ROBERT BEHR
October 2007

[Tape 10]

Q: Say your name.

A: My name is Robert Behr, and I'm right now 85 years old.

Q: Where are we?

A: We are in Maryland, Gaithersburg, you're being specific, and on 70 Chase Street, and that's about it.

Q: In your home?

A: It's my home.

Q: Do you have family? How many, who they are?

A: Well, of course I have my wife, and I have a daughter here, who has two children, they're twins, and I have a daughter in Denver, who has two boys. So I have four grandchildren and two daughters altogether, and their-their ages are, as I said, 9 years old (the twins) and the other ones are 16 and 14–13.

Q: How important is family in your life?

A: Well, knowing that I lost my immediate family in Germany to the Holocaust, all I have is what I got up here. I have no uncles, never had any brothers and sisters, I had no aunts, and they're all killed. So what I have here now is really my entire family, as I just described it.

Q: How do you describe yourself? As a husband and a father?

A: Well, it depends who you ask. (you know) If you ask me, I think I'm perfectionist by itself, I'm a little demanding, because I want things to do right, and I do the best I can for my family. I'm not always as patient as I should be, but as a whole, I think if you were to ask my kids, they would agree that I'm a very good provider and father to raise them and take care of them in their need. They come to me when they need something. Whether it's advice or something financially, they come to me. I'm their first stop, other than their husbands, to come to me. So I think I'm, on all, a decent father.

Q: Given your background, how did that affect your parenting?

A: I'm not quite sure of the question. What do you mean?

Q: Given your Holocaust wartime experience, how that impacted you as a parent.

A: That's a very interesting question. I have to go back a little bit. If you know about the Holocaust, you know that the Nazis created several categories of Jewish people. There were Jewish people with both parents, and there are people who were out of mixed marriage, one Christian partner and one Jewish partner, regardless of whether the man is Jewish or the wife is Jewish and the other party is Christian. So I was very concerned, because the mixed marriage– children from mixed marriages or the mixed marriages themselves were protected to some degree for some of the horrors which transpired to the– during the Holocaust. And I was always wondering. I've never said that to anybody. You are really, literally the first one.

When I got out of the camp after four years in there, I thought I would [not] marry a Jewish woman, because I didn't want my children to be full Jewish. I figured, if they are [in] a mixed marriage, then if there ever is another holocaust with the same criteria as the Nazis were, then they would to-to a degree be protected because they were– the German word is *Mischlinge* (that means mixed religions), and protect them. And I deliberately did not marry a Jewish woman. I

did not look for one, because I wanted to have my children born of a mixed marriage.

Q: That was your fear that it could happen again?

A: Yes. The idea that the Holocaust may be repeated in one form or another was so definitely embedded in my mind in 1945, when we were liberated, I did not ever believe that there wouldn't be a holocaust against the Jews. I mean, there have been other holocausts, as you know, but I was convinced that the Jewish people would be subject to another holocaust on equal or worse conditions as the first one, and I wanted to do everything in my power to avoid that. Now, I'm not very proud of this today, I am not very happy about it, but that's how I felt in 1945, just coming out of a camp, having lost all my uncles and aunts. I wanted to protect any children I may have from that fate.

Q: How do you feel about that same issue today, in 2007 in America?

A: Would I– Would I do this all over again if I were to be married today, picking a wife simply by ethnic background rather than the normal conditions of love and affection? Probably not. Probably after 60 years [of the] war, I sort of [became] convinced that my anxieties and my fear were probably not justified as far as the Jewish people in America or other places were concerned. There's anti-Semitism, as you know, everywhere. But it doesn't manifest itself by killing everybody left and right, just because we're Jewish. So would I do this again? No, I would not. I would probably marry the person I love, regardless of her ethnic or religious background.

Q: Do you feel fairly secure today, being Jewish in America today?

A: Well, it's a very interesting and I will be quite honest. I never volunteer that I'm Jewish. I mean, if I work in a Holocaust Museum, where there are a lot of non-Jewish people working, I let the people believe what they may. But I'm still

reluctant, to this day, to go out and say, “I’m Jewish.” And I can tell you, if somebody call–tells me “He’s a Jew,” I really get offended, because I rather prefer that somebody says “He’s Jewish.” I never volunteer that. If it comes up, I don’t deny it. But I’m not going out .. (excuse me) and voluntarily say, “Oh yeah, I’m Jewish.” I don’t do that.

Q: So if I ask you to give me a sense of your identity, how you identify yourself?

A: Good question. How would I identity myself? If I tell you the truth, as an American citizen of Jewish faith. No. The order of importance is the American citizenship, and the religious aspect is secondary, since I’m not raised as a religious person in the first place. So I would feel quite secure, but I would never volunteer to go out and advertise my Jewishness. Other people are proud. They-they obviously tell everybody who needs to know, “Yes, I’m Jewish and I’m proud of it.” I would never do that. I would– I would accept being Jewish, but I don’t advertise it.

Q: Based mainly out of fear?

A: I think it’s inborn now. It’s– There is actually no physical fear. It’s good question. But it’s–it went– It went with me for so many years. From 1933 to 1945, it was terrible to be Jewish. And it’s not fear so much as habit. You know? You actually– It becomes second nature not to advertise it. Now, that’s very personal. That is not true for all the Jewish people. But for me, it is.

Q: How would you describe your personality?

A: Well, I don’t know how much time we have, but in any case, my personality is shaped by the fact that for many years I was denied any opportunity to be somebody, to become somebody, to have something, and so that has ruined my life. I by– I am by nature a very ambitious person. Can be detrimental to your marriage, in many aspects. And it’s difficult to say but you want me to be honest,

that my work came first, my career came first, and my family came second. That's another thing I'm not very proud of, but that's true. I wanted to make something. I had no education. I had no experience. So everything you see today and hear is made out of the idea: I've got be somebody, I have got to achieve something in life, and I don't want to be a non-entity, as I used to be for so many years. So that shaped my– the fact that I knew nothing, had nothing, and wanted to become somebody, that is the driving factor. So "ambition" is probably a catch word for that.

Q: Ambition is related to a sense of a lost identity and loss of control?

A: Oh, that's absolutely right. I was driven by those things, and it shaped my life. It shaped my career, it shaped what I did, and I wanted to get as high up as I can, and I wanted to be somebody who is recognized for his ability, not by his Jewish faith, but for his achievement in life and what he can do.

Q: Who were you before the Holocaust? Describe that boy.

A: In one word, I– the boy I was, in-be– During the Holocaust, while we were still in Germany– Remember, the Holocaust started in 1933. I was 11 years old. And so it totally shaped my life. It– Of all these stories which are about the Holocaust, 95% of them apply to me: no school, no-no money, no nothing. And so you become a person who– a bare existence. To survive, even before the concentration camp, was of major importance. You were subject to the whims of any German who didn't like your face or didn't like your attitude. He could do something, could denounce you, and the end would be there, you see. And so that is such strong factors, you don't easily get rid of them. You don't easily get rid of them. And they stay with you. And it takes a very strong person to not only create a physical life but a psychological existence, where you feel that you are among people who accept you for what you are, rather than deny you because of what you are.

Q: At your age today, how do those things still inform your life?

A: Well, the best– How do I deal with those factors? Well, the easiest way is what I just told you. I do not advertise I'm Jewish. I'm not proud of to be Jewish. I hide it. If somebody asks me, I admit it, but I would never volunteer it. That's a direct outgrowth of the fact that when you lived in Germany from '33 until we were arrested in '42, that it was something shameful, something miserable, something not worthy, to be Jewish. The German people denied you the right to be a German. And now that I'm an American, I've slowly changed, but it sits in there. It sits in there. And I try not to make, any way, form or shape, something out of this background of mine, but it still hangs in there.

Q: Would you describe yourself as a trusting man?

A: Well, the answer to– Am I a trusting man? Well, yes and no, of course. Yes, as far as my family is concerned. Yes, as far as a few friends I have. No to the majority of the world. I-I view the world with a degree of skepticism. Not necessarily do I condemn them anything, but somebody who is my friend has to earn that. I don't– I'm not a warm person in the sense that I embrace people who happen to come into my life. I'm sort of reserved and keeping a distance, and then as connections develop, we become to [known]. If you ask me how many friends do you really have, I would tell you I have one. I have lots of acquaintances, but I've only got one friend. And he, of all people, is a German Christian, so– But just to show you, I do not make friends very easily. And that is something I have to live with. And I cannot change my personality to the degree that I suddenly become a warm, hospital-hospitable person who embraces people for their existence, for their being, without knowing anything about him.

Q: In terms of emotional/psychological wounds, what do you see in yourself? What have you tried to overcome, and to what degree have you been successful?

A: Well, basically– Let me think about your question. You want to know what the psychological factors are, [to do– to–] in my present conditions in life. I'm basically suspicious; I'm very basically very careful with whom I associate. I mean, I don't mean professionally. That's something– you earn a living, you accept the people who work with you. But in my private life, it's rather empty. I do not easily go out with them. So those are hangovers, direct relationship. When I lived in Germany during the Nazi time, you couldn't trust anybody. You couldn't like anybody. They didn't want you to like them. So you were limited to the few Jewish family with which my mother was acquainted, and which I knew, d their children. But as a whole, the idea–

For example, I don't like– I'm not a good host. Let me describe this. Other people, they love– Americans, for example, born Americans. They have a saying that says, "Why don't you come over for dinner?" They just met half an hour ago. Never do that. I mean, Europeans wouldn't do that anyway, and I wouldn't do this in particular. And I am not a very gracious host. I am reticent to be a cordial, open, slap-shoulder type guy. So those are really hangovers from– little bit from my family life, because my mother was [at] about the same [trends], and so have I. I hope that sort of explains it.

Q: Have you seen changes in yourself over the years that you've been here? Are there things that have softened or lessened?

A: The issues which you're raising, whether my life is today different than it used to be right after the war and for the following years, my gosh, the war is 60 years ago. Yes, it definitely has. I become calmer, and I am now in a fortunate position to have retired with a pension, which is [where] I'm very grateful for, that has eased my anxieties about not having anything, not knowing where the next meal comes from, which was the case in Germany, which definitely was the case in the concentration camp, that– So to some degree, I am accepting the world today as an open opportunity, as something I can live with. Don't necessarily have to be happy all the time, but I have changed to that degree that I am much more a

person who is accepting its presence and not constantly thinking: What if? What happened in the past, can it happen again?—as I did in '45, when I decided to marry a Christian woman to save my children from the gas chamber. That, I would never do. So time has healed, absolutely.

Q: When did you tell your children about your war/Holocaust experiences and about their Jewish identities?

A: Well, that is a very good question. What did I tell my children? Well, I told them as much as they needed to know. I never had the problem like some survivors, that they didn't want to talk about anything that happened to them. I did. When they're about 12 or 13 years old, and they were living with us in Ohio, we– I used the occasion when their history– in school, when their history reached World War II, and I used that as an occasion and said, "I want you guys to listen to something. And here is my story." And I did tell them. I'm not sure they grasped everything, because it was an enormous burden on them suddenly to find out that their father was 4 years in prison and lived under conditions which were less than human. And so they accepted– They were shocked. They were actually shocked. Then I noticed that they began sort of ad– to admire me, you know, and saying, "My dad made it," you know. They didn't understand it wasn't only my doing, but they were sort of proud that they made it.

Now I need to ask you to understand that my family in Denver, they are married– they-they are not Jews. I mean, they're Jews on a piece of paper, but that's about it, because there's also a mixed marriage, and they are not raised in the sense that they have compassion with the Jewish faith as it happens through the centuries. You know. My local daughter and her husband are very Jewish. And he's from Montreal, and was raised very Jewish, and they're much more receptive to the fact that I work in a museum, that I try to spread the word by giving speeches about my life. So in that respect, I must say that I have sort of half and half: one family who knows of, and said, "Oh yeah, well, my dad was–is a survivor," and then let it go; while my younger daughter is much more saying in

pride, "My-my dad made it," you know, and tells people what-what happened to me as far as she remembers.

Q: Are you pleased either way? Does it matter to you?

A: Well– Am I pleased, and does it matter? Well, it doesn't matter. Am I pleased? I feel, with-with-with my-my-my older daughter who's 49 years old, and was never very much– We were never a religious family, never, ever. So [along where] we were a mixed marriage. And so I accept that. I mean, she lives her life, and the Jewishness is there, she knows it of course, but it's not a big part of her life. The other one here is more Jewish, and I'm proud of them, but– You see, religion has played a very small part in their lives, the kids' lives. They're not-not religious. They don't keep kosher [in any way, in any ..... same]. So in the old German– When-when-when the Germans first began to [prosecute] the Jews– Now, I'm not going to tell you my life story. I know that's not what you want. But there was a slogan. If somebody asked you, "What are you?" you always said, "I'm a German citizen of Jewish religion." So what comes first? The German citizenship. And that's the same here with us. We are Americans, we're proud of it, we believe in it, we want to be Americans, and the religion aspect is a fact you live with, and you either practice it or you don't, but it's totally secondary to your [Jew-] nationality and citizenship. [overlap] I don't know if that makes sense.

Q: It does. In terms of identity, American citizenship comes before being German? Do you consider yourself German still?

A: No. I do not. I some ways I do. I love German music. I love the culture. I love the things [about it]. But– I'll give you an example how strong that is in my family.

Q: Repeat, being German, the subject.

A: The fact, do you still consider yourself a German? Well, I do in some respect, as far as the aspects of Germany are concerned which are cultural in nature, from

literature to music and the theaters and so forth. As a citizen, let me give you an example. When I applied for my visa, I was interviewed by the American consul in Berlin. And one of the (which I thought was rather stupid) question he asked me is: If there would be a war between the United States and Germany, whose side would you f-fight for? (you know) Well, obviously I wouldn't– Remember, that was in 1947, (I) shortly after the war. And I said, "Of course I would fight for the Americans." So what you– What America has given me, I can give you in one sentence. That's a Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is the most motivating factor, for this immigrant, as I ever seen. That's why I didn't want to go to Israel. They don't have a Bill of Rights.

