

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Martin Weiss
August 26, 2000
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Martin Weiss, conducted on August 26, 2000 in Bethesda, Maryland by Margaret Garrett on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

MARTIN WEISS

August 26, 2000

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: -- Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Martin Weiss, conducted by Margaret Garrett on August 26, 2000, in Bethesda, Maryland. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is the follow-up interview that will focus on Mr. Weiss's post-Holocaust experiences. In preparation for this interview, I listened to the entire interview you recorded at the Simon Wiesenthal Center on July 28, 1994. I also listened to the first part of the interview you recorded with the Shoah Foundation on September 28, 1998. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that -- in -- in those interviews. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post-Holocaust experiences.

This is tape number one, side A. What is your name?

Answer: My name is Martin Weiss. I was born in Polana, Ch -- Czechoslovakia on January 28th, 1929.

Q: And what was your name at birth?

A: At birth it was Meyer Weiss.

Q: In the previous tape that I listened to, you told in quite a bit of detail your experiences up until you were living with your sister in Europe. Could you give her name and where you were living at that time?

A: Yes, I lived with my sister, for -- in 1945, we lived in Karlovy Vary, which is in the Czech Republic. And I lived with my sister, she had gotten married at that time to Fred Morris. So, actually we lived together til we came to the United States, which was, I believe July of '46.

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Q: And how did you and your sister decide to come to the United States?

A: Soon as the war was over -- and we lived in Karlovy Vary, my brother-in-law was a [indecipherable] of -- in the Czechoslovakia legion in the Czech army at the time. So he --

Q: Your -- your brother?

A: My brother-in-law.

Q: Oh, your brother-in-law.

A: Fred Morris. He was a -- a -- an itch -- and he came back after the war with the Czech army from Russia. So he lived under the -- on the Soviet -- I mean, he was in the Soviet Union for part of the war. And he knew that we should not let us stay there because the Soviet Union will have strong influence. So when they had the first elections and the communists won, we saw that the secret police or so was getting very strong. We decided that we di -- immediately to get papers as soon as possible and leave the country. So my brother-in-law had a brother in United States, so he got an affidavit from him and my sister and myself got an affidavit from my distant cousin, which my sister acquired, and [indecipherable] his name was Sam Fuchs, and he sent us an affidavit to come to the United States. And my brother-in-law was capable enough that he got the papers moving very fast and we were fortunate we left rather early, one of the first people to leave that part of -- of Europe at the time. And on the way here we went through Sweden.

Q: So is this by train?

A: No, we went by bus to Denmark and from Denmark we went by a -- a ferry or a boat to Sweden, and we took the ship from -- I believe it was Stockholm to -- to the United States.

Q: Did you have --

A: The ship's name by the way was the [indecipherable]

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Q: Did you have funds to buy your -- your passage?

A: Well, y-yes, oddly enough we did. In the short time that we were -- spent in that -- in Czechoslovakia -- because my brother-in-law was a veteran, so they -- the Czechs were taking away business from the Germans and giving it to veterans. So he was one of those people, he got a business from a German auto parts store and we -- also, when we left he sold -- he sold the store of -- the fa -- in fact [indecipherable] the store to another fellow, and the other fellow had relatives in the United States, he was able to get some money, so I remember we got something like 1300 dollars, or maybe 2000 dollars and that covered our fare to the United States. So actually we paid af -- for own fare on the way here.

Q: And was it just the three of you --

A: A-Actually it was five of us. It was my brother-in-law, my sister and myself, and his brother and his wife. So th-there was five of us that came simultaneously.

Q: And you came to New York?

A: And we came to New York, and --

Q: How was the crossing?

A: The crossing was, you know, pretty good, although we got seasick, but oth-otherwise, you know, we were -- it was a nice crossing, it was a -- a civilian ship, so it was good enough, as far as that goes. And we came to New York, and like I said, my brother-in-law has his brother here, and --

Q: In New York?

A: In New York, he lived in New York, and his -- and I had my sister, so immediately -- my sister lived in the Bronx at the time, so we spent about two, three weeks with her in the Bronx,

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but after that I go -- she got me a job.

Q: Now, is this another sister [indecipherable]

A: No, the same sister. No, the sister that was here in the United States. See, I had a sister here in the u -- in the -- in the Bronx.

Q: And what was her name?

A: Her -- oh, pardon me, her name was Ellen.

Q: Ellen.

A: Ellen, and --

Q: And she was already [indecipherable]

A: Oh, she was the one that sent us the papers. I'm sorry, thought I mentioned that. She is the one sent us -- got the papers from Mr. Fuchs, the affidavit, I should say. She got us the affidavit and she send us the -- the -- the affidavit so that we can co -- we could come out.

Q: Okay. And so she was living in the Bronx.

A: Right, so she was living in the Bronx, and --

Q: I don't understand, Mr. Fuchs --

A: Mr. Fuchs was a distant cousin, as -- and he is the one --

Q: And why did he get the affidavit [indecipherable] sister?

A: Well because in -- a-at that time, it wasn't like now, at that time, to come to the United States you had to have an affidavit to guarantee that you will not be a -- you will not go on welfare or you will not be a problem to the States, that you'll be s -- suf -- self supporting. So miss -- to -- in order -- the affidavit covered that part, that you could not get the visa unless you had a -- a -- you had a guarantee that you will not be --

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Q: Okay.

A: -- a burden to the States.

Q: So that was from your distant cousin?

A: That's from my distant cousin.

Q: And your sister, Ellen --

A: My sister is the one that's --

Q: -- arranged that.

A: -- arranged that, right, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So we -- she's -- she actually borrowed an apartment because she lived in a smaller place, and we lived there about three weeks. We got a --

Q: She arranged the apartment.

A: She arranged the apartment, right. And after that I -- my sister and my brother-in-law had a -- another -- a sister in California, so he went with my sister to California immediately.

Q: Now, that was your sister in California?

A: Yes, my youngest sister that came --

Q: And what was her name?

A: No, not my sister, was my brother-in-law's sister in California.

Q: Oh okay, okay.

A: And he wanted to settle in California, so they went straight to California. And I settled, because I got a job, which was in the time, I think, most crucial. I got -- my sister got me a job with someone in Carteret, New Jersey. His name was Billy Lebow. And she later, by the way,

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married. And she got me a job with him in a grocery store. That was my first job and I was very anxious to work so I could be self supporting.

Q: Did you speak English?

A: No, I did not speak a word of English. Actually, I never even -- I was never exposed to English. The only time I heard English is when we were liberated by the Americans, and we heard it, but it didn't mean anything because it was a short time and we just didn't understand it.

Q: So you arrived in New York, your sister Ellen helped you --

A: Right.

Q: -- by getting a job in three weeks and you spoke no English.

A: No, no. And I started working in the store. Naturally I --

Q: And what was the store?

A: The store was a grocery store, okay, a small grocery store and I started working there, but one thing I --

Q: What -- what was your job in the grocery store?

A: My job was -- was doing everything, I was cleaning up, helping the butchers, or helping clean up. Deliver groceries on a bicycle.

Q: You had some experience with butchering?

A: No, actually I didn't, because I was very young whe -- when I left home, but my father did have a butcher shop. So I had knowledge --

Q: Was it --

A: -- o-of -- of that type of business, but I really never did that type of work.

