me.

Q: No. Did you know that people were being transported out of Terezin?

A: Yeah, yeah, well see, because we were very close -- lived. We were associated very close to the transport. Outside there was a big fence, a metal fence, and a major part of the day I spent around that fence watching the activity of the train depot. A lot of them -- the arrivals I saw. And when the arrivals came, there was a lot of discussion, because not only I, other people standing over there, where they from? Cause sometimes they came from towns close by. Or from relatives they had, even if they're from a dif -- different country. So that people were identified, and the Czech group came in, so the people said, oh not for me, I don't know anybody. Or the Danish came, late at the end of the thing, same story. So -- but the time you -- first you saw the arrivals, so some you knew, so that this came a discussion point, and people tried to see whether they knew anybody. And they came from Holland, it was a big excitement, because suddenly people -- the adults met acquaintances, or even relatives, and I was part of the -- the watching scenery and taking it in, but not -- no -- I had met -- I never met -- met anybody who I knew, obviously, or anybody who was look -- looking for me. Although subsequently I have to mention to you, some distant relatives of my mother did arrive, and later on we had contact with them. So the [indecipherable] contact with us, obviously. Did I know people were leaving? I saw transports too, but what it meant -- you see, two way traffic, all right? But the injection of new coming -- I did sense, of the people with whom I dealt with, that they weren't there any more after awhile. So there was a [indecipherable] whether people made friendships or so, it's different -- different friendships with people are there for two months, or three months, and fending for themselves, and then they disappear. You become acquaintance, and then you know somebody's name, and suddenly -- sit next to them in the study group, and he is no longer there. I had that sense of coming, going, people moving in and moving out, but where they were going, I had no idea. Where they came from was the curiosity to be discovered. And in line-ups -- in the time of day we had line-ups, the different groups lined up near the fences, so that conversations started taking place, and you started picking up, you know, different languages. Danish sing-song, and as a kid started making fun, or trying to imitate, and learning different phrases from people. But I'd never picked up the language, okay? But there as a lot of interact -- not lot, there was interaction, we had an hour, half hour, how long it took to wait, and we saw different nationalities, and different languages, and kind of came [indecipherable] curious what was going on. So there was more -- I think the arrivals left a bigger impact on me than the departures, because I had no idea where people are going. I knew where they came from. And you -- suddenly you sit next to the

Danes, and you sit next to the Hungarians when they came at the end. But we were not allowed to mix, and we -- there really was a fence between the nationalities, unless they put them in the same caserne. So I became more aware of the change of population of Westerbork over time, but the immediate group of people whom -- who I deal with, my brother and my sister, Malka Weinmann and her husband, midway were shipped out to Auschwitz, cause she was more Dutch, and he was more -- he was Czech originally. So they categorized him, he came under her auspices, and she had other potential [indecipherable] I'm not clear why she survived, but she did. Anyway, that part I -- that one part of the middle of our stay, he was shipped out in [indecipherable] and I do kind of have a image of her being sad for one period of there, but could have been anything, or so, but later on she told me it was -- what was happening.

Q: I have to change the tape.

A: Oh, okay, okay, okay.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

Q: Okay. There was some -- something called the helping hand in Terezin, where children were sent around to help out with the sick, or with the elderly. Do you ever remember anything like -- cause somebo --

A: I was not, because I was in the children's --

Q: Uh-huh, section.

A: Section, or that little, special children's home. And my brother most probably was, when he was -- was a messenger, that was a helping hand.

Q: I see.

A: So he was doing -- delivering messages for different people, Leo Baeck for example, he did -- he ran messages for Leo Baeck, who -- he was a inmate --

Q: Right.

A: -- in Terezin.

Q: Did you ever hear the name Freddie Hirsch, who worked with children there, or not?

A: Nope, no, no.

Q: No. So maybe he didn't work with little ones.

A: No -- little ones, right. No, the -- when wa -- which year was he there?

Q: He was -- well, he was -- I believe he was sent to Auschwitz in '44.

A: Okay, so --

Q: I think.

A: That's o -- that was before --

Q: Before you came, right, right.

A: [indecipherable] came. See, there was a whole group of people who -- particularly the Czech young people who lived in some of these children's homes, they were arriving, I think, in '43, and then they were sent out to Auschwitz --

Q: Right.

A: -- elsewhere, in end of ’43, and ’44.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: So, a lot of people ask me, do you know these people, or those people --

Q: Yes.

A: -- I never was even the same time with them.

Q: Time with them, right. I’m not sure exactly when he was --

A: Yeah, yes, yeah, yeah, ’44, likely.

Q: Did you ever get sick?

A: Good question. No.

Q: No?

A: Remarkably, remarkably, no.

Q: Cause one would think as a kid, right?

A: And -- exactly, as a kid, and my brother and sister neither. I may have been, you know, colds or this sort, but in terms of illness, like dysentery, or typhus, which was --

Q: Typhus, right.

A: -- going on, given that lice and bugs were around me, no, I was spared. Remarkable that I didn’t --

Q: Amazing.

A: All three of us. I asked my brother recently again, any of us were serious ill. In fact, one question which occurred to me, which I don’t know why I started school in 1942, when I was seven, whether that was the norm in Holland or not. So my brother didn’t know exactly, but he says, when you were a child, you had frequent whooping cough, so maybe our parents protected you more or so. I suspect that the schools start at the age of seven, and we’ve had an extended kindergarten. The schools don’t always start that early --

Q: Uh-huh, right.

A: -- in -- in -- in Europe or so. But anyhow, we talked about that, and to our pleasant surprises, we were not sick of physical si -- illness, you know, I mean, requiring infirmary, or --

Q: And did you see --

A: Did I see people sick? Again the pe --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- the wa -- the small group of people I mention -- mention my circle of contacts became very small. I lived with children, and she took -- Malka Weinmann took care of me, and I met my brother and sister, that was basically my circle.

Q: So really very small.

A: So plus ma -- the -- when I went up to these little study places. That was standard, and co -- and again the turnover of people was such. So [indecipherable] when a person became sick or -- was shipped out. You -- people didn't have a tracing -- if you have an ongoing relationship with a know -- fellow, friend or ac-acquaintance, and is -- is there, for no -- three, four months, and disappears for two months, and comes back after three months. The bulk of people who didn't come back, didn't come back.

Q: Right.

A: Whether they were sick, or in -- or wensh -- went elsewhere, di-didn't know, penetrated, and I wasn't focusing attention on this kind of thing. But personally, remarkably enough we didn't get sick, not in Westerbork, not in --

Q: Not in Terezin.

A: Not Terezin.

Q: It's amazing.

A: It's amazing, absolutely amazing.

Q: Really amazing.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you get ho -- how do you be -- how were you treated -- as a little child there's a lot of touching that goes on with children, being hugged, and being touched, and whatever. Di -- did you get that? Do you remember?

A: I received that from Malka Weinmann.

Q: You did?

A: Yes. She was attentive to me, and matter of fact she took me into the -- her orbit, direct orbit. I perce -- now, I was paid attention, I had access to her, and vaguely I recall once or twice, and I came to her with some kind of complaint or so, and soothed my feelings or so. So I had that, it was not the -- she had a lot of children to take care of, and she was not -- in general she's not a touchy -- was not a touchy person, was a very professional woman, very capable, and very caring. But to go and, you know, hug every little child under her care, she couldn't probably do her job, or --

Q: Right.

A: -- or so. So I, did I lack that? Most probably I -- I -- did I miss it? Again, I di -- those -- those were my circumsta -- I mean, I was both accepting, and not knowing any better.

Q: Yes.

A: Okay. I just -- I appear to have adjusted to the circumstances, and I moved with the tide.

Q: Right. Which was lucky, I suppose.

A: Which was lucky, yes.

Q: Ho -- how would you describe your relationship with Leah, and with Leo? Did you talk, did you play?

A: We talked, no, we were in conta -- I ta -- I mentioned I c-come -- gravitated back to them --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- or so. We were a threesome, okay? And related to each other. One illustration, which in fact is under, quote, dispute amongst us, and both stories may well be correct, by the way, because what we each remember is something different. For -- my recollection of the story is that for Passover, for Pessach, for the Seder time, we knew that Passover is coming around, cause we're taught in the group, we -- Leo and I --that's -- I recall, my brother confirms that after I recall it, saved our potato rations, and we ground it up somehow, and gave it to her to make matzoh. She does not recall that. She recalls something different, that Leo and I saved our potato rations and made a birthday cake for her. And I say both may well be right.

Q: Right.

A: Okay, we don't know.

Q: Or you may be talking about two different times even.

A: Or two different times even, or so. But that's the kind we -- and we dealt with each other as a li -- if you ask me as a illustration, well, we came -- she was -- kind of took care of the household things.

Q: Leah did.

A: Le -- yeah, li -- li -- call her Lily.

Q: Lily?

A: Lily. That's her other -- that's her -- that's her name we know of her -- Leah is her formal name, and now in Israel she's -- calls herself Leah as well to other people, but Lily is her --

Q: I see.

A: -- common name, mean, as a family, people know Lily. But so we had ongoing, you know, relationships, and contact. And most probably played whatever children play. But she again had her tasks, and my brother had his tasks, and I was separated from them.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So the amount of contact was not as frequent and as ongoing as had we been all together.

Q: Now I -- I know that you -- you didn't feel insecure in the way that an adult would there.

A: No.

Q: This was the place that you were at. But did you feel somehow more secure, more at home when you'd be with your brother and sister, that sa -- you -- do you have this --

A: The mere fact that I gravitated to them --

Q: Towards them.

A: -- yes, obviously is the case, that I felt that was the know, -- I belonged with them --

Q: Right.

A: -- and they could answer my questions, or deal with me, or whatever concerns I may have had, don't recall the individual point, but I do recall walking regularly from the children's home, which is separate building, to the caserne, and looking for them, and getting -- moving with them. So where that was, know, a stabilizing feature for me, or not, in the likely, yes. But as a child I certainly don't recall that I was looking for, you know, a place where I had to be safe, and only with them or anybody else. Somehow I managed to roam the streets, keep busy, the day passes, get my food, and do my things what I had to do,

and keep out of trouble, whatever that meant, and function. That was my -- that was my daily routine.