And to me, American was the epitome of a dream come true. When our ship landed in New York in February of 1947, and we entered the harbor, and there was the statue of liberty (see, it's coming back; I'm beginning to cry), we all cried. We literally cried. It was the most wonderful sight– Excuse me for being sentimental, but it was something– It comes right back to me. You cannot imagine. To enter this land as a free person. My God. What did we see in New York, the first thing, was lights. Americans had lights. Everything in Germany was destroyed. It was dark. It was miserable. And here were that country which has asked us to come, allowed us to come, and so I'm not sure that answers your question but it gives you an idea how we felt.

Q: You certainly answered that man's question.

A: Yes.

Q: All these years later, when you think of America and the feeling of promise that day, where you today?

A: Where am I today about America? I'll tell you. I-I admire America, I love America. I don't always agree with America. I have my ideas what I would have liked to see different. But as a whole, when you take the people, the country, its-its laws and everything else, its Supreme Court, and as I said, the-the Bill of

Rights, I don't ever want to be anything else but an American. Not ever. And that's not for convenience' sake. That is something I firmly believe in. I'm 85 years old. If a war breaks out tomorrow and they need me, I go. May not be a very brave soldier, but I would do my utmost to defend that what we got. And I hate to see it go down the drain sometimes, but we will recover. We'll come back to where we should be, and that's what I'm proud of.

Q: The Bill of Rights literally was—

A: That was my motivating factor.

[Tape 11]

Q: You described yourself as not being social, yet you're also very charming, a good speaker. Is that something you had to learn? Is it both things simultaneously?

A: Did I ever change or– due to my personality? The answer is yes, I think so, because– It's difficult to quantify that. I'm sorry, would you repeat that question?

A: That's one aspect of your personality, the distrustful side. You have another side to your personality, that stems probably as much from your background: adaptability, resilience, powers of observation.

Q: Yeah. My personality, on your flip side, meaning looking at the more positive side of my life, well, much of it was acquired. I've always been a person who liked to deal with people. And I found people the most interesting element in-in this world, rather than books or something like that. And so what happened is, as I became mission-oriented (now, that's a good old Air Force term), become mission-oriented in the sense that you spread the word of what I'm doing, and connected with that, I accept the people who are interested in this and people who want to know more, people who are asking questions and saying, "How was it? How is it? How do you feel now?"—essentially what you are doing right now.

And in order to answer this, you acquire a certain degree of charming personality which is extroverted and becomes part, because if you want to spread the message to anybody, you got to establish what we call rapport. If you don't have any rapport with anybody, you're wasting your time. And so I have that desire, that if I address somebody, whether it's an individual or if it's a group, I try to establish a degree of rapport. I try to be responsive to their interest. And out of this develops a degree of acceptability, with they accepting me, I accepting them, and I'm happy that they're listening to me; on the other hand, or if it's social, and they are interested in my life, you develop a degree of personality which is opposite from what you really are. You know. It is actually more or less imposed on you because– in order to do what you need to do.

Q: Does that ever create a tension in your life?

A: Does it create a degree of tension? The answer is no. It really doesn't. That comes from the age. (you know) I'm an old man today. I mean, let's face it. And you learn how to balance that out. It doesn't have to cause a conflict. I don't mean necessarily that everything is glory and happiness, but as a whole, you learn how to [adopt to this thing], and you try to reduce the negatives and accentuate the positives (like the song said), and so that-that works.

Q: In order to survive the Holocaust, are there aspects of your personality that you needed to develop to survive, that turned out ironically to help you in this life?

A: In order to summarize what you just asked me: What is the difference between a life in a camp, the freedom, or how did it shape your personality between the two of this?

Q: What were the threads? What turned out to serve you in life after the camp?

A: You already heard it, but I'll repeat it. Remember that I told you a while ago, I'm a very ambitious person? I want to put this into context. I came out of the camps

in May of 1945. I had no education, no money, no home, no country. And that has shaped my whole personality. I wanted to be somebody. I wanted to have something. I wanted to belong. That is a key factor. I wanted to belong. I was looking desperately. Who-who am I?

Let me give you an example. I worked for a little while in a British officers' club, being sort of a-a receptionist and one day I had the great idea. That was still in 1945, maybe November, December. And I thought, well, maybe I can enlist in the British army. Look at those guys. They got everything. They had uniform, they're respected, they had all the things I missed. So I went to one of the officers and says, "Captain, what can I do to enlist in the British army?" And he said, "Who are you?" So I told him, and he said, "Where are you from?" And I said, "In-in– I'm from Berlin." He said, "Well, you can't." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Well, you're a German." And that is something I certainly didn't want to hear, being a German, after having just spent four years in a concentration camp, arrested by the very German. So I said, "Well, I'm not a German." "Oh yeah?" he said. "Where were you born?" So I said, "Berlin." He said, "Where's Berlin located?" I said, "In Germany." He said, "Voilà. You are a German. End of story." So you see, it-it all comes back what you make [of it]. Ambition and the drive to belong. The British army didn't want me because I was a German. May I say that very honestly I certainly didn't feel like being a German after being persecuted from 1933 to '45. But here he was, told me, very logical, "Berlin is the capital of Germany, so you're German."

And so in answer to your question, it's a desire to belong and a desire to be among people who accept you for what you are, not ask about your religion or anything else. And so that what drove me. That what really drove me. I was a very lonely person with nothing. You know. My mother was still alive and– but we had nothing. We were nothing. We were constantly told that we were no good. And I wanted to be accepted. So those were the driving forces which shaped my life ever since I survived the camp.

Q: So the promise of America was also the promise of belonging.

A: Yes, exactly. It was the-the idea, with-with arriving, going to America, being accepted, believing that there is a country which had fought for us. They had fought indirectly for the Jewish people, to liberate them. Didn't always do a very good job, but they tried their best. Thousands got killed, which in essence was part of our salvation. And that was tremendously important to me. And I figured that a country which does that, you know, which was attacked by Japan and then, by Hitler declaring war on America, so these soldiers who went and fought, fought for me. And that was one of the mer–very reasons why I wanted to go to America.

Q: Over time, that started to shift? Did you start to feel less lonely, to belong?

A: I-I very definitely– you– How did-did I feel that belonging worked? Yes. and what really did it: my service in the military. You cannot serve in the military without belonging. You know. And the very fact that the Army accepted me. I wasn't even a citizen. I was not even a citizen. I was an alien. You know? And I was accepted by the military, put in a uniform, shared all the miserable food, and the training and everything else, and all of a sudden I had a home. The-the need to belong ended right there, because I belonged. The need was gone, and the fact were there that I was part of a military army which had stuck its neck out to liberate us from the camps. So it was a very dominating factor in my life.

Q: How soon after coming to America did you join the military?

A: Well, I need to tell you, landing in America– Now, give me 5 minutes and I'll tell you. Landing in America was great. I already told you when we went [and arrived]. We were sponsored by a Jewish organization, the Joint Distribution Committee, and they put us up in the Hotel Marseilles in New York. And the next couple days we were interviewed. And they had established a system where various Jewish communities in the United States, in various cities (I don't know all the details), agreed to sponsor a refugee. So when my turn came to be interviewed, they told me that number one, I can't stay in New York. For some

reason, everybody wanted to stay in New York, most of the refugees, because they felt at home or they had relatives up there. So I said, "Well, all right. I don't have anybody in New York anyway. What are my choices?" So they said, "Well," they looked at their lists and said, "You can either go to Chicago or can go to Dallas." Had two minutes to answer that question. So, make a long story very short, I rationalized it very cleverly. I figured Chicago there are gangsters, and in Dallas there are cowboys, which are a lesser of two evils, and I wound up in Dallas. That's why I got to Dallas.

And I was miserable. I was absolutely miserable. Would you be interested to know why? All right. I was miserable only because I had no money, no friends, no nothing. The Jewish community in those days were not interested in refugees or survivors. Not at all. They did it out of a sense of obligation to sponsor one or two refugees, but giving speeches or asking me how was it in the camps, not once. Not at all. Not ever. And they did their (quote, unquote) "duty" to sponsor somebody, and I was very lonely, very miserable. I won't go into details what I worked at. They got me a job, which was terrible. And then there was no feeling of belonging. My mother was still living in Germany and starving, '47, ration cards. And so I finally said, I can't live lie this.

And then the Army became like a– I've seen the soldiers. Like the British soldier I talked about, the American soldiers in Berlin, they had a good life. They belonged, they did their job, they– and so forth. And I felt, that's my answer. And I enlisted in July of 1947.

Q: Given your background, was freedom a blessing and a curse, to live without structure? Was that also why you were drawn to the army, to have a structure?

A: Definitely. The Army is something you are actually thrown into a structure. You know when to get up, you know when to eat, you know when to sleep, you know when to exercise. There are no question mark. They'll tell you, especially in basic training, 24 hours a day what you can and what you cannot do. A lot of people resented it. I loved it. I was used to it from the concentration camp. They already

told me, except they beat you on top of it. The Army, no. They fed you, they housed you, they [closed/clothed] you, and I got a lot of funny stories and– But I all of a sudden felt nobody denied me as a person. They accepted me. And a lot of people were so ignorant up there, they called me Frenchie instead of realizing that France is not Germany. But it was wonderful. It was– I didn't mind the hours, I didn't mind the drill, I didn't mind the marches, but it was all part of belonging to an organization with which you lived, where you belong, and where nobody judged you what kind of religion do you have.

Q: Before the war, would you have had a very different sense of who you were?

A: Would I have been able to answer .....?

Q: How would you have answered it before?

A: Well, how would I have answered it? I was a totally different person. I was a very–

Q: When? Before the war?

A: Yeah. Before the war, I was a young-young kid who had only a desire to live. There was– There was no ambition, there was no nothing. All I want to do– Life got so miserable and so desperate that all these dreams I had were on hold. I just– I had only the desire to survive this, not knowing– We had no chance to emigrate. The policies which existed did not allow that, because we didn't have the necessary background or relatives outside. So my personality during those day would in essence be a day-by-day, a day-by-day existence. When you put your head on a pillow at night, then you know you had one more day survived. God only knows what's going to happen tomorrow, where those guys (the Nazis) passed laws [co-] constantly. So it was a matter of getting enough to eat when the war started, because we didn't get ration cards. I had a mother who was difficult, to say the least, without going into details. So I was her only son, so I had to go

and take care of her in many aspects. So it wasn't– There was no long-range planning anymore. I'd given that up. I mean, I was no longer in a position to say, "Well, when I got 18, I'm going to go"– I had no schooling. I was kicked out of school and was not able to get into a Jewish school. Daily you heard transports going off to the east after the war started. My uncle (my mother's brother) and family were arrested overnight. And so life was so different that long-range planning, in my case, went totally out of the window. My was a day-by-day. Today I survive, I hope tomorrow I will too. Does that give you some idea?

Q: Is that still in your life today? Do you have a different perspective on the future?

A: [overlap] Do I have a different perspective today?

Q: Because of that, did it inform everything about the future?

A: Yes. And unequivocally yes. My life is much more organized. Of course it's almost going towards the end now of my life. But when I was younger, when I was 30-40 years old, it was driven by totally other factors. It was driven, like I already outlined, to be somebody, to make [something of my]– to make my mother– (my mother!) my friends proud of myself, especially my kids later. So it was– I-I didn't think about the time anymore, in the sense not that I'd forgotten it, but I didn't want it to dominate my life. I did not want the Nazi period to dominate my life, like some other Jewish survivors. It dominates your life. It-it influences– I didn't want that. There are certain little things which hang on there, but they're minor. Okay? But basically, I wanted to shake that from my life. Memories, I keep, but no more domination of the camp time and the Nazi persecution. That is no longer something I want to dwell on.

Q: Why didn't you want that?

A: Well, let me say, why didn't I want that?

Q: You said other survivors do. Why didn't you want that to define your life?

A: Well, I-I didn't want the persecution to define my life because what's the use? I mean, you cannot turn the clock back. It happened, it was there, it was a chapter in my life, which (thanks God) I survived, and you look towards the future. You just, "Where am I going from here?" Looking back and saying, "Oh my God," that's fine when you talk to people who want to learn how it was. That's fine, but isn't going to dominate my life, because my life is the future. My life is where I'm going to go, not where I have been.

Q: The impact of the degrees of betrayal that you felt, to be German and to experience what you experienced.

A: The dimensions and the degree of what I felt of being German. Now, that is a question I just absolutely love, because when I start off giving my normal speeches, I always tell the audience, if they're old enough to understand, that there's actually two things to the Holocaust. One thing is the psychological, and one is the physical. Well, everybody is familiar with the physically: concentration camp, gas chambers, evacuations, all that. But the psychological aspect which I stress, and what I ask my audience, I make them raise their hand. What nationalities are you? They say American. Say, "What do you feel like about America?" And they usually tell you they're proud of it, blah-blah-blah. And then I tell them, "Suppose one day somebody comes and says, 'You have no more rights. You don't belong to us. We don't want you. We gave you– We tolerate you to stay in our country, but as far as belonging to us, that's gone.'" And that is what happened to us up here.

And in September of 1935, during the Nuremberg– and the Nuremberg laws were passed, which in simple terms simply took our citizenship away, it made us residents without any rights to [go]. That was a tremendous blow to my parents. I mean, my father and my step-father both fought in World War I. We so thoroughly believed in Germany. [And] more, much more which I have no time to tell you. Suffice it to say that my parents considered themselves German first and

Jewish second. And "German citizen of Jewish faith" was the slogan we use. That, I was raised. And it was– As the laws were passed, dis-discriminatory to the Jewish faith, and it took away more and more of Germany itself. We were in Germany, we spoke German, we still had access to German books, but the people denied us. The people didn't want us. The very things we-we wanted to belong to said, "You may want to belong to us, but we don't want you to belong to us." So the-the-the feeling that the German citizenship and the German country itself and its people denied us, was a tremendous blow to us. In fact, to me, that was in some ways equally bad than the physical aspect, which were bad enough. But to lose one's country, for which my uncle had died in World War I, my father and biological father were both officers in World War I, fighting this country–

I'll give you an example of my family. My mother had a brother who was what one commonly called a black sheep. What did you do with black sheep? You send him to America. So in October of 1913, he went to New York and lived there. A year later, not quite a year later, in Sept– in August of 1914, the war broke out. And what did this guy do? He smuggled him– gave up his job in New York, smuggled himself back on a Spanish ship to Germany, enlisted in the army, and was killed in October. So that just gives you some idea how we felt about Germany. My grand– My-my mother's father committed suicide because he could not stomach the idea that Germany had lost the war in 1918. In 1919 he killed himself. And so that this illustrates.