Q: So, but it was familiar surroundings, you mean.

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A: Yeah, was familiar surroundings, right.

Q: And did your boss speak any of your languages?

A: Yeah, my -- my boss, it was Willy Lebow, he spoke Yiddish, of course, and -- because he was from Europe as well. And later on it just -- a-as it happens, he -- not much later, he married my sister, okay. So my sister also moved out to Carteret.

Q: Well before -- before then, you spoke Yiddish.

A: Yeah, I spoke Yiddish, yes.

Q: And what other languages did you speak?

A: I spoke Yiddish, I spoke Czech, Russian, Hungarian and of course I understood Polish, or a -- I also spoke German, you know, and that helped a lot because a -- when a -- in that part of -- a lot of the -- in that town, I should say, there were a lot of ethnic eastern Europeans. So I more or less had a -- you know, had a way to get by with some of the customers, so that I -- although language was a problem, but my broth -- this William Lebow instead of pe -- speaking to me Yiddish, he spoke to me in English only. So consequently I was forced to pick up the language a little faster, because everybody spoke to me in English.

Q: So did he do that deliberately to [indecipherable]

A: Deliberately.

Q: -- English.

A: Yeah, deliberately instead of giving me a crutch, to depend on Yiddish, spoke to me in English.

Q: And where -- where did you live?

A: Well, I lived -- I got -- I was very lucky, I found a room in a nice house, oddly enough. It was

a new -- fairly new house that this working c-couple had, and they had a son, he was also my age. And it was a little Cape Cod, but I was fortunate, I got a room with this family. I paid them, you know, for the -- rooming there. And his son had -- their son had one room and I had another room upstairs and it worked out very nice. The woman kept the place clean and all I did really there is sleep, you know, when I would come home from work or whatever. And later on I -- as soon as I -- my sister got married, I used to have all -- most of my meals at her house, but I would live on my own, you know, in this -- so this worked out very good, it was a --

Q: And did you go to any school to learn English --

A: Yes.

Q: -- or may -- you just --

A: Yes, I -- while I -- as soon as I got settled, I started working -- I st -- enrolled in night school immediately. I was going for a number of years to night school.

Q: Is this -- was it first to learn English?

A: To learn English basically, right. To learn English, right. And then when I used up the school in this town, I went to a couple of towns away there was -- they had a larger high school, they have a little more advanced teaching, so I went over there and got some more English basically, and some other subjects that were whatever I wanted. But it was also at night. It was all after work.

Q: Did you have any contact during your early period here with Jewish agencies?

A: No, I did not. I -- oddly enough, I didn't have any contact with agencies, I didn't get any help from agencies. I didn't look for it, I didn't even know whether they existed in -- in some sense. But I -- I was completely -- soon as I got here I was completely on my own, which is, by the

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way, this is the way I wanted it. I didn't want any charity, I didn't want anything from anybody.

Q: What -- why was that?

A: No particular reason, I just didn't think of looking f -- to someone else, you know. Basically that's all i -- I think that's the way it was.

Q: Okay, so here you are in -- working in Carteret and going to school at night and having meals at your sister's.

A: Right, and so now life took -- took on -- oh yes, in the beginning I did go back to New York like on weekends, like on Sundays, because that's -- was the only day I was off and meet some other friends that I got to know, I knew a little, slightly. And we used to meet on Sunday and go out for dinner or to a movie, whatever. And -- but after --

Q: How -- how did you get to know them?

A: Well, some of them I knew -- I don't know, through the grapevine or you know, you know a couple of people, then you would meet another two, three people and so on. So there was like five, six of us that would meet periodically, and --

Q: Were a-any of them people that you had known in Europe?

A: A couple of them were -- I had known in Europe, but some of them I did not --

Q: Okay.

A: -- I met here. And we were -- and the reason being is that -- oh yes, and there was still, on the east side there was some kind of a -- from one of the families there was a -- they had like a organization, they would meet once a month or something. So I went a couple of times there, and so on. And what [indecipherable] really was, that because you didn't know anyone, you didn't know the language, so you could have [indecipherable] together. But after a very short time,

maybe like three months, four months, I somehow decided that that was not for me and that I'm going to try and make fre -- American friends that are local so that I don't have to go to New York. So I started more or less -- and I met a couple of Jewish boys in Carteret, New Jersey, and we sort of became a little friendly and I went along whether it was to the beach or for pizza. And so slowly, slowly I started getting -- and with American kids saw that I'm European. So I literally -- some [indecipherable] I cut myself off entirely. Not by design, it just to happened that it -- it worked that way, you know. And of course I worked a lot. I de -- delivered groceries, big, big boxes on this bicycle, it had one si -- a big basket and a small wheel in the front, and all th-the groceries are in big, big boxes. I was -- and I was only like 16 on -- going on 17 really, and I was pretty light. So the box were sometimes heavier than I was on the bicycle. But anyway, I did this for quite awhile, til I started driving. I was able to drive, you know, a van, which was like a year, a year and a half later. And I worked, like I mentioned a lot of hours. We worked between 60 to 90 hours a week. Like I worked six days a week from seven to six and I -- two days a week til nine o'clock. And during the night we would go twice a week to the market to pick up vegetables. So it was like between eight oc -- eight p.m. to maybe we'll get back two, three a.m., and the next morning we start all over again. So it was qu-quite hectic and I worked like this for a number of years. And --

Q: Thi -- this reminds me of what you said earlier, as a child you worked for your family --

A: Yeah, right.

Q: -- then you went to Hebrew school, then you went to regular school, then you went back to Hebrew school --

A: Yeah.

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Q: -- then you worked again for your family. It sounds like a --

A: Yeah, we worked all the time.

Q: -- similar kind of schedule.

A: Well, th-this was sort of different because a-a-at home in Europe it was different because it was home. It was a relaxed -- i-it -- I d -- I don't know about relaxed, but it was -- it was a different -- the confines were different. Here it was strictly a job working, and it was frustrating because I didn't speak the language, and plus the hours were allow -- they didn't allow you too much time for anything else, and I did a lot of what I would call really dirty work, okay?

Q: Okay.

A: Such as a -- because conditions --

Q: With no future.

A: -- condition -- right, conditions weren't much different than this today because today you go for a job, an immigrant comes in, it's much, much different because they come in, the conditions are entirely different. In those days you came -- it wasn't even that somebody was doing something wrong -- like my brother-in-law wasn't necessarily a mean guy, he was a nice guy. He himself worked hard. His mentality worked in that direction, so what I was doing was not out of the ordinary for him, but it was out of the ordinary for me --

Q: Okay.

A: -- because like such thing as collecting the dirty garbage with the stinking vegetables, even in Europe I would -- didn't do that, you know, so it was the kind of a thing for a young boy it was very demeaning, if you will.

Q: Okay.

A: But I still [indecipherable]. But nevertheless, I was getting paid and I was supporting myself and I remember a f -- I did want to move to California originally, that was my plan, and because the job I got sidetracked here. In California by the way [indecipherable] that time, jobs were unavailable. So my brother-in-law was there, but he couldn't get a job. So that reinforced my need to stay here because I was supporting myself.