Q: Right.

A: And I did that day by day, with some guidance, with some supervision. But I don't think it's as structured, as organized as people would like to see in retrospect --

Q: Right.

A: -- that it was all orchestrated. That's how it worked out.

Q: Now, how were your clothes washed, if they were washed? Do you -- do you know?

A: I think my sister did some of it, and they washed infrequently, obviously.

Q: Right.

A: Must -- things must have torn. Again, the whole clothing for all of us --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- is not clear. I say -- I may have been the beneficiary again of my brothers, but how my brother kept clothing, how I got it, he doesn't know either. But it happened.

Q: Right.

A: And they -- they were washed, and the total clothing collection, which was probably very meager, and I don't recall what I wore, I don't recall the colors or patterns, or of this sort. Left no impression that I didn't have or did have. I wa -- I was taken care of because I was dressed. I wasn't walking around naked, or no -- barefoot. And again, Malka Weinmann may well have supervised that part for me too. So, in broad sense, my needs were taken care of. As know, to survive to function.

Q: Did you wash, did you take baths?

A: No.

Q: Did you smell?

A: Showers.

Q: You took showers?

A: I think I took showers. I think I took showers, yes [indecipherable] there was no bathtubs.

Q: Right.

A: I think I took showers. Did I smell? The whole --

Q: Everybody smelled.

A: Everybody, the whole place had a aroma, odor.

Q: Yes.

A: Heavy, and so they came -- and eventually people got used to that. So --

Q: And bathrooms? Were there latrines?

A: There were latrines, and public long -- long line bathrooms or so. Again, all these things don't leave any impression on me, because it became routine. Whatever facilities were there, I made use of.

Q: You just [indecipherable]

A: Right. Whether they were foul compared to what could have been, obviously. But pose -- mean -- remember, for a little child in '44, the last time I had normal bathroom facilities, was go back in end of '42, beginning of '43, it's a long time.

Q: Right.

A: After, I know, two years of not standard sanitary conditions, that becomes, in some sense, the accepted norm.

Q: Now was that similar in Westerbork for you?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: It was? They had latrines?

A: Yes, yes, right. But it -- nothing to leave any kind of mental picture of it. When I visited Terezin, I saw in some of the places what they had, I kind of recollect on all these long lines. But only kind of re-emerged something ote -- which I took f -- that was it --

Q: Right.

A: -- that's -- that's how one had to go to take care of one's needs, one took care of one's needs using what was available.

Q: And your recollection of the way people behaved is people were simply accepting, this is what was there, and this is what we have to do.

Q: Well, that's -- that's what I her -- saw at yet -- but again, doesn't mean that was all -- always the case, but I was not involved with adult world too much. And the adult world I was involved in dealt with me as a child.

Q: Yes.

A: So I am not a person that could kind of comment anything about that sort of thing.

Q: Did you ever ask your brother, have you heard from our parents again?

A: Not far as I recall.

Q: Not as you recall.

A: Recall, no

Q: Or did you say wh-where are they?

A: Where -- ask -- no, I don't recall that I raised this issue, whether it was on my mind. And part again is I think eventually I moved from transition to transition to a life circumstance that was tolerable for a child. And again, I was not being hurt physically, I was not being -- didn't get sick or so. So I was not in pain, or some of this sort. May have cold, but everybody else was cold most probably, so it's cold. And somehow was accepting, adapting to it, and so stopped asking questions. My brother was much more alert, and much more troubled about all of this, but either protected me, or didn't consider me as an outlet. I have no idea where he [indecipherable] outlet for that matter. He may -- needed outlet more than I did, my brother.

Q: So in some way your youth protected you.

A: My youth protected me --

Q: Every [indecipherable]

A: -- and this way my youth was treated with this -- these little -- being in these little children's enclaves, and children's homes kind of protected me one layer better than my siblings did. I was more privileged treatment in some sense, than they had. He had to work and fend for himself, and I was in this children's home. And it -- physically a more attractive place, I remember that, physically was with a balustrade stairway -- course th- they took over a residential home, that's how th -- that's how they were built. I think --

Q: Was [indecipherable] sa -- I'm sorry, go on.

A: -- no -- go ahead -- those -- no -- since it was an army camp before, and it was good as an army camp, the commandanters, or the commanders, and all this sort had si -- elegant

homes, and that's where they eventually put the children. Right now the museum is in one of those buildings, very elegant room. El -- elegant st --

Q: And did you remember --

A: The physical building?

Q: -- the physical building very well?

A: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

Q: Yes.

A: In fact, when I went to the museum, I thought it was -- that was the place where I was, because very similar stairway, and spatial. So, I mean, I -- I was not in no -- in total squalid quarters, fortunately.

Q: Right.

A: My brother and sister in the bunkbed areas were worse, I was there for awhile, I remember that, but you know, took it, and I moved onto another stage. I was very kind of -- not -- not in control of things, nor was I asking to be in control of things.

Q: Right. Did your sister also eventually work?

A: I believe she did some work, I don't recall exactly, no.

Q: You don't know what, right.

A: [inaudible]

Q: Was there any delousing that you can remember, where they put powder on you, or something?

A: I think there was delousing, we got chemicals odors periodically, was when the bugs and lice became more prevalent, they had delousing, yes. Then, that made life uncomfortable on your bed as well, because had the odor and the residual --

Q: Right.

A: -- fu -- features, or so, the only feature was you saw dead bugs. I don't like bugs.

Q: Do you remember being deloused?

A: Personally, I think once or twice, yes I --

Q: Uh-huh, did that hurt, I mean was it -- was it burning or some --

A: I don't think no, no --

Q: No.

A: -- I don't -- I recall as -- no, I don't recall the physical part of it. But I think the physical, the barracks themselves were deloused.

Q: I see.

A: Cause that's where they --

Q: Right.

A: -- that's where the lice were prevalent.

Q: Were, right.

A: So, sure that's not -- not pleasant or so. But it can it -- it came, and it went, and it came again, perhaps. And that was part of the environment.

Q: Right.

A: So not something to kind of leave a impact, or a imprint on me.

Q: Right.

A: As it would maybe on an adult, or a -- I wasn't fighting it either, you see, it wasn't a question that I wanted something better or different.

Q: It -- in June of 1944, the Red Cross came, and they made this a lot -- certain portion of the place look much, much different, and they call it a kind of potenkin viz -- village, because it was a -- a lie. Do you have any recollection of that happening?

A: No. Partly I think -- you see, we arrived in end of February, and we were not veterans at the time, this -- the -- these were planned, you know. June they came, but they planned it in advance. So all the pe -- the kids who they put in the kid shows, and the other items were the fronts for the -- and props for these movies, must have been picked maybe March and April. I mean, you don't -- you don't do this stuff in June on June. So we kind of -- most probably came too late for that, so we were out of it. I don't recall any of this thing of a sort.

Q: Nothing, uh-huh.

A: And I think I would have, had I seen a play or a s -- a soccer match, or something -- this was -- that's wha -- done the movie. I -- had I been one of the props --

Q: Right, you would have remembered.

A: -- I'd have remembered something.

Q: Yes.

A: And I think my brother neither. But I attributed that fact that we arrived when the planning for this thing -- this must have been underway already, and we were out of eligibility --

Q: Right.

A: -- for that kind of thing, so nor did we get the benefits, whatever benefits existed for the clean up of this sort.

Q: Right, right. Di -- did you go to any cultural activities during the period of time you were in t -- Terezin?

A: No, only this little kids, you know, study group, that's the cultural activity.

Q: That was it.

A: We did have my brother's bar-mitzvah.

Q: Really?

A: Oh yes. That's where the canned item --

Q: Yes.

A: -- I mentioned to you, in f -- January, 1945 was his bar-mitzvah, and he was taught by one of the rabbis to read the section of the Haftorah, and be called up to the Torah, and Friday night had a festive celebration where Malka Weinmann pulled out that can of cheese, Dutch cheese.

Q: Oh, that's what it was.

A: That which she saved for that event. And she collected from other people some goodies they had, chocolates and everything else. So it was a festive event. We did go to services, to synagogue on a weekly basis.

Q: Oh, you did?

A: Oh yes, was a synagogue service going on and so we were part of that little group of people who went to services. And in fact my brother recently showed me that they had announcement sheets, they -- the person who was organizing that service send out an announcement to somebody else, be aware that next week or some of this sort, is the bar-mitzvah celebration of this young boy, Leo Sigmann, and make, know, announce it to whoever it is, that will take place on Saturday morning.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: And he has it?

A: Yes.

Q: He has one of them?

A: Well, by chance my brother, a complete fluke chance, he was walking home from synagogue with some of his congregants in New York, and a fellow invited him come up have -- have guests, and he didn't want to come up, and he did come up, and eventually the person had inherited the diary -- had the -- all these announcements of the Jewish community of Terezin, he had all of them, and he -- when he -- Leo mentioned to him that he was in Terezin, didn't register. When he went back to it, he went looking through all these little notices, and he says, your name is listed in among those notices. I have a copy of it here with me.

Q: Is-Isn't that something?

A: And so they have [indecipherable] the fact that he gave him a composite sheet of different notices, which is just interesting enough that they had the -- there was a sense of community, and belonging with different people. So that celebration I recall, and the can -- the can of cheese which she saved.

Q: Was it good cheese?

A: Yes, well, Dutch. Dutch cheese is good. And other treats for -- even if you don't have -- don't have treats on a routine basis, it tastes very different.

Q: Right.

A: That was the highlight of summer event. So it was not just the bar-mitzvah which most probably, was also being commemorated was -- was [indecipherable] so people did continue doing their lifecycle events, or so, and what's even more interesting in his case, is that bar-mitzvah boys received tefillin, but where do you get tefillin in a camp? People happened to have one set, not going to give it away, necessarily. Turns out that a Czech person had two sets. One a traveling set, was this regular one, which he brought along, so

he gave it to my brother. Very, very small phylacteries. And typically, the ins -- writings inside the tefillin are in parchment, and the very small ones had to write very small letters. Typically, typically they are defective. It turns out that he had them inspected by a scribe, after -- he has them now, he had them inspected by a scribe after the war, in New York, or -- or in Israel for that matter, and they were letter perfect.