I was young. I mean, I had not even the experience. I was growing up. But all the things my parents talked forever about what Germany, its culture, its music, its-its land, its territory, its trees. Germany is a very beautiful country. And it tells us, "We don't care how beautiful it is. You don't belong in it." And so that shaped this whole thing, the torn between the admiration of my parents versus the Nazi attitude and saying "We don't want you." Very difficult.

Q: Were you surprised by friends? What difference did it make on a personal level?

A: [overlap] Very, very definitely. I mean, very definitely, to a degree that some of the kids I associated with suddenly would– didn't want to play with me, didn't want to talk to me. Some of them told me, "Hey, my father won't let me talk to you. We're not supposed to come and visit you anymore." It went all over. Let me give you an example of things which affected me personally.

We lived in an apartment house in Berlin, on the third floor, and-and we had a small apartment, very nice. And one day in 1938, in summer of– or spring of 1938 (I think it was March), we got a letter from the owner of the building and said, "Mrs. Behr" (wasn't "Dear Mrs. Behr"), "the-the inhabitants of the apartments in this house have informed me that they no longer wish to live with a Jew in the same building. Please remove yourself as soon as possible into another place." Those weren't even the Nazis. Those were ordinary citizen like you and I, who just happened to have another apartment up there. Now, I have no idea, honestly, whether that letter was dictated. We got it. And it shook our faith, because we always been good neighbors and congenial, friendly, and here they tell they don't wish to live with [us], in the same house with a Jewish family. It hurts. And so those things shape your-your attitude towards a country which so bitterly disappointed you.

Q: Do you ever recover from those hurts, as an adult?

A: Did I recover from? The answer's 100% yes. And I will tell you what I mean by this. Memories don't fade. You can lose everything else, but you very seldom lose memories if you're healthy. So the memory sticks. And when I give a briefing about my life, inevitably I get asked the question, "How do you feel about the Germans today?" which is in essence what you are asking me. I will tell you exactly how I feel about it. Completely neutral. I will not ever hold people responsible who weren't even born when their grandfathers committed the crimes which were committed by the Germans. Those people are totally innocent. And you cannot blame somebody for something his–his or her grandfather did, by-by going out and shooting Jews in the woods. I mean, there is no way. So my ..

attitude towards the Germans is, I treat them just like a new country. I go there, I go frequently over there, I love it there, I have no problem associating with them, I do not begrudge the, I do not hold them, I hope that they are embarrassed about it, and most of them are, wish it never happened, and– But to blame them and to withdraw from them because of it, that's not me.

Now, there are Jewish people who will not set foot into Germany again because their feelings are different than mine. But mine, simply as I explained to you: Don't blame somebody for something which was happening two generations ago.

[Tape 12]

Q: How is it possible, given what happened to you in Germany, to be secure in America, identify yourself as American, and know that you could trust that?

A: How can I be sure that I can trust Americans?

Q: (You don't always have to repeat the question.)

A: That's a very difficult answer for me to-to give, because it took a long time for me to be sure that things like this– You see, when I first came to America, there was still very much discrimination against blacks. There was discrimination against Jews. It was a very subtle type of discrimination. You would, for example, when you looked for housing, find an advertising that a house is for sale, with a quote that "Christian church nearby." And those were indicator (which I learned from other people who were here much longer) that this is a sign they don't want any Jews. Universities had quotas for Jewish students. And there was a degree of anti-Semitism here. It wasn't personally. Nobody came on your street and kicked you. But it was there. There were certain class distinctions, and it took me a while to get used to that. In fact, I didn't even understand what it meant, "Christian church nearby," that that meant "We don't want anybody [but] white Anglo-Saxon

Protestants," you know. They weren't even sure they weren't Catholics. But those things, you slowly accept and–

You got to remember that times change. America has become much more liberal, much more liberal. I mean– I'll give you a very personal example. One of my children moved in with her boyfriend. And nobody raised an eyebrow. I wasn't very happy, my wife wasn't very happy, but we are from another generation. We didn't stop them. But she didn't experience any problems. Nobody said, "How can you?" And so there was a– America has become a very– much more liberal. It still isn't 100%. No country is ever 100% liberal. But America has changed much more. I mean, there are reasons for that. The Supreme Court ruling about (you know) Roe versus Wade, and you have the integration, school integration thing. So as a whole, Americans have changed to be more liberal. Doesn't mean you are liberally politically. That is a different story. I'm not addressing it. I'm [dressing] it as socially. And that has slowly moved me too, to the fact that I'm no longer worried that a holocaust would happen here. I was in '45. I said, "No country is safe from having another holocaust." And as indeed we have. We had Cambodia, we had all sorts of holocausts. But in '45, when I went through the .. method of protecting my children with the fake birth certificates, so to speak, that is gone now, because I see how America has changed. Much more– America is much more accepting things which .... 50 years were roundly condemned. And so it made me much more sure of myself. I'm now no longer agonizing: Will there be a holocaust here? (you know, and–)

There's a book from Philip Roth which he just wrote, that Lindbergh became president, (you know) the very Lindbergh who was, deep down, a fascist. And he becomes president of the United States. It's a fiction. And he issues immediately any anti-Semitic laws. So– But that's fiction. People-people don't no longer do that. And so I'm fairly secure of myself. (you know)

Q: Were you more skeptical or wary of nationalism,(you know) patriotism?

A: Nationalism and patriotism can be constructive or they cannot be. I mean, if you interpret patriotism with the old saying, "Right or wrong, my country," well, that's patriotism but it isn't necessarily right. You have elements in our country which consider themselves patriots, which I would not for a minute consider patriots, because they deny the very things I'm proud of, (you know) like the Aryan race and those-those elements up here. But again, you can live with that, because you see, the major difference in all of this is the fact, in Germany it was government-initiated and supported. Here it is not. It comes from the bottom up, not from the top down. And that makes all the difference in the world. There still is a Supreme Court. There still are the laws on the book that if they paint a swastika on a synagogue, you can go and arrest them for defamation and that sort of thing. So while not everything is perfect, and while (well) many things could be better, they no longer impact my life in a negative way.

Q: Do you have a very strong sense of right and wrong?

A: [overlap] Well, do I have a sense– I think I do. I think I do, in a sense. It isn't governing my life, (you know) because there are many things I can't do anything about it. I mean, there are political questions, right or wrong, for my– which I have no influence over whatsoever, other than taking a pencil every– [*interruption*]

Q: The meaning of right and wrong for you in your life.

A: Well, the sense for right and wrong really is not an easy question to say, "I'm very much for right and I'm very much against wrong." That's-that's over-simplification. It all depends in what context the question is asked. If I look at discrimination in–against blacks, for example, obviously I feel that it's definitely wrong, you know. On the other hand, there are places where I feel very strongly about. So on a personal level, I feel with acquaintances of mine very definitely a sense for right or wrong. If they do something which I disagree with, and my opinion is wrong, I will tell them if I can; if not, I will slow down my

acquaintanceship with them. If they do something right, I will praise them. You know.

Q: When you came to America, you had to relearn how to live in a civilized society after having had to do what you did to survive in the camp. How did that impact you, then and later in your life?

A: The first thing I can say to this, that– about right or wrong, that I all of a sudden found myself in a society which had laws, not anti-laws but positive laws, laws which govern our life, which I may not always like or agree with it, but I came into a society where the law went from the bottom up. It was created by Congress and approved by the president. We had a society which based on law. Everything here is based on law, because otherwise we wouldn't have that many lawsuits. You know. People can sue. People can try to equalize a wrong by going to the courts and saying, "This is not right." Was totally new to me. Totally new to me. I had no idea that could even be done. Now, the Germans had courts during the Nazi time. Oh, and they followed the law, except that the laws were terrible. You know. If you listened to a foreign broadcast, the judge had no choice but to condemn you to death. I mean, those are laws and laws. These laws here were based on our Constitution, which again it contains the Bill of Rights. So you come right back to the fact that living in this society took some adjusting. I mean, I really wasn't quite sure. Give you an example.

When I came, I had a knife with me to– in case something was wrong. I went to the police station to register that knife. The guy said, "What do you want me to do with that?" And I said, "Sir, I would like to be sure that you write on my card"– He said, "I don't have a card of you. Why should I have a card of you?" I learned suddenly, this is not a country where everything is registered and (you know) and noted down and so forth. In Germany, till today, when you move from point A to point B, you got to de-register at one police station and re-register at another one. So I-I was coming down to– when I went in Dallas, I moved once. And the first time, I went to the police and said, "I want to register." (you know)

These guys were very nice. They thought they're probably dealing with some jerk who doesn't know what in the world he's talking about. But they didn't know my background or anything else.

So this right or wrong becomes a very difficult thing to adopt to it, because it is– we are governed by laws. (you know) May not all like the laws, but they're there. And they're voted on. They're not arbitrarily by one dictator says, "I want this to happen." And so all the laws we have went through a process of being accepted or denied. But if they are accepted, then it's a majority of something or somebody who wants these law to be existing. So that took a while to get used to it. Very difficult. Wasn't even easy. But it was great.

Q: Even in terms of raising your children, were you comparing their lives to what you had experienced?

A: As far as my own family is concerned, no. I didn't. I mean, I've-I've divorced that completely. They were raised in the society they lived in. I did not influence this in any way. I accepted it, and my past did not (I) overshadow any of this. So that, I divorced. I was even very able to do that.

Q: When you told your children about your background, how interested were they? Did you talk to them in detail, or did you keep it superficial?

A: Did I talk to my daughters in detail? Well, sadly to say, I didn't. But not because I didn't want to. They didn't ask. My children know of course that I'm a Holocaust survivor, and they know some of it, but in some ways they did not show the amount of curiosity. My younger daughter much more than my older one. And that is probably due to proximity. (you know) I'm here and the other one is in Denver. But they did not, like so many young children– Let me give you an example what I mean by this.

There are hundreds, hundreds of schoolchildren (seventh graders, eighth graders) come to the museum. Okay. They get that on their itinerary and they come in there. What I normally do with them, I give them a little quiz before I

send them up to the fourth floor where the Holocaust story begins. And I usually ask them, "What museum are you in?" Half of them don't know. I ask them, "What is a holocaust?" And you would really be surprised. These children are not particularly oriented, don't even know. Said, "Give me another word for 'holocaust.'" It's not very difficult. You don't have to say "genocide." That's much too complicated. Say "mass murder." That's what it really is. And I'm constantly amazed. But they don't ask any questions.

Neither did my kids, even though they had an in-house capability to find out. (you know) They listened. My daughter came and the first voices up there, she came and listened to it, you know, and she congratulated me on my good speech and so forth. But did she ask any questions in detail? Their lives are so full, and they are– their lives are so engrossed in their daily activities, personally, I'm afraid they don't even want to know. They know the basic outlines and they know what happened. Details: Did I have enough to eat? And if I did, what did I get to eat? No. I try to tell them sometimes that our staple food was something– was barley. They didn't even know what barley was. And so instead of asking, "What's barley?" you know, and "How come?" it is "Ah, mm-hm, ah." So it is– My children unfortunately did not– When they got older, sometimes they did. But then they were married, then they had their own problems, they lived in their own world.

And so no. The answer basically: My children– Now, it's strictly personal. My children did not demonstrate a degree of curiosity I was hoping they would do. For example, both of them hate history. And now the Holocaust– you cannot understand the Holocaust, you know something about history, World War I, the loss, the Versailles Treaty, you know, unless you know sometimes. And I was hoping that they would ask me some question: How did a Hitler come into power? Well, I'll be honest with you. They never did. I shoved it down their throat because I made them, but they did not, out of their own volition, come and say, "Hey, Dad, tell us. What happened in Germany? How come they elected Hitler?" You know. They didn't. So for what it's worth.

Q: When you do teach and speak with kids, what are you hoping it does?

A: Well, hoping is to spread the message, that there was a tremendous wrong committed for no reason. I try to tell these people. And you see, again it depends on the age. When you talk to graduate students, you get a wonderful reception. They are interested. They know things. When you talk to eighth graders and you tell them that 6 million Jews were killed, the best you can hope for, that they would ask how. And then you tell them about the gas chambers, you know. But the depth of the tragedy– (you know) In fact, I tell them: Two million of those children were your age, who were stripped naked, shoved in a gas chamber, the door was closed, and they pay– they died a painful death 15 minutes later. I look at their faces, I see them, nobody cries, nobody looks shook. I mean, I-I– they-they listen to hear the words, but the depth of this tragedy takes an adult. It really does take an adult. And so it is difficult to communicate the tragedy of this Holocaust to younger people.

Q: Is it also here in America we're so removed, so protected?

A: Well, I think that's absolutely right. The-the perception that this could happen in my country, and may not be against Jews, it may be against Catholics, or it may be against Muslims, you know. Muslims feel [prosecuted] here now, right or wrong. And they– that– We are removed. But I don't think that realization is really set in that this could happen in our country. I don't think these people are– Not their fault. They think we're so far removed that it's an interesting story, it's a sad story, it should never happen again, but it will never happen to my country.

Q: For you, do you find there's personal value in your testimony?