Q: Why did you think that you wanted to go to California?

A: Well, number one I wanted to live with that particular sister, near -- near her, although I had a good relationship with this sister as well, and she was very selfless. But the other one was younger, prob -- closer to my age I should say and we had more -- we grew up together so we had more of a -- a rapport, or whatever.

Q: This is not the sister you came over -- was this the sister that you came over --

A: That's the same sister that I came over with.

Q: Okay.

A: I -- I -- yeah. And so we had a sort of very good relationship and I -- I would have felt more comfortable.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay. And not that this sister was not good, but I mean she -- she was actually always worried about me and so on. So -- but she was older and she left and I was like, about nine years old, so just for that reason alone, but otherwise I had equally as good a relationship with Ellen as I did with the other one, with Cindy. But as I worked, one thing that I do recall that used to frustrate me, I wanted to go to school and I couldn't afford to go to school because I couldn't quit working. So every so often I -- I would get sort of upset about it [indecipherable][tape

break]

Q: You were talking about wanting to go to school.

A: Oh yes, however, there were a couple of reasons I couldn't go to school. First of all I -- my preparation wasn't as good because I left school when I was pretty young, a-a-after [indecipherable] grade, but -- plus I didn't -- my English was still very poor and I had no confidence in going to school. Plus I couldn't afford to take off from work. So I soon decided that that was the only thing I could do is work and anyway I worked like this til about -- for my brother-in-law [indecipherable] for about -- til 1952, when I was drafted into the armed services, during the Korean war.

Q: Now, had you become a citizen?

A: No, oddly enough. I was supposed to but somehow they didn't -- my papers didn't come through. So I was drafted into the service without being a citizen. And it's a very funny thing, I served the whole time in the service and I was not even a citizen, but a -- and being in the service didn't help my citizenship because it took another while befo -- when I got out of the service, to find out why I didn't get my citizenship. And of course they gave me some kind of limp excuse that I -- they were investigating me and so on that if I had any communist affiliations. So I was laughing because at 16 how could I have communist affiliations? Nevertheless I -- I did get my citizenship right after that.

Q: Be -- before that, what was your job in the service, where were you?

A: In the service I was stationed in Fort Lee, Virginia, and oddly enough I was there for a whole two years. I was in the food service, and as a matter of fact, my job there was rather good. I had an aba -- first year I had different jobs. I was an -- I worked as a cook for a very short time and --

and after that I went -- they send me to -- for a short time to a meat plant, to a -- where they were processing the meat for -- for the post. But I was there also, a very short time. Then I -- the most of the time I was in a -- assigned to the officers' club, which I had a very good assignment, I was the buyer for the -- I used to buy the meat there, and -- for the club and issue it to the kitchen.

And so tha --

Q: Make what in the kitchen?

A: I would issue the meat to the kitchen.

Q: Oh, issue the meat.

A: A-And the officers' club. I was a -- prepared it for them and so on. So I had a very nice ga -- actually it was a very nice job, I was completely on my own and they liked the job I was doing so they wouldn't release me to go elsewhere. And as a matter of fact one time I had a run in one of the lieutenants there, so I was lucky enough, I was -- got myself an order to go to [indecipherable] headquarters in Paris, and he wouldn't release me, so I stayed there for the whole time. But after that things were rather good. So I really had a very nice job. It was like going to a civilian job every day that I had my own car there and I lived there f -- I was there like for a -- a whole two years. And on weekends I was able to go to Richmond, and I would go sometime to a -- a Jewish dance or something of -- different things like this. And we would -- actually, was a very good -- a good two years, cause I got to be in the service.

Q: How was it being a Jew in the service?

A: I had no problem at all with that. I -- you know, I just -- see, I never emphasized or made a big issue of being Jewish. I never had a problem [indecipherable] in Europe when I worked with other people, I -- I used to just act normal and I -- I never encountered any -- any prejudices or

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any problems with that. And in fact in the -- in the -- this particular section in the officers' club, I was the only Jewish person there. Oh wait, there was another Jewish fellow there for awhile from Brooklyn, but he -- nobody liked him and eventually, you know, he left from there. But it wasn't because he was Jewish, he was just not exactly a nice guy. And so I really didn't -- didn't experience any bad like -- you know, bad times because I was Jewish. And after that, in '52, I -- I had plans to move to California finally, just --

Q: So you're out of the service now?

A: In '54, I should say, I came out of the service.

Q: And what was your rank when you left?

A: I was corporal.

Q: Okay.

A: Oh, while I was in the service, too, they gave me a choice to go to a linguist school in Monterey, California, which --

Q: Wha -- what school?

A: A linguist.

Q: Oh, linguist.

A: A ling -- ling -- linguist school.

Q: Okay.

A: And -- but at that time, which I was really, I wanted to do, I even took the tests, let's see in Russian, Hungarian and Czech and they -- I passed them and they wanted to send me to -- more for Russian, and I -- it sounded very tempting but they asked me -- they had -- I had to sign up for an extra year of service, which with hindsight I made a big mistake not taking it because the

extra year I would have been in school anyway, a whole year. And -- but alrea -- I was already at the time 24 -- yeah, was 24 - 20 fi -- going on 25 and I figured an extra year would make me a year older when I came out of the service, instead of 26 I would be 27 and I just made a choice not to take it. And that was a mistake on my part because I could have gotten -- they gave you a four year college credit course in one year, really what it was. So that was one of my mistakes. Anyway, I s -- when I got out of the service, I had decided that I'm not going to help my brother-in-law in the store, I'm not going to get tied up again, I'm going to go straight to California, because I always wanted to move to California. And as it -- lo and behold, my brother-in-law was short handed as usual in the business, and because I felt obligated with my sister and him, I started helping and before you know it, I s-stayed -- I stayed here and --

Q: He wasn't able to find anybody else?

A: No, he always had -- he -- he's operated a small business and he was not forward-looking enough that he would expand or get more help. So --

Q: No, but instead of hiring you --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- he couldn't hire somebody in your place to do what you did?

A: Well, he felt I was more capable because by that time he took over another store from one of his brothers and the store didn't do so good, so I -- he felt that I could build it up. So one thing led to another, before you know it, I ended up buying the store from him, because it --

Q: Now, how did you get enough money to buy the store?

A: I didn't, I was paying them off in small amounts and he was pretty generous -- not that the store was worth much, because the store really was not producing enough income, but --

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Q: But -- but were you able to, when you took over the store, before you bought it --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- were you able to improve it?

A: Yes, I -- I -- what I did, I was very good at the time, I was rather capable of taking a store that was run down and -- and built it up, more-so than a -- somebody else.

Q: What did you do?

A: Well, I sor -- I just hustled, you know, I still just --

Q: So you worked harder than someone else would have.

A: -- I worked harder and I merchandised, I tried to give good service and whatever. And so whenever I ran the store, things were running smoother than if somebody else ran it. And -- and eventually my brother-in-law saw -- he sort of talked -- not talked me into it, but he -- they told him it will be a favor and they turned over the store to me, in a sense. And I was --

Q: Were they doing you a favor --

A: Not --

Q: -- or were they getting rid of it?