Q: Very odd.

A: And the man was overwhelmed. And he told them where he came from [indecipherable] somebody's been protecting it, or so. So he still has those.

Q: Oh my. But we -- these small --

A: Very tiny, very small ones.

Q: Huh. Amazing.

A: So life on -- this respect for life on religious sense went on, circumscribed by the circumstances.

Q: Did a lot of people go to synagogue? There must have been different synagogue groups, always.

A: Different [indecipherable] I can -- I would not know -- can't -- the totality I can't tell. We had a synagogue -- well, a synagogue, a service place, it was an ongoing place, and we went regularly. So all these places were relatively small physical space anyhow --

Q: Right.

A: -- so they couldn't crowd many people in.

Q: Right. And your sister went as well?

A: I believe so. I believe so. Yes, I can't -- you know, but -- but it was ca -- it was an activity, you know, we know Shabbat came, that -- that's what you do.

Q: And that was what -- right. And you celebrated as many holidays as you could?

A: We celebrated, because again we were taught of the holiday cycle, so we celebrated, commemorated with -- within what we could, whether -- the one -- one episode I remember was about the matzoh making, okay?

Q: Yes.

A: But whether -- I don't recall a, you know, full fledged Seder, or so, myself, in detail, but it must have occurred. Or a -- a Seder must have occurred, right? So again I have these

little glimpses, of course that one left an impression to me, that we did something, you know, special. But the -- you know, s-some semblance of the calendar commemoration continued.

Q: Right.

A: Part because of the education, and part because of the practice.

Q: Now, this visa that you had to Honduras, but there was something about going to Switzerland, am I correct, that you --

A: Du -- the n -- no, there were they -- the visas were for Honduras, provided by our Swiss relatives.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: My s -- mother had a sister and brothers in Zurich, and they are the ones who mobilized --

Q: To get the visas.

A: -- to get those visas. But nat -- I believe at my father's behest, know, been begging and -- but -- and it came too late for my parents and two older brothers. So it had a Swiss association with it, but it's Honduran passports.

Q: I see. Okay.

A: That kept us in this category of treat them differently.

Q: And that seemed to protect you throughout the whole period. Some -- or something protected you.

A: That of -- protect us from the -- of course, in Theresienstadt they had ongoing transports to Auschwitz as well, and Bergen-Belsen, and elsewhere. So we were never put in any of the transports, because of that status, not because we were children, because they didn't differentiate, they put the children on there as well, plenty of them. But, at the end of the war they had already in I think the fall of '44, they had after this propaganda episode, the Red Cross again had a deal with the Swiss people [indecipherable] Swiss authorities had a deal for transporting people to stu -- Switzerland in exchange for trucks and tools, who knows what. And money, I think. So, a number of people were eligible to go, and rumors spread, or evers know, spread that pi -- that this was happening, people ought to be signing up. And they had certain categories people who were eligible, and we cate -- under our categories we [indecipherable] because we had Swiss relatives maybe they thought my par -- my mother lives there, who knows what. Anyway, were eligible to go, and we were -- kind of suggested we could go. So we consulted with different people, including these other relatives of my mother, which was -- and there was a lot of

suspicion, and our name was not put on that train. Must have been in the fall of '44. People had arrangements, see th -- whoever was suspicious had arrangement of giving back mailings with codes of -- if it is correct, they write -- some words, or some style, or what have you. If it's not correct, they would do something different. When the letters came back, they actually came from Switzerland, the packages were sent from Switzerland, so that train of, I think 11 -- 1200 people left, and I -- my brother and sister could have been on that train, but we missed the bo -- train.

Q: You missed the boat.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes.

A: But subsequently, they had similar types of announcements, and some the -- some went actually to Auschwitz directly. They were told they're going somewhere else. We were not eld -- we -- eligible because [indecipherable] workers, had to be of working age, at least I wasn't, and so we're not eligible. But in '45, there was another opportunity if you were going to Swiss tr -- [indecipherable] or -- or Freedom train, and for that one we were eligible, and we did sign up. Now, that train never left, but ne -- wer -- there -- was destined to go to a gas chamber. Many people don't know that, Theresienstadt had a gas chamber, but Terezin does -- fortunately it was never used, cause they wanted to save the travel time and distance of the trains, for that time they wanted to use the trains for their own war purposes, or [indecipherable]

Q: Did you hear about that then?

A: What, about the train going to tre -- to gas chambers?

Q: Yes.

A: After the war we discovered.

Q: No, I mean, that there -- that they were supposed to be building the gas chamber, and --

A: No, no, no, no, no, no.

Q: You didn't. This you heard after the war.

A: Yes, that's true [indecipherable]

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But that train never left, because the war is coming to it's end, but that -- the plan of the Nazis was to have that train go to the -- very close by. And it was th -- but the foil was, let's say, the Swiss Freedom train. So we were saved once more by --

Q: Right. There was a train to Switzerland in 1945 with about 1200 people --

A: I think ’44.

Q: -- from Terezin. There may have been one --

A: May -- may -- maybe jan -- maybe January, February, could be. That’s the one we were not.

Q: I see, that was one --

A: Which means that we did not sign on.

Q: I see, right.

A: I don’t know the dates exactly.

Q: Right. Okay. We have to take a break.

A: Yes.

Q: Sorry th --

End of Tape #4

Tape #5

Q: Charles, do you -- you were liberated in May, and you didn't take this second -- or at least we think it may be the second transport to -- to Switzerland. That was going to go in March or April, you think?

A: Around that time, yes.

Q: Uh-huh. So is -- is anything ch --

A: That was an aborted trip, it never -- that never took off.

Q: It never took off, so no one went on it.

A: Exactly.

Q: Did anything change radically in -- in those few months before the liberation?

A: Well yes, there was much more movement of trains, and so much more activity.

Q: You mean in and out?

A: In and out, yeah, right.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And towards the end of the war -- and I lose -- I'd -- nobody -- I mean, I still didn't know the calendar date, whether was mar -- February, March, to me it was the winter, who knows, but I don't associate with particular months or dates. But towards the end, since I hung around that fence at the -- near th -- near the railroad, watching the railroad tracks on one side, and the movement of activity on the other side, there were ki -- more and more people were standing around, and they were kind of coming instant war reporting commentators, because by the sound of where certain cannons went off, or airplanes were flying, they were able to tell, or the -- they thought they could tell whether it's the allied forces or whether they were the Germans. And as a standee next to that fence, I was kind of coming -- hearing about, know, the forces against the Nazis are coming closer to here. And that came -- gave momentum as the days increased, whether -- was -- must have been April I assume, or so, but I can tell. Also we saw German trucks moving out different kind of German soldiers, w-we had [indecipherable] with the German soldiers, but there was more movement of people [indecipherable] going and -- and kind of what you found out after that they were regrouping and escaping. And more people were hanging around that fence rather than working, wherever they was doing. So there was a very different atmosphere towards the end of the war than before. That was the most noticeable part, and this -- listening to these comments of -- they're coming, they're not, they're further away, closer by, and judging of a sort, I got a sense that -- wh -- since I then knew right -- it was a war, everything else, that this war is now reaching a different

stage. So that was very much in the atmosphere, in the air, and the conversation, and I was there listening --

Q: Right.

A: -- and absorbing, and most probably even parroting what was happening. Different kinds of transports came the end, I think the Danes and the Hungarians came pretty late in the game. And -- kind of -- so new people, you never heard -- you -- heard before. The Danes came very late. So new languages, but the -- and they were different appearance, too. Now, turns out that Theresienstadt also got a whole group of people from the death marches, were -- ended up in Theresienstadt, but they never ended up to our place, they ended up in -- that's why people ask me about, do you ever meet those people, no. Matter of fact, I know now some people who says they were in Theresienstadt at liberation. And their description of what they saw was very different than what I lived. But they lived in the small compound, away from where we were anyhow -- not that -- not [indecipherable] I've seen everybody, but I would have [indecipherable] I seen coming in, I would have seen very different type of person coming in, straggling in, decimated people. We didn't see those people, although we were liberated the same day --

Q: Same day.

A: -- or so. So anyway, the momentum that's -- the scene was changing, the war scene was changing was evident, and was part of the discussion. And that I do recall being there, participating, absorbing. On again, on a daily, incremental basis. By the end of it, you know what was happening. And I recall the final days or so where the troops of the German Nazis were leaving, and for good luck threw hand grenades over the fence for us, for now a gift to us, who ducked and moved on. But that's already before we got it, that's a good sign, because they're good-bye, and good riddance. So that was the approach towards the end of the war which changed the mood. I think a lot of people -- and again I capture that indirectly being -- being there. Right, I know exactly the details of what was happening.

Q: I -- I just -- as you were talking I realized that I didn't -- I didn't ask you when did you realize there was a war going on?

A: In --

Q: Was it very late?

A: Late, yes. In ter -- in tere --

Q: It was pretty late?

A: 1944.

Q: In Theresienstadt?

A: In Terezin, yes, yes.

Q: And --

A: But part of it see, as I grew older and stood in that fence, that fence was a -- a part of my activity.

Q: Right.

A: Right? And that's y-you hear people talking. You overhear, so at -- at '44, when I was eight plus, I was kind of understanding a little bit more about war, sides, Nazis, Germany, others. People in -- when they lined up, and they had different -- [indecipherable] I overheard conversations, but I was part of it, eventually starts some [indecipherable] so I understood there was a war, and the Jews were targets and victims, because obviously we were -- most of them were Jews, okay? And I hung around s -- the synagogues, so --

Q: You hear a lot.

A: You hear -- hear this kind of s-story. Whether I knew all the sophisticated details --

Q: Right.

A: -- or not -- that's irrelevant, but I knew there was a war, and I knew things were now suddenly being changed. One side was losing, one side is gaining. What it meant being, you know, who da -- who decides where -- obviously I was not fully in command of that, whether it was allied troops, or even the names of it, but that -- but there was a -- the Nazis, or the Germans, basically, versus other people, and that there's a battle going on, and you know, you heard these reports about the airplanes flying, and sounds of bangs and booms, and people interpreting all of that, I -- I started ab-absorbing that, over time. It wasn't a one day event either, remember --

Q: Right.

