SAM SCHALKOWSKY
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[Tape 1]

Q: Your name and age.

A: My name is Sam Schalkowsky or Schalkowsky. I am now 82 years old.

Q: And where are we?

A: We're in Chevy Chase, Maryland, suburb of Washington.

Q: And in your home?

A: Yes. We're in our home, here in Chevy Chase.

Q: Tell me when you first started to talk about your wartime experiences.

A: I think it's been a long period of time, which– (and I'm not unique to that) right after the war, where there wasn't much said. There was a sense that it really– people didn't want to hear too much about it. So it could have been, oh, at least maybe something like 20 years before it was acceptable or desired. And I think that had mostly to do with a new generation displaying an interest in it. So it would have been– And the first time actually I talked to, would have been either in this unaffiliated group that we belong to, that I might have spoken to them, and–or our daughters, one of them in high school perhaps. Susan's high school class was interested. So that would have been around 1970 or thereabouts. That would have been the earliest time.

Q: How important was that for you, to start to talk about it?

A: It was important for me in terms of realizing that the people wanted to hear it. And certainly, of course, our daughter. That was a big deal (you know) for the whole– to appear before her own class. So it was more in terms of what it meant to the audience than for my own need or desire to-to relate this particular period of my experience.

Q: What about your own need and desire? Was there a point earlier in your life where you did need and want to talk about it, but didn't?

A: I ...d frequent (you know) talking about it. I never really looked for it. I responded to people's interest. It's changed most recently, I think, when I started to change my attitude as to what it is I was trying to accomplish by talking about it. But all along, I preferred to minimize the frequency of my talking. I kind of had a feeling that if you keep repeating the same thing, it changes the actual story; that basically the-the experience first becomes a story, and then the story becomes the experience. And I didn't particularly like that.

Q: What were your concerns? What didn't you like about that?

A: It's– (you know) the– To begin with, I have blocked out a great deal of the details of my experiences, those– particularly those that were most unpleasant. So as time goes on, what-what I was reading about and hearing about other people and the books and things that was published, somehow some pieces of that become interwoven in my own talking about my experience. And so I was kind of concerned that it's really the connection between the actual past and the past as I saw and read about it, was being not-not in good– not a good connection. So I-I tended to minimize—

Q: Tell me again the worry about blurring those lines.

A: My concern was that as time went by, and I was hearing and reading more about this period, what was going on, and especially as I found some documentation from

other survivors, who were perhaps in the same places, that because I had blocked out so much of my own details, I was beginning to incorporate what I read as though it was my experience. Now, sometimes, whenever I could, like in a recent talk where I quoted from other documents that were describing what was going on at the particular period, that was clear. I was not talk–saying it was my experience, but it was my background. But I was concerned, and I still am (you know) concerned, that probably too many details that I might now relate as being my own experiences are really experiences I relived or rejuvenated from what I have heard and read.

Q: So was the concern that you want to get it right, or that you were growing more distant from your actual memories?

A: I think that in my case there is another aspect to it that fits into it. And that is that I-I get– I wouldn't say bored, but not that interested in repeating the same thing again and again if I do it too often. So these two things together, and perhaps other things, deterred me from accepting or certainly not offering to have many-many talks about it. (Yeah.)

Q: But it's more than just getting bored, your issue about the inevitability of blurring memories, that's a complicated issue to the value and purpose of testimony.

A: Well, it's in the– in-in the purpose. First of all, because of the way I've (you know) I-I operated, I work, I need something new, to bring in something new, in whatever I'm doing, whenever I can. It's been my (you know) professional experience to do that. I have something like 13 patents to my name, and all the time looking for basically innovation to solve a problem. So to just do this without looking for something new was not very interesting for me. So it's when I find a way to combine this need for something new, something useful hopefully, that I started to-to accept, especially from the museum in most recent years, to-to accept the opportunity. And certainly other work that I was doing in the museum, it's because I was– I was– I could use my mind, basically.

Q: When you have told your story over the years, you lose your own past?

A: In a sense. It's interesting that I– if I have spoken to our-our group that we belong to (and that's now some years ago), I did that because it fitted into the series that they were having, education kind of series, like the creation of the state of Israel and what was my own experience, was to highlight the time. That-that helped. But it was that particular need, and also in what I did in the archives in my first assignments, was-was not that routine. When it becomes routine, I lose interest.

Q: Did you have a personal need, after having survived, to tell others about it?

A: Not-not much. No, not much. Of course when-when the people you deal with and you relate to, you don't like to have a hidden history. So when opportunities came in more intimate relationships, friendships with other people, that I didn't mind relating some of these things, provided I could– I could sense an interest. But that was the main reason. And of course there is– When there is an interest, you kind of– you tend to make yourself important by showing up this kind of thing. And I'm sure this played some role. But no-no driving interest to actually go and spread the word, like people keep telling me (you know) I should write a book, with such an interesting background, such adventures. I-I don't get interested in doing that at all, simply because I can see that so much of it is being done. So what's one more story? It's doesn't (you know) add that much to it. So unless I can find another purpose, I don't dwell on this story. In general, I don't dwell on the past—not just my experience during the war years, but even more recent experiences in other areas. I tend not to dwell on the past; try to focus, look for some purpose, some-something of interest in my present environment.

Q: Has that always been the case for you?

A: I think so. I think so.

Q: It's just a sense of who you are, or your way to keep moving forward?

A: Well, in the case of– I really don't know. Just I know that that's the way I tend to be.

Q: You said the world wasn't particularly interested when you first came?

A: Well, the world, meaning the people around you. They participated in one way or another in the World War II– in our experience, however remote to-to these– to my experience. And it was too close and too unpleasant, and I think they just didn't want themselves, they didn't want to dwell on it. Just like I didn't want to dwell on the past, people in general, I think, immediately after the war, didn't want to do that. Not exclusively, but I think there was the general sense.

Q: There's a sense in contemporary America that unless one deals with the past, one doesn't move forward. What is your sense.

A: I can– I can accept it as a desirable and necessary (you know) point of view. But that is separate and distinct from how I was. I think I've changed since I've been at the museum, after I retired, that I can rationally, logically see the need for such purpose, to disclose. And (I) that influences my responding to talks. Now I am officially part of the Speakers Bureau, but it doesn't mean that I talk every week or repeat myself. I still try to keep that to kind of a modest frequency.

Q: When and why did you join the museum, and what happened?

A: I joined the museum as a volunteer basically after I retired. I retired in 1998, and here I am always interested in doing something, hopefully something productive, something new, and the question is what I was going to do. I thought that my work the last period in-in my– in our own business, where I was (excuse me) very much involved in new developments in our area (this microbiological testing), that I would want to continue with it, because I could see there is a lot of need there. But I very quickly found out that I was out of it, that this was no longer my environment. And being an engineer, I was not really immediately considered part

of the microbiological community. So I needed to– I abandoned that altogether within probably like six months, and started to look around. So I volunteered at the Holocaust Museum here in Washington, and I– because of my knowledge of languages (I know Yiddish and I know Hebrew, and I think, some English), they assigned to me at the archives a recently received collection from Kovno, which is where I come from in Lithuania. And I found that Yiddish, even though I had not spoken or used it for close to 60 years, that it was still there; and I could be refreshing it and applying it usefully to this document collection, because it happened to be from Kovno, which is– And I was like in the Kovno ghetto. So that got my interest, and this led to a number of projects over the years that kept me interesting–interested.

Q: What happened when you stepped into that world?

A: Well, the first– One thing that I mentioned is to discover my knowledge or awareness or– of Yiddish, of the language. But to me, Yiddish was– I knew it because it was spoken at home, but it was not central to my life as I was growing up, because I belonged to a Zionist organization and where Hebrew was the language of discourse, and I attended a Hebrew gymnasium, which means everything was taught in Hebrew. So literature was Hebrew literature. So Yiddish, I-I could see– I could re-recover it, just by working at it.

And of course the test came when I came across this one document in this– It was the–a collection of documents from the Kovno ghetto police. And I had some encounters with the ghetto police when I was there briefly. So that kind of was of interest. And what they were describing in this document, which was in Yiddish, quite extensive, typewritten, 250 pages, what they called a History of the Kovno Ghetto Jewish Police, that they were describing this what was going on, and some of it obviously rang a bell, even though I had really blocked out some of the unpleasant details, or even re– normal details, but– So it was bringing back my background, and it was shedding a different light on how I was thinking about it. And I thought that this document in particular, because it was treated not very well

in the Holocaust literature– Actually only one historian who was excerpt- excerpting from it and writing about it; I thought he had a very wrong point of view, even though he also came from the Kovno ghetto. So I thought that this document had to be– had to become public, that it was an important addition to describing what life actually was like in– from a people's point of view, in, say, in the Kovno ghetto, and by-by extension, to in other places which had similar conditions.

Q: Was your discovery of your own past emotional for you? Was it exciting?

A: [overlap] Yes, it was exciting. I don't know if it was emotional. Some of the detailed description which corresponded to my description might have been emotional. But when you work at it for a while and repeat (you know) this going through these experiences, the emotional aspect tends to be reduced.

So I embarked on translating it. Now, this was not as part of the–my museum activities, because I decided that on my own. So I made this my– another project of my own. And I would say that in-in the process of doing it, I recovered a good part of my Yiddish knowledge, because it was not there but it had to be retraced, whether it's through dictionaries or through participating in reading groups. So it served these two purposes—one intended, the other one not—that I did translate. It took me a couple years.

Q: You said it shed new light on your own experience. What did that mean?

A: Well, I can illustrate it. I and my mother were taken off the street in the Kovno ghetto by a Jewish policeman, following the directive from the elder council and the Nazi rulers .. to provide them like 500 workers for the re– for the Riga ghetto (Riga, the capital of Latvia, not that far from Kovno). And of course nobody volunteered for that, because there has not– had not been any selections until that time. They did not end in the ditches of the Ninth Fort, which was the killing grounds of the Kovno ghetto.

So the police picked up people wherever they could, and my mother and I didn't manage to escape them. And they took us down to this–the square, the center square in the ghetto, where they were collecting those to be transported to Riga. And in-in that square, there was the detail of the Jewish policemen which was led by a man called Michael Bronson, who happened to be my high school teacher of Lithuanian just 6 or 9 months before that. And I knew him personally because we had extracurricular connections. And so I thought, "Well, he'll– he can help me. (you know) He knows me." And he didn't. Didn't do anything. And my mother and I were taken away. So I kind of– (you know) I held it against him. I says, "How– (I mean) I'm not just anybody. I'm his student, his pupil."

Well, reading what was actually happening, how this-this transport was assembled, there's nothing he could do, because the SS were right there with him, and he– I thought that it was his job to select who would go and who wouldn't go, and that was not true either. Everybody who was collected was going to go. So it-it illustrated that my perspective at the time was anything but complete on the background, what was going on. And there are some other instances like that.

Q: Emotionally, does your feeling of betrayal change by that discovery? What do you do with that psychologically?

A: Well, what-what's changed is that– What this document was describing, and supplemented by other documents, is that the-the issues dealt with by people like, say, in the ghetto police, in the elder council, in the labor office, are not as simple as it might appear. And people would take a position like I did, (you know) that these were traitors, (you know) they just didn't care about anybody else. And yet when you read it, you find out that it's not that simple. And for that reason I felt it needed to be publicized so people can make their own decisions by getting both sides of the story. And that's what prompted me to try to push this project forward.

Q: Has that generally been the case, that as you've aged and learned more, that your perspective on your experience has changed?

A: Probably, probably, yes.

Q: How?

A: [overlap] Well, I think it changed fundamentally in this way: that for a while, immediately after the war and some time, this-the purpose seemed to be to describe what was going on. So to relate atrocities and to give people a sense just how awful this thing was, was the– was the purpose of-of talking about. See. So you look what (you know) hatred and bias can bring about. But I think when I got involved in it more deeply, at the museum, it changed in this respect: that I thought it's not as simple a-a historical event that could be reduced to the extent of the atrocities. There is more to it. And particularly if you want to try to understand it, which is not simple, you have to look further and deeper into it. Not– I can't say I have the answer, but I know that it needs to be addressed more than just relating just what happened.

Q: For you, what is your sense?

A: Well, it's only a sense of what I can do. I mean, I cannot prescribe what everybody else should do, or the– what those that make policy on it should do. But it changed, but in part because of my other interests in dealing with it. Like I mentioned, it had to be– I had to address something– a new angle or something before I was interested in dealing with it, whether it's to publish something or to talk about it. So it was the need for this new angle that brought me, for example now, as of my most recent (you know) talk that I gave, that I [would] not going to focus on my experiences; that my experiences are the background for what I want to talk about, but what I decided I would explore a little more is the people that I encountered in– during my experiences. Because there are these broad categorizations of (you know) perpetrators and collaborators and bystanders and so on and so on, that are much too broad. They don't bring up real people and try to shed some light: how did they– how did they become what they became? And so this is what I-I did last time, and this gives me the added interest that I need to keep talk about it, because

it's a new angle and it's not (you know) just my experience, and how good or bad it was, but the particular people. And there are a variety of them. And they do or they don't fit in these categories that I thought might be more useful in trying to understand at least some aspects of how the Holocaust came about.

[Tape 2]

Q: Discovering your own past through these documents, you had to rethink your experiences. Did that affect not only the nature of your testimony at the museum, but personally—

A: Of course it did. But I think you need– it need to be looked at from two different perspectives. One is the-the rational, the logical thing. (you know) Did I actually (you know) experience this? And on that part (you know) you can conclude that yes, it brings something back, but it does not really affect me that much. But on an emotional level, it does. It could bring back the fears or the anxieties associated with those experiences. And that can show up in any number of ways. The concern that something bad is about to happen, that you can get that sense for no-no good reason, really. But any event that you start worrying about (you know) suddenly can get out of proportion. And of course in the dreams that you get, the nature of these dreams become more disturbing. So these are two different– Rationally, I read about it and I say, "Yeah, it's– I was there." But I don't feel the (you know) the pain that I must have felt when somebody hit me then. That I don't feel. That's history. But emotionally, it's–it does bring things back.