A: Well, they were -- they were getting rid of it but they were actually think -- it -- it's very hard to say because their mentality was geared in certain -- it's very hard to understand that. I would not accuse them of not -- of doing it to get rid of it or to -- or -- or for ulterior motives, because they really -- you know, my sister had the best interest for m -- for me. And my brother-in-law too was the -- he was not a shady guy, it was straight. And I think in their own mind they thought they were doing me a favor, okay. But what was happening is that the store was just not a place that you could build it up too much. I would improve it, but I would not get where I could make

a good living out of it. In the meantime -- oh yes, in '56 -- '57 I got married, and then I realized -
- not then, I -- I realized before that I have to make a little more of a living, so I worked hard and
I tried to make a living and I barely scraped a living out of it. It was not a moneymaking
proposition. Well, while I was there, somehow or another I -- by that time I saved some money --
oh, in the meantime [indecipherable] the money that I got -- that I saved, even though I was
making very little in the beginning, I saved money from a he -- you know, on a regular basis, but
I had -- in 1947 we discovered I had a brother that was in a prison in Russia. We found out that
he was alive, so this was a -- th -- actually the Russians kept him two years after the war was
over as a prisoner, and they accused him of being a German, so they kept him with the German
prisoners. They didn't believe that he was Jewish. So when he came home, they found out he
was alive, so a lot of the money that I saved, I spend a lot of money on he -- oh, he made his way
to Czechoslovakia, because I had another -- a brother living in Czechoslovakia as well, another
brother, Mandel. He lived in the Liberez and somehow when my brother came back from Russia,
he found a few Jewish people that were -- remained there alone. One man who -- where -- where
my brother lived in Czechoslovakia. Sorry. [tape break]

Q: -- that your brother came back to Czechoslovakia.

A: Right, so my brother [indecipherable] spent all those years in Russia. He came -- somehow he
made his way to Czechoslovakia, to Liberez, where my brother Mandel lived at the time. And
naturally, he didn't have anything, so -- I was so happy that he was alive that I was willing to
share everything that I had. In the meantime my brother Mandel's wife was also very sick, she
had some kind of bone disease. And at that time they just came out with streptomycin. And we
lived -- actually Carteret was next to Rahway, New Jersey where Merck produced streptomycin.

And you couldn't even get it on the market, but I got somebody to get me some streptomycin and sent it to my sister-in-law. And none of them had money over there, so I tried to help my brother, help my -- both of my brothers. So I sp -- really spent all of my savings. However, my wi -- I got married, I lived in an apartment for a short time, like a year, year and a half and I found out that it was not really good because we had trouble with the landlord. So I got mad, I figured I would decide -- I decided to buy a house. And at that time ta -- buying a house was not as simple as -- as it is today because most people couldn't afford, or didn't buy a house as quick as today young people do. Things were a la -- a little different. And anyway, I bought the first house and -- so that by that time we had a little -- my daughter, Gail and so we moved into the house and we lived in Colonia, New Jersey. I moved out of Carteret because I didn't like it there, it was a very blue collar town and it was a very limited type of town and I wanted my kids to go to a little better school in a -- in a community that they had better schools, so I moved to Colonia, New Jersey.

Q: We-We're about at the end of the tape, so I have to stop and turn it over.

A: Oh, okay.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: You were talking about getting married, having a child, moving from Carteret, the store not working out. Backing up, where did you meet your wife?

A: Oh, my wife I met in -- actually through a fr-friend, somebody she knew on a blind date, actually. And she was from Hillside, New Jersey. And we had a couple of dates and before you know it we were getting married.

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Q: So did you know right away that she was the one?

A: Yeah, actually I did, you know, oddly enough.

Q: What -- can you say what there was, or is it -- must be something --

A: Well, there was just a certain connection, I guess, you know, there's a certain spark or something. And I liked her immediately. And at first we didn't, somehow or another we didn't click too much, so I -- for like about three or four months we hardly saw each other, and then after that we started getting together again and all of a sudden I realized that -- that I was in love with her. And before you know it, we got married. It was just that s-simple. But I'll backtrack a little bit.

Q: And your wife is Jewish?

A: Yes, my wife is Jewish. Yeah, she was the -- actually, her father had died when she was very young, so s -- her mother raised -- there were three sisters, you know, so she was the middle one.

Q: Okay.

A: And I'll backtrack a little bit to Carteret. Carteret was a -- well, where I had my store, was a very simple blue collar town, like I s -- mentioned before, it was a lot of e-ethnic people, some of them were first generation people, but all of them were actually foreigners, they were immigrants. And when I had the store in Carteret I never liked Carteret too much because it was very hickish and blue collar --

Q: Very what?

A: Very hick.

Q: Oh, hick, okay.

A: Yeah, hick. And I somehow -- and I didn't care for it too much because when I first came to

Carteret I si -- lived there, I must say this, people were not bad by any means, even the Jewish people, but their -- most of the people I found were very condescending, like even when they were -- they really were not interested about what happened during the war, but everybody was like -- like -- almost like you pat a dog, poor kid, and -- and I really remember I didn't like that. I didn't want to be pitied, I didn't want to -- you know. And I remember that made a big impression on me when I was very young, and I was very proud, if you will. And I -- all I wanted to be is this -- like everybody else. And that was one of the reasons I moved out of Carteret the first chance I had, okay. As a matter of fact, even my sister, my brother-in-law especially, was against me moving out of town, it was what do you mean it's not good enough? And all the people in town used to tell me, what are you a big shot, it's not good enough to live here? And all of a sudden I found, because I was an immigrant, that I had no right to make my own decision, that people actually thought -- they would almost think what you're entitled to, you know. And now that I look back I find it funny, but at the time i-it was -- it was a big thing.

Q: Now what -- were your sister and brother-in-law treated the same way?

A: No, no, my sister -- you have to remember my brother-in-law lived -- was already in the States over 40 years when I came.

Q: Over four?

A: 40.

Q: 40?

A: Yeah. My -- this brother-in-law, this mist -- William Lebow. So he had brothers, they were all well established, you know. So they were already part of the scene.

Q: And ha -- and he was older --

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A: So he was -- he was the -- no, he was one of the people, you know, he was highly respected in town, you know, his brothers were respected, they all had businesses.

Q: And about how old a man was he?

A: Well, at the time he was -- when he got mar -- right after -- at that time he was about 42 years old.

Q: Okay.

A: [indecipherable] I'm sorry I said he was here 40 years. He was here about 20 - 25 years already at the time.

Q: Oh, okay, and he was in his 40's?

A: So he wa -- he was in his 40's.