A: -- it was several weeks of time. And I -- again, the fact there were more people at the fence than before, I didn't know why, but it was a changed feature a-as well. So that's how I kind of participated in the approach of liberation.

Q: When you started learning more, realizing that there's a war, and hearing the guns, and somebody saying that the Nazis are doing things to the Jews -- wh -- however you heard it, did you start getting afraid then, or --

A: No, it came in a good time, because it was th --

Q: Because it was at the end?

A: It was the end, and people are saying we're winning, or you know, we're going to be freed.

Q: I see.

A: So --

Q: So no -- no time for fear.

A: Well, not no time for fear, just not -- was again, was n-not the highlight of what I was kind of taking in. I was taking in about some war, and one side is going to lose, and these guys are going to get it, and they're leaving, walking away -- way -- when people saw these trucks, or whatever it was, with [indecipherable] German soldiers running, the commentary was they're surrendering, they're escaping, they're doing something. Well, then you sense that these people, the bad people are going out of your life, you know? It was not that dif -- kind of fear more than had it occurred in '43, or '44, when it was the [indecipherable]

Q: Now, is there a period of time between when the Germans leave, and the Russians come, when it's just all of you inmates in Terezin?

A: There was a short period, but again, only --

Q: Not in --

A: Not -- not -- again, it wasn't identified to me as a new period of, know, freedom or so. I only sensed it by the number of people at that fence.

Q: I see.

A: That was growing, growing, more people were there. People hanging around. And you hear this [indecipherable] you know, we being -- going to be freed. You understood what was happening, that end was coming. And then, see these mass, you know, departures, it also was consistent. So now the people -- question of when will [indecipherable] people most probably listen to some kind of radio or other features, then they -- that's -- word spread amongst each other. I was obviously not party to that. And -- but it sounded more real that what other people were talking about, and I kind of integrated that into my absorption, whatever I was thinking.

Q: Right.

A: You have to re-recollect that when I child hears things, it is not all as logical as what's being presented, or as totally comprehensible. But they ab -- do absorb a change of tone, a change of discussion topics, and that's what I was capturing.

Q: Right. Did food change? Did you still ge -- you still ate in the way you had before?

A: Same.

Q: Same.

A: As far as I'm aware, the same. Not aware of any change.

Q: Any change in that way.

A: No, no.

Q: Do you remember the Russians when they came?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What was it like?

A: First of all, they came and obviously jubilant, you know. Was a -- and the people themselves were kind of very excited and they handed out ci-cigarettes to people, and chocolates to people, I think to us, to kids, and in that respect they were very, quote, kind, and a breath of fresh air. Right? Soldiers who were friendly rather than soldiers who were guarding people who -- and people embraced them, and touched them, it was a different -- you saw that some whatever it was, new -- liberators, but that's what -- that's what they left the impression. In that respect they were most pr -- most probably very good. I did know, and I can see that image too, of rampaging through the barrack to the caserne of the -- you know, where people were crowded, and ripping off watches of women. I saw that scene, apparently they also pillaged and raped, which I obviously did not see -- or not obviously, but I just didn't see, or didn't know what's happening. That's later, but the grabbing off watches of people who somehow managed to retain them during the war period is -- was very kind of shocking to me. But they di -- transformed very quickly, the role of the being behind the fences versus being free, and more movement. I think the fence came down, or -- but we still had a fence, I remember was the -- suddenly you saw the German soldiers, whoever the -- whoever was in charge of the control mechanism in Theresienstadt were now being required to go with wheelbarrows and picking things up, and fixing things up, and breaking things down, and they were being beaten by some former German people who ta -- trying to put -- change their roles in order to get more privileges, and that was going on and people were cheering on and pointing out, you know, hit them harder, etcetera, this sort, get even with them. So the -- again, that was a very different atmosphere what you saw before. So that's the Russians kind of influence, a very quick turnaround of the ones who were doing the Nazi work before, and now they became -- and we [indecipherable] was a little surprising to see these other naz -- Nazis, or Germans, and Germans beating up their compatriots, or so, and with full vigor, I mean, just reversed direction. But that -- the transition from being occupied versus being liberated, and the change took [indecipherable] very, very quickly. And very noticeable, and to -- very quick. Now in May, the eighth, ninth, we were liberated, and by June already we were out.

Q: Really?

A: Now, a lot of people didn't make it to later. There was a typhus epidemic, and again is a quarantine, but the most typhus epidemic took place in that other quarter where these other people who were in the death marches who made it, barely made it, ended up. I don't know whether in our particular compound, they did it by caserne to caserne, I don't know what -- we were allowed to leave in June. Again, some people say you couldn't have left in June because there was a general quarantine. Well, I know I left in June, you know, I mean --

Q: Right.

A: I don't care what the historian books say on that. People verif -- generalize from the generic fact, and apply it to everybody.

Q: Right. So where did you all go? And -- and who -- was it Leo who made the decision

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, what happened was after the war, there was a very st -- quick effort to identify, locate people who survived. And whoever did this, might -- the Russians, or others, made a list of the survivors in tha -- in Theresienstadt, and people from different localities contacted the authorities somewhere, that was designated, maybe Red Cross [indecipherable] I don't recall, obviously. And we had relatives who survived the war in Holland, who were in hiding during the war, in the broadest [indecipherable] were kind of somewhat distant, but in the context of the time they very close to my family, partly they're -- they were raised in the old country, very close in the same courtyard, effectively, so they were like very close cousins, brother, sister type relationship. Anyhow, that relative knew that, you know, who was -- who were the Dutch relatives they had, and went around finding out in Westerbork most probably, with the Dutch authorities, where are the S-Sigmann family, my parents, my brothers and my sister and myself. And eventually they found out that the only ones who are surviving from their records was us three. And they got in touch with the Theresienstadt people, who went and got in touch with Malka Weinmann, and through us, and saying, oh, yo-you will come back, you have a place to go -- the people who were released from these camps had a -- a place to go. We had a place to go because somebody was claiming us.

Q: Right.

A: Had we not had that we would have been again, rerouted somewhere to a displaced persons camp, or hang around later in Theresienstadt, I don't know what would have happened. But since we had a relative who was putting a claim us and offered t-to come to them, we went with Malka Pollaczek, who also had a brother, and Alicia Farber, whose parents survived. So she was reunited with her parents, so her parents were claiming her. So we all went back on the train from Terezin to the American section, you know, Czechoslovakia kind of was split into different regions whoever liberated them. One half was the Russians, one half was the Americans or the French, I think. And we

took a train from Terezin to Pilsen, and maybe took a plane from Pilsen to Amsterdam, I think a French plane, was probably a army transport plane. And we stayed a few days or so with Malka Weinmann, because we were close to her. And you ask what attachment, that was probably -- I -- we sensed that. And well, a very different life suddenly, you know, plates, and tables, and food that we never had eaten before. White bread was served, we thought it was cake, we refused to eat it as bread. I had a tin can of anchovy paste, I don't know whether you know what anchovy paste is, it was in a tin -- a tin little thing like toothpaste, imported [indecipherable] foods never crossed my lips. Spent a few days over there, till they discussed with -- how to get us to these relatives, the Bergers, who themselves spent the war years separated from their children, daughter and son. The daughter, son and parents were in three different locations, and they were --

Q: And they all survived?

A: They survived, yes, they survived. And then I rejoined living with them after, for one year or so, till other family members elsewhere in the world started looking for the Sigmann family, and locating us, and discovered we were the only survivors. So we spent a year with the Bergers, and were a year in -- from June to July, or June of ni -- June to June, from '45 to '46, and being -- lived in Amsterdam.

Q: And how was that for you?

A: Again, they were very caring, and very warm, and very attentive to us, but they themselves had to reconstruct their lives, because they had a major interruption in their life. So we took in the scene of reconstituting life, but was really more normal from what people were used to. I mean, s-sitting at a table with the family rather than in a compound. Cooking, baking, washing. You know, th-this family, the Bergers, they were hidden by some nurses, single women who had worked in Indonesia before, and I think they lived at Amsterdam. And they lived behind a partition wall for several years. Couldn't go out in daytime. Didn't know where their daughter and son was -- were. Their daughter was too old to be hidden, but too young to be hidden, too, so she had had a quote, an Aryan appearance, so she worked for somebody in the outskirts of Amsterdam as a open house help, au pair. It's -- her name is Miriam. And she was there, and -- very interesting story is that we -- we -- once we came back, and told us their -- their tale, and each one has his own tale of escape and saving. But this girl, Miriam, mus-must have been around 16 maybe, by the end of the war, was in -- publicly hidden, and the people were very devout, Calvinist, or [indecipherable] most people did not e -- travel -- or com -- can't do anything on a Sunday. That when they later on came to visit us, visit us on Saturday in fact, apologized that we came on the sebbe -- Sabbath. But they were very devout, they were very close to the family, but they were very good people, too. They -- in order to -- they kept the fact that she was Jewish in hiding, or public hiding from their own children, so they couldn't say very much, but they read the scriptures, and how the very devout Christians, and they tried to read the Scriptures associated with the holidays, to keep this girl informed about purink and how do the calendar, or what have you, but sh -- Passover, and Easter, often overlap, so they read this -- the -- the portion she told us about, it was kind of -- and they're very nice people. We met them after they came, they