Q: What did you do with that? You were just prepared to take that on in your life?

A: Well, yeah. For one thing, I would spread my activities out. Now, not do it for too long a period of time, but just cut it off and just go away from it for a while. And that helps, and coming back, because I was convinced that it needed to be done.

Q: Are your Holocaust experiences always in your dream world?

A: No, no. Not now. But I should say something that has changed in the last year, which I don't normally announce because some people, there is a stigma attached to it. For-for a while when I was working on this, and being– (you know) volunteering at the Holocaust Museum, and being retired makes a big difference, because when you're not retired, when you're involved in all kinds of activities that are very important to you, whether professionally or from a livelihood point of view, that's a great distraction. You don't– You don't have time or interest to dwell on these things. But when you're retired, these distractions are not there, which some people say that that makes the golden years, but I doubt that. So the distractions are not there, and then add to this that what I chose as a replacement for it is to work on Holocaust matters. So it was a bad combination. And (f) so there was some kind of depression that would lurk in the background, and every now and then (you know) come out more strongly. So I consulted some medical people, and I ended up about a year ago on what is called, I guess, an antidepressant. And that makes a big difference. So there is a medical way to deal with it.

Q: One survivor said that as he grows older, he's become much more emotional, more vulnerable.

A: Well, the only parallel I can see here is the fact that (you know) these other distractions are not there, and it depends what you're doing. If you're not involved in Holocaust matters, the emotional things are not likely to be that much affected. But if you focus on it, they are very likely to do so.

Q: Were you surprised by the depression?

A: It's not– It's not a matter of surprised, I don't think. It's just something that's there, and you don't know how to get rid of it. It's– And it-it interferes with life and your relationships to people, especially your close people. And I didn't like it.

Q: Working at the museum, how did you feel about testifying or telling your story? When did you decide, beyond the manuscript work, talk publicly?

A: Well, it depends on the situation, the particular situation. As I said, I did not seek [him] out. But when this opportunity somehow showed up, where people asked me, it [dependent/depended] on who I was going to talk to and what I think I was trying to accomplish by it. And it had a lot to do with what I said before about what it did for me or didn't do for me, whether I was interested in doing it or not.

Q: Do you have friends who are Holocaust survivors?

A: Yes. Now of course with them, throughout the years, even during the early years when nobody wanted to hear it, you get a number of Holocaust survivors who– especially who were at the same places (which is what tends to be the case), and all they're going to talk about is their experiences and the people in it and so on. But they're aging, some of them have passed away, some are no longer in the best mental state, so it's changed. But even so, I think the tendency during– if opportunities when we get together, is to-to talk about the experience.

Q: For you, has it been important to have that?

A: Not-not particularly, but I was interested when the opportunities came up, at least to listen if not to participate in detail.

Q: When you now talk about your experience in terms of key people who shaped your experience, what have you gleaned and how do others respond?

A: The response, I don't know. I suspect– I only had really two occasions to use this approach. And the last one, this conversation, I thought there was a great deal of interest, at least the way people expressed it afterwards in terms of my autographs and whatnot, [take] pictures with me– And I suspect it was because of this angle, in addition perhaps to the particular experiences, personal experiences that I bring in as the background for it. So this is my– It's limited experience, but I think it's of interest. And that's what encourages me (you know) to perhaps continue along this

line. I don't know how long I'll be doing this before I get bored with it and say, "Let's find another angle." But I think it can go for-for a while.

Q: It's more challenging, I suppose.

A: It's-it's more challenging. It's– presumably involves the people, the audience, in thinking about this, not just hearing your nice adventure story, especially if there's a happy ending. But it gets them involved hopefully in thinking about it—not that I offer answers. I can't. So that-that helps.

Q: It makes the evil of the Holocaust less "other."

A: I hope it-it makes it more human, this-this evil. There are people that (you know) perhaps a lot of us can identify with, and can only wonder, (you know) how did they wander off in this direction and became such willing participants? They're not all monsters, although there are some who are, and they-they produce the bad stories of what people experienced.

Q: But that they are not all monsters is a more complicated and horrifying story.

A: Yes, right. Yes, it is. It is.

Q: You've dealt with that in your own life, trying to deal with that complexity?

A: I haven't, really. I haven't really, until– not until recently. Not until after I retired.

Q: Tell me more.

A: Well, let's say it's the-the diversion of other interests and needs (you know) of doing what one does, (you know) whether in– professionally for–to produce income and so on. And when that is gone, that you-you're open to-to this sort of (you know) recollections.

Q: Was your world view more bifurcated before?

A: I– The few opportunities that I had to speak about my experiences, I tried to describe the details. Whenever possible, if it was (you know) horrors-horror kind of stuff, I would try not to draw upon my own experiences, mostly because I did not retain them. So I would use, like in one instance, excerpts from-from this document, this manuscript from the ghetto police. They were describing what was going on, and I could say, "Yes, I experienced this, but I'm not describing it. Here-here it is." (you know) Was another-nother instance, trying to remember, where I did the same kind of a thing. I quoted somebody else, somebody else's description, even though it matched my background. But I wasn't describing my experience specifically, just showing the connection to it.

Q: Clearly there's something protective about that.

A: Absolutely, right. [*Yes.*] Especially if you're concerned about your emotional-emotional reactions. I-I didn't– I wanted to avoid that. And I think by now, I can, because I've done it a number of times. So the emotional level goes more into the background.

Q: It is in some way, I suppose, easier to deal with documents and translations.

A: Not necessarily easier.

Q: No, that's–

A: Not necessarily.

Q: Maybe less threatening of something emotionally, though.

A: Well, you can stop reading. (you know) If it– If it goes too-too deep or you don't like it, you stop it. You can go back to it. But it doesn't leave you. (you know) If-if there is a connection to your experiences, it does not go away.

Q: It must be more than diversions and distractions. Is it that you're ready to understand something about your own experience now?

A: Well, it's not just the distractions. It's that associated with these distractions was a desired objective. Like if I have a need (you know) to try and develop something new to be productive in some way, that was an important part of the– what we'd refer to as the earlier professional kind of distractions or family needs. So it's-it's that part that goes away, and now you're looking for a replacement for it. What can I do (you know) that maybe is new? It's not (you know) that (you know) known, and would be useful. So– And I was working in the– in the Holocaust area. So I naturally ended up doing just that, looking for like– There're other small kind of things that happened, like in this manuscript. It's been moving very slowly in the publication area. The Holocaust Museum presumably is trying to publish it, but it's not at the top of their agenda.

And there is another complication that came about with it, in that there was a man who also was in the Kovno ghetto, decided that his uncle, who he lived with in the ghetto, is the author of this whole manuscript, because he saw him sitting at the typewriter at night. And that was standing in the way of the museum moving ahead. (you know) They had to somehow sort it out or make a deal with him or something. And so I started to look into the manuscript in a lot more detail for the purpose of trying to identify a little better who produced this document. And I think I succeeded in showing, with some kind of factual information—from page sequences, from looking at this document almost page by page, and finding out wherever there was a reference to when this particular page was written, to produce a timeline of the creation of this document, all kinds of background information for it. And I think– I came to the conclusion, which I think is reasonable, that this was not a one-man (you know) operation; that this was an organized effort of the police

department, starting from the top. And there is, I think, good– I wouldn't say justification, but good– You can make the connection and show that this is really what it was. And I thought, here is something. I was able to come up with something new, and it was also useful here. So there are opportunities like that. But that's the sort of thing I would be looking for.

Q: When one is reconstructing the memories of traumatic experiences, is it surreal at the same time? What's the complex of emotions?

A: [overlap] It's this question of (you know) how did you survive, and all that, that invariably comes up, and I don't have a exact answer. Perhaps every time it's asked, I come up with a different possibility. I think at one time I was interviewed and I said that it's– having friends was important, that you can't survive by yourself. And that's, I think, an important ingredient. But I would also say that there's something else more fundamental that's involved, and that is the-the desire to live, the need to live. Is nothing rational about it. I think to me, I'm not in that particular branch of science, but I would say it's like in your DNA. And you can't help yourself that you struggle, because otherwise, if you look what people went through, and for how long they went through, and still looked for ways (you know) to survive the day, I think there's a lot to that, that– And then of course everybody will say luck plays a role. But you have to put yourself in a position where luck can play a role. So I think this drive is-is there, and it was there to many people. Whether they used it to [deny] people being taken to a– to the extermination camps, and they know that's where they're going, and they have no way—

Q: The primal quality of survival.

A: Well, this– That there is a irrational angle to attempting to survive. And like I was starting to say about the people I read, that in eastern Poland, that were– they were told, there's going to be three transports, certain dates, and of course the Nazis wouldn't say where it was going, but it was well known to the people that they're heading for the extermination camp, whether it was Treblinka or what have you.

And they described that there was no great emotional outbursts; that they were going about packing their things. What should they take? What shouldn't they take? And their rationale was that it just couldn't be that-that they would be taken by other human beings and just killed. So there must be (you know) something else that would happen. There had to be a rational basis for doing what they were doing, and here they were doing nothing because there's nothing that they could do.

So if you take that (you know) into other situations, I have (you know) my own examples, like when we were taken from Kovno to Riga, at the-this assembly place, when I saw my teacher, I kind of shouted to him, although I'm not very loud. I said that I wanted to live. And he of course didn't hear any of it. But my mother was-was standing next to me, and I'm sure she heard. So that when we were on our way to-to the railroad station, we're going up a hill there in town, I heard her going behind me, and at one spot she says, "Run," (you know) "run." And I looked at what she was pointing at, and I saw this street of Lithuanians going about their daily business, and it didn't look like an environment that is conducive to escape. I didn't know any Lithuanians; the ones I knew or heard about were not friendly; so I didn't run. I thought, maybe there will be other opportunities. Maybe this is indeed not the selection of the known variety. And so there was this rational kind of almost risk assessment. (you know) Is this a reasonable risk to take? And in my mind it wasn't. And some friends who later heard about it, who're in the psychology business, said I wasn't ready to abandon my mother—which all of this may be true. But there was a– some rational aspect to it.

On the other hand, at the end of the war, when I did escape from-from the column that were being marched out of Magdeburg, and that was a reasonable risk, because we knew that the Americans are already nearby, and the Russians are nearby, and there's a fair chance (you know) that if we managed to escape, that this would be successful. So there is not only the will, the need, the desire to live, but there is a rational approach (you know) to choosing the risks that you're taking or not taking. And many people of course who had the same desire to survive maybe chose risks that weren't good. And others didn't choose at all, gave up. So there is this– again this-this complexity. But I think the fundamental need that needs to try

to survive is there. And you can see that in poor countries and– where people put up with an awful lot of unpleasantness, just to live. Not a very good life, but they need– they want to live.

Q: Those two scenes are very different. In the first ("I want to live"), did that just come out of you?

A: [overlap] (Yeah. It just came out.) I was trying to connect to my former teacher, because he wasn't doing anything.

Q: Had you known, until that moment, that you had that instinct for survival?

A: No, I never analyzed it. You don't– No, you're not that analytical in those circumstances.

Q: In terms of your survival itself, did you learn early on that there were things you were and weren't going to do in order to survive? It's interesting that you say you can't survive without friends—

A: That's in retrospect.

Q: Okay. But there are those who you could imagine wouldn't want any friendships or relationships. So for you, did that just turn out to be your way of survival?

A: Well, it turned out that way because I think it's-it's more-more universal. So that there're all these other young people who also needed friends, and they looked who they can relate to, and that's how this so-called friendships ..... relationships materialize. So .. I found this one man in-in Magdeburg who– Sam Isaacson, who– we escaped together. And then he later told me there was a third fellow there too with us. But he was then instrumental in finding that American captain who put me into this German hospital. Without that, I would not have survived. And there're other instances like it, but—

[Tape 3]

Q: In general terms, what role did friendship play for you in terms of your survival?

A: You mean, talking about the past?

Q: Yes, the past.

A: Well, I-I find this individual instances where friendship played a key role. I find other instances where just luck played a key role. It was, I think, all there. [*uh*–] I think my mother's presence [played] a key role.

Q: Would you say that again?

A: My mother's present during these years, I think, played a key role. And I think, if I had to analyze it, she was one of the people, if not the person, who gave me the-the notion, the realization that my life is important. She wanted me to survive. She helped me in certain very definite ways. Whereas that, I think, is-is a key ingredient. If all you see around you is that how worthless you are, you might tend to– not to be as active in looking after yourself, more likely to give up. And she was– she was not with me throughout all these years, but she was, until the end of '45, at least in the same camps, perhaps in the women's camp. And there were opportunities where we're interacting. I think she had the, I think, a mo– a important kind of indirect effect.

Q: And were you the same for her?

A: I doubt it. I was younger. I was used to (you know) to– that parents take care of you. (you know) And I was not at the stage where, say, you take care of your parents, although when I had the opportunity, I did help. But it was more the other way around.

Q: When you were a young boy, and I don't know what age your mom was–

A: She was, (you know) considering that I was the youngest and there was something like a 20-year spread, you can– you can tell that she was in her (f) late forties or fifties. I have the dates, but I don't remember.

Q: Do you imagine her Holocaust experience was very different, by virtue of her age and being a mother? The difference for a young boy and a mom?

A: I haven't looked at it or thought about it in those terms, but I do know that her experiences were very difficult. And she was a hard worker, and–and knew (you know) how to– how to try to survive. But even– But for her age, certainly, it would have been much more– much more difficult.

Q: When you were trying to keep yourself alive, were you simultaneously always concerned and worried about your mom too?

A: I might have been concerned, but there's really no-no point in that. (you know) The survival is a day-by-day thing. (you know) It's what's happening now, what's likely to happen tomorrow, that you're concerned about, and would be perhaps concerned also about her. But it's the immediate. There's no long term, no long range kind of planning.

Q: Survival day by day, the notion of choice, is that forever shaping you as an individual from that point on?

A: I think only in terms of risk taking, that you've practiced (you know) taking risks, making these choices, whether they're good or bad, but you had to make this– If you didn't, you're not trying to survive. You had to look at what was going on, and whether you had a choice, or put yourself in a position where you will have a choice of–between options, and-and taking–making a choice, which always involved risks. So perhaps the habit of risk taking is–is part of the legacy (you

know) of that experience. I mean, I can look at people in my own family, looking at certain dangers that they look at: the food might be now 3 days old, (you know) what– you got a problem. See, that's not a problem to me. No, that's not what you worry about.

Q: You could see how it might affect you in the opposite way, that it might make one not certain of choices. But for you, not.

A: I don't see that.

Q: It didn't make you doubt your instincts or your choices?

A: There's no time. For these sort of things, there's no time. It's instinctive a lot of the time, although there may be (you know) a rational basis somewheres there, but it's instinctive, what you do.

Q: Was friendship also a way of hanging onto humanity? Does it keep you connected in a way that's important? Is it also a burden?

A: I think the (you know) the relationship of a mother to her children isn't something you can generalize to other situation. I think that's unique. And it-it doesn't apply to a father, for example, though my father was already passed away. But from my observations. So I cannot generalize from a mother-(you know)-child relationship to anything else.

Q: You had been taking care of your mother for quite a while before?

A: No, I wasn't. She was taking care of me.

Q: She was.

A: Yeah. She was– I mean, there was a period in the Kaiserwald concentration camp where I had access to clothing that could be traded for food, and during that period I could (you know) help her with some-some food. But other than that, I mean, in the– in the Riga ghetto, she was doing laundry for the well-to-do Jews in the ghetto for food. And she would share that with me. And in the– what makes an impression, is when– The first day, when we were taken into the Kaiserwald concentration camp– This is the first concentration camp, and the procedure is quite traumatic, where you're reduced to nothing, to a number, nothing that you own, and you're very much see that you're not worth anything to anybody except for perhaps what labor you can provide. And that first day, when we met across the double fence, the division between the men's and women's camp, and she threw her portion of bread across this-this divide for me. I-I didn't do that. So this is the kind of thing you can– you can expect (you know) to see from a mother. Maybe not always. But it was on that day, I think it was critical. It said– They say I'm nothing; well, she says I'm something. I should stay alive. And that-that makes an impact, I think.

Q: And you're literally being stripped of your physical and emotional identity.

A: Identities, right.

Q: Your mom did not survive.

A: No. She died in Stutthof, I'd say about 3 months before the liberation.

Q: Had you been in touch with her? Had you been able to see her before?

A: Not in Stutthof. Only on the way to Stutthof. The men and the women were together in the transport.

Q: When did you last see your mom, then?

A: That was on the trip from Kaiserwald, from Riga, to Stutthof, by boat and then by barges. We were together during that–those few days.

Q: How did you hear about her death?

A: Well, after the-the liberation, I first– I looked for information in this tracing bureau, which happened to be in the town that I was working in, in Germany, for UNRRA, and found nothing. Then when I encountered other people that I knew, women, who did survive or knew something about the people from our transport, and what information I got is that she perished in the typhus epidemic that took place in Stutthof, after I was– already left. So that was my impression of (you know) how she– how she died.

Q: Could you grieve, or by that time had even that been changed by—

A: It has. It has been changed. It isn't– It isn't a relationship or a sense or an emotion that you want to rejuvenate, because it's– I think it would be too difficult to deal with. So it's pushed away.

Q: Still is, Sam, or does it start to shift?

A: Well, no, it still is. The only thing that comes up if I dwell on it is the anger, the rage at (you know) what they did to her. But there's nothing you can do about that.

Q: Does one just tamp it, just try to keep it—

A: Yeah. Just keep it on the factual basis. Keep the emotions out of it.

Q: When one survives what you've survived, does it later in life make it difficult to seek help? Does it complicate even—

A: I don't know. I have not examined it (you know) in this– in this context. You mean, does the experience affect you in terms of how you want to deal with its aftermath or?

Q: Does even having survived it make it difficult to seek help, for instance for depression? Does it seem, in the big scheme of things, something you should be able to handle, given what you've already survived?

A: I think that when there're other ways of dealing with it, that would be the preferred way, to me, like (you know) getting involved in your– in your work, in your family life, and– And that was effective, of course, for a long time. It's just after retirement that that was not really available in the same manner. So it was very late before I-I sought (you know) help of that kind. And you keep reading, they tell you (you know) go-go get it. It's–it works. And I think it does work, which is– That was not available really for– until (what) maybe ten years ago, that you can actually interfere with the workings of your– of your mental system with-with a pill. So– But it does.

Q: In what ways do you see your Holocaust experience having altered who you are, who you were as a person?

A: I think that the Holocaust experience affects survivors, including me, in a negative way. I mean, I don't think that you can completely avoid its effects. And– But at– by the same token, there's really not much you can do about it. Just deal with it, with (you know) the way you are and who you are. So yes, I think it affected me, and not in the way that I would like to see, in my– how I can relate to people, or cannot relate to people. But as I said, well, that's water under the dam. You just have to deal with these after-effects and do the best you can with it. And I think it's not that (you know) terrible. There's other ways people can be affected, in worse ways.

Q: Absolutely. . . .What are the negative consequences for any survivor, and yourself?

A: Well, I think in-in-in free relating to people, even (you know) even to family perhaps, that it interferes with that. Because you always, I think for me, have to look after your emotional (you know) reactions. Because they can be (you know) unacceptable to me. So it interferes with an open, completely open and direct kind of relationship. Not terribly bad, but– (you know) So you're not the life of the party. So what?

Q: The qualities one needs to survive are probably the opposite of what one needs for successful intimate relationships in the world. So there's an inevitable tension.

A: Well, you always have to– In the survival process, you always have to look out for danger, for– And that can come from anywhere. So this alertness (you know) is what I think may be getting transformed into a interference with-with relationships.

Q: And a kind of guardedness, a kind of distrust or wariness?

A: And, well, on the other hand, being careful in– and testing what you're going to say and how you're going to behave, not being (you know) spontaneous about it.

Q: Measured?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Could you see those threads all throughout your life?

A: I think so, yeah.

Q: And did your best not to be led by them, but to—

A: Well, try to (you know) deal with it as best as you can, and the choice of your friends makes a difference.

Q: Tell me how and when you met your wife, and how you married.

A: Well, I was– I graduated from Columbia University in New York, and got my first job there, and I met her at some party, some social event. And within something like 6 months or 9 months, we were married.

Q: What were you drawn to?

A: I don't know. It's–It's interesting, but obviously there was a match of-of personalities and pers–perhaps personal needs. .. Because, I mean, I'm not– don't want to get into details. I don't know I know them in detail. But I do know that there was– it was clear to me, because at the time, I was going out with another young woman who was a survivor. And I thought, well, we're a match, and kind of looks like obvious, you know, that's the direction. And when I met Ellen, it became obvious that it's not; that– So just in what specific ways, I wouldn't venture.

Q: Did you know you wanted a family and children?

A: I took it for granted that that's what you– that's what life after the camps was like. (you know) Get a good job if you can, and .. build up a– build a family.

Q: Was there a rush towards normalcy?

A: Well, (you know) after all these years of exciting adventures, and you find yourself in so-called normal life, you look around and say, "What is normal life?" And that's what you see. Normal life is a family, a good job, and a house, and (you know) that's it. May be dull, but that's what it is—compared (you know) to the past.

Q: Particularly when you're young, to have survived and then step into the normal life must have felt dull or ordinary. It's such a shocking transition.

A: Shocking? Well—

Q: It's a dramatic transition.

A: Dramatic. Dramatic, yet. But again, this is, I got a job where I had challenges. And that's where the challenges came from, the– to advance professionally, and I did, did well, I thought. But then found out that there was one aspect that was either due to my experiences or may not have been due (I have been there already), is that I didn't take well to working for somebody, (you know) to take the authority. And so before long I was looking for ways to do it on my own.

Q: And engineering suited you? Was that a good match, given your sensibilities?

A: Really not quite, but you could– (you know) It was enough of a base to do what I wanted to do, because in some of my activities we were outside of engineering. They were– Some of it was in business, some of it more closely to science, but enough of a base to-to go in those directions.

Q: Had you dreams as a young boy, before the war, of another career?

A: Of being an engineer. Yeah. And the question was, well, what kind of engineering. There are so many varieties. And there was– Electronics was coming on, electrical, there was other scientific– I don't know that physics was a branch. But I looked at something that says, what do I really know? The only thing I knew was things that I could see around me. Those were mechanisms. (you know) So said, well, I'll take mechanical engineering. I never worked in mechanical engineering, but that was my-my degree.

Q: Did you tell your wife, early in your courtship, about your experiences?

A: Yes, I believe so. Sure.

Q: So she knew.

A: Yeah. Well, her own background is allied to it.

Q: And children. You had how many?

A: Two. Two daughters. Susan is the older one, and Linda, who just moved here from Columbus, Ohio. She's worked there for many years, after college.

Q: How does it play out, a Holocaust survivor and being a parent?

A: I don't know what it is for them. You– It couldn't be finally positive unless you try to make it so. For me, I think it affected my dealing with young children in a negative way. I think I was not as emotionally relating to them as perhaps I would have been without– or sometimes too emotional. So I think it affected that, but not, I don't think, in any terrible way. They made it in spite of me.

Q: For kids, in some ways your experience would trump anything that they're going through, whether they're reluctant to complain or be upset about something, when you think of what your father's gone through.

A: Maybe. I think Susan, the older one, might actually say that. (you know) In her own experience, when she would compare, she'd say, why could– why should she worry about that, (you know) by comparison. But I don't know how prevalent that is. (you know) People have their own need to live, (you know) and their own desires and objectives. And when you look at my experience, you say, well, that's something of the past. (you know) You don't really expect anything like that to be part of your life. So it's interesting but not necessarily relevant, beyond the immediate interrelationship.

Q: You said we all are whatever our past is. That is with us.

A: Yes. [overlap] [Can't divide it], yeah.

Q: When did they express interest in knowing about your Holocaust experience? When did you first tell them?

A: They saw it in their Sunday school experience. They were shown movies when they were teenagers. So that's when they might have started to ask. And to the extent that they asked, I told them within (know) limits of (you know) what at their age they can accept or– accept. And then of course it was in their student years, when there was a class that was dealing with something, to survive in the forest or something like that, and they invited me to talk to the– to the class. And there were questions afterwards that they could also send in through Susan, because we ran out of time. And I remember that one question that the fellow student asked says, "How did we deal with drugs in the concentration camp?" That gives you an idea, the different perspective. They try to trans– to transform their background, their problems to my background. And you can't do it.

Q: Are you a citizen?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Was that important to you?

A: Oh, it happened to be very important in terms of my connection to Palestine or Israel, because I had family there. I had a brother and two sisters still there after– immediately after the war. And because of my Zionist background, I wanted to go to Palestine after the war—even though, through my actual connections to people I met, especially one American officer who was doing a lot for me, who was arranging a visa for me to come to the United States, which he did arrange. And I said, "Well, that's not where I want to go." And I was making arrangements to go with this illegal immigration to Palestine. And so the first boat that I– that my friend Harry actually took, also helped by the same lieutenant, went, I think in March '46, and I didn't– I wasn't going to go with that. But then we found out that the British were holding– were stopping all the boats with illegal immigrants and

putting them in a camp in Cyprus. So the advice given to me is that you have– you can go to the United States. Why don't you go to the US and wait there? It's better than being in another camp in Cyprus. So that's what I did a few months later, in July of '46, that I came here. But I immediately (almost, within a month or two) volunteered for the draft, because officially World War II was not over on the books. So if you served in the Army, you could get a GI Bill of Rights. And so I went into the Army, a volunteer, got basic training in field artillery, and then they shipped me out to Korea, and they put me in the counterintelligence corps there. And 10 months after my entering the Army, all draftees were released from service. And that of course put me in a better status as far as citizenship. I was– I served in the Army. I could get it [in something] like 2 or 3 years instead of 5 years. But I had my first papers still. I was not a citizen. But I could study–

[Tape 4]

Q: So that fast-tracked you, made it easier?

A: Yeah. So in terms of (you know) why citizenship was important, be– having the GI Bill of Rights, 10 months in the Service meant I had 2 years plus 10 months, which was a long way for college education. But the better part of it was that I could study in any accredited college. And the Institute of Technology in Haifa, Palestine, was an accredited college. So within a year of coming here to the United States, I was in Palestine, in Haifa, studying at the– at the Technion. And I got involved because the war of independence started, and I served there, first in the Hagannah, then in the Israel Defense Forces. But when that was over, I came back to the United States to continue my studies here. And I got my citizenship soon afterwards. So I had my education, I was a citizen, I felt very much at home here, and appreciative (you know) of the opportunities here. I did not regret leaving Palestine and coming here. Obviously I preferred it, because I had had a taste (you know) of life in the United States, the people relationships. I mean, the Israelis were okay as far as I was concerned, but they didn't wish you a "have a nice day." (you know). That's not their way. (you know) And I seemed to like the friendliness of people here. So

yeah, the-the– Serving in the Army and getting the citizenship was important to me, and I appreciated it.

Q: Did your siblings stay in Palestine?

A: Oh yeah. They had gone there in the early thirties. So that was home for them.

Q: When you think of homeland?

A: I think here, this country.

Q: Do your wartime experiences affect the easy notion that we have here of patriotism? Is it more complicated for you, the fine line between patriotism and nationalism?

A: No, I think it's more simple. It's more– (you know) It's more real to me, (you know) patriotism here, to be patriotic here. I think it's straightforward. (you know) You can have things here that I didn't see anywhere else. And so that's it. That's my country—even though I was brought up on Palestine being the homeland of the Jews.

Q: Do you think of yourself as American?

A: Oh, sure.

Q: How would you identify yourself?

A: Well, I would have to say how– to be a survivor and not to be a survivor, an American survivor, a survivor that lives in America, to detach that from it: the survivor angle as being (you know) what makes me American. I think it's more fundamental than that.

Q: Tell me what you mean.

A: Well, the opportunities, the relationship with people, even though there was quite a bit of anti-Semitism when I first came here. But there was no really fundamentally a purely American American. They came from someplace. And so that kind of puts you on an equal basis for claiming your right. You may not like the way you're treated, but (you know) people are not perfect. Countries are not perfect. I think it was Churchill who said that. It's not perfect, but it's the best there is, in his– in his quotation.

Q: How would you rank Jewish, Holocaust survivor, American, husband, father, as part of your identity?

A: Survivor and Jewish are, to me, one and the same thing. If you're a survivor, and you stay– you come from (you know) a Jewish background, you're Jewish. I mean, whether you wanted it or not, you were Jewish. And I certainly feel very much Jewish.

Q: Was that an important part of your identity before the war?

A: It was the identity, but it was Zionist, the Zionist angle, because that was the way out of Lithuania. Didn't feel like Lithuania was my homeland. Jews certainly, by and large, didn't feel that, although there was a small subset. As a matter of fact, my former teacher (Bronson, who was in the police), he was one of those. He had been a captain in the Lithuanian army, which is a high rank for a Jew, and he belonged to a group, kind of played a leadership role in the group that said Jews can be part of Lithuanian nation, and they should work on that. And of course he learned very quickly that that was not so.

Q: When you're a Holocaust survivor, does it become the defining part of your life for the rest of your life?

A: I think so.

Q: Tell me the reality of that.

A: Well, when you talk to people who did not (you know) experience it, and you describe or think of your own experiences, it is so different, it is so unique, if you will, that you can't help but identifying yourself as such.

Q: Is there any part of that that, if not limiting, that one resists after a while?

A: Well, you resist by not dwelling on it with other people. But you can't avoid it. You– I mean, with– To find amongst Americans people you can relate to very easily, they're bound to be from– (you know) also from other countries. (you know) Recent immigrants or old immigrants or– So it does define you.

Q: Was it important for you that you marry a Jewish woman?

A: Yes, yes, it was.

Q: Always had been, and would have been before the war? Or more so after the war and what you survived?

A: Well, it was kind of obvious. (you know) It couldn't imagine something different. Not-not at the time when I married, and was too close (you know) to my experience.

Q: Was it the cultural identity of being Jewish, or were you religious?

A: No, I was not religious at all, because the– my upbringing in Kovno, the particular Zionist party I belonged to was not religious. In fact, they were anti-religious. So I was brought up not being religious, and that sticks with you. How you– (you know) How you're brought up is a major influence.

Q: In the Holocaust experience, faith didn't play much of a role?

A: No. No, it didn't play any role at all, I don't think.

Q: Did the Holocaust experience in fact confirm your sensibilities in not believing?

A: I could easily use that (you know) as a confirmation. It's very simple for me to say. I look at my experience, I say: Where was God? What kind of God is it? (you know) How can you (you know) look for that as your help? He didn't help. So, now, I don't know if that's a true assessment or not, but it's very easy to rationalize it that way.

Q: Have you ever been tempted by faith at any point in your life, or now?

A: No.

Q: Any of that shifting as you—

A: No.

Q: Has the experience made you less afraid of death?

A: I think (you know) death becomes real when you get to the older ages. And it's a reality. And the only question is, (you know) how do you deal with it? Well, one thing is like postponing it: I'm okay today, so I'm not going to worry about, and do what I can. If something happens, you feel (you know) some symptoms, say, "Ah, this is it, this is coming," then the only thing to do, of course it's disturbing immediately, but the only thing to focus on is how you're going to go out. It's very important to go out (we call it) with some dignity, not to go through long medical treatments, and to avoid pain but to just go to sleep. And that's the best you can do.

Q: Have you taken care of DNRs and that of thing?

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: I also imagine you would want a little bit of control over it.

A: Very much so. Very much so. As much control as possible, which is not necessarily possible because of the medical profession that– and the rules of the game.

Q: Having seen what you saw and survived what you saw, how do you ever grieve and mourn as people do after that? Did it impact the way you grieved and dealt with other losses that came in your life? Does it change it?

A: I suspect it does, but I don't know how it would have been otherwise. I have no reference. I had these experiences when I was young. So how would I have been if I did not have the experience? I can't imagine that, except I know it would have been different.

Q: Do your children identify themselves as Jewish?

A: Yes, they do.

Q: Proudly?

A: Well, they have their– They have their own ways. You [could] pretty much have to ask them.

Q: Will it be important for your daughter's children to know about your Holocaust experience?

A: Yes. And (you know) I provided them with the tapes that have been made, and some maybe documentation that they were interested in. So they have it. They could (you know) convey it. And I suspect they'll– they do want them to know (the children).

Q: Beyond the details of your narrative, what would you want your grandchildren to consider, based on what you've gone through?

A: It's hard for me to imagine. (I mean) I see the present (you know) generation, who look at the experiences of survivors, and what they make of it. It's– And I think the next generations will have their own perspective. It's not going to be– It cannot be a background that makes our experiences real in any way. So all you can do, I think, is to tell them what you know, and any hints you can give as far as how to– how to assess its relevance to them. But it's going to be up to them to– and their own evolution and growing up, as to how they will deal with it and what they will or will not get out of it. But they will know that there was something different there.

Q: Is there relevance to this kind of testimony in our world today?

A: That's what I am kind of concerned about. It's– The main theme that you hear about is (you know) prevention. Should not happen again. Well, it is happening. So what do you do? How do– How do you prevent it in Rwanda, or in Darfur? It– You can only try to deal with it after it's happening. So prevention, maybe you can talk about that in western countries, to-to prevent, but the ingredients for it happening are in western countries also. So yes, it's relevant in terms of prevention or containment, but it doesn't happen automatically by saying (you know) people shouldn't hate. What people? When? In what part of– What's the– What's the background? So to make a– To really to make a significant influence from that experience, I think, is-is the complex part, and that's the part, I think, that needs to be worked on.

Q: Being Jewish in America today, do you feel secure? Or does one never feel secure?

A: No, I feel secure. I mean, the concern here is global warming. (you know) That's not-not a Holocaust. And I'm old enough so that my range is not very long. So

what you can anticipate for this short range is different [what] our children have to be concerned about.

Q: When you see something like Darfur or Srebrenica or Rwanda, how do you respond?

A: Well, in two ways. One is that: What can one do to prevent it from actually happening? And that means to prevent the conditions to materialize and that will make it happen. Very little. I mean, you'd say United Nations is supposed to be (you know) concerned, be concerned about that. But then you're facing situations that are happening. And there, all you can do really is to influence public opinion, because it's only through that mechanisms that the governments involved can do something about it. It's not– You can't go there and join the army that fights the military. It's– It's-it's not a very satisfying way to try to deal with it. Prevention in this African or Asian countries is almost impossible.

Q: Do you inevitably measure it against your own experience?

A: No. The– The usual comparison is this issue of genocide. (okay) This was genocide, there is genocide happening. But that's not my perspective. Mine is a very narrow perspective. I'm one. (you know) And here you're talking about genocide and it's millions. So I don't really connect through that mechanism. But I can connect through individual people who are subjected to it. But that's harder to do with people in Rwanda or in Darfur, because it's a different background.

Q: Bosnia perhaps was a little—

A: Bosnia might be closer, yeah.

Q: Is there some part of you that's not surprised?

A: Well, the part that would not surprise me is that when I look at the ingredients that are needed to implement (you know) a genocide or random murdering, these ingredients are there. So that doesn't surprise me, that it can happen. (you know) It can happen here. But is it allowed to happen? (you know) What does it take to prevent it? But not that it can happen. That doesn't surprise me.

Q: In human nature, have you learned, is any of us capable of either? The capacity for good and evil in each of us?

A: I think the-the capacity for rationalizing the evil part that one engages in is there. The motivation is what's needed, to look for this rationalization. What personal gain, what advantage do I get out of it? What rationalizations does the government or whoever's– like the Aryan philosophy, that-that is (you know) is there, but just the spread of different types of collaboration is so wide and so important that it comes (you know) from a wide range of types of people in different ways to support such a thing. That part, I know it can– it can be there. But the environment has to be created. The mechanism has to be created. And people can be taken into that net.

Q: It seems to me, you understand with a kind of vividness that would be particular to what you've gone through, the degrees of evil and good, degrees of collaboration, degrees of betrayal.

A: Yeah, there's degrees of (what do you call it?) people who don't want to get involved, bystanders. There's different kinds of bystanders. And they may not think (you know) that they're contributing to it, but they do, in different times of this process. Yeah, it's-it's complex. And to say that "Look at– Look at me, I could never become this monster," well, you don't need to become this monster. You can support the process in much, much different ways, all of them necessary.

Q: Describe the first moment you felt real liberation, coming out of the hospital.

A: Well, see, strictly speaking, I was liberated when I escaped. The American (you know) troops were going by, and I was there on the side of the ditch, and then I become unconscious. I was unconscious, so if I was being liberated, I had no idea that that was the case. And being in the German hospital was kind of– They were Germans, you know. Is this liberation? Of course it had very positive aspects, being in that hospital. So it was only after I was released from the hospital, and went outside, and it happened to be the hospital on the edge of town, and I was not going to go into town. I wanted out, away from all this. So I went into the fields, a road going to the next village or town, whatever it would be. And it was a spring day, beautiful day, and you were in nature. I hadn't been in nature for years. And I felt (you know) free in a sense that I did not have to fear for my life. There is no-no danger looming around the corner, because the Nazis are gone. The Germans in the hospital maybe didn't like my presence there, but they sure weren't mistreating me. In fact, a–a German nurse in a white coat would bring me food on a tray. (you know) Well, that's not concentration camp.

But another aspect of it is, aside from not being– not fearing for your life, is this notion that you are alone. And that was not a threatening thing. That was the opposite, because the experience in ghettos and in camps is that you're never alone. Particularly in the concentration camp, the– whether it's the kapos or SS, are on top of you every minute of the day and night. So not to have anybody, and not to have to worry about it, was something that was very, very different. And that's what I considered to be really my experience of freedom. I didn't know what the future was going to bring, but I wasn't worried about it. I was dealing with the immediate. I was going to see what can I do in this next village.

Q: You lost all points of reference, no matter how awful they were, so it took you a while to get accustomed to that?

A: Well, it's again, it's the-the importance, the overwhelming importance of the need of the moment. I needed to get a meal. I needed to find a place where I can sleep. I needed to know who am I dealing– Who are these Americans? (you know) What–

How do I deal with them? Can I find other survivors from the camp? So there's no great philosophical thoughts. There were just: deal with what you have to deal with at the moment. And that's what usually makes the day. It's– you– I can philosophize about it now, but I don't have to worry about these things.

Q: What you did after the war (the war crimes work), how important was that for you? Tell me what your role was.

A: Well, I think– Strictly speaking, the role, in terms of the American officer and officers of this team who took me in, was simply to help me get along. I don't think they were dependent on me being (you know) an interpreter. They had two Polish officers who were interpreters, and they had American with German backgrounds who were interpreters. So they really weren't critically dependent on my services. They wanted to help me, really. And so they took me in as part of the team.

To me, of course, I would hang onto anything I heard that I can be useful. Like they were saying whether then or later, I don't know when, that I could de– I could sense the difference between a German who was a Nazi and who was not a Nazi; or that if we were interrogating a camp guard, I would know better some of the questions to ask, because I knew what they were doing and how they were doing it. So I felt that it was useful, it was important. And I was with them for almost 8 months, doing this.

Now, when– Their-their mission definition changed in time. I don't know exactly when along these 8 months, but they were told not to pursue crimes against other people other than Americans; that they should pursue war crimes against Americans, which basically meant war crimes against the American flyers who parachuted down and then were killed by the local Nazis. And in that department (you know) I couldn't add that much, except to judge the people in the town where this happened, or the village where this happened, as to who might have been (you know) involved, in terms of assessing their former participation (you know) in the Nazi governance.

Q: What was that like for you to do that, to confront Nazis who had been a part of it?

A: Well, hopefully that I'm helpful in bringing them to trial.

Q: Did you deal with them? Were you furious with them?

A: No, I think the Americans were more furious than I was. To me, they were a known quantity. (you know) They– I had seen them before. And of course it was perhaps satisfying to see them now in this meek (you know) position, not acting this brave, strong (you know) men that they were not, really. So there was a satisfying aspect to that.

[Tape 5]

Q: When you were working with the war crimes team, did you have any feelings of revenge or anger?

A: No, no. I don't think so. As I said, I think the– some of the Americans, especially [Lt. Reese], was more emotional about seeing (and) what-what was done, what happened.

Q: But you'd been living it.

A: Yeah.

Q: Why no sense of revenge?

A: Well, the sense of revenge– (you know) I'm practical. (you know) I mean, I can have a sense of revenge, but what am I doing? I'm helping with this war crimes team, and that's what I can do. I'm not going to go find an SS man and try to kill him.

Q: Do you think war crimes tribunals are important? Is there value to trying to make people accountable for those kinds of crimes?

A: Well, from the (you know) broad perspective, I don't know. People say that it was important. It set up standards of what can or cannot be done by governments and in wartime. My own perspective is not quite satisfying. I mean, it's one thing to see the top leadership, (you know) the Nazi, and 10 or 20 of them being (you know) hanged. That's fine. But I was looking more for the people at the level that I had encountered. And those were not the philosophers, the theoreticians. They were ordinary– not ordinary, I hope, but plain people who happened to be either sadistic or murderous, and then you go up from there to the higher levels, who were not actually doing– They didn't pull the trigger; they supervised those who did. I wanted to see some of those.

The only one that I did come across (and I just actually checked it recently) was one man in Kaiserwald, was Dr. Krepsbach who was the medical officer and whose job was the selections. And I had a direct encounter with him. And it turns out that he was tried before a war crimes tribunal, but not for what he did in-in Kaiserwald. Before he came to Kaiserwald, he was in Mauthausen. And that was supposedly the worst inside Germany, the camps, with a lot of medical experiments. And he was (med) one of the medical officers there, and he was tried and convicted and executed. So fine, he was executed, for what I– in my mind, it's also for what he did in Kaiserwald.

But it didn't reach down. The war crimes tribunals didn't reach down. Was just too many. There were thousands of people who committed these war crimes. And it was stopped at a certain level. They went for the higher ups, not for those who actually committed the direct atrocities.

Q: When in our time you see something like the Milosevic trial—

A: Oh, you certainly hope, and I follow it hoping that they catch these two generals and-and air out their activities, to show (you know) that this is being done now, in our– in our environment. Yeah. I'm very much in favor of attempts to-to punish more current (you know) people who commit these war crimes, as defined now by the Nuremberg trials.

Q: Except you're right, even there, it comes down to a few people.

A: Yeah. But that's– It's symbolic. (you know) It's– Hopefully it teaches a lesson, which I doubt that it teaches a lesson. But maybe, maybe it will. But it doesn't. It doesn't stop.

Q: When you hear "forgiveness" and "mercy," how do you respond?

A: I don't go for that. It's– For one thing, I'm not religious so I don't subscribe to the religious aspects of these kind of notions. (you know) You be– I-I like to be helpful and generous with people who are on the other side of this problem. No, I-I don't believe in forgiveness. There is very little punishment already, as it is.

Q: People say that without that, there's a bitterness and anger that animates a life forever. Does that ring true for you?

A: I'm not sure I follow that.

Q: The theory of forgiveness is that one ultimately is released from bitterness and vengefulness.

A: May be. Maybe to some people it– I don't think it would work for me. I (you know) I try to not dwell on the-those things that cause bitterness, because there's not much I can do about it except voice my-my bitterness. And that's pointless. So I try not to go that route.

Q: Has your Holocaust experience shaped your political, social views?

A: Well, I think– I think it does. I am– I am more concerned about the welfare of ordinary people than about the welfare of (you know) big corporations. Yeah. The people effects is what I am concerned about, and I think it has something to do with my background.

Q: How would you identify yourself politically?

A: I-I think I would identify myself as an independent, tending to vote with-with the Democrats because they, more often that not, would at least proclaim the same interests (you know) in the welfare of people, not always affecting it, but– So I'm a Democrat with an open mind.

Q: Are you culturally conservative?

A: Like, what do you mean by that?

Q: Your view of gay marriages, or drug laws?

A: Yeah, I'm-I'm likely to be liberal in those issues.

Q: As a parent, did you pamper your children more because of your experience, or less?

A: I think, both.

Q: Tell me about you as a dad.

A: Well, pampering them perhaps when they were young, and being perhaps unnecessarily strict, some aspects, as they were getting older.

Q: Do you want them to be risk takers, to be unafraid?

A: I think they are.

Q: They are what?

A: They are more risk takers, more independent. Sometimes maybe too independent, don't listen to what we say.

Q: Anti-authoritarian.

A: Right, anti-authoritarian. Right.

Q: You were here in the sixties, the civil rights movement.

A: [overlap] And obviously very much in favor of it. But not actively participating.

Q: Surprised by it? Did have any particular meaning for you?

A: Yes, surprised that it had been going on so long, that it was accepted, (you know) the racial divides. It did not (you know) match the rhetoric of the country as a democracy.

Q: And identifying broad ideas of discrimination?

A: Well, obviously I'm not for discrimination of any kind.

Q: The McCarthy era, red scare?

A: Well, I think always in– wanting to see that kind of stuff (you know) stopped immediately, drastically; that it's was ruining people's life unnecessarily and wrongly.

Q: The Cold War, with your early interest in Zionism and Marxism?

A: Well, no, I had no-no positive notions about the Soviet Union then. I mean, they were anti-Zionist also.

Q: Vietnam War?

A: Not– I could not identify with it, except to be able to be amazed and aghast at the kind of war it was, in terms of American soldiers, what–how-how they had to (you

know) do their jobs there, the conditions, the fire power that was involved. It's not like any kind of experiences that I had. It was just a different scale. And it– I was very much– not shocked but (imp-) awed by it, that something like this (you know) should go on, and with such casualties for no obvious purpose.

Q: And the divisions in America in the sixties, socially, culturally?

A: New. A totally new thing to me. Could only read about it and try to (you know) understand what it is, but it was totally out of my perspective.

Q: Did it seem indulgent, that they were pampered kids who didn't know about suffering or struggle?

A: Yes, yes. Yeah. They-they seemed (you know) indulgent, especially this freedom of relationships that seemed a waste and a distortion of what could be there, should be there.

Q: A waste?

A: A waste in their– in their– in their– in their– in their relationships, that-that they let that do this to themselves.

Q: Contemporary America now, your thoughts, your response to 9/11?

A: Well, clearly it was a big shock. And to try to understand or try to deal with the potential of terrorism, it seems– it seems like it did, and it seems now like such a powerful weapon against us, such a threat, that how to– how to deal with it is– I-I do not know. It's not– It doesn't take armies. It takes something different to deal with it. And I'm not sure that we have figured that out. But that the threat is very real.

Q: The Iraq War, where we are now?

A: Oh, I think terrible. Terrible mistakes. Unnecessary totally. Not that (you know) there's an easy way out of it now, but it was certainly mishandled in its origination and basic decision, and mishandled in its execution.

Q: Your sense of the world order. Do you feel it's precarious?

A: Yeah, I think so.

Q: Tell me where you are.

A: Well, if-if you talk about global warming, (you know) and the global economy, and the globalization of everything, how you deal with that effectively, is-is threatening to the future.

Q: Do you vote?

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: Is that why?

A: Well, [no], I'm a good citizen. I don't know that I (you know) influence events completely, but that's what you can do.

Q: Why do so few of us do that in America, do you think?

A: I don't understand that. You mean, vote? Yeah. I don't understand that. It's– The lack of awareness of the importance of that is– shouldn't be, but– And we're not unique. I think western countries, most of them have the same problem. It's– I think it's the influence of present wellbeing. (you know) So you don't bother. You say, "I can't really change things, but it's not so bad right now, so let it be."

Q: We take it for granted?

A: Yeah, we take a lot for granted. Yeah.

Q: As a Holocaust survivor, you don't take those things for granted?

A: No. You can't, because the negative possibilities (you know) are kind of visible.

Q: What do you mean?

A: That things can go the wrong way. That it's possible. And it has to be watched and prevented. And awareness is one of them, probably key.

Q: Have you been on jury duty?

A: Once.

Q: What was that?

A: Well, it's an interesting experience. For some strange reason, the judge appointed me as the (what do you call it?) the chairman?

Q: Foreman.

A: Foreman, yeah. And it was a very simple case of a woman accused of drunk driving. And she was adamant that she was not at fault, and yet the policeman showed pretty good proof. So it was a simple decision to make, that she was guilty.

Q: Do you have faith, given your background, in a criminal justice system?

A: (Ye-) The problem is that you– the media (the newspapers, the television) tend to publicize the negative sides of-of the just-justice system workings. (you know) The people who are condemned to-to death and then you find that more of 100 of them have been proven innocent, and-and the notion that there are 2 million (you know) prisoners in prison in this country, is just staggering. It's almost like a little country,

is in prison. And we-we have no real way of-of reversing it. It's– But the media, I-I think, are-are catering to people's desire for things (you know) that are– that gets their attention, one way or another. And bad news gets people's attention. And I don't think it's-it's a total picture. But– It needs to be a lot better than what it is.

Q: Are you opposed to the death penalty, abortion, those kinds of hot-button issues?

A: Oh no. I'm not opposed to abortion, because I think it's (you know) ridiculous to say that a baby's life (you know) at the very early stages, especially if the mother's health is involved– It's-it's a extreme argument, a stretch to much too far. That's abortion.

But the penalty? I-I could be (you know) on either side of the issue if I knew that the-there would not be so many false (you know) convictions. Plus the fact that it's very doubtful that it– that it prevents– (you know) it's preventive in any way, that it's-it's reduces crime. It's not proven. On the other hand, to spend so much funds and money to keep obvious criminals alive through their lifetime also seems like a kind of a unreasonable thing to be doing. So it's not simple, not simple.

Q: Do you generally feel your experience has shaped your views on social things? It's not that neat?

A: Well, I think it is– it is simple in-in–on-on one level. And that is that it takes me to be concerned about ordinary people, because that's was my experience. I was ordinary, and there was nothing coming from anywhere (you know) to-to be really helpful, except possibly from the inside. So to be (you know) concerned about more concern of the welfare of plain, ordinary people is where I think is my experiences influenced me.

Q: Your thoughts on Affirmative Action?

A: Again it gets– it gets complicated. On the one hand, you look at survivors and you say, well, we had no Affirmative Action. We (you know) had to do what we could

afterwards and make our own life. And so many succeeded. So it's a– It takes something other than just Affirmative Action. It has to– It takes internal motivation, so– But on the other hand, some help (you know) is-is appropriate. But I certainly would be against (you know) quotas for anyone. So again it's-it's– you-you find the things are done which seem right, and then you see how they're executed and you say, no, that's really didn't do it. And that's so prevalent in many things.

Q: When you survived what you have, do you just laugh at people bungee jumping and risking in physical ways?

A: I haven't thought about that. It's– I think bungee jumping is kind of foolish, but it's a thrill. Obviously it's a thrill to these people. I-I would obviously favor more productive risk taking than just for the fun of it.

Q: Have you looked for physical risks in your life?

A: No. [*Were you a–*] No. I– No. I would probably tend to take physical risks when there is danger involved of any kind, but you don't– (you know) in our environment there isn't much of that. Maybe driving on a superhighway is a dangerous thing to do, and whether you pass somebody or not is a risk you take. But those are minor things.

Q: Have you struggled with depression or melancholy most of your—

A: Not since I'm taking the medication.

Q: But had you, as you look back on it? Had that been a real force in your life?

A: I think during the more recent period (you know) of retirement. It probably was– periodically might have appeared, but not in a continuous kind of way, as it was more recently during retirement.

Q: In terms of personality and temperament, were you like your mother or father?

A: I don't–didn't really know them that well, in those terms.

Q: How would you describe your mother and father?

A: Well, the period that is most memorable is the– my teenage years, when my father was already not well, and my mother was handling everything: the store, the– his– taking care of him, taking care of the food, the cooking, and everything. So she was a– She was very determined and very capable in-in handling the situation, as well as later in the camps. She– But my father, he was– he was kind of out of it. He was not well. He needed help. So I can't (you know) make any comparisons.

Q: Capable and determined sounds a lot like you, too.

A: Maybe, maybe. But that– Maybe that came from my own experiences, not necessarily from her. Or it could be, (you know) from observation.

Q: Are you today similar to that 16-year-old, surviving what you did? Are there qualities of your personality and temperament that stayed the same?

A: I mean, the qualities of personality in that environment, the early environment, in– (you know) during the Holocaust, that were brought out in you, are just not the same that would be brought out in our– in our present environment. This alertness, this intense alertness, is a condition (you know) of the environment I was in. I may– (you know) I-I'm still be alert. (you know) If I see a situation that looks kind of a little dangerous, I will (you know) try to avoid it. So in that respect it's the same, but not as intense. And I think that might apply to other qualities as well.

[Tape 6]

Q: What does the word "mercy" mean to you?

A: Mercy. .. I guess, forgiveness .. is the association that comes to mind. Mercy.

Q: As a concept, your thoughts on forgiveness and mercy?

A: I think we spoke about forgiveness primarily, which I was not eager (you know) to do in my– for people in my experience. I think understanding is-is important, perhaps to understand why people did what they did, and how they did it. Whether or not .. that would lead to forgiveness or mercy, I don't know, but it would lead to understanding.

Q: And that's important?

A: I think so. I think it's important in the overall context of-of "should not happen again."

Q: Anger?

A: Anger, very definite and particular– not so much from– Well, some of my own experiences, early experiences, to be exposed to brutality for no reason whatsoever brought on anger or rage. And in particular where– as it dealt with my mother's experiences and end, it brings on anger and rage. But it can't last too long.

Q: Why?

A: Because there's-there's no-no practical outcome from it. (so) You can't go with it anywhere.

Q: Nothing you can do?

A: Yeah. You cannot really express it, except to yourself maybe, but not in any practical way. Maybe as a relief, possibly. But no, I try not to dwell on it.

Q: Can one talk about it? Is there value in talking about it?

A: .. I suspect that in general. Now, if I look at it kind of objectively, independently, I would expect that there is value to it. Yes.

Q: To what?

A: To expressing it. To expressing anger or rage. But .. only in terms of stopping it.

Q: Doesn't transform it though?

A: No.

Q: Betrayal?

A: Has– Would have to do with specific instances, specific people.

Q: Use a subject.

A: (Yeah.) The betrayal, you have to evaluate it in terms of specifics, not as a generality. And again, you have to try to get into the particulars to see how it evolved and how it might have looked from the other person's point of view. So– Yeah, I think it's one of the things one encounters, I think, in this kind of experiences, but they're motivated by the other people's selfishness or self needs.

Q: You talked about the Lithuanians collaborating with the SS. Were some kinds of betrayal harder for you than others? The degrees of betrayal?

A: I don't look at .. at the Lithuanian participation as-as betrayal. There was nothing before that to betray. They did that out of a new opportunity to do what they– the way they were leaning to before anyway. So betrayal, if I were to look for a particular instance, it might have to do with my cousin from– who lived with us in the ghetto. He and his wife (who was pregnant at the time) and his mother came from this town where they were living, in Mar-Mari-Mariampol, and we lived

together in the ghetto. And when this collection started for the Riga transport, we were all going down the street, looking for a place to hide. And I looked upon him (he was older, was a graduate chemist) as he was in charge of our total family, looking out for us. And then I looked around and they were all gone. They went into some place, and he didn't look for us or look after us. He was just taking care of his-his family. And so they stayed on, and we were– we were trapped. I might say, "Well, he betrayed us," which, strictly speaking, he did, but only from my perspective of what he should have done. From his own perspective, I'm sure he wouldn't consider this betrayal. You can't, if you try to hide, go into a house and then go back out looking for us. That-that would not help very much. But I-I considered it betrayal.

Q: Did you ever talk to him about that?

A: No, hm-mm. Never had a real opportunity to talk about it. Saw him occasionally after the war in New York, but we never addressed the subject. I just didn't feel very friendly towards him.

Q: Revenge?

A: Revenge is a kind of hypothetical subject, again not real. I heard people say that their revenge with-with Hitler and the Nazis is that they survived and had families of their own. It's true, (you know) if you want to think that way. But again, you think of revenge as a more active kind of action against those you (fee-) have those feelings. So to me, it might be a momentary kind of thought or feeling, but nothing real or practical.

Q: Does the rage and anger you felt over your mother lessen over time?

A: It lessens.

Q: And again, what does?

A: Because–

Q: Again the subject.

A: [overlap] This feeling of-of revenge in connection with my mother's experience is, it's more– it's more an anger, and a thought of revenge as trying to do something about it, which of course you can't. So it-it lessens in time, just by repetitive occurrences and the conclusion that really it's a pointless thing. But it lasts less and less. It may come back momentarily, specially as I read about .. the– what might have happened to her in Stutthof. It may not have been the typhus. And all these other possibilities are worse, not-not better. So the notion that she might have been exposed to any one of those situations makes one very angry and bitter, but revenge is not a practical, (you know) rational thing to follow from that.

Q: Choice?

A: Choice. Now, that's too broad. "Choice" is too broad a concept (you know) to address. It's-it's part of life. We do all– Everybody does that every day, make choices. So I don't know what would make it unique in my experience, except that the-the outcome of choices is more serious perhaps.

Q: And the absence of having any choice?

A: Now, that-that is a very definite aspect, unique to the (you know) the experience, especially in-in the camps. Not so much in the ghetto. .. But in the camps, it's the lack of choice in the sense really of the absence of control of what-what's happening to you. And it's more the absence of control that is the-the influence on one's evolution, than the absence of choice that's– There're many choices, but you couldn't control .. the-the– how many you have, or which ones you can or cannot choose in a practical sense.

Q: But in terms of the influence of one's evolution, the absence of choice is more important?

A: Very important.

Q: Tell me a little more.

A: Why it's more important?

Q: And how it was for you. What do you mean by that?

A: Well, I remember it in terms, for example, of the change after liberation. I think I mentioned my trip with [Isidore Reese, Lt. Reese], back to Germany in more recent years. And when he recalled how–what I was like after (you know) we came together, and he described (you know) the things that he actually did to-to help me get over the-the past, one of them was getting me a dog, which is easy enough to understand because the absence of trusting relationships was as a dominant thing. And with a dog, you learn that there can be a trusting relationship, you can be free. But the other thing that he said he did is, he taught me how to drive. And that, to me, has to do with getting away from the notion of the absence of control. And I can sympathize with teenagers who want to get into that car and make it do what they want. They have control. And that's what I think he did for me. I learned I could take that jip-jeep and make it go fast or slow, left or right, and that is a form of control, which he thought helped me get over the transition.

Q: Smart man.

A: Amazingly, because he's a– he's– He was a smart man in that sense, because he was trained as a lawyer, and lawyers are not taught how to handle with Holocaust survivors. .. But he figured out that something wasn't right, the way I was relating (to) initially to the group, that I was– As he described it, I was friendly but kind of

distant and un-uncommunicative. And that's what he did in order to try to change it. And I'm sure he did change it.

Q: How are your siblings like or different from you?

A: Well, my siblings are different in one very important respect. They're much older. I was the youngest. And the three siblings that were alive after the war are all between 15 and 20 years older. So that's not a normal kind of sibling relationship. They were more or less taking care of me, rather than relating to me as-as a brother. And that's the, I think, the main characteristic of our relationship.

Q: Are you alike politically? Do they share your views?

A: I don't know that we ever dealt with it. They were in Palestine. [My] main concern was the local situation. Before that, my brother is the one who went first to Palestine and then brought over my two sisters. And presumably, I and my parents were supposed to be next, but that did not happen. So that was– that was the main (you know) relationship.

My brother, who was the oldest, was a big kind of doer in this Zionist organization that I belonged to, which is no doubt why I followed him in the same group. And so he was kind of a role model to me. I looked up to him. He also served in the Lithuanian army as an officer [in] training. And so when he would come home in his military uniform, with his white belt, I mean, this was not just my brother; this was somebody to look up to. So that was the key (you know) to our relationship.

Q: Did he feel guilty he couldn't protect you?

A: [overlap] He felt guilty (at least he expressed it) insofar as when I came to Palestine, and immediately almost after that, this war of independence flared up, and that I ended up in-in the army there, in the informal army (Hagannah) first and then– and again exposed to high risks, because the war of independence was very

costly in terms of the number of lives of the Jewish population. And certainly being in the army increased that risk. And he felt kind of guilty, although he did not bring me back to Palestine. I arranged that on my own. But that I would be in that situation after the Holocaust experience, he felt at least bad about it, if not guilty.

Q: Did you talk to your siblings about what happened to you?

A: I don't recall any detailed discussions of-of details. It was– I don't think so. There might have– The Lt. Reese, after-after the war, after he came back to the United States, he made some trips to-to Israel and became very friendly with– especially with my brother. And I expect that they got the information from him. But I don't recall discussions to convey (you know) details of my experience.

Q: Neither your inclination nor theirs?

A: .. (excuse me) Actually, in Israel, the Holocaust survivors were not looked up upon. They were, in fact, looked down on because they didn't fight. "Here, we Israelis, we fight. And they just went (you know) to their deaths." So they were– It was not an environment, much like here actually after the war, where histories of survival were not popular, not well received. So I think that contributed also.

Q: Another reason to be silent, then.

A: Yes, right. To be silent, yeah.

Q: Do you feel anti-Semitism today?

A: I personally don't feel it.

Q: Feel what?

A: Anti-Semitism. I don't– I don't feel it. Not the nec– in a way that would bother me personally. I can read about it and feel (you know) upset about it, but I don't feel it as a personal risk to me, of any significance.

Q: Do you feel resentment in some larger sense still exists?

A: Resentment against what?

Q: Against the Jewish people, or against Jews in general.

A: In-in the world?

Q: In the US and in the world.

A: Well, I think makes a difference. The-there is a difference in the US and in Europe, European countries.

Q: Well, about the US?

A: [overlap] I think it's much more widespread in European countries, maybe in part because of the large Muslim populations there. But it pervades into the governments and the population as a whole. Here in this country, it's more localized, and you can kind of say that it's less-less pertinent.

Q: So you've felt that change over your time in America?

A: Oh yes, yes. Well, whether in terms of what job you could get, or what house you could rent. There was definite instances where it's clear.

Q: How do you respond to Germany?

A: I try to be selective, and not to be just generalizing [on] Germany. I had a lot of dealings with Germans. Professionally, I happened to be involved in programs with

German companies, and in business later on. So I had no trouble working in Germany, but selective in terms of the individuals, basically their age, and (you know) how old were they during the time, and what were they doing. So– And there all kinds, in that– in that sense. So anyway, I-I feel not to be broadly kind of generalizing.

Q: When and why did you go back to Kovno?

A: I went back to Kovno with Ellen and Susan in 2001.

Q: That would be your wife and daughter?

A: Right. Susan, my daughter, and Ellen, my wife. We went– Well, Susan wanted to visit Kovno because-because of my experience there. But we went in part, well, because by then, I had already been waiting for– working for a couple of years at the museum, and reading up a lot of stuff, and the experience became more-more part of me. And they had a meeting. They called it a gathering (you know) of Lithuanian Jews. And so I felt that I would be going there and be amongst Jews, which is better than just going to Lithuania. And at the same time, Ellen was invited to come to a reunion of this–the-the school she attended while still in Germany. They made an effort to identify former students and invited them for a reunion. So we went to Kovno, Lithuania, other cities there first; then on the way back, we– Or was it first– no. On the way back, we went to Ellen's reunion in Germany. And that's when 9/11 happened. So we were delayed somewhat in coming back to the United States, but that was a-a-a noticeable year in terms of– Of course the 9/11 kind of tended to overshadow our personal experiences.

Q: Where were you and what happened when you found out about 9/11?

A: Well, we were just maybe two days before our scheduled flight back from– This is Kaiserslautern in Germany. The school was a religious school who treated the Jewish pupils quite well, actually. .. And we were just going to visit at a town in

which Ellen had lived earlier, before Kaiserslautern, which was in Wurms, Germany. And on a train coming back, we saw– we heard a-a few Americans sitting a few seats ahead of us, talking in English about this strange thing that happened in-in New York, New York City. And when we took a cab back to our hotel, or the school where we were– where Ellen was at this reunion, the cab driver was-was telling us, "You're not going back to-to the United States very-very soon." And of course that led one thing to another. The local German population went out in great demonstration in support of Americans, and it took over the-the atmosphere.

Q: Was it odd to be in Germany, with people taking to the streets?

A: No, this was a different–different types of Germans.

Q: What was that for you?

A: To Kovno?

Q: Yes.

A: The ghetto, looking at the former ghetto, was unreal. Couldn't see it the same as what it was. I mean, some of the houses, the square in the middle of the ghetto were all there, but they were just not-not there. On the other hand, (you know) the house where we lived, the little wooden structure, was still there. And it brought back (you know) recollections but not-not tangible, not really. (you know) It's like, (it) there is a connection to it, but it's not-not– emotionally it was not connected. But it was interesting to meet some of the local people. There were resources that they had in terms of recalling the history and what they were doing, and the community, the Jewish community is there, not very large. So– But it didn't have any significance, (you know) emotional effects.

Q: Did that surprise you?

A: In a sense, yes, because the prospect of such emotional effects is what kept me away from there for 50-60 years. And was okay, it's not– It didn't have these negative– any major negative effects.

Q: What do you make of that?

A: It's the same as any other attempts to connect to the past. You connect at some level but it's not the real– not a real level. It did not have these negative emotional effects that I can have from other contacts with the past. Somehow it was– It was neutral in that respect. Interesting, but neutral.

Q: And the others that you can have? You described them as sometimes unrelated. An example of what that might be?

A: It's the emotions of– The most common, I would say, emotion, negative emotion, is the anxiety that something bad is about to happen. You don't know what it is, but you sure are concerned about it. And that could come about when you think about the immediate life and situations you might be in, say, "Oh, I'm worried. Something (you know) may go wrong." But it gets exaggerated because of these-this emotions of fear, anxiety, of things you cannot control and might lead to-to bad situations.

Q: And it can be when you least expect it sometimes?

A: I don't know if there's any-any particular driving force there. It's–It depends on-on your mood, on– If you're in this slightly depressed mood, you're likely to have that more.

[Tape 7]

Q: You spoke about blocking out some of the memories, but that wasn't to say that the emotional wounds weren't still there. That's connected to that anxiety?

A: Yes. That–It's connected. These emotional moods (you know) are connected to these anxieties. Yeah.

Q: Do sights and sounds trigger memories?

A: Not particularly. (not) Nothing special (you know) about sounds or– I think maybe hearing Lithuanian in Lithuania might make some connection. No, but nothing in particular. And don't know where it could come from.

Q: You've literally repressed a whole—

A: I repressed a great deal, I think. Yeah. .. I– As I said, I suspect that many of the things that I now might describe as my experience came from reading about it and deciding, yes, that was my experience. But I had most likely, before that, repressed it.

Q: Does it trouble you that you're not sure it's your memory?

A: Well, after a while it's no longer (you know) from– It is– It is my own memory. And some aspects of it are indeed. (you know) It brings back some aspects that are real, from reading about it from other sources, or hearing.

Q: When you started the translations, you described dreams and nightmares. What were those?

A: Well, they were either rather disturbing or .. nightmares in the sense that they woke you up. But mostly it would be very disturbing. So you wake up in the morning not feeling very-very happy. .. But they would– They would be those kind of dreams that bring out these emotions of helplessness, of something bad (you know) is about to happen and you cannot do very much about it. So you wake up. That's the one solution.

What would be kind of a persistent– (I think at the time, not so much now) the kind of dream that would be disturbing is that you're going someplace, you are someplace, you're trying to get home, and you just cannot find your way home, or back. That seemed to be a frequent kind of thing.

Q: [describes Miri's father's nightmares]

A: Well, I'm not surprised (you know) that it's a common-common thing. It comes from the same sources, either your own experiences, or fearing those experiences. And like he didn't have to be in a concentration camp to be afraid that he would be. Obviously that was in his– in his environment. So I-I'm not surprised that it's common.

Q: Did you live in a constant state of fear?

A: Depends, depends what situation you're in. And again it's this business of being diverted; that you had to deal with problems of the moment. But if you're on a work party, and it's a bad work party, it is how to avoid the guard, and how not to work any harder than you need to. You paid attention to that. The fact that the guard could (you know) shoot you at any moment is a– it was a real possibility, but that's not what you worried about. The-the details of the situation is really what preoccupies you. And there isn't much time to sit there and contemplate (you know) what things might– you might encounter. You had– The situation was there all the time, practically. And if it wasn't, then you used that as a reprieve, as a time to relax, if you could. No, not relax, but rest.

Q: And concentrating in that way continued throughout your life, really, till retirement.

A: [overlap] Pretty much, yes. Pretty much, yes.

Q: It worked well until—

A: Mm-hm. Right.

Q: Was retirement significant in all sorts of ways?

A: [overlap] Of course it is. It's significant and fundamental ways.

Q: Tell me, and use the subject.

A: Retirement is and can be significant, as I said, in fundamental ways. This business of what you do with yourself changes completely. You have to find other ways to-to replace your preoccupations with your professional life, your economic life, and you have to find something that will-will keep your attention, will-will use you in some way. So that is a fundamental change, because if you don't have it, then you're not distracted.

But for me it was the opposite side of this, that I got involved in the museum, and it gave me a new preoccupation but it was not always the– It was not distracting from the past. It was bringing the past back. So adjusting to that, and to reconcile these two things, was the-the important aspect of-of my adjustment to retirement.

Q: Are you still in the process of that?

A: Well, it depends on what I'm doing there.

Q: Why is so much of the survivor experience generally framed in terms of the narrative experiences, the story told?

A: Well, it's framed in terms of the– The narrative is framed in terms of the experiences because it is presumed that that's what people will listen to, that they want to hear it. It's-it's like what makes newspaper material readable or not. The routine isn't-isn't of that much interest, but now if you hear something unusual, and you get an insight into how you might prob-perhaps survive, people like to learn a

lesson, and if you don't do it explicitly, then you look for it (you know) indirectly. And the notion at least initially after– in the seventies, when this recollection started to come to the foreground, was that it was important to describe the Holocaust in its details, in its detail horrors. So that's is my perception of why it came about that way. And survivors, I think, like to tell their stories, and display their own (if you will) courage or whatever it took to do. It may– It's always (you know) looked in a positive way, the survivor story. .. So it–it was– It was selling. And it still does. I mean, look at the number of memoirs that come out. (you know) Practically every week there's one or two new ones. Now that we're in the– in the writing phase of it, because I guess publishing has become so much easier.

Q: There is an appetite.

A: There seems to be, yeah, at least (you know) right now. But it may be changing. It may be changing. It may be reduce-reducing interest.

Q: Having too many, you mean?

A: Maybe, yeah.

Q: Do you give much thought to what you want young people to know about the Holocaust?

A: Well, I think it's– Two things. As a minimum, to know what it is. To know these narratives and to know some of the broader perspectives that some historians are-are bringing out. But what I would like them to know (and I don't know how likely that is, or how easy it is) is to try to understand it. That is much more difficult, to understand it from their own perspective, which is even more difficult. I mean, it's simpler to look at it and say, "Oh yeah, there was Hitler, the Nazis. But this-this is not around now-nowadays. It's not"– But it's not that simple.

Q: Not to distance themselves?

A: Mm-hm. On the other hand, you don't want them to (you know) look at it and say– and worry about (you know) where-where-what's in the future for them, in those terms.

Q: Are your own memories distant? Have they become more distant over the years?

A: No, they've not become more distant, but as I said before, my memories have become defined through telling them. So it's what I've been telling, is what– [is] become more-more defined. And there's a danger in that.

Q: And the danger is?

A: The danger is that it's not-not truly (you know) your memories, and perhaps not the important ones.

Q: In the telling your story over and over to people, is it inevitable that the emotion would become detached from the memories?

A: I think so. I think it definitely would.

Q: What would?

A: It-the– It would become detached. The emotion would become detached by retelling. Because as I said, it's no longer the experience; it's the story of the experience, and the emotions are not that close in-in that case. They become detached also.

Q: That may be why it stays in the storytelling form for all of us.

A: Yeah, right.

Q: What memories of yours are still the most vivid?

A: You mean, from the– from the camp experience? What memories? [*Yeah.*]

It changes. If I come across something, however (you know) that happens, and I try to go back to the experience, I focus on that experience and it becomes more-more current, more vivid. But it's not necessarily going to stay. I may (you know) next week run into something else and another memory would-would come up.

Q: When you were liberated, one survivor talked about having to relearn a code of conduct. Was that true for you?

A: No, not so much in those terms, because when all is said and done, there is a moral compass in camps also. Some people diverge from it more, some less. But to me, that was not the issue. It's how to integrate in this world that is totally foreign to me. I mean, just to integrate, how to live amongst American soldiers. They could look like very strange creatures (you know) to me. Their English was not my English, and so my English had to change, whatever there was of it. Relating to them, their– so naturally, at least the ones I associated with, so naturally fle-friendly and wanting to be helpful. So that encouraged my own (you know) appreciation of friendly interactions between people. I thought that was– that was it. That was a good thing. And I think we might have conveyed something like that to our daughters, although Ellen probably had a lot more to do with it. But on one early birthday, they–the two– the girls gave me a poster of Charlie Brown where he says, "Aren't you glad you smile?" And one of them (I don't know if it was Linda or Susan) wrote underneath, said, "Don't you wish everybody did?" So that aspect of personal interrelationships on a genuine friendly basis became, I think, part of my– and maybe not always in a positive sense, in the sense of wanting to please more than is necessary or desirable. But it was an important aspect of personal interrelationships.

Q: I imagine you had to be extraordinarily adaptable and reactive.

A: Yes, yes. You had to be adaptive. I-I think I mentioned in one of the talks my experience with this-this SS man in Kaiserwald who was in charge of the clothing warehouse. And that– he was– He was feared in the camp. [*wait for noise*] (Okay?)

So this SS man, his name was [Fischer], Oberscharführer Fischer, master sergeant, he was in charge of the kleide– Kleiderkammer, the clothing warehouse. And to be part of that work group was very desirable because you had access to-to clothing. And I had worked in-in the Riga ghetto in the air force clothing warehouse, where I learned a few things, how to handle and warehouse and sort and whatnot the clothing. So I thought I had some qualification. And the-the man, the Jewish man who was in charge of this work group when I got into– got into Kaiserwald, his name was Max, he one day– And people didn't want to work in this workforce because that was Fischer. You stay away from him. So he asked me if I wanted to come to his workforce. And I said yes. That was a choice I made, because it was a good– had very positive aspects to it. But how do you deal with an SS man like Oberscharführer Fischer? So I figured, Max has been dealing with him; I'll watch him and see what he does. And I noticed that what he was doing, that whenever Fischer addressed him in any way, or told him anything to do, or what have you, he would snap to attention, click his heels (you know) and respond loudly, "Ja wohl, Herr Oberscharführer." So I says, "Well, that's what you have to do. Maybe I can do it." And of course my clicking of heels and "Ja wohl, Herr Oberscharführer" didn't sound as-as good as his, but I did it. And before long, I found myself in charge of that work group, not by my choice but by Fischer's choice. And so that's-that's (you know) what you have to do. When you don't know– there's no rules, (you know) no standards of how to behave, you try to figure it out.

Q: It's also an example of choice. On the surface, that would seem not an obvious choice.

A: Well, it was definitely a choice because the choice was, you say "Yes, I'll go with you," or you say "No, I don't want– I don't want this guy." But the alternatives

were not good. The other work parties were nothing to (you know) to desire. So this was a reasonable choice, a choice of two bad alternatives.

Q: And a good choice that maybe not others would necessarily have made.

A: [overlap] Maybe not. Maybe not.

Q: How did being young impact your survival?

A: Oh, I think it makes a tremendous difference.

Q: What does?

A: I think youth and survival are very, very much linked in terms of the nature of the survival process. I think in particular at my age, the late teens (16, 17, 18) is already a-a phase of life where you're looking outside of your immediate family and-and teenage friends environment. You're getting exposed to the world. And you try to figure out how to integrate into that world and go away (you know) from your family confined environment. So even though the environment you're trying to adjust to was not all that great, but to try to get adjusted to it is, I think, a normal part of that stage of growing up. So in that respect, age in this interval has a– it was very important. If you're much younger than that, you're what you would call now child survivors. And they survived because somebody hid them. Somebody (you know) protected them. They– Not they could do really on their own. If they're much older than that, then they're already (you know) set in their ways, and they're more affected by suddenly finding this tremendous change from what they were before to what they're exposed to now. So I think age is very important.

Q: And more resilience at adolescence?

A: I think so. I think so, by and large. I mean, depends on your– how you grew up before and what you were– what you learned in your earlier life.

Q: Even in the midst of that horror, were people who they were when [it] began? Did you survive that experience pretty much based on what had already been formed?

A: I don't know how I– (you know) what in particular, how– (you know) what influenced my survival. It's a lot of things.

Q: We talked about your mom and

A: Yes, yes. She-she influenced (you know) my vision of myself as being– that it-it would be good to survive, it's important to survive. It's not just my own desire to live, but that it was important to somebody that I should– I should live. So yeah, in that respect, it influenced it.

My activities in the Zionist movement may have influenced it because I was active in it. When the Soviets took over the Baltic countries in 1940, we went underground, although there was really no good reason for it. We were in favor of the Soviet Union. It's just, they didn't like Zionism. So we were underground and we had to act in a kind of organized manner. It might have– This might have helped.

Q: You described yourselves in that period (before the war) as idealistic young people.

A: Yeah. We were, yes, idealistic young people. The idealism of course was– had to do with Zionism, with getting out of Lithuania and go build a new life, a new country. It certainly took idealism to believe that you could do that. And people were doing it. Young people were doing it. They were moving there, establishing the collective settlements, and they were doing it. So it was idealism grounded in some reality. But you had to be idealistic about it, not-not practical.

Q: How would you have described yourself in the camps?

A: How would I describe myself? I don't know. There was just, it's– Alert .. and-and working on-on survival of the moment, which is really the key. It's the only way you can survive.

Q: Certainly sounded resourceful too.

A: I think you had to be, yes.

Q: How old are you now?

A: Eighty-two.

Q: At 82, at this point in your life, are there things that you're remembering now more than others, things that continue to shift for you?

A: I think it has a lot to do with my activities at the museum, that as I encounter material that is– relates to my experience, I– it brings them up and I remember them, kind of dredge them up from somewheres there, deep into memory, which I thought has gone away. But it has to do with the signals I'm getting. I wouldn't do it just because I'm older.

Q: But you've placed yourself in that situation too.

A: Yeah, yeah, I did. One thing led to another.

Q: And you see value in it?

A: Yes, I do.

Q: Tell me.

A: I see value, not only– Of course maybe that's self-serving, but in that the value is– It gives me activity that utilizes something that I have, like being able to use

Yiddish and Hebrew and my background to support some of the activities at the museum. I think that has a lot to do with it. But then I also say, well, what I'm doing is important in a bigger sense: the purposes of the museum and what have you. And that (you know) may or may not be (you know) very important, but I do try to bring that in.

[Tape 8]

Q: Have you been through the museum?

A: Yes. .. I've been through the museum in most of its exhibitions, certainly the permanent exhibition, and some of the others.

Q: How is that for you? Do you remember the first time you did that?

A: Well, I can't say that it had a great emotional impact in terms of my personal experience. I found it well done and bringing out important things about the Holocaust experience. But not that it upset me personally in-in a great way.

Q: I ask because one of the survivors in the Life After the Holocaust program is very involved but hasn't been through the museum yet.

A: Yeah. Well, people will always differ in terms of their reaction to things, their past or present. It's– Again, it's not something– there's– I know people who will not go there. But not necessarily survivors.

Q: Do you remember when you first saw a Holocaust newsreel or movie?

A: I thought that I saw things that I had not seen in my own personal experience, in all these piles of-of dead bodies. I've seen enough, I have carried enough of them, but not on the scale that you see in these documentaries.

Q: Beyond those details, the general sense of it?

A: I didn't know the Holocaust before seeing these things, on the scale that the Holocaust is. I knew it on my very limited (you know) narrow perspective, which included some of the ingredients of what you see in the– in the broader description, but I certainly did not know it on that scale, until I saw the material.

Q: And your reaction to that?

A: Nothing– I mean– How should I say? Interesting and illuminating, unbelievable.

Q: So you were in it but had no idea.

A: Of the scale and the large scale of it. Yeah. I mean, we knew for example already in late 1941, maybe 5 or 6 months after the Nazis captured Lithuania, that there is extermination going on. We knew that the people they were selecting out and sending– taking over to the Ninth Fort were being shot and killed and buried in these ditches. But– And when all is said and done, we knew the scale of it in Lithuania. We knew that by the end of '41, more-more than 80% of the Jews were already dead. But I didn't know the scale of it (you know) globally, worldwide, in Eastern Europe, and the industrial mechanization of the process, and how it eventually (you know) displayed itself in-in the ghettos, in the camps. I didn't know all that.

Q: If you had known, do you think it would have impacted your survival?

A: No, I think it doesn't. You still deal with your immediate environment, immediate things going on around you.

Q: Did you have any "survivor guilt"?

A: No, I don't. And I sometimes (you know) wonder about that. Why don't I have it?

Q: Have what?

A: The survivor guilt. Why don't I have it? I don't have it. Could I have done something more that would have helped my mother survive? I don't think so.

Q: Maybe there are more survivors who don't have it, actually.

A: Maybe, although what you tend to read about is descriptions of survivors having guilt, as though this was some-some kind of accepted and required after-effect. But I don't think it's that necessarily all– all-inclusive, that prevalent. I'm sure, yeah, there are many. But maybe that has to do more with somewhat older people who lost their immediate families, their children, their wives, their husbands, that–that it could be more amongst them. But not-not necessarily– Not in my survival age.

Q: Do we idealize Holocaust survivors?

A: No, I don't idealize Holocaust survivors.

Q: I mean, the general public.