Q: And your sister, because she was his wife, was she treated like he was, or --

A: Oh, no, no, no, no, they -- they were all treated right, but you know it was a kind of a -- the situation was different, the society at the time. You had to co -- if you came in from out of town you had to sort of prove to yourself that -- the townspeople thought they had a monopoly on the town, something li -- it's just a sentimentality. But I was working in the store there -- once I owned the store and one of the things that was happening to me is that I was not making a lot of money, and -- I backtracked a little -- and I was -- it was getting on my nerves, I was not making a lot of money and I was -- had to deal with a lot of people, they were like Ukrainian or Polish, and they'd come in, I spoke their language, you tried to be nice and they would always accuse you of being a cheat because you were Jewish and so on. So there was certain resentment on my part with certain accusation on their part. And I wasn't willing to take that garbage because I figured if they don't like me, too bad, that's their problem. And I just wouldn't ba -- put it

simply, my tolerance level was not very high [indecipherable] treated and anti-Semitism. So in the meantime, like I say, I'm -- I -- the money wasn't there and one day I realized that I came to the United States, I wanted to be an American, I want to act like one, I want to speak like one. Here I'm spending most of the time with people that don't speak English and they are illiterate or -- or very poorly educated and I spend every day with these people and all of a sudden I found out that was not what I wanted. So I got very mad one day -- this is after spending there seven, eight years, to my regret, I got mad and I said I'm going to close the store, I'm going to move to California this time to --

Q: Yeah, were you married at this point?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You were married.

A: No, I was married, but by that time already my daughter was, let's see, must have been about four years old. And by that time I had a son, Jeffrey, which came later, about a year and a half or -- yeah, almost two years after my daughter. So, they was both small, Jeffrey must have been like about two years old. And I decided I've had it with this and I'm not going to live like I've lived it -- like if I was in Europe, I want to live in America. So I wanted to get out of this neighborhood. Besides, I saw there was no -- no future there. So I picked up and I went to California with my wife and children, and by that time my other brother that had come out from Russia was -- also went to Israel with the Haganah from Czechoslovakia. But eventually we brought him out to the United States because it was getting too expensive to upkeep him in Israel, we have to send him money all the time, so we decided to bring him over here. So by that time, that was, I think -- I'm not sure what year it was. But anyway, by that time he was already -

- we brought him out from Israel to the United States, and -- but he also moved to California because my sister was there. So he settled in California, so when I decided to move, he was already living there, plus I had my other sister there. And when we got there we tried to get an apartment, but in the meantime I had left a lot of loose ends here in New Jersey. So -- because I didn't empty -- empty out a store and so on. So I had to come back, so I left my wife and my children there, and while I was here settling my affairs, my wife decided she didn't like it there and she came back -- she got -- hopped on a plane and came back. So that was --

Q: With the children.

A: With the children, right. So --

Q: And only your stuff was still in California?

A: No, and -- right, well we didn't move per se, you know, we just went physically, ourselves you know.

Q: Okay.

A: To find an apartment and so on. But our house -- oh yes, in the meantime, the house that I had bought, I sold, because I was moving in California, cause I -- I was so sure we were going to stay there. But anyway, at the time my wife was a little emotionally upset and so on, because of sh -- after the children, she had a little tough time of it emotionally or mentally. So anyway she -- all of a sudden something struck her there, she didn't like California, so she got on a plane.

Q: Did she have family here?

A: Yes, she had family here.

Q: On the east coast?

A: Her mother lived here, although her -- her relationship with her mother was not great. But her

sisters lived here -- no, actually one sister lived here at the time, one sister lived in California I think, at the time. And anyway, she got on a plane and she came back with the children. So once she was back, I didn't have much of a choice. My house was sold and the business was gone, so I got an apartment momentarily and we lived in the apartment for a little while. And then along came -- one of my lawyers that I knew told me there was this small house available, and I decided that a house, it wouldn't cost me much more than the apartment, even though it was small.

Q: Whoops, something happened.

A: Oh [inaudible]

Q: Okay.

A: Okay, anyway, so on the spur of the moment, instead of staying in this apartment which we did not like, I decided -- I bought this house, it was a little smaller than I would have liked to, but we could afford it. And it's what we could afford, so we moved into this small house, in Colonia again. And the children started school over there, and we lived there f -- we intended to live there like a couple years and we -- it turned out we lived there like about 10 - 12 years in this house, cause my wife didn't want to move from there, cause she got so used to it. But in the meantime I got a job as soon as I came back, worked f-for again, a s-small s-supermarket for a shor -- for about couple of years. And then I decided to go back and to -- I found a place and I wanted to open a store. And again this time it was very important for me that I open in an area where you have Americans, that I deal with regular people rather than like back in Europe. So I opened this store in Madison, New Jersey, it was a new store and I struggled there --

Q: A -- you opened the store, it was an independent --

A: Ah, yeah.

Q: -- grocery store?

A: No, it was an independent, actually it was more of a butcher store, okay.

Q: And you just opened it?

A: I just opened it from scratch, right.

Q: Okay.

A: I set it up and I opened it, after I worked for this ga -- fellow, Woodbridge for a couple of years. And like I said, this was a new shopping center, and I opened up, but it was a ups -- coming community. So I opened the store with a little -- in mind with a little hi -- better caliber of customer, and little up -- upscale, and I struggled there for a couple of years, again not making money. Actually, I was losing money for the first couple of years. But eventually I made it, the store caught on eventually because from the start it got the good reputation. And I sit in this particular store for the next 25 years, while my kids were growing up, I sent them through school and so on. So as far as living in general, you know, we tried to live as normal as possible, as any American would. But here, for the first time in my life, the customers spoke English, I spoke English and I felt like it was -- I arrived in the United States, I didn't have to put up with places like Carteret. So in that respect I -- i-it's sort of like my dream, I guess, of living as an American came true.

Q: So you had a really tough period for awhile.

A: Well, i-it -- it was tough, I'm sure it was not any tougher than anybody -- but hindsight it doesn't seem so tough. At the time I -- I -- I remember, because one of the biggest problem was - - again, it's very hard to compare it to -- to 1999 or 2000, is because the amount of money people

are making is -- was just entirely different level, you know, it was --- it was true everything was -
- a -- a lot of things were less expensive, but it was very hard to make -- make money and keep
it, because things -- things were difficult, especially like in my case, you know, I'm sure that
there were a lot of people, i-immigrants like myself had the same problem, nobody helped you
period, whether it -- but -- which was okay because I wanted to be self reliant. However, in some
cases people come, they get big wedding gifts, or they get a start here, they gotta push there.
Like I had a friend, he was complaining about his father-in-law [indecipherable], but he would
buy him carpeting for the house, or -- or buy him a garage, or whatever, were -- were -- or -- or
turned over the business to him, whatever, I didn't have that. So it was i-in a sense struggle. On
the other hand, why should I look for some -- someone else to give it to me, you know, it's
simple as -- as far as I'm concerned, it's okay. But it was tough, because the amount of money
you made or you've been able to keep was very difficult. And in that respect, I guess it was
tough, but I imagine that most people had -- didn't have it much different.

Q: So now you're retired?

A: Yes.

Q: And how did you decide to retire?

A: Well again, I was in the store and we -- I was there like 25 years and the real estate -- the
shopping center was sold to another company and the first thing the new company came in, they
took over, they wanted to triple my rent, which I could -- definitely could not afford. And by
now the business also was suffering, cause I was in the meat business and the cholesterol thing
came on very quickly, very strong, and all of a sudden the demand, plus the competition was just
too much to -- to absorb, because the demand just dropped, and -- while the competition was

increasing. I was in an area, it was a very competitive area. There was like four or five supermarkets within a couple of miles of me. But for the longest time I held out, but with a reduction of meat consumption, it was going down. So then when the new landlord came in, and he demanded almost triple rent, plus extra added expenses, I just felt I couldn't afford to stay there. So I retired prematurely; I really wanted to stay in business another four or five years. And -- so once -- which worried me, because I didn't think I could afford it economically. But somehow or another, once I saw that I had to go, I made the best of it and so far so good.