were very close. But kind of seeing how people were coming out of the war, and what they went through, was both interesting, and it was very common. Their son, who was a tall fellow, was in hiding in a little attic, in a little town up in -- in the country, again didn't see daylight, public daylight for several years. And he was an artist and he made wooden pins for the underground, emblems. I believe that's how he spent his time. And so the reconstituting of life in Amsterdam was -- we were part of it, but we [indecipherable] we were visiting. These Bergers are interesting people because they used to have a restaurant, kosher restaurant in Amsterdam, a very elegant one apparently, before the war, and they had pretty elegant dishes, and cutlery, but after the war their apartment was gone, all their belongings were gone. They couldn't -- they knew who they gave it, they couldn't get it back, even because they survived. People denied, apparently that they had received anything. They had to start from scratch, in very small quarters, we lived in very, very small quarters. There was no shower or bathtub in the house. We had a little metal bathtub that we -- I was a little boy, I was able to use, other people used most probably too, and we went to public baths. This was the life. But for them it was a -- happy to survive, but was a big setback of their lifestyle to what they had to live through, and remember that. Of course they would -- had the restaurant before, they're still -- so they're getting the old customers coming back, come and eat. Some widowers, or single people, lost their family. So they used to come in the evening and se -- were served things. Whether they paid or not, I don't know. But they kind of resumed the sort of role [indecipherable] that was their past life, and lot of war stories were coming around the table. You know, sort of hearing these things, the -- we were kind of a special case, now we had one experience, people had very different experience. The hiding, some survived, but only, you know, one person. And some people were traumatized, and completely troubled. And I remember one man, he used to come to visit [indecipherable] Berger to talk or his despair -- despair. And I remember he was a very sad person, and he really -- when that man came in in the evening, we would kind of shoot out of the room, the small quarters. And a month or so later we learned he committed suicide. So those kind of things, you k -- that was the ac -- different things were going on in Amsterdam, it was -- it was not a normal return to life, again. These people, the Bergers, at this restaurant, also kept kosher, obviously. And basically ate dairy, because they didn't have any dishes and cutlery for meat, and moreover, meat was very scarce anyhow, because that time the only meat you could get, kosher meat was in cans, preserved. But because of their hospitality reputation, and restaurant reputation, the soldiers in the Jewish brigade, who passed through Holland from Canada, or from England, stopped in ou -- those who kept kosher, stayed in their house, or ate in their house. But they brought their rations over to the Bergers, so the only time we ate meat was to eat those rations the first time, after many years eating meat. But didn't have enough cutlery, or -- and no plates. So the cans were warmed up on the stove, and we passed around the can and this cutlery in order to eat. That's the kind of -- for them it must have been a terribly painful contrast after being a elegant restaurant with all the trappings of a restaurant, having to serve their own in this way. But they made -- they made the transition, we'll open up another restaurant a number of years.

Q: They did?

A: Oh yes, yes, in Scheveningen, of all places.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, and then that -- then they moved to Israel, right.

Q: Oh.

A: So, you know, I'm trying to convey that --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: -- I was absorbing a complete new s -- and I was getting older, I was able to record that mentally.

Q: Right, right.

A: And that became part of my ex -- post-war experiences.

Q: Did you, within a short period of time say, where are our parents, or did you have a se --

A: No, I was told --

Q: Yo-You were told.

A: -- I wa -- I was -- I was told that we lost our parents, they died.

Q: You were told that.

A: Whatever that meant --

Q: Uh huh. Meant, yeah.

A: -- in the long run, that was not a issue.

Q: Okay. And were you told that once you had left Theresienstadt, or do you -- do you have any recollection?

A: No, I think already most probably before, because when we got that postcard from the train, in discussions with my brother and sister, whenever it may have come up, I think I had it already a general sense --

Q: Right.

A: -- that I have no longer my parents.

Q: Right.

A: But after the war, when you hear other stories of -- people's life stories of losing a husband, a wife, children, then I realized that -- where I fit it in, that I also lost parents. I was part of the group of people who went through the war, some went through in hiding, be -- people in groups, some were in hiding. Some were in this camp, some were in that camp, some were in convents. And I was in two camps, and some people lost -- or didn't lose, and I lost. So eventually I fit it in to my category, and -- but that was a pretty dynamic -- I use the word dynamic selectively, seeing people were really -- had to re-establish themself, that some people could make it. And also it was very much evident people want get out of Europe as -- or Holland as fast as possible, many people, they -- the first opportunity to get out, and especially the children. They sh --

Q: Especially children?

A: There -- they -- once they get their [indecipherable]

Q: Children.

A: -- out of the country, out of Europe. Not a good place to be. Partly out of memory, but partly out of experience. So it was a sizeable exodus. Felt wa -- was -- weren't too many people who survived, okay? But there was a noticeable exodus of people who left to England, people who left to isr -- Palestine. And some people stayed. And some elderly parents -- pa -- no -- reluctantly but willingly encouraged their children to leave. And some people couldn't stop the children that want to get out of there as fast as possible. And that a -- again, I absorbed that part of the scene.

Q: Right. We need to change the tape.

End of Tape #5

Tape #6

Q: Charles, did you want to leave?

A: I did leave, as you know.

Q: I know. I know you did, I wanted to --

A: Right, but for different reasons than what was occurring. Th -- when I say people who were eager to leave were the older people [indecipherable] not sure, take these two children of my relatives, Bergers, Miriam and Manfred, they got out as fast, but they wanted to leave right away, I mean they were -- imagine not being with their parents for several years, and May, June they see them, and they wanted to get out, on -- go to Palestine. The parents did not -- were not encouraging that right away, but reluctantly they yielded, so right after the high holidays, they left on the illegal transport, where they were put in Cypress, they ga -- had a long journey. But -- so that age bracket and above, there was a much greater personal decision to leave Europe, or leave Netherlands. They both went to Palestine. One of them there right now. The tragedy was that the brother ended up in Palestine. When the state was established, he was in the army, and he was killed by a convoy in the protection of Jerusalem during the War of Independence. Was just -- had just become engaged to a beautiful Yemenite girl, and so now that's -- the family had to absorb that loss after being spared the other hurdles of the war, ended up a victim in Palestine - Israel. Parents not fully reverc -- recovered from that wound, whereas the war wounds were healing, that wound kind of was pretty difficult for them to deal with. But other people also were leaving. And in contrast to the pre-war, which I don't recall too much, Westerbork or Terezin, there I did have friends. I visited homes like in more normal circumstances. But again, it was somewhat temporary, because people I dealt with, they moved out to other countries suddenly, okay? And myself also left. But it was a different -- but I do know the names of people who were there. We joined the youth organization, I think it was the precursor of Bnei Akiva. My brother was older, he was allowed to join, I tagged along with him, and given that was much choice, not too many other children around, they let me come. And we went to hikes and activities. So we had a little more normal type of event, of youth organizations that obviously you didn't have before, and some of the names of the people from that period I still know by name. And I've discovered recently one is in t -- married, you know, with families in Toronto, and one lives in Israel, and one here, one no longer lives. But that kind of life became more normalized. I went to school in Amsterdam, Jewish school, and es -- had special studies, Jewish studies in either synagogue, with people. So it kind of -- but even those teachers started leaving. We had the teacher, and the middle of the year they went to England. Of course, it was not a -- people weren't on the firm ground, or so. So we -- I -- when I left, it was not unnatural for me to leave, because that's what other people were doing for all kinds of reasons, which I may not have been fully aware. But it was not my decision, of sorts, because my other relatives, who were closer in relative ranking that the Bergers, my father's brother lived the United States, and they were also related to the Bergers so they were in touch, wanted us to join him. And my mother's sister in Zurich wanted us to join them. So we were wanted, but we were kind of being

pulled in two different directions. And the decision was that the two boys would go to New York, and the girl would go to Zurich. Whether that's wi -- wise decision or not is not for me to say.

Q: Who -- who made that decision, do you think?

A: The relatives.

Q: Ah, I see.

A: I mean, both had a loo -- a genuine eagerness to want to absorb us, and you know, take care of us as children without parents. And they decided, not to divide the spoils, but they thought that boys would be better off in education, particularly Jewish education in United States, and the girl would fit in better in Switzerland. My aunt had a -- uncle had a dress store, an elegant dress store, and she could perhaps work her way into that. But anyway, we were split, which my sister to this day finds horrendous. And she found it very surprising that it was proposed and implemented.

Q: Wasn't it difficult for the three of you to split like that?

A: It was difficult, yes, yes. And especially those were days where na -- ba -- people didn't have telephone conversations, you know, you wrote to each other, kept in touch that way.

Q: But she of course, remains even more alone. You are split, but you're still with the one --

A: I have a brother.

Q: You have a brother.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: And he -- she goes into -- did she know these folks?

A: No, no.

Q: Not -- no --

A: No --

Q: -- these are strangers.

A: -- well, well, my -- my uncle from Switzerland, that's the -- my aunt -- my si -- mother's sister's husband came to visit us in '46, okay? Very nice, brought clothing and candy and treated us, and -- very nice, and told us about the family linkages, and all of that, and so it was either total stranger -- we knew the name of the family, the -- these -- okay.

Q: [indecipherable] but this was not someone close that you --

A: We hadn't dealt with them in years, obviously. And the United States family, all I knew was my father's brother, my uncle. But I had never seen him. I don't think my brother saw him either. And they were again, far away, the United States was far, far away. So that was a new change in our life status of being separated, moved away from Holland, and a new stage of our life had to begin. But again, the intentions certainly were well-intentioned. Whether is was appropriate under the circumstances, but that set the course for our lives, and with the ca -- impl -- consequence. My sister married somebody from Switzerland, we ended up in United States. And were raised over there by my uncle and aunt, who were very generous to absorb two more children in a household of six children.

Q: They had six?

A: They had six.

Q: Wow.

A: And raised us effectively under their auspices, so I'm certainly appreciative --

Q: And this was in New York City?

A: In New York City.

Q: Did he remind you of your father at all? Was there any -- anything that struck you?

A: Mm, I -- wa -- that -- my memory of my father was vague. I -- my -- the only memory of my father is this -- the last scene, sitting on his lap with tefillin on his head. That's not a association, that's a picture, a photograph. No, I don't -- I was too young to make that sort of linkage.

Q: Did you get along with the other six kids?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes?

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: They didn't -- they didn't mind two more.

A: Not -- no, they were kind. I mean [indecipherable] me, I was another refugee, and the immigrant, and --

Q: Green.

A: -- kid who went through the war. Went through the war. So, of a helpful, and --

Q: Yes.

A: -- no, and some of the children were closer in my age, so I could relate to them, and some were close to my brother. They fi -- we fitted in after awhile, and at the time we were arrive already, the older children kind of were started to move out of the house. So, the family was not as large on a daily basis.

Q: I see.

A: It still was large, I mean, and totally appreciative obviously that I had a home. Because otherwise, you know, that's a big problem after the war, people were homeless. Some people had, you know, lost their parents, and their siblings, or what have you, and nowhere to go. And their immediate, or s -- distant relatives were also killed during the war, so I was relatively better off.