A: Well, is there personal value? All I can say, I hope so. I do my very best to convey the tragedy in my own words. I try to make it so that each age group is more or less involved, depending whether I talk to graduate students or eighth grades, and so I tailor it that way. But to what degree I'm successful? There is a–

There is a sign at the Holocaust Museum, "Remember." You know. It's on the outside when you come in. I'm not sure they remember very much. They-they will go home and they will know there are tragedies. They are probably more impressed to some degree of what they see there, [and] what they hear from a survivor. But that's probably not fair, because I don't always know. I just have the impression– For example, we recommend, the museum recommends that a visit to the museum should be no less than 2½ hours, to walk through the Holocaust story. When you see kids coming back in 45 minutes, and many do, you get an idea of the perception which these kids have. They walk through because they were told to do it. They look at some of the pictures. There's nobody there to explain it to them. (you know) We– The type of information I convey to you now, they don't have the benefit. These are objects which they see. Most [of] the time when you ask them what was impressed you most, were the shoes which were there, but is physical. The-the-the wagon, the railroad car, that's physical. But when you– For example, there is one where, from 1933 to 1945, it's a rolling thing on a TV screen, where all the anti-Jewish laws are passed, which to me is the most frightening exhibit, not only because I lived there, but if I would see this from another country—let's say, a country in Africa which has a dictator, Idi Amin, who had passed one law after another, if he– if he didn't kill them outright. You go by there, that doesn't mean and it doesn't sink in. Each law is a tragedy in itself. And you have to [take] the time, and you have to [do] the willingness to read this and comprehend. What does that mean, that you cannot use public transportation? Kids would say, "Well, we don't have any public in Sheboygan anyway, so what's the big tragedy?" You know. Not realizing that Berlin was much, much bigger, and we had to go to work. We were forced to go to work. We couldn't use public transportation. So the perception is difficult. And it depends much on the age and the preparation of the children. There are exceptions. There are some schoolchildren who come who are well prepared. The story of Anne Frank, for example, is one of the wonderful examples where kids take an interest.

Q: Describe your first time going through the museum.

A: My first time going through museum? I found all the problems my first time, I mean, I-I know things which the museum doesn't reflect, and I was wondering why it doesn't reflect it. May I give you an example?

When you come out of the elevator, you see a huge picture of a policeman and a Nazi party member and a dog, which faces you. Huge. I mean, it's as big as you can get. And it doesn't say much. It just say "a Nazi party member" and that's all. There's a little thing in that picture which is so important, that only people like myself know that. The Nazi party member had a white armband. And that white armband meant this: that after Hitler took power, right two days later, they deputized all these hooligans with the– as deputy police people, with the same right to arrest people. Suddenly you had millions of these guys who were deputized as being authorized to release you.

Now, unfortunately, when you know as much as I do, that may be very unfair. The– You notice in the museum the problems. I was so anxious, and was very pleased of the amount of things that were [displaced]. But when you have some background knowledge, you see things which the general public doesn't realize.

Q: Emotionally, psychologically, how was it to see?

A: Well, as I told you, I saw that– They have me assigned sometimes to be what they call a roving person up there, to help people understand. And I hardly ever get asked a question. And wear uniforms so they recognize us right away. And there were certain exhibits in there, for example, the medical experiment. That's pretty graphic. And I'm very sad that they take their 5-year-old kids up there and– But that's for me to decide; that each mother must decide that for themselves. So the-the exhibit is actually, as a whole excellent.

Q: But for you, how was it to see that footage, to see those things?

A: It brought back very bad memory. But you know, it's funny. The years which were in between the event which you saw and my life today are so vast, at 60

years, that the impact were no longer what it should have been. Had I gone in 1948 or '49, and seen this, I would have probably gone home and haven't slept all– wouldn't sleep all night. But time is a very wonderful factor, which in my life reduces the impact, through the sense that you see the picture, you remember it, but it's– I remember the people, or my family who died, but I didn't go home and cry. I said, "That's– It's over, it's finished, it's gone. I'm glad we have that exhibit." But it did not cause me to be particularly depressed. No, it didn't. It was more or less a factual thing, but– an historical thing, but it did not depress me personally. Now, maybe that's cold-blooded, but it's the truth.

Q: We read about one survivor who is still not able to go in and look at the footage.

A: Well, he's not the only one. I mean, there are survivors– For example, the other day we had a meeting, and there was one lady [said] who was born in Germany. She hasn't been back to Germany at all. She would do anything, go around Germany if she wanted to go to Austria or someplace, you know, or some other place. But she felt very strongly. In fact, I got into an argument with her, because I go back. And [she said], "Aren't you ashamed to go back to the very people who persecute you?" And remember what I said. I don't hold the current generation responsible. But the impact for me is not– In a sense, it's mental, if you will, at all. But it is not so that I have a reaction and don't sleep at night. It's not there. I mean, it's part of my life which is over. It's finished. I survived it with the grace of God. He made me live, and then I see the exhibit, I remember the incidents, but I go home and sleep. I don't have any more problems like that.

[Tape 13]

Q: At the museum, was that the first time you saw archival footage of the Holocaust? If not, when was the first time?

A: Well, the first time was probably right after the war.

Q: The first time what?

A: The first time when I noticed footage of the museum was right after the war, when they had newsreels. A lot of people no longer know what newsreels are. (you know) They were shown in movies-houses before the film. So we saw them already when the first moviehouses were opened up in Berlin; or I would say the war was over in May, and by June and July, they had the first moviehouses, and there were newsreels. They were usually French or American or British newsreels. But there they showed the concentration camps and things like that. So that was my first experience to know about the vast outgrowth of the Nazis' criminal activities. Because we on– we knew about our own personal life, and not much else, that there were hundreds of concentration camps with zillions of prisoners, and they are not just Jews. I mean, everybody else they didn't like. That, we found out– I found out at least the first time in about 1945, before I went to America, when we went to a– when I went to a movie, my mother and I, and we saw these newsreels, which were quite drastic. (you know) Eisenhower did an excellent job to bring a film crew over from Hollywood to film the things in .... concentration camp. So we knew. We knew.

Q: How was that for you, that first time?

A: The first time, was going on my knees and thanking the good Lord that I was sitting in that moviehouse, that I survived this. I mean, when you see all the death and starvation around you, and here I was sitting relatively healthy, with my mother, and having survived all of this, it was just grateful. You know the old saying, "Here but for the grace of God go I"? That was my feeling.

Q: Were you stunned that you had been able to survive?

A: Yes. [*In the scale of things– yes.*] I was able to be very surprised. But my survival is really a story within a story itself. But in answer to your question, yes. I was not at all sure. In other words, if I may say that if my mother hadn't married my

stepfather, I would not be sitting here, because he was one of those protected people because he was an officer, and a decorated one, in World War I, and the Nazis in their conference in-in 19– January of 1942, decided that those people would not be gassed. They would be starved to death if at all possible, but they wouldn't be gassed. And that was my survival. So I was not– I was surprised much more to that story I just told you. But the idea was that gratefulness that I survived, and the reason I survived was the marriage of my mother to my stepfather.

Q: Were there other aspect of your own personality or abilities that also made it possible for you to survive?

A: Well, the answer is– I was able to survive because I wanted to survive. Now, that wasn't just will power. That was a lot of luck with it. For example– and give you two examples.

In Theresienstadt, I was– after having horrible jobs before, I was able to get a job in the kitchen. Now, this kitchen took care of 6,000 people. The food wasn't very good, but it was available for those who worked in there. So I was able to get that. So I– that was way-way step number one.

And then I– to– In order to save my parents, my stepfather, my mother from possible evacuation, I volunteered to go to a subcamp of Theresienstadt where they promised that I would save my parents' life. And I did. And the Nazis, for whatever reason, kept that promise. They did not evacuate the people– Theresienstadt, you see, was overcrowded, and the Nazis sent one train after another right from there to the gas chambers.

Q: You had some faith that the Nazis would honor their word?

A: No, I did not. That is hindsight. That is pure hindsight. They promised that if we-we would volunteer to go to that subcamp, they would not evacuate our children. And evacuation meant death, plain, pure and simple. Resettlement, it was called. So I did it, I volunteered, in the hope that they would– I was not at all convinced.

Not at all. And I had no faith in any Nazi promise. None. And so I said, I have nothing to lose. Either we're going to be resettled anyway, because overcrowded, or I have a fighting chance, if I go and suffer, perhaps they will let them remain there until we-we– I use the word "liberation," which we didn't know at the time when [that] happened. Yes. I had no faith in it. I just hoping for the best and hoping that the good Lord would protect them while I'm gone.

Q: How important was your own youthfulness in your survival?

A: My youthfulness was instrumental. In order to understand that– the answer, one has to know something about Theresienstadt. As far as German Jews are concerned, the Nazis only transported three groups of Germans. First of all, the majority were old people, old people. The Nazis literally, in their conference in Wannsee, in the protocols you will read: We don't need to gas them. We're just going to starve them to death, and they're going to– they're old and feeble. No use to wasting time, money and trains with them. They're going to die. So that was one group. The other group were the mixed, the younger people, were those of mixed marriages. And a third group were the one of decorated officers, the families of decorated World War I officers. So that it didn't surprise me because I knew that that's the only reason we were sent there, is because of my stepfather's achievement during World War I. And so I had hope [to survive].

And my youth helped me to master this. You cannot really understand it until one knows about. Theresienstadt was a very difficult thing. It was "Hitler's gift to the Jews," so it was by no means as bad as some of the concentration camp that had gas chambers and so forth, and–or Auschwitz, where they worked people to death. We were not worked to death. We starved to death if possible. And the atmosphere there was different. It was not as bad, I would be lying if I say that, although it was bad enough as it was. And the– My youth enabled me, among all these old people, to be something different, which the-the administration of the ghetto made use of. They were– As far as German Jews are concerned, there were not that many young people. They were mostly old.

Now, the camp was dominated by Czechoslovakia Jews. Okay? And they had a lot of young people in there. They ran the camp, inside, other than the Nazis. And so my youth helped me considerably.

Q: Did it become an informing factor in your life, a sense that things could always be worse?

A: That's definitely true. That's definitely true. Things could all– The thought that things could be worse is a very obvious one, because all you had to do was look around you. You see people who were just as nice, just as pleasant, just as intelligent, just as– you name it, and they were suffering more than I did, for whatever reasons. And– There was a lot of illness and sickness, and no-no doctors and no medicine. So obviously things could always be worse. And you knew that. And you-you thanked the good Lord each morning that you were still alive, because you didn't know how you would be in the evening. And so that-that was feeling which was definitely there. You never knew, and–

Now, a ghetto is a breeding ground for rumors. I mean, rumors left, right, and down the middle. Everybody knew something from somebody, about somebody. (you know) And so you hear all these rumors, and some of them were pretty terrible. So you said, "My God, that can happen to me." Was a story about a young man being arrested by the Gestapo in Theresienstadt, and they had a special area where they had jails and [every-] they beat up people. And he was sent there, or he was taken there, I should say. And-and everybody knew about it. Turned out to be, it wasn't even true. But the stories were going around with that. And so you knew things could be worse, could be a lot worse.

Q: Did you carry that for the rest of your life?

A: Did that come a perspective? You know, I try to tell myself that. (you know) When I– When I start complaining about my life today, or yesterday or the day before, and saying, "Oh my gosh, this didn't work," or "That is not right," and so forth, then sometimes you have to remember, it could always be worse. (you

know) There's always something which could be worse. That has sort of governed my life ethically (you know) and so forth. It didn't make me change things or what, but it made me accept something and saying, "Well, it may [be/me] worse and it could be– could be worse. (you know) I'm still walking. I'm still here. I'm in decent health. (you know) And those are our presents which I got." But the thought that things can be worse, you don't have to be Jewish for that. I mean, that's sort of universal. Anybody who has any feeling at all, and is not a complainer by nature, will know that things can be worse. And I was no different.

Q: What role did luck play in your survival, and how did that shape you later in life?

A: I– If I look back at my life, at the 85 years that I lived, I've been very lucky. I've always been very lucky and I can– and I attribute that simply not because of lucky per see, I think. Some higher power held its hand over me. I mean, (you know) I'm not a very religious person, and I don't even give a– give it a name, but there is a higher power which sort of protected me. Because I was very– several times near to be dying. There was a time in the end of 1944 where I wanted to die. I'd finally given up. And God sent me a sign that He didn't want me to die. And if you're interested, I will tell you about it, but it changed me and so I felt that I've been very lucky.

Q: First, what happened that you gave up?

A: Okay. Where to start? Briefly, the subcamp of Theresienstadt was– not built, because there wasn't much to build. It was– It came into existence because one of the highest leader of the SS lost his headquarters. It was bombed to pieces. And of course no respectable SS general could live without a headquarters. So he selected a piece of land which is now near the Polish border, and decided to have a new headquarters. And I volunteered to go there. And the time there was terrible. It was the worst time in all these time, this– We went there in– I think I went in late '43, and stayed there for almost a year and a half, if I remember correctly. And it

was– We had an SS lieutenant colonel who was absolutely the most cruel guy. And he would not give us– And what happened towards the end of 1944, I got very ill. I got very ill. I had something which was called impetigo, which is a vitamin deficiency disease where you have big blotches all over your body, who seep all the time. You have a high temperature, and– You need to also remember that we were cut off from all news. We did not know anything about assassination of Hitler, attempt to assassinate him. We didn't know where the troops were. We didn't know nothing. We had no newspaper, no radio. Nobody was allowed to tell us anything.

And then we saw a sign. And the sign was the refugees fleeing from the Russians, coming by the camp in droves. And we thought, well, if they're fleeing, then the war must be pretty much going towards an end. And it did. And so that was a sign which we saw, which-which I said, "No, I don't want to die. I want– I want to– It must be coming to an end. It looks"– We had no hard facts. I had no idea where the Russian army was standing, and so forth. But the German fleeing west was an indication, they must have had a reason. And the only reason they could have had was the Soviet army which (g) was approaching Germany. And so it gave me new hope to say, "I don't want to die. I want– I want to try to stay alive," even though I felt terrible. I had no hope left, I had no strength, nothing.

Q: Is that survival instinct in us? Is it primal, or does it vary from person to person?

A: No, for me the instinct to survive is probably primal. Survival doesn't always mean exactly dying or living. (you know) Survival can also mean different phases of your life. (you know) You want to help your family, you want to be able to pay college for the kids, and make them into decent human being. That's part of the survival. And to me, that's primal. I mean, that is not acquired or anything. That's there. Having survived myself, I wanted to do that for my family and anybody else I could possibly do it for. So it's definitely primal.

Q: Would you consider yourself an optimistic person?

A: Would I consider myself an optimistic-optimistic person? That's 100% yes. I'm basically an optimist. I always believe that somehow the Lord has protected me until now, he will do it in the future, and– Look what I got. I'm healthy. I'm 85 years and healthy. And if you don't feel optimism about that fact, all the money in the bank isn't going to help you if you're sick. So the fact that I've got my health, and can do things like sitting here with you and answering your questions, that is a reason for optimism, that is a reason for survival, that is a positive indicator that I should continue my life as best I can.