Q: So you had worked very hard all your life, from the time --

A: Oh yeah.

Q: -- even as a small boy.

A: Yeah.

Q: What was it like for you suddenly to not have to --

A: Well --

Q: -- not be working any more?

A: -- I thought I would have a problem with that. As it turns out I don't have a -- I -- I adjusted very easily. I amazed myself. I will say -- after I retired, I did, when I got out of business, I did go part time. I worked for a supermarket in New Jersey for -- periodically. And when I didn't work there I worked someplace else, couple of -- two or three days a week or so, and now that I moved here actually, I'm also doing -- basically still doing the same thing, I'm working a little bit, part time and then I volunteer and I do things. I'm not bored.

Q: Now, what -- what work do you do part time?

A: Actually, right now I work -- I do some consulting, like for the food industry, like restaurants

and sup -- food stores.

Q: Like, for example, how -- how would that work? A client comes --

A: Well, like somebody wants to set up a store, so I help them set it up.

Q: And how do they found you?

A: Well, I find them, really --

Q: Oh.

A: -- most of the time. Because when I came here I -- it took a long -- I did some of it in New Jersey, but when I came here I didn't know the area, I didn't know where to start. So it's a little - - I didn't depend on it too much. So I started working actually one day in Katz's. Here I walked in one day and he asked me if I could help him out, I got to talk to him. And I started helping him out, I'm still there.

Q: Wh-Where is this?

A: Katz's market in -- a kosher market. So I'm there -- whenever I want to work, I ge -- he and I have an arrangement, when I -- if I want to work, I work and if I don't, I don't.

Q: And when you want to work, what -- what does ti --

A: So I go in --

Q: What work do you do when you want to --

A: I work in the service counter. Th-Th -- they sell meat, you know, so I --

Q: Okay

A: -- do service. So I put in like three days a week on average, two or three days a week. And what's nice about it, I -- I am not committed where I have to, you know, I -- I work -- whenever I'm free, I work. So this way I could do what I want to do, still I work a little bit.

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Q: And you said you do volunteer work.

A: I volunteer in the Holocaust Museum.

Q: Now, how did you happen to volunteer there?

A: What happened is that I had -- in the beginning when I first moved here I had a hard time to even go into the museum, by the way, it took me like two or three years prior to -- that I went in. It took me three years just to get in the door. But when I moved here, I kept on meeting people and they were telling me -- and once I walked into the museum, I realized that once I broke the barrier and I was able to walk in there that I would like to volunteer. Because I was thinking prior to this to volunteer in other museum, like in the Smithsonian. But when I got familiar with the Holocaust Museum, I decided to volunteer there.

Q: And why did you decide to volunteer there?

A: Well, I figured that just for the sake of enlightening, like people that come in or whatever, to make them understand certain things what they saw, something like that, something [indecipherable]

Q: What did you want them to understand?

A: Oh, they'll un-understand, instead of just seeing pictures, or just seeing -- to give them a little more meaning to it if -- if -- if I had the chance that -- to understand. Cause sometime you look at pictures or you read something, it's one thing, but then sometime when another person sort of co-conveys a little explanation to you, maybe you got a little better insight of it.

Q: Well, like what insight did you want them to have?

A: Well, like understanding.

Q: What did you want them to take away?

A: Well, I want them to take away more or less the -- how precarious freedom can be. Basically, this is the way I see things, that if you don't know what dangers lie, you're not careful to protect what you have. If you -- th-that freedom is something you don't take for granted. That -- it's something that you have to you know, that you have to be aware of what's out there and not to allow yourself to be caught in it, basically.

Q: And what do you do at the museum?

A: Well, this past two years, actually, I was taking young kids through the "Daniel's Story," okay. N-Now this year I'm going to go and -- in fact they're going to have a training course for older kids, like in the permanent museum. So I'm gonna volunteer in there, I think, also.

Q: And you take people through, you mean you explain --

A: Yeah, it -- it -- it --

Q: -- you actually explain --

A: -- yeah, explain it, you know --

Q: -- things as [indecipherable]

A: -- like in the "Daniel's Story," it's for the younger children, that's four to seven graders. So we take them through and we explain to them, we try to give them a certain understanding at their level. And oddly enough, in some cases I think it does a lot of good, you know.

Q: So you -- you feel that they are receptive --

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: -- that they can understand --

A: Right, right --

Q: -- and they're interested.

A: -- right. And I -- and I've also seen, from different aspects -- in fact, my daughter is on the board of -- in the ADL and I've ga -- and they have programs that are also sometimes in conjunction with the museum. And they started a program, they train teachers, the Catholic diocese of the Washington area. And I've seen what they did -- what they're doing in the Catholic schools is just phenomenal. And I -- I feel that when you get it out there, if you got people that cooperate and they educate and they give them exposure that you get these kids that make -- grow up to be anti -- very big anti-Semites, that they get it from education of certain -- they get certain information that I may -- they will not get at home, but they get it in the school, like in the Catholic school an -- at that, that each time you in -- you inject people like this with a little knowledge, that sooner or later it helps someplace else as they grow up. You know what's - - even if they have a background of anti-Semitism, they already -- they got it in their own school, through good teachers, which I've seen some of them are very, very capable. So this is the kind of stuff, that's one of the reasons I feel that it's very important to reach them. And a lot of the kids we get in the museum, many times you think of Jewish kids, actually we get kids from Carolinas, from Oklahoma and from that -- kids that never heard of Jews, or -- or never had any - - you know. So this way it gives them, instead of thinking of a Jew as a Jew, they think of Jew as person that went through a bad experience. And -- and maybe some of them will understand some of it. So in that respect I think it's -- it's a very good thing.

Q: When we met a week or so ago, I thought you had said that you worked in the speaker's bureau?

A: Oh yeah, I forgot, okay, I do that too, right, okay.

Q: What do you do there?

A: Well, in there I -- I speak before groups, every so often, just about my experience, basically.

I-It's geared mostly to an individual's experience.

Q: And how is that for you to do that?

A: Well, at this age it's okay, it's a -- each time it's a little difficult because it's very emotional.

But in the same time I feel that again, if people hear it, if somebody comes up with denials and they hear it from somebody like me that I went through it, all of a sudden th-they -- when a -- a denier denies, they may not buy it. And then -- so in that respect I think it's -- as a matter of fact, just recently I spoke to the -- in the museum itself, and we had a full hou -- the whole theater was full, actually standing room only. And I could not believe the amount of people that came -- came up to me and they were just, you know, genuinely touched and -- and they were [phone ringing] Excuse me.

Q: Okay, we'll turn it off. [tape break] You were talking about speaking at the museum recently and people coming up to you afterward.