Q: Right. Did y -- when did you learn English, when you came here?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So you -- what -- did you speak a common language in the household before you learned English?

A: Well, they spoke German, I understood German. I don't know where exactly I learned German, but I learned German somewhere along the line. Of course, at home we did not speak German, Dutch was -- probably -- the parents spoke Yiddish. But that was a common language, and then I start --

Q: What did you think of New York? It's so dir -- I mean, Amsterdam is small, very quaint. New York is huge, massive.

A: Oh, it was very massive, oh yes, it was very massive. And the whole -- well, generally, after the war, a lot of things were brand new for me. I mean, the food was brand new. I had eaten -- I had not eaten oranges till I -- I think got in the -- either in Amsterdam or got in the plane and --

Q: Really?

A: -- of -- or so. When I came off the boat, came here on the boat, people offered me a banana, I didn't know how to open it. I mean, it's a strange food.

Q: Course.

A: Or so -- so, y -- generally even in Holland after the war, there were all kinds of new ec -- experiences or so, about food, or otherwise. I remember with my bo -- my uncle from

Switzerland, who took us out and treated us to vanilla ice cream. And the pungency of that vanilla taste is still in my mouth, I mean, I just -- it's very different today, doesn't have the same intensity of taste, but it was a very strong taste, a flavor which I never had, or don't recall, I may have had it when I was five or six. But from five to six to nine was a long time. So those things kind of, you know, were all sensations that we experienced. There was an ho -- another interesting thing was I was saying of -- people were kind of coming out of the woodwork in some sense. The people who were in hiding got out right away, from the camps. Those who had a place to go had right away -- some straggled in, depends where they were kept, in which camp. So it was an ongoing process of people coming, and eventually people leaving. Was a lot of young people, particularly children had to be taken out of convents or hiding places, and was a big battle sometimes, you know, older sisters f -- survived. [indecipherable] little sister was in the convent in Belgium, went through the effort, identified everything [indecipherable] and that little girl refused to come. Again, in this Berger household we had a lot of traffic, but people -- there was a home, people came across. So I in some sense absorbed more of that than I would have otherwise. And I remember those two sisters finally successful in getting out, this whole discussion of getting their little sister out, finally getting their sister out, and the sister rebellious, she wants to go back to the sisters in Belgium, rather than the sisters in Holland. And I think eventually she had -- had -- had to yield it, they got -- bring her back. You know, the chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Herzog went through country to country, also through Holland, trying to save those children, invoking his position in dealing with the clergy, and the church. And had very great difficult time, I remember him there with his top hat, and making, you know, talking about his experiences. That was an event. So, it was -- th-the post-war reconstitution was very much an activity of the country, of the Jewish community. And therefore was a lot of activity and movement, and was not a -- you know, a stable community, were never -- never really became stable, because Holland as you know, lost a very high proportion of it's Jewish population. Underestimated the people talk about [indecipherable]. The interesting little side story, my relative, my uncle -- I call him uncle, he was a Berger, had a brother in Palestine, who was a -- a shoe store. And one day he sent a crate of Yaffa oranges to him. And that was a communion celebration, they handed out these oranges as prizes to people, and everybody took those -- an orange for their entire family. And there was the biggest gift they could ever dream of after going through the war, of getting something from Palestine, a Yaffa orange. So, I remember we got one too, and it was something, you know, unique. So a lot of feelings were going on in the country, which today people have much less -- they take a lot of things for granted. Every -- every -- ev -- all these events became events rather than, you know, part of a routine life. So it was, in some sense, quote, exciting. Because things were really appearing, and I was -- as I was getting older, I was a -- absorbing these things much more than anything before [indecipherable] certainly I was a little boy, but already approaching 10 - 11, to move on there. So carry back interesting memories of the year in Holland.

Q: W-Was there any schooling during that year, or

A: Yes [indecipherable]

Q: There was?

A: There was schooling, in a Jewish school, and I got -- there got my formal teaching, arithmetic, and geography, and --

Q: So you were finally getting some subjects that you hadn't at all?

A: Yes, absolutely, and sp -- Dutch grammar, and m-more formal instruction, and also Jewish supplementary education as well.

Q: Did you enjoy it?

A: Yes.

Q: You did?

A: Yes, yes, yes. I mean had [indecipherable] fortunately I had no learning disability or learning problem, and most probably I wasn't the only one who had the shortcoming of lack of education, cause pe -- similar people that were my age must have had something similar, didn't go to school during the war. So it may have been, you know, equal peer class.

Q: Right.

A: Like, I never thought of it in these terms, but my -- I -- I went to do what s-s-sc -- students have to do. And so anyway, we went to the United States, a long route, because The Joint was involved in transporting people from one country to another, and so it was a torturous trip to go from Holland to Antwerp, to end up in Marseilles on the buses and trains, or so, and in fact I saved The Joint, I think, a big bundle because one of the stops, one of the night st -- overnight stops was a U.S. army camp, and we're supposed to stay one night then go on to the next stop and go to whatever quarters we were supposed to go. They have a whole group, not only us, I mean a bunch of children. And I became violently sick in that --

Q: First time.

A: First time. The odors of the mess hall were so powerful that I actually couldn't take it. I became sick, and vomiting, and fever and all of that. I may have had other problems, too. So the com-commander of the camp was very upset that somebody became sick under his reign. So he told people to stay till I become healthy. But they kne -- they knew our travelogue, or itinerary, and he kept us there till we able to go to the boat to Marseilles. So I think The Joint saved a big bundle, for again, strange reasons. And they took a -- took a boat to the United States, a long journey.

Q: A cargo boat, or an actual --

A: No, it was a boat that was used for the U.S. army originally, for -- so it was not a -- a cruise boat, but it had berths for people to sleep.

Q: Sleep.

A: So, it was a long trip, with a storm in the oceans --

Q: Get sea sick?

A: Yes. Seriously.

Q: It's terrible.

A: It was a terrible day, it was a terrible day. It was a Saturday in fact it was, and we're up on the deck and vomiting, etcetera. And well, that's what the [indecipherable] kind of, then a new stage of life, which -- come to the United States, and be absorbed in a new family. And schooling over there, and then things became uphill.

Q: You -- you adjust rather quickly, though, don't you, usually, to circumstances, somehow --

A: Apparently I do.

Q: -- it seems.

A: Apparently I do, yes.

Q: E-Easier than Leo, your older brother?

A: I would say most probably. Yes, I think he took things more for -- he must -- may have been more aware than I was what's happening around him, so he took a little more difficult. I do make the -- I did make the adjustments reasonably well. In fact, I talked to a survivor, and really there are two stages of survival, one is survive the war, another one is survive the post-war.

Q: Post-war, right.

A: And I did, thank God, both.

Q: And what was -- what was the name of the family, I know the last name was Siegman, but --

A: Siegman.

Q: -- they spelled it differently than you.

A: [indecipherable] right, our original name was Sigmann, S-i-g-m-m -- m-a-n-n. That was the family name. When my uncle, Mendel Siegman came to United States, they changed it to S-i-e-g-m-a-n, because double n is always -- was regarded as a European legacy, I don't know how he knew that, or whoever it was --

Q: Right.

A: -- but that's how it was. So when we came to United States, rather than having in the family, same household, Sigmann and sig -- Siegman, we took on their name, but eventually it had to be changed when I became a citizen, formally, because my -- my passport, original passport from Holland to United States was S-i-g-m-a-n-n. That's how I was registered.

Q: I see.

A: But the difference in the spelling is not that great, so we took it on.

Q: Why did they change the name to S-i-e? Why not S-i-g-m-a-n, do you have any idea?

A: No, I think it sounds -- zi -- see, in the German pronunciation was Ziegman.

Q: Ziegman, I see.

A: Okay. And zieg is i -- is a --

Q: Right.

A: Okay. So they only changed the double n, but I wasn't -- again, I was not there when it happened.

Q: Did you call him uncle all the time?

A: Uncle, yes, yes, yes.

Q: And his wife, aunt?

A: His wife Aunt Susie, yes, yes, yes. We knew that we, know, were not part of the original family, we were old enough that -- I mean, that -- had it been, you know, five years earlier, may have been different story, you know? So we kept our family identity, but we were certainly part of the --

Q: Yes.

A: Siegman family, and raised under their guidance and support, and --

Q: And -- and how many years before you saw Lily again?

A: I saw Lily again in 1960.

Q: Wow.

A: A long time.

Q: Long time.

A: She had moved to Israel, 1951, I think, married, had a --

Q: Oh, so she -- she left fairly soon from that family?

A: She left fairly soon, yes, yes. She went down Aliyah.

Q: So she must have been six -- 16 or 17 when she left.

A: Around that time, 16 - 17, right, yes, yes.

Q: Wow. So she must have been unhappy in some way, no? I mean --

A: I don't want to speak for her.

Q: You don't know.

A: I mean, I don't want to put an [indecipherable] on her.

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: But she wanted to go to --

Q: To Israel.

A: Israel.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then she had met somebody, but she wasn't married when she left -- who was also going to Israel. And soon after, they married in Israel, and settled there. But 1960 -- meanwhile we were in touch through letter writing.

Q: Yes, I understand.

A: So --

Q: But he -- here you -- you all grow up --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and you're adults now.

A: Absolutely. No, it was a big change.

Q: Big change, you know.

A: Big change, but interesting, there was a lot of personal chemistry.

Q: Yes?

A: Oh yes, we retained, oh yes, because of our letter writing, and somehow it went through together. When I visited her 1960, was immediately back to where we left off, whatever that word means.

Q: Right. That's fabulous.

A: And this -- and the same thing was true with this daughter Berger. I hadn't seen her -- well, that's [indecipherable] right. I hadn't seen her from 1946, when she left after the -- 1945.

Q: Until -- until --

A: Well, then I saw her in happene when I visited Holland on 1960, then to Israel, too, I met her again.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But we started off where we left off.

Q: The same thing, yeah.

A: Yes. And now too, when we meet or so --

Q: Right.

A: -- we have a much more sense of belonging to the same family or so, than -- or -- although we have very different paths, different experiences since then, but we still have a lot in common.

Q: Did you feel you divided culturally when you were here? Or were you young enough so that you soon became a kind of American kid? Do you have that -- do you have any --

A: Well, now it took getting used to, I mean, but people acclimate when they -- first of all, want to acclimate quickly. I came in with the Berger family, was -- they didn't want to send us with old, ragged clothes so they went out -- out of the way to buy new wool suit for us, with the knickers, pants or so. That's how I arrived United States, but it was not stylish here, and I disposed of them very quickly, okay?

Q: Yes.

A: And I started wearing, you know, American type clothing, and so I -- I -- the language took a little longer. I was in some sense fortunate again under the circumstances that I was raised in a neighborhood in the West Side, where there were a lot of immigrants, too. Urban families who so -- survived the war, or came pre-war, so it was not coming into middle America. Was partly European, and West Side in general is very cosmopolitan.

Q: Now where in the West Side were you? Lower West?

A: No, the upper -- upper West Side.

Q: A hundred --

A: 88th Street.

Q: Oh, 88th, okay.

A: West -- on the West End Avenue.

Q: Right.

A: So -- and the synagogue we went to was again, familiar territory, and so it was at -- that cultural change was not as dramatic had it been otherwise, what some people went through. But the language and the clothing you saw this, you want to be, you know, like everybody else.

Q: Right.

A: So I had to learn quickly. And up to a point, the children in school were kind to me, because again, there -- that was [indecipherable]. I was a refugee, went through the war, whatever that meant, no parents. That's -- some were sensitive, some were not, but on the whole, they had experienced that too, because the school that I went to, they had -- I was the first one who was -- they had [indecipherable] seen this before, so it was interesting. A kind of interesting story was that when -- it was I learned how to play one of the sports, and, you know, and be one of the boys or so, so in the courtyard during recess, the kids played punchball. You know what a punchball is?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: [indecipherable] a pink Spaulding -- Spaulding --

Q: Right.

A: -- punching [indecipherable] baseball with base -- with a Spaulding. And everybody had to be chosen for the team, that was the rule, so I was chosen as well on one of the teams, but I was useless because I didn't know what the game was all about, didn't understand the language or the instructions, what people screaming about. And my luck was that a guy, the other team hits the -- punches the ball right to me, and I miss it, and people started jeering and screaming. And then one young kid, young little fellow with black eyes, remember his name, got up and scolded the kids. This boy went through the war, etcetera, lost his parents, etcetera. If you [indecipherable] with him, you'll never get it -- never hear it again, the end of it. And then suddenly I was part of the team, and people accepted me. So it was a good lesson, people learned I was so -- I mean, the kind of [indecipherable] fact I recite it indicates that I remember it favorably.

Q: Absolutely.

A: But it was a need to be, you know, integrated in the small and the big. But again, my transition was a little bit better than it cou -- it could have been much worse. Wasn't -- for me it was a gradual transition to the American scene, because the rest of the people around me were also heavily from immigrant families.

Q: Right. We have to stop the tape and change it.

End of Tape #6

Tape #7

Q: Charles, what did your uncle do?

A: He was in the diamond business.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Wholesaler. But originally when he came to the United States, he was in textiles in Europe, and he had to start a new business, of course, ca -- can't do textiles over here.

Q: Right.

A: Was difficult.

Q: And where did he come from, did he -- from Poland? Przemysl?

A: He came from -- was born in Przemysl as well, and lived in Frankfurt, and lived in Antwerp. And he managed to escape with his family, quite an ordeal, and quite a story, if you want to hear a -- what's called a flight story, I recommend you speak to his son. A remarkable story, how they managed to go through enemy territory, through France, back to Belgium, through Casablanca, to the United States, with being separated, and my aunt being pregnant, and having a -- he had -- my uncle had his -- my grandmother, his mother with him.

Q: Wow.

A: And down the line, I mean, quite a story how they ma -- how they made it, how they were not driving cars, and [indecipherable] had to hire a car for at that time, for five children and two adults in Europe, a truck or so, and use your wits about it. Is -- if you -- I don't know if you have any flight documentary -- documentation, but it's a remarkable story.

Q: So you -- what grade to you start when you start school there, since you seem to --

A: Well, since I had a year in Holland --

Q: Right.

A: -- I was not as much back, so f -- had -- technically I had -- give me credit for one year for Holland, and the second year over there. So when I came to the United States, they put me into fourth grade.

Q: Okay. So you're actually pretty much where you should be.

A: No, no, I was -- no -- no, no. I came to United States in '46, when I was --

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, okay.

A: -- okay? I should have been really in the fifth grade.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: So I'm -- I spent, I think a few months in the fourth grade, and I was promoted to the fifth grade. Where I was more sensitive, I wanted to be where I belonged, somehow. That -- and I fortunately caught up soon enough that I did not have to --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, carry that, being behind, whatever that meant, for a long period. But the year in Holland was pretty good for me. I think it was in Holland, it was in Holland, it was in the third grade they put me. So, oddly enough, my arithmetic was better than peop --

Q: I'm not surprised.

A: -- than the kids over here --

Q: The kids here, right.

A: -- were, and so I was -- I -- I did all right in schooling, and yet managed to catch up quick enough.

Q: Right. And you went to high school on the upper West Side as well?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No.

A: No, no, no. I went after one year in upper West Side for a kind of day school, I went to Yeshiva in the East Side.

Q: Oh.

A: By the sixth grade. And went through high school there as well.

Q: And then where did you go to s -- college?

A: Then I went to City College in the evening.

Q: Uh-huh. And you worked during the day?

A: Part time, and studied in the morning, and the evening -- I worked in the afternoon, I went to evening college.

Q: And what were you doing as work?

A: I was -- afternoon I was teaching in Hebrew school, and one semester I worked in the medical library. I went into evening school, and got my degree, and then went for graduate studies, Columbia.

Q: In economics?

A: Economics.

Q: And h -- how did that interest grow? Were you always interested in economics, do you think?

A: No, I mean, no it actually was through exposure primarily, the choices that -- some subject matters I was more interested in compared with others, and I was challenged by th -- the bottom line is I had the most difficulty with economics, that's why I went for it.

Q: Really?

A: Right. The other courses went much easier. I thought originally of going into international relations, or so and was -- had easy street, I got A's, and you know, just coasting through it, and economics I had to think, had to read. So, I decided --

Q: So you wanted the challenge --

A: I wa -- I wanted to understand it, so --

Q: Right.

A: I went through a -- I went through economics, on to graduate and -- as a major in graduate studies as well, and --

Q: And you got a PhD?

A: Co -- all but dissertation. And worked toward the university for -- or college for nine years, and --

Q: At Swarthmore?

A: Swa -- first at City College for nine years, and then Swarthmore for five years.

Q: Mm-hm. And when did you get married?

A: 1962, in Montreal.

Q: So when you went to is -- no, this is after you went to Israel for the first time and saw your sister.

A: After, right.

Q: Uh-huh, right.

A: Right, right. By chance, my wife was in Israel the same summer when I was there.

Q: No kidding?

A: And we did meet, but I didn't know who she was at that time, so two years [indecipherable]

Q: So where did you meet her?

A: On the street with a group, she was with a group of youngsters, and I knew some people in that group. So I had a conversation, which she recalls, too.

Q: That's funny. And you met in Canada?

A: In New York, she was in New York.

Q: In New York, I see.

A: And the rest is all good history. Much, much more favorable chapter.

Q: She had a good -- she had a better history than you did?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. She was --

Q: Cause she was here, she was here?

A: She lived in Montreal. She was raised in Montreal --

Q: Uh-huh. I see.

A: -- and her parents had been there for -- way before the war, so she did not personally experience, nor did her parents --

Q: Right.

A: -- directly. Her parents lost --

Q: Excuse me. The plane, I'm so -- yes, okay. It's the first time we've had a plane, okay. Yes, she comes from Montreal, yes? She was raised in Montreal?

A: Mont -- raised Montreal, and did not have direct experience with the Holocaust, although her parents, her mother did lose some sisters.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: In Poland, who left -- who remained there. So she had a more normal upbringing.

Q: Right, right.

A: And that -- also the good chapters in my life.

Q: Yes. With four children.

A: Four children, and --

Q: A boy and three girls.

A: -- I have nice grandchildren, and a lot of, you know, happy days and times and -- and of rewards for surviving.

Q: Yes. D-Do you, when you look back on the times after the war, do you see a lot of ways in which what happened to you affected you, or is that really very difficult to parse out?

A: Well, it's -- definitely the war experience is engraved into me. I mean, I know, I went through the war, I know I lost my parents and two brothers. So I'm very sensitized to the Shoah and what happened, part because I lived through it, in my own way. I was not as directly affected like some other people went through hell. I did not have, you know, my -- any numbers carved into me. And I was not beaten up physically, or so, but I certainly am a victim of not -- of having had a lost childhood. I mean that never -- right? I knew I was different, but [indecipherable] and the younger ages when I came United States, I knew I was not the same everybody else. Other people had parents, other people had normal memories, I had no pictures of my childhood, I had very few concrete episodes, no family vacations, except for I went back, you know, to the beach story, but -- so I -- I know I was different, and I was at a young age is especially more sensitive. Once you get married and have children, you join another category of life. I was more with a similar group, but the issue where you come from, whether it was raised, or -- know, specifically, or underlying, people talk about experiences which I could never talk about. Or show pictures, or something of this sort, so that respect it affected me, or so, over time I th -- I'm sure that my sensitivities about the world events or so, must have some roots in my experience as well. I don't want to link everything who I am, I do -- I don't want to sou -- I never wanted to, I don't intend to psychoanalyze myself, of you know, my behavior or good deeds, or bad deeds, or good habits or bad habits are attributed to the war, and I don't feel that I have to glean who I am, or attribute who I am to the war experience. I am

who I am with that being part of me, but it's -- certainly it's a very central part of my memory of -- or so, though fortunately, since 1945, many other events have happened, I mean good events have happened, that they have receded, okay, proportionately of my life, I have the good life.

Q: Right.

A: Okay? But that doesn't eliminate --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- what I went through, and awareness of it. I'm a different person, of course, of what I went through. How different, in which ways, very difficult to pinpoint. Obviously, I mean [indecipherable] I'd never come to the United States, I mean, that's [indecipherable] you know, and my wife -- if you go through -- if you go this sort of route, so --

Q: You wouldn't have met, you wouldn't have --

A: Would -- exactly, we wouldn't be sitting over here right now. So I -- by the nature of the animal, life would be different because of the war in so many ways which I cannot eve -- trace. Nor would I know what had happened. You can't predict -- too parallel life events, or so. So I am who I am, with that being a major part of me.

Q: Did your uncle talk to you a lot about your father and your mother, so you could get a -- a -- a picture of them?

A: No, he talked very little about his family in general.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And talked very, very little about my father and mother. My aunt from Switzerland talked more, oddly enough.

Q: You mean the one that -- who took in --

A: -- the one -- the one that's -- my sister, Lily, right.

Q: Lily, I see.

A: Not oddly, I think, just different circumstances. And my uncle was much more tight lipped about family in general, or -- not to [indecipherable] re us. In part I also think that he -- that's more speculation than fact, but I feel that maybe even fact, he I think felt somewhat guilty that he did not do more to get my parents out, whether it would be more encouraging or physical action. He himself had come to the United States in '41 or so, so there were some years involved. I have no idea -- I have no clue how much contact they had. He told us [indecipherable] was very -- always a very -- my -- my father was the

older brother, and he always told about his respect and, you know, esteem for him, only to talk to him as a younger brother. But he never talked about details of background. But he never talked about his own -- to his own children either, too much. So when I speak to my cousins, his children are so now about -- because they also regret they never pumped him for information just in the family tree. [indecipherable] or so, and his background or so. Anyways, the answer to your question is no, very little information about my parents. So that's another void.

Q: Right.

A: How they lived, how they celebrated, how they did things. My brother knows a little bit more, my sister knows bits and pieces, I know very little. That's certainly a blank compared to other children.

Q: Right, right.

A: Wa -- so again, that -- it's understandably I was a very little boy, right, so I don't recall where -- and my sister mentions to me that for my father's 40th birthday he got a electric shaver.

Q: And you wouldn't know, right.

A: I wouldn't know, right? That was a big deal in Holland to get an electric shaver, because people used to use shaving paste --

Q: Right.

A: -- to do the beards, so.

Q: Let me ask you an odd -- something of an odd question. When you mentioned the postcard, and your brother telling you of the postcard, something happened to you.

A: I choked up a little more, right?

Q: Yeah. What is it, i-is that symbol of the loss for you, do you think, or s --

A: In part it's a symbol of the loss, obviously, but also is the content. I mean, for parents to write a farewell note to parent -- to the children is not normal, and for a brother to end up saying [indecipherable] which means I will see you again, and never materialized, is a painful message to receive, but never follow through. So more emotions may be evoked from that than describing that they went on a train, and they open up a -- a suitcase in the camp.

Q: Right, right. Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to mention that I have not asked? I'm sure there's --

A: I'm sure there's things that you would like me to ask which I haven't answered, or I -- no, I wa -- my job was not to know, give you all my thoughts and feelings. I mean, you asked a number of intriguing questions or so, I think gives you a -- some sense of what the war --

Q: Right.

A: -- was -- meant for me, what I -- what little part I played as one individual, and -- well, in some sense our families are like mic-microcosm of one type of --

Q: Absolutely.

A: -- Holocaust story, you know. And the implications of it all are serious, you know, let's talk about millions of people. Here's a very, you know, quote, normal family that was split apart.

Q: Right.

A: To the extent that I have four children and a family and grandchildren, my two brothers would had equal families, and never experienced any personal fulfillment in this regard, and my parents never saw grandchildren, I did. So all the human relationships, and all the human events, were kind of disrupted. I had a disjointed childhood at best. My brother had consequences of it, my sister are similar, you know, so this is just one family to, quote, just one family, and there's plenty of damage, and I repeat again, I did not [indecipherable] go through the personal horrors of people who go through Auschwitz, or ber -- Buchenwald, and tell horrible stories, you know, on a personal basis or so. But that's just a kind of little composite story of one family and how it spreads, what happened to us, and how one takes it.

Q: Well, I'm very grateful that you were willing to -- to come and do the interview, and --

A: Thank you for --

Q: -- I thank you very much.

A: Okay, thank you.

Q: And we're going to take a break and look at the photographs.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay Charlie, describe this picture for us.

A: This is a wedding picture of my parents, 1922, in Frankfurt, with the extended family there, and including in the back right behind them, my mother's sister and her husband, Rosie Goodman, and Morris Goodman, where my sister went after the war. Next to

Morris Goodman is Pepi Berger, who -- with whom I stayed for one year in Holland, with her husband Josef Berger. And next to her is Mendel Siegman, who is my father's brother, with whose family I stayed, starting in 1946 till 1962, with his wife Suzie Siegman, who is not in the picture, he wasn't married yet. This picture went through the war itself, because my cousin carried with him through certain concentration camps, and by good circumstances it was finally brought to our attention, so this was salvaged, and this is the kind of big collective origin picture.

Q: And this picture?

A: This is a portrait picture of my mother that was taken, I believe, after her marriage, I don't know exact dates on this one. And it was this plus the next one from my father, was given to us by very, very close friends of my mother, who had it in their collection, and when we came back after the war to United States, they wanted to make sure that we have pictures of our parents, and they enlarged it, and framed it, I believe, and -- and have been with us since. They hang on a wall in our din -- living room.

Q: And this?

A: This is the companion picture of my father, also given by the same friends, Hansha Label Velk, who were close friends of my mother, and this the only full faced picture I have of my father as an adult after his marriage.

Q: Okay, the picture on the left?

A: On the left is a picture of my mother as a young girl, 1913, must have been 14 years old or so, and the [indecipherable] where she was raised in Switzerland. Both this and these other pictures are -- giv -- were given to me by my Aunt Rosie from Switzerland, my mother's sister, who had it in her collection. Without her I would not have any pictures of my mother in any stage of her life.

Q: And the one on the right.

A: The one on the right is 1922, most probably either be -- just before or after she was married. Again, for -- formal posed picture.

Q: Now who's this?

A: This is my picture of my brother, must be a half a year old or so, 1926. And that's the only picture I have of my brother. My other brother -- this one, ar -- Aron Erik. My other brother Josef Trey, I don't have any pictures at all. I am -- most probably didn't have it in her collection, or they never found the occasion to give it to me. But that's the only remembrance picture I have of my p -- late brother.

Q: And this shot?

A: This shot at -- is a picture of my father with a friend on the beach in Scheveningen. My father is on the right, the taller man, in 1924, just after he was married. And the background picture of that big circular building is the prominent hotel in Scheveningen to this day, called The Curacao. Until World War two, that's all existed on the beach as far as the visible building, now it is all built up around it, so it doesn't look as identifiable any more. But it's only snapshot picture I have of my father.

Q: And who is that?

A: This is my mo -- late mother, 1940 picture, the latest picture [indecipherable] really close to before she was killed in Auschwitz a few years later. And again, that was given to me by my relative. We have -- we carry no pictures with us -- we didn't carry any pictures with us during the war, obviously, and any family pictures we had we -- either they were disposed or not given to us after the war.

Q: And these pictures?

A: These pictures are from 1946, must be early '46, wintertime in Amsterdam, my uncle Moritz from Switzerland came to visit us, brought us lots of clothing, which we are wearing, and other goodies, and parading through the center plaza of Amsterdam. To the left I am, next is my uncle, and my sister Lily, and my brother Leo. Wasn't that a nice visit. On the right?

Q: Yes.

A: Is a picture taken after my sister left, otherwise she would have been in the picture, went -- left to Switzerland. In the background, in the center, are my relatives, Pepi and Josef Berger with whom I st -- we s -- we stayed for one year in Amsterdam. To the left, the woman with the beret is Malka Weinmann, who kept close to us, both in Amsterdam, and when she came to United States, stayed with -- friendly with us, on good -- very good terms. She is, I think, holding a -- a hand of the little nephew. And the woman on the right is a sister of Pepi Berger, who was a Regina Felsen, or Feldrin, who married during the war, and -- to a Dutch person, and she was part of the family as well. So this is a kind of contemporary Amsterdam picture. Contemporary 1946.

Q: And who is this good looking group?

A: This is the wedding picture of our daughter Dafna with her husband Dani. And next to Dafna is my wife Gita. And Dafna is holding one of her nephews, Ayal, who is the youngest of our oldest daughter, who is sta -- sitting right be -- standing right behind Dafna and Dani, that's Atara, right, and her husband Joel - Jody, right next to her, right. And their other three children are the boy with the sleeve -- shirts -- shirtsleeve is Ilan, shirtsleeve right behind me, right. And on the side, the girl with the white skirt, this is our oldest granddaughter -- the white skirt at the end, next -- behind my wife Gita.

Q: Oh, here.

A: Right. That's Michal. And in front are our two other grandchildren, one of them is Hadar, the small one, and that -- that's the four children of Atara and Jody. And next to her is Shlomit, and the little boy next to me is Yosef, who are the two children, at that time, of our daughter Naomi, in back and her husband Ari.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Right. This is Naomi, this is Ari. And on back, the last two next to Atara are our son, right there, tall fellow is next to a -- next to -- that --

Q: Here.

A: -- that's right. Our son Dov, and his wife Tzviya, right over there. That's the last family picture we had, but there -- since then, we have had, thank God, a few additions in the family. Atara -- Dafna and Dani had -- to have two children, Amihi and Tahiwa. And Naomi had another son, Menachim Benjamin. So thank God the -- is a contrast that they have two wedding pictures, and this is the continuity which Hitler tried to destroy, but we beat him.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Left is my wife Gita and myself, and on the other s -- on the right is my wife Gita and myself again, different poses and formality. And this is the best part happened to my life when I met Gita, and she is all around superb blessing for all of us. And those are the bright chapters, opened with when I met her, and then the family pictures since. So this is the continuity with a major interruption, and some family tragedy between, but thank God that the bright side is that the continuity exists.

End of Tape #7
Conclusion of Interview