A: I don't know that they're idealized. .. Well, as I mentioned, in Israel they certainly were not idealized. I don't know if they're idealized now in Israel. But I don't think you really mean idealized. I think they're– In a sense, they're looked upon as strange creatures. (you know) How– (you know) How could you get out of this (you know) like that? But it's not idealizing. It's– And it's not necessarily admiring. It's-it's interesting. It's very interesting.

Q: I think you're right. You see the museum volunteer at the museum, and people surround the table to hear the narrative, there's something in that.

A: Something in-in their—

Q: In what we're talking about, the interest or the—

A: Oh, in the people. [*Yeah*] Yeah. [overlap] There is something there. Of course I cannot see it from their perspective, being on the other end of this. But yeah, there is, amongst many people, not-not necessarily all.

Q: Have you read any of the Holocaust memoirs?

A: Some. I've read some of them, yeah, from (you know) people that are describing some of my background, or people– Mostly from people who describe my background, my experience, type of experience, or locations or– just to learn what did they see and remember that I don't. And I learn a lot from that, which is what makes me concerned about my memories. But no, it's just an overwhelming number of memoirs that-that are appearing, have been appearing. There're hundreds of them.

Q: Are there any that you think got it right in some important way?

A: Yeah. Yes, there are some that are more relevant to me, seem more real to me, and more– and better in describing some aspects of the experience than some others. Some others are not that– People are not always good writers.

Q: How would you describe yourself now?

A: [laugh] Well, not-not passionate. I [don't] think you get passionate about ideals at my age. It's– There's a different kind of survival involved at this age. And you have to pay attention to that too. But Zionist, no. I'm not– I'm a Zionist in a sense of a great supporter of the state of Israel. I think it's terribly important to the Jewish people overall. And– But that's not necessarily Zionism anymore. Zionism means to go there. And I'm for the existence of the state and its-its strengths. And it has its negative things too.

Q: In terms of your personality, beyond that, how would you describe yourself now?

A: In terms of my personality? I-I don't know. I don't know. I'm– [overlap] Necessarily, I have slowed down a lot.

Q: Still a risk taker?

A: But there's not much need for taking risks. We're comfortable. (you know) We're not in imminent danger. The risk only comes when you go to see the doctor and say, "What is he going to tell me now?" (Yeah.)

Q: Optimistic?

A: Always. Always have been. And I need optimism. I react badly to negative attitudes. That-that I know.

Q: Tell me more about that.

A: Well, people who are negative in terms of their outlook, and speak that way, have a negative influence on me. I become– (you know) I just react to it. I don't want negativism. And I respond positively to positive attitudes. My mood is better.

Q: What's ahead. Are there things you'd like to accomplish now?

A: No, it's just day to day. Enjoy the things I can enjoy, which are limited. And try to do something productive with myself to the extent that I can, because without that, (you know) there's not much point in going on.

Q: Are your siblings still alive?

A: No. No, they're all passed away.

Q: When did that happen?

A: Well, the first one that passed away, he died when I was born, so I never knew him.

Q: Say brother or sister.

A: That was– (Trying to get his name ...) And then the second sibling was two years older than I was. His name was Baruch or Bokhe. And of course with him I had a closer relationship. And he died when he was 12, I was 10, from diphtheria. Then my sister Sarah in Israel was a nurse. She died in childbirth. My brother David died from heart– a heart attack. I think he was on a business trip in Korea. And then my sister, who moved here, her son moved her here, and she was in a– in a home. She died a few years ago, just, I guess, older age. So they're all gone.

Q: So you're the last of the family?

A: Mm-hm, right. I'm the last of the family, yeah. But I have my own family.

Q: Is Lt. Reese still alive?

A: (excuse me) No. Lt. Reese died a day before I gave this first person talk in 2004. And I was supposed to travel to Miami, where he was in a hospital, after the talk. When I called, I found out he already passed away. He was 95.

Q: How do these losses impact you?

A: Well, it makes you very well aware of your age. And you try to keep whatever friendships you still have—which are also changing. Friendships are changing. People have their own problems and needs.

Q: You mean, harder to find time, or what do you mean?

A: Well, it's– Some, for example, might get more involved with their immediate family, their children, grandchildren, and it can be time-consuming. And when there's no family relationships, it's just person to person, it becomes different.

Q: We mentioned the DNR. Is that something you've discussed with your children?

A: Oh, sure. [*Yeah.*] Yes. We discussed DNRs and our wishes. Our daughter in particular, Susan, is very aware of needing to know what our preferences are.

Q: Because she wants to get it right, or because—

A: She wants to get it right. (Yeah.0

Q: Are you afraid of death?

A: No, no. I'm not afraid, but I would be more concerned about the process than the end result.

Q: Not suffer?

A: Not to– Yeah, that's right. Not to just suffer just because (you know) we have to continue on, no matter what. That's-that's not what I believe.

Q: You said you're not religious. Do you have any sense of an afterlife?

A: No. No, I don't think there is an afterlife. I-I have changed perhaps slightly in one respect, and mostly because Ellen is so interested in the subject. She-she believes that there is something, that the world is just too complicated for there to be (you know) nothing. So all that pretty much goes to agnosticism. And I might lean in this direction, say "I don't know," which I don't. But is there an afterlife? I don't think so. It's not– It's hard to imagine.

Q: Do you think that what you're doing at the museum might make a difference?

A: I can only hope so. They're working like they want it to make a difference. So I hope they succeed. Whether– (you know) how much– What kind of a contribution my contribution will have to it, I don't know. I can only use the opportunities that come my way. And they either will or will not. I think some of it will be meaningful on a small scale. It's not going to prevent (you know) a holocaust, just because of what I'm doing.

Q: What do you think people misunderstand still about the Holocaust?

A: I don't know that I know enough about people (you know) to say what they understand or don't understand. It just a-a crude judgment. It would be that they need to understand more how a holocaust comes about; that it is not a simple (you know) event powered by some top people and implemented by the lower people; that it's a process that takes in a broad range of people. And-and it needs to be understood in this fashion so that this broad range of people can be addressed and made to understand that they're important in this process. It's not just the person that you want to put in jail and that then you've secured everything. That's not so.

Q: As the Holocaust survivors age and die, is there a danger that without the power of the personal testimony—

A: Well, it takes both the testimonies and it takes people wanting to see it. Both are needed. The testimonies are being (you know) materialized. They're there. But what do you do to make people want to-to look at it and learn something from it? I don't know what you need to do to do that. Maybe you have to scare them, to show them what the Holocaust was, how bad it was, and then they'll get interested. You have to– I think the teaching, the training of younger people, that's, I think, is crucial because that's where it all starts. So I think that's where the impact can be as far as future generations wanting to know about it and trying to learn something from it. But just having it is not enough.

Q: Your response to the current rise of Holocaust denying?

A: Well, you read about that, and that there is. And it's-it's more disturbing in places like Russia, because it pervades high levels (you know) of government. It's not the same as the British (you know) group who are obviously out of– out of line [there] with the– with the broad population. But it's-it's there. And of in Iran it's a– it serves a purpose. It's simply one of the mechanisms. So yes, you have to be concerned about it, but you have to take it– In order to deal with it, you have to take it in the context of where-where it is, and what purposes it serves in that local environment.

Q: Are there political issues now you care very much about?

A: Yeah, I care about the– our government, the elections coming up. I think our government is-is not working well for us, and it should not continue, and that what comes after it is-is better, not just indifferent.

Q: Do you know who you're voting for?

A: I don't feel that I need to decide it right now. I cannot influence that choice. I mean, I know I wouldn't be– I most likely will be voting Democratic. But who that will be, I don't know. And who will be on the Republican side, I don't know either. So– And that's important to know.

Q: There was a special relationship between Jewish Americans and the black community in America. That's changed over the years.

A: Well, nowadays the minorities in the– in the spotlight is the Hispanics, the immigrants. And I don't understand all the ramifications of the different policies towards them, but being an immigrant, obviously I would tend to favor their-their welfare. (I'm going to need a break sometime.)

[Tape 9]

Q: The word mercy?

A: The word mercy. I'm trying to think of the dictionary kind of definition of "mercy." It's– What comes to mind is, mercy implies the– having the power for forgiveness, the-the choice to forgive or not to forgive. And who has– Who has this-this power, the– You'd have to speak of specific situation. If you're a judge, you can have mercy. If you're in some relationship with one person has some powers over the other person, you have the power for affecting that other person. So how you fit something like that into what we're talking about, I really don't know. I don't think it's-it's relevant to me, in that kind of an interpretation.

Q: Relevant only in terms of what you describe as understanding.

A: Yes.

Q: That things have evolved.

A: (Right.) The– yeah. You have– that you can– You should have understanding, which does or does not affect that other person, your– whether you have it or you don't. But it affects your view of the other person's activities. That's kind of in a more limited scale.

Q: Has the world changed since the Holocaust?

A: All the world has changed tremendously. I mean, there's so much of it that I used to understand, that I don't understand. I mean, look at the equipment we're using, that the kids are using. (you know) And it-it has broad implications in terms of people's lives.

Q: How it's changed since the Holocaust.

A: Yes, .. the world has changed a lot, certainly technologically, in terms of relations between countries. We all (you know) hear about this globalization, but there is more– Look at Europe. Talking about the United Europe, in terms of post World War II, I mean, that's was not thinkable. And of course this whole terrorism business, that's a major, major influence on the lives of people, the relationships between different peoples. There's different concerns. I mean, to think of (you know) suicide bombings would be so prevalent, so easily (you know) organized as a means– as a mechanism for war, I mean, that was not thinkable 60 years ago.

Q: Or very rare, I guess.

A: Yeah. They were considered (you know) outside the human (kind of) race.

Q: The value of testimony for prevention. You said the ingredients are still there. What did you mean by that?

A: Well, if you look at the people involved in something like a holocaust on this scale, you'd start with the criminal mind, the pathological (you know) murderer, which we had in-in the camps. They were running Kaiserwald, for example, Germans who were not suitable to live in this violent Nazi world. They were too violent for that. Or I should say, their violence was not controllable. But they could be let loose (you know) in a camp to control the Jews. Well, the jails are filled with some people like that. All they need is to be given the opportunity. They don't need the theory. They don't need the Aryan kind of philosophies. They just need an opportunity to do what they want to do. And they're there.

And then you go on (you know) from there. At the other extreme, the-the ideologues, the theoreticians who can justify, provide a rationale, so that all these people in between have a way of rationalizing their participation. Well, the theoreticians (you know) are there. The Osama bin Ladens are there. So the rationale can be (you know) made available, and– (not necessarily the Osama bin Laden type) and there's all these people who, in between, who are given opportunities that is of some benefit to them, for them to want to rationalize their

departure from their moral– their own moral standards. So it just– you just have to have all these– all these things come together to create the Holocaust. But the ingredients are there. They're not, fortunately, no-not coming together, certainly not in this country yet.

Q: But that is what you meant when we talked about Bosnia, Darfur, Rwanda? Those ingredients are there.

A: Right. They were there. They're there in Darfur. And we had no influence on the way this was made to come together.

Q: Are you less politically active in something like Darfur, or more?

A: [overlap] Yes. Politically I'm less active. Yes. I-I don't go to demonstrations, although I certainly support their being. But that has more to do with limitations of age, I think, although I never participated in demonstrations to speak of.

Q: Is there value in the concept of mercy or forgiveness even in the face of evil, even if it wasn't relevant in terms of your own experience?

A: That-that– This notion of-of mercy and its importance is difficult for me to address because I think it-it is most common, or perhaps fits best, in a religious context. And I must say that when I find out, as-as I know, that most of the [city] population in this country is religious, they believe in a God, and I don't, and I say, "What's the matter with me?" Now, we're in the minority. (you know) But my beliefs are real to me. And I think in the– perhaps in the context of-of religion, it has– it has a place. But not to me outside of that context.

Q: In our criminal justice system, mercy has a place?

A: You mean, outside the religious context. [*Yes, yeah.*] Then-then it-it goes into– again into the thing we talked about before, that it fits into situations where the one

having the power for mercy has the power to make it– make it– have an–a real effect. I mean, a judge has the power for mercy, and his decision has very real consequences. But for me to say I have mercy, so what? It's-it's not-not a meaningful kind of thing.

Q: It would be interesting to see if any of that had value in terms of how one moved on in life. Is that useful or effective in doing that?

A: I think from (you know) some instances that I have heard about, yes, some survivors declare their– that they have for– they forgive (you know) the perpetrators. But I think you find that is connected to religious notions. It doesn't-doesn't– It supports their religious belief structure.

Q: But for you, no, either way.

A: No. To me, I guess I-I just am too–too down-to-earth, if you will. It has to have some practical relevance to mean something to me. Now, to many people, to most people, faith has a very practical relevance, so the concept can be meaningful to them.

Q: This interview today, not a narrative, your thoughts. What value, if any?

A: I don't know. I'm waiting to see. [laugh]

Q: is it a different kind of conversation?

A: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. It's– tends to be much more philosophical, which may or may not be of interest to people. Maybe some little bit here and there might be. I think you've covered a lot of territory, and– So I-I think the purpose of finding– (you know) of creating an educational tool which goes beyond the narrative, I think, is a very useful instrument in trying to-to advance this building of

understanding the Holocaust, not just knowing what it is. So I hope it will serve that-that purpose.

Q: Is there any—

A: That's why I'm doing.

Q: Is there anything I should have asked you but I didn't?

A: You asked a lot. [laugh] Maybe there's something that I could think of that I wish you hadn't asked me, because (you know) it's uncomfortable to– especially to make pronouncements that I'm not so sure I'm (you know) qualified to make.

Q: Thank you.

A: I have a request I'm going to make to you. [*Yes.*] I decided there is a price for doing this interview: that I would like the museum or you, however it happens, to provide me with a copy of my interview, not just the little pieces that you pull out, if that's possible. And in fact, three copies.

Q: We'll pass that on.

A: That's the payoff.

Q: I bet it will be possible, is my guess, Sam.

[room tone]

[End of Interview]