A: Oh yes, and it -- it was very, you know, I don't know, how can I put it? I -- I was very surprised and -- because people came up and they actually [indecipherable] and asked for -- even for an autograph, you know, they were like very taken wi -- and the response was just fantastic. And you have to remember, most of these people -- not most -- if not all of them were -- like probably 90 percent of them were not Jewish, you know, and they wanted. So when you see it makes an impact like that it gives you an idea that it -- it's the thing to do, you know, to -- to make -- because th -- fa -- just for no other reason, just the fact that this way they could say gee, I met someone, so who is this guy denying that this happened when it did happen. I met someone that did.

Q: Really.

A: So that respect I think it -- it serves a big purpose.

Q: You've -- you've done a lot of being interviewed, not only the speaking that you do, but for the Wiesenthal Center, for the Shoah Foundation and now today. How is that for you? What is that like for you?

A: Well, a-at this stage i-it's still -- every time I give an interview i-it's still difficult for some reason. Certain areas you just get very emotional. But the only reason I did it is because everybody says it's important for -- for the history, so when I was in California a few years ago, I -- you know, I did it because some -- for the same reason, and the same reason here. And I just feel that if there's enough information out there that the deniers will have less chance of denying, basically.

Q: Mm-hm. Can we go back? You mentioned that you had two children, but what was it like for you when your childr -- when your first child was born?

A: For me it was like probably the nicest thing that ever happened to me. ...When my daughter was born, I -- it actually changed my life and gave me more purpose if anything, and it was just one of the nicest things probably in my whole entire life. And -- and then of course my son came, so it, you know, iv -- it was just -- I enjoyed my kids from the time they were born. I -- I could honestly say that. I'm very fortunate in that regard. As a matter of fact, yesterday was our anniversary, our 44th anniversary. So my daughter made dinner and I can honestly say -- she is like 40 -- 42 years old, I think, and I had nothing but pleasure from her, so -- and now she has two children and it -- it's like I'm getting it all over again, so it's really very, very nice. Now, my son got married and he -- he's also married a very nice woman and she is like -- like my

daughter. And they have a -- a little boy now, Joshua. And so in that regard I think that between my children, my grandchildren, it's probably the crowning of my life, if you will.

Q: You mentioned that you moved to this area about five years ago.

A: Yes, five years ago.

Q: And how did you decide to move to this area?

A: Well, once I gave up the store, it was a matter of -- of I could not live where I was, because I liked it there too, but it was a matter of moving into a senior citizen complex or Florida or whatever. And then I realized that I would rather live near my daughter so I could watch my grandchildren grow up. So that was a easy decision, and it was a good decision because I really - and I didn't want to go out and live in a senior citizen complex because I really didn't want to go out to pasture, I want to live among the living, that life goes on. And so basically I got what I wanted, you -- you know. So I -- I really made the right decision, as far as I'm concerned.

Q: I also wanted to ask you about your religion. You talked about that some when I was here a couple of weeks ago, but I wonder if you would talk about that on the tape. You took -- you -- I saw in the -- one of the tapes that you -- your family growing up was very observant and Orthodox and that you went to Hebrew school, you were Bar Mitzvahed, and then you were -- the Holocaust came along, and then what?

A: Yes, I, as far as religion, I guess I'm not what I would call religious, per se. I'm more nonsectarian if you will, in some respects. Yet, I am very Jewish, or I did [indiscipherable] I would -- did grow up, it seemed like when I -- where I grew up, everybody was Orthodox and everybody was observant, period. There it was a given, you were Jewish, you were brought up somewhat -- most people were -- were Orthodox and -- and observant, especially in our town,

but most people were. In the city you found some people that were maybe wavering a little bit. But I have to ad -- say, we got in -- when we got into a concentration camp, I remember the first holiday right a -- we came -- actually, we came to Mauthausen from Auschwitz, and I remember we were in Mauthausen, this was like about a week after Auschwitz actually, a week or te -- to two weeks after Auschwitz, and it was [indecipherable] because -- I remember that. And my father, my uncle, and whoever, you know, the oldest got together in a huddle and tried to say the prayers as much as -- most of them knew it by heart. And somehow [indecipherable] right there and then, I sort of like couldn't fake it, I just -- I just -- I just couldn't see it, because of what happened. And from there on in I was not religious. I literally, in the beginning, I guess it used to bother me, but after awhile you just learn to live with it and I -- I just never got -- I never thought of religion as -- as an important part of my life, that's what I'm saying. And when I lived in Czechoslovakia for a short time after the war, there was no o-organized synagogue or anything that I recall a-at the time, and the government or the -- basically the whole population in general in Czechoslovakia was not exactly a religious type of country like in some countries. And wherever you went, on papers you have to fill out, we put out atheist fa -- because it was easier. If you put on -- like in Europe you have to put on Jewish, or religion on a -- on application. And we chose atheist for one simple reason, because if some clerk would get ahold of your paper, if you said Jewish he probably wouldn't pass it. If it was atheist he would pass it, whatever. And --

Q: Now this -- you said we, this is?

A: Like in general -- ge -- a lot of Jewish people in we --

Q: Like your sister, and --

A: -- yeah, wa -- like a lot of Jewish in general. And it was -- religion was not part of your daily

life. And -- and then, of course, when I came to the United States I had to work Saturday right from the start and it so -- it so --

Q: And that -- you were working for a Jew in a kosher store?

A: Oh no, no, no. You mean here in the United States?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, no, I never worked -- no, this was a non-kosher business. I never worked in a kosher store.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. No, this was my brother-in-law had a non-kosher --

Q: Okay.

A: -- it was a -- a regular store.

Q: But he worked on Saturdays.

A: He worked on Saturdays. And my brother-in-law [indecipherable] was really very agnostic, he -- he just was not into religion. He was very smart, very well read person, but he was not religious. But he was also very well learned in religion that -- the funniest thing, cause it was -- he was -- he went to Yeshiva and all that. But he -- he was definitely not religious. As a matter of fact he was -- and I have to admit, I sort of went along the same -- same route, because I worked Saturdays. And religion to me wasn't something that I had a need for, and I still don't [indecipherable]. So I'm -- I -- I -- now I go to services and I do go because of my grandchildren and I want to belong, so I sort of -- but I'm not a very religious person, per se. However I live, I think in life I practice most of the Jewish teachings or -- or live my life as -- as a Jew. I never denied being Jewish. I never went around with a thing on the lapel like some people to -- to

prove that I'm Jewish, I don't have to prove anything. So I never had that -- but o-otherwise my thinking is also more on a nonsectarian level in some respects, like politically I -- I am liberal, I guess you would say, politically. But I am conservative maybe in some areas, you know, and I guess Jews may be, okay. So I'm not exactly -- but some -- but religion really doesn't play, or never played a big part in my life. In other words, I looked at religion more of a -- as a crutch would -- like someone -- I see some people do and I didn't want crutches. So this is my way of explaining it.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: We do have to turn over the tape.

A: Okay.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side A, Martin Weiss. I -- I want to ask you what you think about some contemporary things, like recently Joseph Lieberman was nominated to be vice president on the democratic ticket. How -- how did you feel about that?