Q: In your adult life, have you ever had periods of despair or depression?

A: Yes. I-I-I had– I had my ups and downs in my employment. And there was one incident where the government has its own methodology of reducing people. They have a bumping system. The seniority bumps lesser seniority, bumps lesser seniority. And I found myself suddenly out of a job, from one day to the other. I was terribly depressed, because with the– with the experience and knowledge I have, it was very difficult to find a job. And I was– That was one of my greatest depression time when I was very, very sad. And I had a heart attack several years ago, and did not– You never know how that thing is going to go out, and I did [that], survived that one. So yes. There are periods in my life where you begin to doubt, when I had experiences which were primarily– not life-threatening necessarily. A heart attack can be. But the one I'm thinking about, the loss of a job, I took that very hard, because I worked hard, and it is not a person who fired me; it was a system which pushed you down. (you know) And that's something hard to accept.

Q: And how did you get through that?

A: Well, again, I was very lucky. They found another job for me, which was equal almost in pay as the one I'd lost, and they said, "You're just what we're looking for, we'll give you that job," and there was– All of a sudden my immediate

problem to earn enough money for my family was gone. It was gone. So whatever that is. Fate, God, you name it.

Q: And the job issue . . . [inaudible]

A: Ambition. Ambition which I mentioned before. I was a very ambition person. And .. that is, if you are vice-president of a company, and certainly you– they tell you, "You can stay in a company, got to be a mail clerk," well, you're still with the company, you earn much less money, you lose all your prestige, you lose your window in-in the building, which probably only one. So that's-that's a tremendous impact, on me at least. And again I was able to overcome. But the reason I overcame it is pure luck. Pure luck, and the fact that I had a decent reputation, that people wanted me.

Q: When did you retire and what did that mean for you?

A: That was a very difficult decision, and I'm still angry with my wife. When-when I had 39 years, and I was– in 1988, she told me that it's time to retire. She wants something of me. Now, this sentence you need to understand. I think very early in our discussion I told you that I was married more to my work than to my actual family. It's not something I'm very proud of it, but that's my nature. I wanted to– Ambition drove me. So my wife was very much alone. I traveled all over the world, I was always gone, I was barely home when my children were born, because the Air Force sent me someplace. And so the idea that– (I'm sorry, I lost the thread.)

Q: Your wife wanted you to retire.

A: Yeah. I– My wife wanted me to retire, and I figured I owe her. I owe her that– to spend some time with her, more time, more present time. Was a great big mistake. My daughter warned me, because I wasn't ready to retire. All of a sudden you sit at home. And the next day you sit at home. And the phone rings, and it isn't for

you. And then the phone rings again. It still isn't for you. While you're used to getting, "Mr. Behr, the phone is for you," (you know) no more. It was for my wife. And you feel an emptiness creeping into your– into your [mind/life]. It did in my case. I had a real emptiness which-which I– no matter how hard I fought it. So I looked for a job. I was still in Dayton, Ohio, and I found one for a contractor where I worked for a year until they closed shop. And that kept me going for a while. (you know) And then I taught school, which kept me going, which was constructive, was something I loved to do. And so it wasn't for the– certainly for the money, because they don't pay-pay those schoolteachers, adjunct teachers very much. But it– My retirement was much too early. I was full of energy, I was full of interest, I loved my job. I should have never listened. I should have worked a few more years, until I would say I'm ready to retire. And– But I felt guilty. I really felt guilty, and I thought I owe my family some time of myself, not job number one, job number two, and then thirdly comes my family. So.

Q: How long ago was that?

A: '88. So I was (what) 66.

Q: And then what. Did you get used to it? Did you do something else?

A: Well, I-I had no problem very much because I worked for a contractor, and then I– then I taught school. When I really felt the impact, when we moved here, to Washington DC. I tried to find a position where–which I can teach again, like an adjunct teacher. I tried to find a part-time job. But with the experience I had, that isn't very easy. (you know) That's not a profession you can say, "He's an industrial engineer," or– Who wants a broken down, old intelligence officer? I mean, it's– I mean that seriously. It is not something where the demand is very high, unless you have a technical background to go with it—that's fine—which I didn't have.

Q: Is that ultimately what led you to volunteer at the museum?

A: Yes. Precisely. I volunteer (A) at the museum and (B) at the local hospital. I work there one day a week, in-in the emergency room, and-and that-that led me to the volunteer jobs I have. Because they were the only ones I could find without any– I had no difficulty finding volunteer jobs. I liked them, and I stuck with it.

Q: Did the work in the museum give you a new sense of identity and purpose?

A: Definitely. Yes. The-the-the museum is basically very good with volunteers. They appreciate it, especially to survivor volunteers, which are not that many left. And the-the museum in fact restored to me some degree of pride, that I contribute something .. to my own life as well as to other people. For example, on my jacket I have a two little signs that I speak German and I speak French. And people come up to you and say, "Can you help me? I-I don't speak English." (you know) And so you really have a sense of fulfillment. The museum has furthermore discovered that I'm a fairly decent speaker, and sent me out on various trips throughout the United States to talk to children about—or adults, for that matter—about the Holocaust, my own personal experience therein. So yes. Definitely it has.

[Tape 14]

Q: What kind of racism did you see in America when you came here?

A: That's a nice question. What did I see about [prejudism] and so forth? Well, first thing was, remember, I wound up in Dallas? And about– I don't know whether it was a week later or ten later, I got an anonymous letter which was vicious, to say the least, that– to get myself back home, and used a lot of four-letter words. "We don't want you here. You have no business being here." That was my first introduction to thing. And then slowly I began to learn that there is a hidden language among Americans, which has distinct meaning as far as discrimination is concerned. I think I mentioned already "Christian church nearby." There were

ideas of– that rent restrictions against Jews. (you know) People told me that. I hadn't actually seen this. And there was a certain degree of discrimination.

Now, one of the stranger types of discrimination is that I was very careful to say to somebody, "I'm from Germany." (you know) Now, without explaining between Jewish and Germans and all that, you had to be very careful. And I happily lied about it and told everybody I was from Switzerland, who didn't have a need to know. German had of course Swe– They speak German up there. And they all accepted it. That was great.

But the war was just over. Thousands of Americans died. Very many had hard feelings, and sometimes even against the Japanese, but that were– they were Germany's allies and so forth. So you got to learn this in your experience. (you know) Because what was I to say? "Who are you? What's your nationality?" I remember that sentence. Nationality or some didn't mean anything to me in that sense. I learned what people expect to hear then. So what do you say? You're German? That's not acceptable. You're Jewish? That was against my grain, to advertise that I'm Jewish. So that posed a very difficult question, and I solved it by just escaping it and saying I'm Swiss. So everything was fine. The Swiss were neutrals, nobody hated them, nobody loved them, so there was no problem at all. But I did indeed live through that period, until I got in the military. And then it stopped. (you know) The military in this particular way, (the) whatever their personal feelings may have been, there was nothing [personal].

Q: You were in America for the civil rights movement, McCarthy era, Cold War, Vietnam War, women's movement, etc. Any reactions to those?

A: Well, the one which got my most attention was the black– the attitude towards black. The– I was– I mean, when I heard in– that in the South they had segregated buses, of course it reminded me of everything. When I heard that they had water fountains for blacks, water fountains for whites, and everything what I experienced to some degree from– directed against myself and my own people, I all of a sudden saw that. And it gave me a great shock. You know. I heard people

talking in Texas, not very flattering about black people, and of course that raised very many memories. And remember that I said I was always worried–

Q: Start again. And remember—

A: I remember that the Holocaust was very, very much on my mind, and I thought: How can these people do that? And in 1947, when I first got to America, it was no longer– or not yet anyway, as much as it became later on, until 1954, when the schools got integrated and so forth, some of this separation based strictly on color. And I was really shocked. And I never heard much about it because the Germans didn't report that so much and– at least not to what I was aware of. And so this attitude was, from that point of view, a real shock to me.

What was not a shock later on was the war you mentioned, the Vietnam War, the Korean War. Those were things I could accept. I mean, that's to me quite– Not necessarily agree with it, but I understand where we came from, and I understand what we're trying to do. So that did not provide– Maybe a little degree of sadness that people had to die again, but it did not come as a surprise, and I thought that it was [America]. But the attitudes towards minorities was a real shock to me, because I thought: Didn't the– Didn't the world learn a lesson, (you know) what happened? And obviously it took a while before they learned that lesson.

Q: Did it undermine your own sense of security and safety in America?

A: The answer was, to some degree, yes. I mean, I thought, well, if they treat their- their minorities that way, what hap– what would prevent them to next day to treat the Jewish minority (which is a minority, even though they don't look like one) the same way? And I had no one to talk to about it. See, I didn't– That is a subject which in-in Texas you just didn't bring up with people you didn't know very well. And I didn't know anybody very well. And so I held that back. I ate this into myself, which made me sad. I mean, I cannot even use anything– not even angry. It made me just sad, and question that a country which I admired so much would

do those things. (you know) And having experienced so much myself, I felt that this was dead wrong.

Q: Did you get politically active in it?

A: No. I did not get reactive, other than my personal attitude towards minorities. My first job was with minority people in a factory, and I treated them as courteous, and I was looked at sort of by the other white people, when I sat next to for lunch to a– to a (as they call it then) colored person, and I was looked at and they-they did not approve of that. And you felt that and– But I got unhappy because I thought that is so wrong, and I'm going to demonstrate that where I come from, a person is a person, regardless of its appearance. In my little own way, I did that. I also did it in the military, where there were blacks and lots of Latinos in those days. So, yes.

Q: Your thoughts on immigration, and the relationship between immigrants and minorities in America?

A: I'm just as puzzled as most Americans are of what to do about immigration. I immigrated with all the legal requirements fulfilled: applying for a visa, filling out questionnaires, getting interviewed by the consul, you know, and I do not really condone the idea that we have millions of illegal immigrants here who just sneaked across a border, and here they are. And basically I am not for an amnesty. But that's one side of my brain. On the other side of my brain says: My God, what are we going to do with 12 million people? We can't send them all back. They're needed here. They pay taxes. They-they are honest. They– We have them here where I live. All-all the physical labor practically is done by Latinos. And they're very honest, they're very nice. I have not seen anybody being– So I don't have a good answer. I really do not have a good answer. Neither does Congress, and that's why we are in that mess, because we don't know really how to get out of it.

Q: Are you skeptical that the immigration issue can be xenophobia as well?

A: I don't think so. I really do not believe that's the case. I think that people, decent people are honestly wrestling with that question. How did we let them in? Well, we didn't let them in. They came in. And so we're now facing a fact that– I think that most Americans I am in contact with would like to find a very decent answer to the question of what to do. On-on the one hand, you don't want to reward them. (you know) You know all that. And-and on the other hand, you don't want to kick them out either. So basically my instinct was, they should come in here legally. But send them all back and have them all apply for a visa, takes longer than I will have– 12 million people. So I don't have– If I had– If I had to make a decision, I would find a way to keep them here, and legalize them, whatever methods is it. And I wish that Congress would have agreed to the proposal the Bush administration made to keep them here and allow them to stay, and legalize them to the degree that they don't get expelled. (you know) Maybe apply for a visa while they're here, while that visa is pending. (you know) And so that is what I would do. I would say, you can stay but you need to apply for a visa, you need to pay for it, and while-while that is working, you can stay here. And many of the Latino families have American children. They were born here.

Q: What generally are your thoughts on Affirmative Action?

A: Oh, like I told you before when I talked about Dallas, Texas, and the experience I had, how they treated me, [Affirmative] Action to me is justified. I mean, under certain conditions, but basically and overall, to give a minority who has been suffered a privilege to be accepted by eliminating certain conditions which would have handicapped them, I'm all in favor for it.

Q: Is there inevitably some lasting identification with those who are marginalized or discriminated against?

A: Well, it's theoretical. It's not a practical thing anymore, but it's theoretical. I'm an immigrant. I came from a foreign country. I'll give you an example. What deeply bothers me (and that's in answer to your question) is when people come to this

country and don't learn English. I mean, when I came to this country, my English was nowhere near what it is now. And one of my first ideas was, you've got to learn the language. I did everything in my power to become fluent in English. And I noticed that some of the immigrants do not make that determined attempt to learn German. I get– To learn English (excuse me). I work in a hospital, and I see foreign families, whether Latinos or Asiatics, come in, and a 6-year-old kid comes and does the interpreting. "My mother has pain in her right leg." She doesn't– She cannot say it. She's been here for years but she still cannot say it. She uses her child. Makes me very unhappy. I mean, I would have– But if my idea would be prevailing, and these people can stay, [it's] under one condition: you must learn English. Age is no excuse.

Q: Why is that so important to you?

A: If you want to integrate yourself in a society, in my opinion, number one priority is to communicate. And if you don't speak the language, you cannot communicate. Communications, whether it's a marriage or [adaptation] in a country, is of tremendous important to learn the society in which you wish to live, or the marriage in which to live. You've got to communicate. And unless you learn the language, you can't communicate. It's no use to read Spanish or French newspapers: would tell you what's going on, but you cannot even verbalize it in- in English. And that's wrong.

Q: Are there political issues that you do feel strongly about?

A: Can I drop the political aspect? I don't want to really answer that one, (you know) because there are, and I don't want to talk about that. I will gladly talk about social issues.

Q: Okay.

A: And as far as social issues are concerned, they concern me very gravely. For example, factors which have nothing to do with the Holocaust is health insurance. Now, in Germany health insurance mandatory. You pay a lot of taxes, you accept it, but it's mandatory. Everybody's got health insurance. I grew up in that society, notwithstanding the Nazis, that everybody had health insurance. And to have a country which struggles with the idea to give health insurance to everybody—we're struggling with this, we have discussions about it—that shouldn't be. We should only discuss how we can do it, not why we can do it or whether we should do it. (you know) And so those are [the] troubling issue which I– which I really have.

And I see strata of societies which are vastly different, from the very poor through the very rich. We do have a middle class, no question about it, but it's not easy to work your way up if you're in a poor strata, to join the middle class. Not easy at all. Education is a major factor in that. And the opportunities are there for education, but again, if you don't speak the language, you can't use it.

Q: Death penalty? Any thoughts?

A: Well, I'm basically against the death penalty. But then I need to look at my past. If the Allies hung the people at Nuremberg, did I feel bad about it? Not for one second. In fact, I would have helped them string them up if I had to. But then you mellow. (you know) There was a hatred of those people who were instrumental in killing us, whether it was Hermann Goering or Ribbentrop of whoever it was. I had no pity for them. I had no pity for the other people who were condemned to– Not some of the people who were at Nuremberg. And there were a number of trials [and] people. So that death penalty went away.

And I still, in my own mind, struggle. Where do you draw the line with-with where you support the death penalty, where you stop? When you read something about brutal murders and so forth– Basically I would in all circumstances avoid it if at all possible, because life in prison without parole can be .. worse than the death penalty sometimes. (you know)

Q: But you understand the impulse for the call for it?

A: Oh, I understand the impulse why we have a death penalty. Should we do away with the death penalty? Would there be a vote, and a nationwide vote which you can answer as yes or no? Do away with it or not? I would probably vote: do away with it. (you know) But again, these are very personal feelings, and you can hold any number of arguments against it. (you know) People do very brutal things and totally unnecessary things out of vicious ideas and– Why should these people live so they kill more people? (you know) But—

Q: At 85, you're very healthy, but you've already witnessed death. Do you feel any more or less prepare in terms of your own mortality? Has it impacted your thoughts on death and loss?

A: Yes. (you know) Every once in a while, and more– less "once" and more "while," I'll keep thinking: your day will come. I do think sometimes about dying. And it immediately reflects my thought: What would happen to my wife if I die? What– My children can manage. But my wife needs me, and I know that. And it is that thought; it is not my own existence. Is my lack of opportunity to support my wife, to help my wife– And I do a lot of things for her, as she does for me. But any time I think about dying (which is inevitable; it's going to come), and– What would it do to my wife? (you know) What would it leave her with problems and concerns and worries and things I've been taking care of all my life? So the thought is very definitely there. And as each (l) year clicks by, it comes to just a little more vivid. (you know) I'm thankful that I'm healthy, I hope to have a few more years, but the thought is never from– completely from my mind.

Q: Is there any fear?

A: Not so far. So far, it's been so that I– I cannot even envision. I mean, I'm not afraid of death. I tell myself, as long as I can die quickly. I-I'm very afraid of a lingering illness, where the quality of life diminishes so that you depend on other

people, that you are no longer able to take care of yourself. That's what I fear really more than death itself.

Q: Have you done your healthcare proxies and DNRs?

A: I've done as much as I possibly can. I exercise as much as you can in my age, and I do it regularly. I watch what I eat, and– I must confess that I smoke a pipe, and I still do, and it's either my toothbrush or my pipe, and I don't [going] to give up both of them. So I do as much as I can to stay well. (you know) The rest is up to my higher power, and there's not much I can do. I do what is in my power to-to-to stay well. But whatever– What life has in store for you, you need to accept, (you know) even if it's difficult.

Q: Had you had any experience with death before the Holocaust?

A: Oh, my grandfather died. I had a personal tragedy and– Not very much so, I must say that– But I did have death, and I knew that people were dying and I'd been to some (what they call) your viewing, you know. So you see the person you just used to know shortly before as being a vivid person, lying up there. But basically, in my young age and until the war started, .. that I was somewhat removed from death, because we didn't– I didn't have a large family. And so we– I heard a lot [about] rel- relatives who died, but personally experiencing [that they suddenly] was very seldom.

Q: But during the war?

A: Well, during the war it changed completely. A human life was nothing. In Theresienstadt, my first job was to collect dead bodies. I mean, if anybody ever seen piles of dead bodies, I mean, not in a newsreel, not on television, but people who are [ruthlessly] put on top of each other, and people who died from starvation, are not very pretty to look at. Is nowhere near what a viewing looks here, where people are embalmed and look very nice and have good clothing on.

People I saw die or dead were nothing more than a piece of (I can't say human) a former human being, which I had to carry in a wagon outside the city to be burned. (you know) So what you do, you lose all respect for death. You lose all empathy and you– You only care how heavy is the body, because I got to lift it. And so what you see in movies sometimes, or in theaters, or read in books, death became ugly, even though you had nothing to do with the killing; but under the condition we lived in, the-the–

Theresienstadt city was a city which had about 4,000 inhabitants, not counting the military. They crammed 60,000 people in there. Now, just imagine this. People died. They didn't even have room to die sometimes. And that was bad. It was really, really very bad. And the– your– You were supposed to treat death respectful. You know? Respectful of the person who lived and achieved his duty, all gone. Survival and everything else wasn't important. And if it meant carrying dead bodies outside the city, you just did it. It was just another job. That's all. But compassion, sadness, pity, to be very honest with you, all gone. All gone. There was nothing. My heart was cold towards the dead body. My emotions were dead, and I am nowhere near where you can glorify the-the person's death and remember only the good things and all the– I didn't know most of them. They were dead. They were just other prisoners.

Q: And now?

A: Well, the answer I can give you: I didn't have a death, since in my family I-I had not– I had a cousin who died, who was very ill, for him– for whom death was probably a relief. And he was in a home, and so that was good. And that's all I had. All my other relatives were gassed. They were gone. And you ask now, but see, that's only memory.

Q: And your mom? Did she die after?

A: My mom died in 1949, and she had cancer, and it was sad. But her quality of life had diminished very much after all those years in a camp, and so I took it. She

was fairly young. She was only 51 years old. And it made me feel more sad. I felt like almost I neglected her. (you know) I should have done something to keep her alive. (you know) And of course it wasn't possible, and so it's– It's a milestone in my life, but it's gone. It's over. It's finished. I don't like to dwell on it.

Q: Having your mother there, and being almost responsible for your mother—

A: Oh, definitely.

Q: What dimension did that add to your own experience in the Holocaust?

A: What the dimension is? That I nearly prostituted myself, meaning that I did everything to get some food for my mother. There was only one place where you can get food: in the kitchen, in the ghetto kitchen which cooked for all the thousands of people. There were several of them. And I needed to get in there because my mother was going—my stepfather as well—they were rapidly going down with the food they were having. It was never enough. And I finally did something which is difficult to describe. I-I became friends with a Czech man who was already in a kitchen. (you know) And the relationship between Czechs and Germans was not good. And these were both prisoners. That is like in today's prison where you have gangs. I mean, if you– if you expand that, you had one group of German Jews and you had one group of Czech Jews. The Czech Jews ran the ghetto, no question, more or less very well. They had of course all the good positions, one of which being– There were several of them. One, you could be a Jewish policeman, and you could be working in a kitchen. That was all Czechs. And I sa– I-I met the guy and I wined and dined him in that– but not literally, but I sort of– For example, the Czechs always believed the German Jews helped get Hitler elected. We didn't stand up. Oh God, we had arguments. We did not stand up to the Germans when Hitler tried to become chancellor, and they blamed us. It was our fault that Hitler ever came to power, and that they are now– have an occupied country, and they are sitting in a concentration camp. So I began to admit this. I said, "Yeah, we could have done more." And that was strictly a

psychological attempt to get this guy's friendship. And sure enough, we became sort of– not friends but acquaintances. He liked me, he was older than I am, and he was a chief of one of the kitchen. And finally I told him, I said, "Look, I would love to work in a kitchen for you." I didn't want to work for him at all, but I told him. And so I sort of pros– myself, prostituted myself mentally by saying things which I really didn't mean. And I got the job. I was in a kitchen, and I could take some food home for my parents. Not legally. That was strictly forbidden. But we managed. And I was able to save my mother's life by that. (you know) So.

[Tape 15]

Q: When did the reaction of the American Jewish community to Holocaust survivors change?

A: Well, it did change. But I– What I'm going to give you as an answer is a very personal opinion. I mean, there may be historians who will violently disagree with it. So be it. But my opinion is that the whole relationship between the Christian world and the Jewish world in America changed drastically due to the Six Day War in Israel against the Arab states. Those enormous unexpected visit–victory in six days, where the Israeli army defeated Egypt and Jordan and Syria and came out completely as a victory, suddenly put Israel on the map like never before, with the possible except of 1948, when the-the United Nations allowed Israel to exist. Not ever since that time was Israel suddenly in the minds of so many people. Suddenly there was a little tiny country with a bunch of refugees who resettled, and they beat the hell out of– out of the vastly superior (numerically at least) nations. And I almost felt that the attitude of the Americans began to change. There was a certain degree of respect. May not be love and admiration, but admiration did play in it. They said, "My God, look at those guys." You know, Moshe Dayan with his black eye patch. You remember that? These became heroes, folk heroes. And Americans are very attuned to people who do good– do-do brave and good things, and become their– Americans are not ignoring this. [They never say], "Eh, what"– No. Americans admire this. And suddenly there is

this tiny little state which is in everybody's mouth. And-and Israel began to get admired. And I think that a lot had to do with the change of attitude, even politically. I mean, our government supports Israel, (you know) and-and financially, militarily, and commercial– economically. So this was did something which none of us could have ever achieved without it. That was a past. That was gone. [You ....] here. So forget the Holocaust. That's fine. You're here now, and now this war. And the victory of that war, in my personal opinion, electrified the American people. It really did. And from then on, so many things changed of the political and social and economic and military attitude of the United States towards Israel. It's remarkable. And so I think that's–that was the trigger.

Q: Did you find, after that people were more interested in your story?

A: Yes. All of a sudden .. people– Jewish people were in demand as speakers. Suddenly, ten years later, we start building a Holocaust museum. (you know) It put Israel and the Jewish people on the map. And maybe rightly or wrongly, we were associated. (you know) We were Jewish, and so there were the Jews winning that war, and even though we didn't personally fight in it, we supported it, and the people began to get respect. And that respect it gave towards the Israeli people transferred itself to some degree to the Jewish communities, not an individual necessarily, but Jewish organizations, and there was interface between Christian religions and rabbis and so forth. And so, in my opinion, a whole new, very favorable association originated from this. Now, again, that's a very personal opinion. It's not from somebody's writing or anything. That's just my own evaluation. So right or wrong, that's what I believe.

Q: Did you find that more and more people started to identify themselves more fully as Holocaust survivors?

A: No, I wouldn't say that. I would say that maybe identify them as Jews. (you know) There were Jews like me, who never wanted to admit to anybody that they were Jews. Remember, I told you earlier in our discussion that I would never

volunteer that I am Jewish. Now all of a sudden it didn't matter so much. Somebody said, "Oh, he's Jewish. He's related to these guys in Israel who fought that war." (you know) And so while there always will be anti-Semitism and there will always be people, but the general population, in my personal experience, I no longer hesitated to tell people I'm Jewish. I mean, I really didn't. And I– while I don't volunteer it, but when I'm asked, I don't hem and haw around it. I said, "Yes, I am." And thinking back of what these guys achieved there made me proud, because even though I'm not Israeli, but I'm Jewish, and there is a common bond, see?

Q: Does the state of Israel have any meaning to you?

A: Does it have any idea? I'm very happy it exists. I'm very happy of all the refugees they took in from Russia and from Ethiopia and all the– all the thing. I think the Jewish state is something that deserves to be supported by our government, which it does very well. And it is a stabilizing factor– could have been a stabilizing factor in the Israeli if they wouldn't make the mistakes they're making now about the occupation. There we go back to the '67 war. (you know) To me, the war was over, there would have been a peace treaty, and there would have been this. Little did I know that you have a fanatic minority in Israel which feels that they have (quote, unquote) the "right" to occupy Palestinian lands. That I don't agree with that at all, (you know) but that's after the war and it's hindsight. (you know)

Q: When did you first publicly start to identify and talk about being a Holocaust survivor?

A: When I joined the museum. That's the first time [I ever]– You see–

Q: Put that together as a full idea.

A: I put this together because, you see, "Holocaust survivor" to the average population doesn't mean anything. It really– Go to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and

tell them you're a Holocaust survivor; maybe [you have] a small group of people who know exactly what that is. What Holocaust? What did you survive? So there was not the general acceptance that there was a Holocaust. I mean, it's being denied today. But the general ..... was just simply ignored. Didn't know. And so my awareness and promotion of the idea came actually when I joined the museum as a volunteer, where suddenly was emerged (you know) people who did nothing else but think Jewish. They weren't even Jewish. They were just working there. But they promoted the idea and they supported it, they spread it out (you know) to– the museum was built, and (it) I lost the shyness. Because if I had believed what I used to, I wouldn't be sitting here. I really would not be sitting here. Because to talk about my Jewish experience was not something I ever wanted to do, until I joined the museum.

Q: How long ago was that?

A: I joined the museum about 4 years ago.

Q: What has that meant to you, to start talking about it?

A: Well, it– It became slowly– not right away. It became slowly a mission, the mission to spread the idea of the Holocaust. Now, it started out very-very small. That means you had individual visitors who would ask you a question. (you know) Sometimes when I was upstairs, they would point to an exhibit and want to know what that is, and how come. And the museum had special about book burning, for example, you know. That was a wonderful experience because so many people were curious about it. And so the idea of being able to promote the idea is actually what did it when I saw it in the Holocaust museum.

Q: Are you friends with other Holocaust survivors? Was that a world you would have wanted to fit in?

A: Well, again, I have to be personal. No, I don't have any friends. I have acquaintances, but no friends. I told you, I'm a very difficult person to make friends. And for example, when I volunteer, I know several of them. We never have any social contact. I don't have any social contact with them. We are very friendly and interested when we are in the museum, or when there are common activities from the museum, but as to a personal relationship (my wife visits your wife, you know, we get together to go out for dinner), that has not happened. And again, that is a personal criteria. My wife and I are– you may not believe it, but we are rather shy. And we do not, especially my– due to my wife's health, we do not mingle very– I-I'm not a mingler at all. And– But we-we are, when we are in the museum, very good colleagues and so forth.

Q: Is there any part of you psychologically that has been unburdened or freed?

A: Yes. I told you. What-what has been– As far as psychologically unburdened, I am no longer afraid to tell somebody I'm Jewish. I mean, I don't, I think, tell you, if somebody says– I would never say, "I'm a Jew." Never, ever, ever, ever. I would say, "I'm Jewish." And the idea is that I find the term (even though it is strictly personal) "I'm a– I'm a Jew" like something discriminatory. I mean, there-there is a difference, as you know, maybe understand that, there is a difference in my– in my eyes, in my feelings. Other people may think that's stupid, that's the same thing. Well, to me it isn't. So I'm no longer to say– oh yes. "Are you Jewish," somebody would say; I would say yes. Before that, I (would) probably wouldn't have said yes. If a stranger asked me, for whatever reason, I would have said no. I would say I non-denominational.

Q: Do you think a place like a Holocaust museum has a purpose? "Why have one at all," some people say.

A: Well, whoever says that has not learned a lesson from history. The museum, like the Vietnam memorial, like the World War II memorial, the museum is one demonstration of the honor of a major political event. It isn't necessarily because

it happens to be built in America, but there is one in Berlin, there is one in other cities. They have– The Holocaust Museum has a mission to transmit the idea of the tragedy of that period. Can you imagine, they had an Armenian museum? I mean, so many Armenians were killed by the Turks, allegedly, and nobody honors it. Nothing. I mean, it's just people who are of Armenian descent who promote the idea that they were wrongfully accused and murdered. We don't have to do this. We got a physical, monumental evidence, where people can go and visit and learn that– The museum has a fantastic library where you find all sorts of material if you're interested. And more and more people come, because it's there. It wasn't there before. Take the Holocaust museum away, and you got to go through the Library of Congress, you got to work your way through, and to probably find the same books. But they're not consolidated, they're not linguistically organized. They have people trained there who–Says, "I would like to do a research on a Ukrainian city, and I need some material." (you know) You probably find it in the Library of Congress, but it's not going to be that easy. And so the museum has definitely a mission.

Q: Your thoughts about Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur?

A: Well, it started actually– My-my major reason started with the Cambodian thing up there under Political Pot, when he killed 2 million people. (you know) And my-my very sad feeling. And I really mean that. I was hoping that by May of 1945, when our war was finished, the Second World War, that that would be the end of mass killings. I mean, murder will always happen. But the idea of massing killings for ethnical– for ethnic reasons or for-for the tribal hatred, like in Rwanda, I mean Darfur now, which is all tribal, I mean, that's to me very disappointed. I did not like the thing in-in Bosnia, and I-I was sort of sad that Yugoslavia was split up, because you see, it's funny. As long as Tito was alive, it was a one country and so on. (you know) And when Saddam Hussein was alive, that was one country, and no– Now the only guy who murdered was him. And so then as soon as he was gone, the country fell apart. So I–I don't know what the

answers is. That, you know, we always talk about the international community. Well, that's-that a bad term because the international community is you and I and him and her. You know. So it's not that we all speak with one voice, even though we should sometimes, but we don't.

Q: Has the world changed since the Holocaust, then?

A: I think so. I think the world has changed. The world becomes cognizant. Look of the effort we're making to stop the civil war in Darfur. We really make a sincere effort through the United Nations to stop that war. (you know) The Holocaust definitely had an impact, except that the impact is limited to some countries and some small– France right now is going through a great wave of anti-Semitism. And they should know better. And so it's the idea that as the world learns something about it, of course they [earn]. Are the listening? That's something else again. You know. There's a great deal of difference between learning and listening, because if you listen, you feel obligated to do something. Learning, we learned about Rwanda, and of all the killings, and we didn't do anything.

Q: Do you think each of us is capable of good and evil, in some way the rest of us might not understand?

A: The difference– I think– Most people, in my opinion, understand the difference between good and evil. What my– What some people don't understand, that in their mind, in their activities, evil dominates the good things. I don't know if I say this right. You have people who kill. I mean, individual. Nothing to do with a holocaust. But people who murder a pizza delivery man. They know that's wrong. But they're not listening to their conscience. And I do not think that one can ever change this. Human nature is difficult, and human nature is complex. And to have suddenly a world where everybody is friendly and amiable and listening and receptive, that's a dream. That's a dream. I don't think we have it, I don't think we ever will. But that's something which I think we have to live with. And all we can do is try to minimize the evil and promote the good.

Q: Tell me about your one friend and your relationship.

A: My friend is a gentleman with whom I worked for many years in the Air Force. And he retired and stayed in– He's an American, naturalized as I am, from Germany, and he served in the Air Force with me, and then he married a German lady and retired in Germany. He lives there now. Got great problems with the exchange between the US dollars and Euro, but that's neither here nor there.

He-he's a good friend of mine because we have very much in common. He likes history– And the strange part about it that some people cannot understand: He's German. He's not Jewish at all. He's German. He was drafted during the war, and he was in the navy, in the German navy for about 5 months before the war ended. And he is– We often get into a political discussion. I said, "Your father." "What about your father (you know) and your grandfather?" (you know) And he tried to convince me that his grandfather and his fa– his– primarily his grandfather were– and his father, were not ever Naz– National Socialists. And I said, "Well, you're just one of many. There weren't any." And so I like his attitude. He condemns what the Germans did. He literally condemns it, and he means it. (you know) And we have intellectually an awful lot in common. (you know) And so he's the– what my wife calls my favorite Nazi. And he's of course German, was in the military and all that, and so we use that nickname. I always address him as my favorite Nazi. And he hates it. So that's nice.

Q: Does he have insight about why he was vulnerable to his own participation?

A: No, he was drafted. He was drafted in the mili– towards the end of the war, and went like everybody else, and was assigned to the navy, and became a cadet, to go to officers candidate school, and then the war ended already. (you know) But his whole background is very German, (you know) and proud of it as– His father was a man with a "von" in the middle, (you know) which means blue-blooded, (you know) and-and I think he– He never really told me his name was "von Rossbach," and he dropped that. (you know) So he dropped the "von" and cut that name out when you– okay.

Q: When you talk to young people about your experiences, how do you hope it will change their world views? Or do you think it will?

A: Frankly–

Q: And refer a subject back.

A: I– Will-will my activities change the opinion of the world I talk to? Middle, young, shall we say, eighth graders on up to graduate students. I hope so. I'm not convinced that they would physically do something about stopping, but certainly the seed is there. If they pursue it in any form or shape, in a manner that you read books about the Holocaust, that they talk to other people about the Holocaust, that they're aware of it, then I think the seed is there, and in many instances I think it will grow. It will never eradicate hate crimes. I don't think that will ever happen. But I think that many of them will think, will think and when a disaster strikes, like killing in one of the African countries for a tribal necessity and so forth, they will– they will understand better now, since they know what could be the end result. Six million dead. It starts with maybe, when the Nazis came to power, they arrested 20 and beat them up. But on the next day, 30. And (you know) Niemöller's famous saying. But the-the seed is there. And with any degree of luck, it will grow. To what dimensions it will grow, I don't know. I don't know. I won't be around. But that's one of the reasons the museum, as well as myself, we hope that the seeds were sown will germinate and grow into something where people actually said, "We're not going to do this," or "We'll support this in order to stop that." (you know)

Q: When you speak, what do people ask you?

A: Ha. That's a good question. The best question I ever had was from a young kid and he asked me, "How many people did you ever kill?" And so I told him I-I wasn't the killer. I was the victim, not the killer. But the question they ask are basically the same. First question I usually get is: What did you do when you

came to America? That's one of their standard question. The second standard question is: How do you feel towards the German people? That's the second standard question. Okay. Third question is: Do you ever went back to Germany? And do you talk to Germans? And that's so– the three standard questions. And they want to know sometimes details about the camp. What did you get to eat? Where did you sleep? And what– Did you have a tattoo? And so those are pretty much the standard question. But the first three, they're almost standard, almost standard. How do you feel about the Germans, and that sort of thing.

Q: You interrogated Nazis after the war, with the Air Force. Did you feel hatred or revenge? What happened to that in you?

A: When I first did it in 1947, I very definitely felt that anything we can get them, they deserve. (you know) Any punishment they can get them. See, I was only a screener. The formal interrogation– I screened whether the person was in the SS or wasn't. He– The Americans and the British, but I'm sure the Americans, created a questionnaire where all the Nazi organizations and subdivisions were listed. And people had to fill those out. So there were some organizations [in it] were nominally Nazi but they weren't. Others were. And so my job was to flush out who did what to whom during the war. And you got to remember that the be- the worst thing about the thing is that there weren't any Nazis. That whole German people unanimously and individually decided, "Me? Never Nazi. Him, you go to ask." (you know) And it was terrible. They just absolutely will not say, "Yeah, I made a mistake. I followed him. I believed in him." Very seldom did you find it. You find it in literature. But face to face?

There's an excellent movie out called *Downfall*. And that movie is the last week of Hitler's life. And it introduces the person who was instrumental in furnishing the information, which was Hitler's secretary. Now, she lived with him day in and day out. In her introduction in that movie, she said she had no idea what the– what the Nazis did with the Jewish people. She knew that the Nazis didn't like them; they knew that they deprived them of work, and-and some

degree of comfort. But that they actually evacuated them, she knew that too. That was only to work on road construction or whatever the case may have been. But that they put them in the death camp by the thousands, she never knew. And now, you're going to believe this? She was Hitler's secretary, [Kristol/Traudl Junge]. And she said that outright in the movie, (you know) after it was [found], and– So that's the attitude you'll find. "It wasn't me."

And then you have mitigating circumstances, if I may say that. Every civil servant in Germany during the time had to belong to the Nazi Party. All schoolteachers were civil servants. There were mass admission to the party, because they wanted to keep their job, so they had to apply. Could you condemn those? You– Can you put them in the same bucket? So what I'm trying to say is, there are various degrees of guilt. (you know) If somebody joins a party in order to keep his job and feed his family, well, I'm not so sure I want to put him in the same bucket as some SS guard who beats up Jews for fun. So yes, they were both Nazis, but within the party– And one needs to be objective about this, because there are people, Jewish people in particular, who condemn them right out. "They're all bad." Well, that isn't the case. And so I always try to judge the person by what duties he perform or she perform within the Nazi organization, because some of them really, they were just pushed in there and they had nothing to do with, other than being nominally party members.

[Tape 16]

Q: The impact of your wartime experiences on your spirituality?

A: I need to– The spirituality of my family as well as myself is very limited. Ours was not a religious family at all. Not in any respect. And especially after my mother got divorced, she did not in any form or shape encourage me to be religious or adhere to Jewish religious traditions and so forth. So it was a minor matter. We-we had really– We were Jews nominally. We were Jews by registration, if you will. The– (you know) The Germans have a line item in their birth certificates. That's how they knew who was Jewish. You have to list your

religion. And they-they knew right away. And so we were nominally Jewish. But as far as actually being a Jewish person who adheres to his religious belief by-by practicing it, that wasn't the case at all. Not in any form or shape.

Q: Did your wartime experiences strengthen or weaken your belief in a God?

A: It makes me question it. I mean, the unfallibility of the good Lord, who can do anything good, bad, or indifferent, makes–made me doubt, made me very doubt. I always admired the Jewish prisoners who were with me, that those people who firmly believed in their God and prayed. And I deeply admired them, but I couldn't. I questioned. I questioned, I doubted, and I had little if any respect from the higher power, from a God (if you wish). And it-it's changed after the war, only to the effect that I thanked the higher power that made me survive. And– But as to the misery which happened and the tragedies that happened, I had very mixed emotion about the benevolence of God and–or a higher power or whatever you want to call it. I know of religious Jews who, in the middle of all the misery, celebrated the holidays and knew when they were, and firmly believed and prayed. I could only admire this. But it didn't– I couldn't. I mean, it was– I was never religious before, and I was certainly not religious after.

Q: And now?

A: Well, I-I basically do not believe in organized religion. I do not personally (and that's strictly speaking for myself) that if you go to church or you go to synagogue, and somebody tells you to open page 235, and we all now sing on the right page, last paragraph– That to me is not religion. That's how the Army, again, who tells you what you should do. Religion, you must do in your heart. I feel closer to my Maker when I'm alone in the woods someplace, and the stars are out, or the sun is shining. Then I know I can communicate. I can't [communicate] in a crowded synagogue, if you will, where everything's regimented, every step is practiced. That's– is not for me, for other people, and will never be .....

Q: Do you believe in an afterlife?

A: Frankly, I have never given it much thought. That's one of the things I've never particularly considered, and– You ever seen the movie *Gone with the Wind*? "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." I really don't know if I'm interested in afterlife or whether I'm [coming back]. If I had a choice, I would say, "Oh please, no. One is enough." And I would not want to be resurrected as a chicken or something else. (you know) That's– You have to have a mythical belief in that, and I don't have that. And I don't have no desire to feel that I will be resurrected at one time or another into a human being in a different country, on a different circumstances. But I don't have that.

Q: When you think of the young man who came over on the boat and saw the Statue of Liberty, and you imagined that life then, where are you in what you could have imagined and hoped for yourself?

A: Well, obviously, I had very mixed emotions when I saw that Liberty. On the one hand, I was afraid. A new country, a language I didn't really understand, and an experience– my mother back home, no one I knew, no one I could talk to, and I should perhaps give you one brief detail. My biological father was in New York. And he was the one who helped me to come over there, in addition to the Jewish community and the Joint Distribution Center. And my father died while I was on the ship. I never saw him again. And so I got to this country having lost the major support I was hoping to have, and– even though we'd been– my mother's been divorced for many years. But I was still fairly close to him, and he lived in Berlin as well. And so it was a great shock. So I came– The boy who come, the boy you mentioned, who came to New York, had very mixed emotions. I didn't even know that my father was dead. It was only when I landed, when I was handed a message that the had died. So it was somewhat– On the one hand, you have great anticipation. On the other hand, you are worried that you cannot hack it. And the third one is, you don't know what is going to face you. So it was a– basically a hopeful arrival, but mixed with apprehension, because it's not easy to get to a new

country where you don't know the people, you don't know the customs, you don't know the language, and so forth.

But that– My feeling towards my higher power were not impacted by that. I strongly believe that God saved my life, and nothing else did. And even though I wanted to die, he wouldn't let me. And so [from]– But there again, I was hoping that–that life would be good to me and get me through this, because what else could there be? Because what I went through (be) last four-four, eight years, [if] you will, nothing was compared to that. So whatever happened in America couldn't be any worse.

Q: How do you think the Holocaust experience impacted your choice of career?

A: Well, it impacted it in a sense that I first of all joined the military, which has a built-in mission. Within the military, I choose intelligence, because first of all I thought I was qualified for it, and secondly, I knew that the Holocaust was something you want to prevent under all circumstances. The job I did was as an intelligence [officer], in those days, during the Cold War, directed mainly towards the countries Soviet Union and its allies. And they were not exactly the most lovable people towards the Jewish people either. (you know) I mean, that sort of thing. So being able to now (A) to defeat them if necessary, or to withstand attacks by them, would in some ways help the Jewish people in-in the Soviet Union. (you know) And it never came to a war, luckily, but that was sort of my motivation towards the intelligence work, to do what I can. I'm a linguist, and that helped. So I got accepted.

Q: Did you have any overall belief in justice or setting some wrong right?

A: Well, if you look at it in general, then I must say that my belief in right and wrong, and good and bad, was in America, as I lived here, formed by what I saw and heard and believed. Not everything I heard was true, but much of it was. The things were better than I thought they would be, and the tremendous amount of freedom. I mentioned already that nobody asked me if I wanted to move and

where I moved to. That was something so unknown to me, and so wonderful that I could do that, that my attitudes towards life in general, my particular one in-in– is or has been something like a wonder, you know, school really marvelous. Wasn't always very happy. I was very unhappy at times and very lonely and everything else. But that was my own choice. (you know) Nobody made me go to America. Nobody made me work in a factory up there. So that is my own choice. So you learn from your experience and you become a mature human being which can face reality, probably far better prepared than it used to be, where everything was dictated, edicted, and directed by a hostile government, where you had no choice to even think: is it good or is it bad? It's always bad. You knew.

Q: The meaning of becoming an American citizen?

A: The choice wasn't even mine. First of all, I wanted to become an American citizen. But the work I was doing required a clearance, a secret clearance, later a top secret clearance. And that could only be given to American citizens. So the Army shipped me and my wife and– to the States to get naturalized. It was a wonderful moment. I– We-we were naturalized at different times. I was nat-naturalized in 1951, hers was later. And when you raise your hand and you swear to be an American citizen, and to obey the Constitution, which was different than the Germans, who swore an oath of obedience to a person (Hitler), well, this one was a document, which was the foundation for American democracy. And you swear to uphold that. It was a very proud moment. It was a very, very proud moment. I was there with-with a witness who swore that he knew me, that I was an upstanding citizen. What he didn't tell the judge there was that the met me two hours before for the first time. And he was a military sergeant who was directed to come with me and swear to my honest upbringing and honest character. And he looked that judge clear in the eye and says, "Yes, sir, I know him for ten years or longer." And I thought, well, good. And-and so it was a very proud moment. It was– It was great. It was– It was something–

And of course the first thing you do, like all naturalized citizen (I don't know anybody who didn't if they were old enough), you want a passport. You know. The citizen oath and the document you get, which is a very nice formal type document that on such and such a date you, Robert Behr, were naturalized by Southern District Court of New York, and so forth, that was fine. But what you really wanted was a passport. So the first thing I did, I applied for a passport. And I was so proud when that document came. Now I really felt I was a citizen. With- with the oath and the document, I knew I was; but feeling it took that little blue book in my hand and saying "American citizen." And that was a page in there where it says that all persons having contact ... are requested to assist Mr. Behr, Robert Behr. I mean, it was just-just a piece of paper, but it was tremendously meaningful. It was– And you'll find if you talk to other naturalized citizen, they all want passport, even though they have no intention of traveling, but they want a passport. (you know) It has a tremendous meaning. It still has today. I'm over in Paris, or in Berlin, and I see the American embassy with a flag. It does something to me. It-it's not just "Oh, I have to go in here, and it's another security and I have to go through this and this." This is my country. (you know) And even though we're not always universally liked, people don't even like Americans, at least per se, but for individuals they usually have a great deal respect. But when you see the flag and you have that passport, talk about belonging, you really do. And you feel it, and it's there. And I don't think I exaggerate. It's true for me, but I'll bet you dollars to donuts that's true for many, many immigrants. It gives you something which is–

Why do we stand up when we see the flag? Respect, isn't it? It's just a piece of cloth. The Supreme Court said you can burn it. Nothing will happen to you. I too-totally disagree with that decision. It's not freedom of speech. To me, that's much more. People who take America for granted do not impress me. People have died for what we are today. From the Revolutionary War, to the 1812 War, to the Civil War—you know all that as well as I do. But people have died for that flag. And to say you can burn it, or you can ignore it, to me that's something– I lived

for that flag, because I wanted to come and be a part of that thing. And with the little passport, I did it. Well, okay.

Q: Have you ever served on a jury?

A: Yes. Yes, I did.

Q: Tell me about that. Did that mean anything to you?

A: Do you want me to tell you about a rape trial?

Q: Not the details, just the idea of serving on a jury and how you exercised your citizenship in that way.

A: Well, I was called, and– right here in– I was once in-in-in Ohio, I was called, and I served, and it was a theft story. And I didn't really have any great emotional feeling as now that I'm accepted to serve on a [jury]. That would be lying. It was something I had to do. The law required me to do this. The laws are different in each state. In Ohio, it's stricter than here. And you went, you– in, and you're hoping it wouldn't take too long, because I was working still. But it didn't give me any great sense of patriotism. I mean, I would be lying if I say that. It was something you had to do, you went through it, and when it's over, it's over. You know.

And I had a rape trial here in Rockville, Maryland, where I was in the jury. And that was quite emotional. The only redeeming factor was that the jury almost unanimously was convinced of the guilt of the accused. (you know) Of course he had a lawyer, and the lawyer said that wasn't so, and– You have the details. But it was, again, not something which made me proud to be an American. No, it didn't. It was just a job as a citizen you have to do, and that's it.

Q: How did you respond to 9/11?

A: No different than millions of other people all over the world. It was a day I had to pick up my daughter from the hospital. She was there for–

Q: Would you begin with "On September 11th"?

A: Okay. (how) Eleven-thirty, to me, was what it was-were to most other people, a day of horror, a day of things. And what I had to fight from that day on, and really literally fight, is an ingrained suspicion against Muslims. Remember the day? I think it was either on the day or in the evening or the next day, when my wife sent me to the store, and I saw a woman with that scarf over her head. And it almost rubbed me the wrong way. That may have been a totally innocent woman who wears that for religious reasons, or for tradition, and it brought in me almost .. repel– repulsion that I-I– I said, "What are they doing here? I mean, They–Those are people, they killed 3,000 people." In those fir-early hours it was still 3,000. And so that-what that day had a– had to fight it. I had to fight the very system, the very problem I was faced with, that people condemned you without knowing you, because of your religious or ethnical-ethnical background. And here I was, doing exactly the same thing. I had no idea who that lady was. She may have been the nicest person in the world, but she– to me she was a Muslim, and those people had just killed 3,000 innocent people in New York, and she disgusted me. I said, "Why couldn't she go to the store and take it off?" Well, then I thought, maybe you ought to admire her, that in spite of the general feeling of the public against Muslims, she wore her religious belief on top of it. But I couldn't– The admiring was secondary. The gut feeling was: I hate them. I really detest them. And so that was my reaction for them.

Q: And now?

A: Well, we're going to get into political philosophical. I think that the mullahs–

Q: Did it shift at all, that visceral feeling?

A: That visceral feel did not go away. It transcended its– from a personal antagonism to a person I see on the street, towards a political antagonism on a broader picture. I'm– I no longer feel bad or-or offended by a person who wears a burqa or something here, if you will, and–but– That's gone. I mean, I'm long over that, and I respect them as I respect anyone. But it transferred itself to the broader picture of the Islamic world which is out to destroy us. So that's how it stands.

Q: How do you think your background and experience have shaped your view of the future?

A: In what kind? What do you mean by future?

Q: The world view in terms of the future.

A: Well, what it's done to me, having seen what Hitler got away with– You see, there is always the memory. Hitler occupied the Rhineland, he occupied Austria, he occupied Czechoslo– the Sudetenland, he occupied Czechoslovak, all without firing a shot. Nobody—the French, the British, the Russians—nobody stood up to him. Nobody. He got away with everything, and that is what I think and remember. The world is relying on the United Nations now, that-that's to-to solve its problems, and we do not stand up to people. We-we do not– We talk. Oh, we talk. And we're brilliant where we talk about, and our Secretary of State travels and meets with leaders and so forth, but we're not going to tell somebody, "We give you 36 hours or we're going to nuke them, we're going to nuke you, or throw bombs on you," whatever the world you want to be. Like we did in– finally on 1 September 1939, while France and Britain said, "If you don't get out in two days, out of Poland, we're going to declare war." And we did. That's how World War II started. Now, we don't do that. We try to be diplomatic, we try to be–negotiate, we do that– And that sometimes worries me (you know) and that I don't see America being tough enough, regardless of what other countries think, to do the things we believe are right. We don't. And again, that's a personal opinion, may be debatable, but I think sometimes we ought to stand up for what we believe, and

not just in Congress or in the White House Rose Garden; we ought to actually make it [true]. Now, we did that in Iraq. We marched in there under false pretenses. We got– We were lied to and we were misled to, and so you have to be careful what you're doing.

Q: Do things still trigger memories of your Holocaust experiences?

A: I don't have very many physical things about it. I think about it sometimes and I get reminded of it when I see, for example, when I see poor people, and homeless–

Q: Reminded of "it"? Start again. What can trigger memories?

A: I try to avoid having memories of my incarceration. I really don't know– It sometimes comes back. For example, if you get a questionnaire because you applied for a job or a credit card or whatever, there's a sentence in there, 's a question in there: Are-are you or have you ever been imprisoned? What do you put down there? Do you put down there yes, and then start writing two pages of explanation? Or do you simply say no? So you see, it pursues you. In the normal course of events where we have today a society which is extremely curious, you have to fill out a questionnaire when you apply for a job, and they want to know. It's perfectly all right. But I don't know what to answer. So mostly in that particular case I'm inclined to say no, I was not in jail, because it wasn't that type of jail.

Give you another example how that comes back. I applied for a clearance, or was asked to apply for a clearance. And in that, you have to list all your relatives. This is very [easy because] I don't have very many. One question, where was your– These people rubbed me the wrong way. So I put down– Where was your father born? So I put down Russia. But it isn't true. See, what is true is that he was born in East Prussia, which was occupied by the Russians in 1945, and still is, which is now Russia. So his-his hometown was German at the time he was born, and is Russia now. So what do you put down?

So the past comes back to haunt you, to– coupled with the requirements today to strip your soul and bare your soul, [heart], because people have a right to know about yourself. So it's never far away. It's never far away. And so the-the– whether it's the war or [with] the-the-the question told you about "Have you ever been arrested?" Well, of course I've been arrested. (you know) But that's not what they mean. And you know. And it-it follows you, because the world changed so much. My father was today born in Russia, but it wasn't Russia at the time he was born. (you know) And so I-I live with a split personality, if you will, because you come into a lot of things which you can't– which you don't want to explain. And yet you don't know whether you should lie or—

[Tape 17]

Q: [not recorded]

A: So the quest– In answer to your question, of course it's individual, because how do you find love and devotion and characteristics which you like? Well, usually you find them by accident. Everybody finds their spouse usually by accident, unless they grow up together (that happens) and they get married, and that becomes a good marriage or not-not becomes a good marriage. But in my case, most of the people met their spouses by accident, and then you go back and do this: Why do I love that person? What is it in her that attracts me? So you began to look at the thing, and it could be sexual, it could be emotional, it could be all sorts of things. It could be a combination of things. But somehow you got to crystallize that, because what– when you have a friendship (in my case, I look at it) which is purely sexual and doesn't have any intellectual background, then you can go with your wife to bed but you can't talk to her. And you see, that's a sad thing, because sexual ambitions go away, but spirituals remain. And that's where it comes–becomes of importance. And I always begin that way. To me, something– I want something lasting. I want to belong with somebody. Now we're back to where we started. I want to belong to somebody. And in order to do that, I've got to have an intellectual background.

My wife is European, I'm European. I'm not even sure. I've often thought about: Would I be happy with an American girl? And I don't mean anybody in particular. I have my doubts. Not that American ladies or women are worse, but they have different– their upbringing, their characteristics. They're not better or they're not worse; they're just different. And without going into details, I found so many ladies I met who are married, good marriages and everything, but there's a difference between them and a European woman. And again I want to stress, it's neither better nor worse. It's just different. Culturally, education-wise, habit-wise, you know, that sort of thing. (So, I hope I answered that.)

Q: The word "choice."

A: Choice. Well, choice, you know, is a very broad range of things. You have material choices (you want to buy something, you want to buy this television set or that television set), you want to– it can be spiritually, you want to cho– you want to choose that lady over that lady. So choice is a very partial endeavor. And it goes back to what I normally do before I make a choice. If I can, if I'm rational enough, I analyze what the options are. I analyze a little bit. If it's a material thing, I look at what other people write about a TV set; or if it's a choice of a job, then you ask yourself, will I be happy in it? So choice is a process of evaluation. And you can do it in writing, which sometimes helps. You sit down and get your thoughts, and then you reorganize it and say: What is the best outcome if my– if I make choice A, choice B, or choice C? If you– If you spontaneously act to make a choice, very often it's the wrong one. (you know) It's not whether you want a hamburger or a cheeseburger. That isn't very difficult. But when it comes to human beings, when it comes to jobs, when it comes to psychological things, then choice is something you need to treat very carefully. And I do that. I try to be no spontaneous but selective and analytical, and then I make my choice. Doesn't always mean it's the right one, but at least I try.

Q: And is it even more complicated when the absence of choice was so powerful? To have it is also something that's changed over the years?

A: Well, choice in a ghetto is very, very small, because there were– usually weren't much options you have. And there was not much you can evaluate it, because you knew what you wanted. You wanted to survive, that means you got to have something to eat, (you know) and so forth. When the war was over, and when I began to enter life, then the–the process of analyzing choice started. I really did not have, in my young life before and after the camps, did I have the wisdom to use choice as an analytical incentive—only after the war. Should I go to America? Would it– Was that the right decision? Should I go into the military? (you know) Those are choices which impact your life. And so it wasn't just survival. It was now the future. And so choice for me is an analytical process which I do as best I can. (Quit writing.)

[room tone]

[End of Interview]