A: Well, I -- I feel good about it, however, I have a little problem with it. I -- I like the idea that he was chosen, and I respect him, definitely, because I think he's a capable guy, not because he's Jewish necessarily, but he has a certain -- he has a good character. But I think they overplayed a little too much, they made a -- a lot to -- too much to do with -- the press in particular, about him being Jewish. And I think sometimes the Jewish community made a big thing to know about him being Jewish. And I have a think on this that all things considered, that he's Jewish, we know this and a -- but he is -- more, he is running as a citizen of the United States, not as a Jew, so they shouldn't make such a big issue of him being Jewish. In other words it shouldn't be -- like if this was in 1900 and they were making a big to-do about him being Jewish, it's one thing, but you're talking about 2000, where I think the citizens should be -- he's a citizen of the United States. So he -- is he running as a Jew, or is he running as a citizen? And I think they're making too much of it, the fact that he is Jewish. And I have to admit, I have mixed feelings because when Jimmy Carter ran, one thing I didn't like about him is because of his religion, because he was a born again. And I thought that was -- like it clouded his thinking in terms of decision making, or whatever. So I should apply the same thing to hi -- to Lieberman. However, whether it's my own prejudice or what, I think Lieberman is more based -- how can I put it? Grounded, if you will, and Jimmy Carter was more emotionally born again, but -- where Lieberman is more of a -- has a good character, plus he is jew -- he is Orthodox. So maybe there is a difference in how I see it,

okay? But I don't like when they stress the Jewish part to the point where they already did.

[inaudible]

Q: There have been some portrayals of the Holocaust in movies recently, such as "Schindler's List," and there was one, "Life Can Be Beautiful."

A: Yes, I saw both of them.

Q: Yeah, what -- what do you think of like --

A: Well, I -- I -- I really thought they were both very good. "Schindler's List" of course, was in a different -- on a different level. I think "Schindler's List" I think was fantastic, and it didn't color anything, it gave it a picture from the raw, like -- like it -- not that I was in the same place or had the same experience, but it was -- i-it was rather -- rather well done in the sense to give the portrayal of -- of what's -- how things were at the time, or how a soldier behaved, or how -- you know, different things. As far as the Schindler story itself, I'll be honest with you, I never heard of it before the movie came about, I never heard of this. So from my vantage point I never believed something like this could happen in -- in reality. Evidently it did, so I -- you know, for me it was a -- you know, something almost hard to believe on the beginning, you know, until it was well documented, that there was a German that was -- that would do something like he did. But the movie itself, the portrayal and the circumstances of the inmates and th -- and -- versus the officer and the -- and the part and so on. It -- it really gave it a -- a pretty good picture of a -- what life was like.

Q: And what about the other one, is it life --

A: Oh, "Life is Beautiful."

Q: Yeah.

A: That one I liked too. At first I wasn't sure I'd like it because it was a comedy, how can you make a comedy out of it? But all in all I thought it was really a very, very good movie. Very, very good. I -- I thought it was just very clever and in spite of they tried to make other movies something similar, I don't think they came even close. This -- this one here I think was very unique for this type of movie.

Q: Did you feel it was realistic, or --

A: No, no, definitely was not realistic, but -- but it was --

Q: What -- what did you like about it?

A: Well, it's --

Q: I didn't see the movie, I know what it's about, but I didn't see it.

A: I -- I saw it awhile ago, so I don't remember exactly. But I liked about it because it -- it sort of conveyed a certain ca -- comedy -- a -- a sort of comical part of life, in a sense, from a satirical point of view, or something like this. I think it has a certain satire that -- that was very illuminating as -- to some extent, sort of on a human nature, of a psyche, whatever, you know. So in that respect I thought it was a very good movie, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: There was one movie [indecipherable] talking about movies that I saw recently that I really thought it was very good also. Maybe not quite as [indecipherable] but that was "Sunshine", I don't know if you heard of it.

Q: I did hear about it and it was highly recommended to me.

A: And it really was one of the movies that -- the reason I thought it was very good is because it dealt with the subject of assimilation, which I found very unique to Hungarian Jews, to a lot of --

Q: Unique to Hungarians?

A: Yes. And a -- to Hungarian Jews because they tried very hard to assimilate and very har -- tried to be very like -- almost like a intelligentsia type persona. You know, it -- it tried to take on that -- that Germanic mantle, if you will. In -- in the -- Hungary it's very similar in the -- in the class system and so on. Which I was viol [indecipherable] always very violently opposed to, you know, from my point of view. And --

Q: You were violently opposed to --

A: Opposed to that Hungarian Jewish mentality, you know.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: And one of the reasons that I thought it was good is because of the -- it deals with the subject of assimilation and a lot of Hungarian Jews were -- because of you did have a class system on Hungary, and so everybody tried to make sure they act like they were very fancy, or very uppity. And I remember even as a kid I used to find it very, very bothersome to me. And when I saw Hungarian, a lot of Hungarian Jews, not all, a lot of Hungarian Jews, even during the war, a lot of the Hungarians were -- punished them because they were Jewish, and they were doing things to them that they were Jewish. They would always [indecipherable] breast that they're royal Hungarians, okay, and I found that very, very disgusting to -- if you will. If somebody beats me I'm not going to say I love you, you know. And basically this deals with that type of subject, you know, it's -- it's a very -- you have to understand that, the -- like in the context, you know. And I found it very amusing that somebody had enough sense to make a movie like that. And that's about as closest to what I think, the way I understood things, that -- that -- you know, this shows it for what it is. That if you are persecuted and somebody berates you because you're Jewish,

you don't join them and become one of them because he doesn't like you to be Jewish. Instead you tell him to go to hell, you know, where I come from, you know. In fact during -- even in the camps, I -- I recall, a lot of the Polish Jews -- like we always had markings where we came from. Like I -- even though I was from Czechoslovakia [indecipherable] we were taken to camp, but from Hungary. We were not from Czechoslovakia. So we had a mark that we came from Hungary, a U for Ungar. And the Polish Jews used to hate Hungarian Jews, okay, and one of the reasons was, believe it or not, for that reason. And I was [indecipherable] when I lived among the Hungarian Jews and I moved -- and I went from Hungary, I was -- lived on Hungary. But I had the same resentment to them, for that reason, because they always insisted what good Hungarians they were. And me, as a Jew, I don't care where I am, if a -- a Ukrainian doesn't like me, I'm not going to say I love you, I'll hate him back. So, you know, that's my take on it, for what it's worth.

Q: So you thought that was a good portrayal of --

A: Yes, it was very good portrayal, a really [indecipherable] very good. It tells like of three generations, and could have had some different ways that I saw things, but nevertheless it -- it really hit the mark. I thought it was very good.

Q: Well, I don't have any more questions. Do you have anything that you would like to say, or can you think of anything that I neglected to ask?

A: No, I -- I did -- I think you covered it all. I would just like to say that by and large most of us were lucky to come, make a life in the U.S.. And things -- all things considered, things have changed in the United States too. I remember when I came there were a lot of things I didn't understand about -- there was Jim Crow and a lot of other things I remember. I used to go to

night school, I used to ask, and I could never understand it. But all things considered, that things have improved, and they're improving constantly with civil rights. So I really think I'm fortunate that I'm here. And I think probably most people that came from Europe the time I came would probably -- probably endorse that. And that is going to be all that I have to say. I think it's -- and life is good if you -- as long as you stay healthy.

Q: Thank you very much for giving your testimony. This concludes the interview with Martin Weiss.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview