United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Fred Bachner
January 10, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Fred Bachner, conducted by Melissa Block on January 10, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Summers, New York and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The 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.

Interview with Fred Bachner
January 10, 1999

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: Okay. United S --

Answer: [indecipherable] hold this in your hand?

Q: Yeah, it just props up like that. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection, this is an interview with Fred Bachner, conducted by Melissa Block, on January 10th, 1999, in Summers, New York. This is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Fred Bachner on April 23rd, 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. Okay, that's the technical stuff. I'll hold this and it -- that's okay.

A: It's all right.

Q: No, that's okay, I'll -- I'll get it, cause it'll be a long time. I wanted to ask you first if you can talk about where you were when the war ended.

A: When the war ended, I was in the vicinity of Dachau, near Munich, where I was liberated and met the American troops, who liberated me, actually. And I found out the creation of a Displaced Person camp, by the name of Feldifing, which I did not join. I had the accommodation in the village where I was liberated and after being separated with my -- with my brother and friend from the Jewish community, we felt lonesome and proceeded to look for some places in Munich, to settle for time beings.

Q: Okay, walk me through that a little bit. You had been on a train with your brother and a friend?

A: Right.

Q: And what -- what were their names?

A: I don't remember the name of my -- of my friend, but my brother's name is James Bachner and I happened to meet him in Dachau, af-after I survived the Death March out of Auschwitz in January 1945.

Q: Okay, so you were be -- you were being liquidated from Dachau on a train, you jumped off the train and how did you hear that American troops were coming? How did you realize that you were free?

A: Well, excuse me, you could see the chaos that started by the airplanes that started to b-bombard the vicinity where the train was moving and the railroad tracks and the train itself slowed down. And it was a wooded area and the troops liquidated their post, from the top of the railroad cars and it was sort of a chance to take, now or never. So that what we took and thank God, we were successful. And we were in the water there, where -- where we were confronted by some French prisoner of wars, who helped us by changing our prison uniforms. And then we were -- we hid in the woods and -- until we met the American troops, so, two or three d -- two or three days later, until the fighting finally stopped, and we sa -- went out from the woods onto the open streets and we were stopped by a American patrol, who took us to a POW camp and then we were interrogated, and set free.

Q: You were set free, do you remember how you felt when they approached you? Were you afraid, did you -- did they know who you were? You weren't wearing prison uniforms, you said, you had regular clothes on?

A: No, no, no, no, we're -- oh, you -- no, I'm sorry, when we -- when we met them, we were in civil uniforms, that's correct, but we were recognized by the hat -- that we had no hair on -- it was shaved in a certain way that the prisoners were, by a -- sort of a center of the head, the street, that was left a little bald down to the skin and next to it, there were a little bit of hair, so it was recognizable as a street or a mark to be a prisoner. And we had a hard time to the convince the -- the people, the soldiers that we are Jews, because they were -- believed that the -- all the Jews were killed. And we choder -- we showed them our numbers on the arm and then they still didn't believe it, and they ask us when the Jewish holidays are, which we knew and answered them and then they finally said yes, you know, and t-took us into the Jeep and drove us to headquarters, where we met the colonel, who instead -- interrogated us about the German troop movements and the camp, from Dachau itself, the location and the -- whatever we knew about the camp, we told them, which wasn't very much, because within the camp, we had no knowledge what was going on outside the camp. So we couldn't be, in that respect, any great help.

Q: Hm. How long were you questioned for?

A: Oh, I would say about a half an hour.

Q: And do you remember how they received you? Were you -- Were they warm to you, were they suspicious? What was their attitude?

A: Well, at first, like I said, they -- th-the patrol who met us was suspicious, and they had all the rights of being so. And then, when we were at the headquarters, the people warmed up towards us and they took us to the POW camp, which was nearby, and they ask us whether we will -- would like to stay in the POW camp, wh -- or whether we would like to have some private accommodations, which we naturally choose to be -- to have the private accommodations, because there was more -- better than the POW accommodation --

Q: How?

A: -- the POW camp accommodation.

Q: And where was this? Where were you?

A: To be honest about it, I -- I don't -- I -- I -- on the map I could locate it, but I don't remember the name, whether it was Shwabingin or whether it was nearby [indecipherable] where -- that wa -- it was -- it was not very far out from -- from Munich, but I would say about a hundred miles or so and that's -- that's where we were and that's where Feldifing, the DP camp also is, close to Munich.

Q: Uh-huh. And you were how old, and your brother, about, was how old?

A: I was -- Well, it was 1945, I was 20 years old and my brother was 23.

Q: Okay. Now, somehow -- How did you end up in the DP camp and tell me about what that was like?

A: How? I'm sorry?

Q: How did you get to the DP camp and -- and what was that --

A: Well, we -- you know, it's a funny thing nowadays, in 1999, I would say, things are more electronically and -- equipped. Those days it was word to mouth and it worked very good, I must say, because people were constantly on the move. Everybody was looking for somebody and traveling and moving and meeting. And everybody had the story to tell, and that's how we found out from people that we met, who told us about that particular camp and we pursued to find out who, if any of th -- our friends or acquaintances from the camp were in the -- in that particular camp. I was not in Dachau per se, in the main camp, but I was in a satellite camp, that we were transported in that particular train.

Q: So it sounds like, for a period there, before you went to the DP camp, you and your brother were sort of on your own?

A: That's right, that's right. We were isolated from any news and from any friends or people of Jewish contact, and that's why my brother traveled into Munich, to see what is going on there and o -- upon his return, we waited a week or so and then we decided that it would be better for us to be where the Jewish population is, despite the fact that we could have had a very substantial German factory and property from the Nazi that was -- evacuated the house, which we occupied after his leaving.

Q: Well, tell me about that. Wa -- This was after you'd been interrogated? How did you end up where you did?

A: Well, after we left the -- after we left the DP camp -- not the D -- the interrogation, see, and we were told -- we told the commander that we would like to be on our own, and

not in the POW camp, he instructed the lieutenant to take care of us and to give us some accommodation. And he took us into the marketplace and comma-commanded to meet the mayor from the town. And he met the mayor of the town in a short while and he instructed the mayor, without any doubt, that he has three Jewish survivors and they are not going to sleep on the street and to provide us with a comfortable home and food and all that. And as -- they gave an -- an -- an hour's time. And we waited an hour and then he came back and he said that he found a home for us which -- and he's going to take us there and give us a woman to care for us and provide us with anything that we want and need, which actually took place. After we took the house, we looked around, there were three bedrooms and we took all the beds, pillows and all that into one bed and for the first time in our life, we slept comfortable and warm, and it was the first time that we really slept in -- un-undescribable. Now, this house became the meeting point for the Jewish soldiers that were in that particular camp, the POW camp. There was also a detachment from the Israeli army there, as prisoner of war, who served as the English army. And I would say that it was -- it was a comfortable time that we spent there with these people who had an opportunity to meet us and they brought us army rations and it was quite remarkable.

Q: That is remarkable. I mean, this was very soon after --

A: Days -- Days after, days after.

Q: So you had gone from being a prisoner on a packed transport train, to being completely on your own, in a house with -- I mean, I'm just trying to imagine what that must have felt like, to make that leap so quickly.

A: Well, it just felt like -- like being newborn and you started your life over from the beginning and you met people, and you -- that you never figured you're going to meet again, and -- you know, and it was a camaraderie, it was -- unde-undescribable.

Q: Did you trust? I mean, you were still among German people at this point. Did you trust them?

A: Well, to be honest about it, I trusted them as far as ca -- I can throw them, which isn't very far, but a -- I -- I -- I s -- I sort of felt I had the upper hand at this particular time, because I knew that the American had everything un -- occupied and I -- I felt that there was very little that they could do, in order to do anything physically, or any other which way.

Q: Did you -- Did you witness any treatment of how the POW's were being treated by the al --

A: No, no, it was -- it was afte-after the war, there were na -- no German soldier's occupation visible. The American were in hundred percent control and all you can see is what -- what I knew were -- how -- how a camp, the concentration camp looked like, it didn't look like a concentration camp, but it looked like a camp and you know, one camp or the other, there's no -- not much -- any big difference. The only thing different was that they had bunks, which we didn't have in the camp, and they were treated different

than we were, and there was -- there was a difference in the camp, in the treatment and the accommodations that they had in the POW camp than I had in -- in the concentration camp.

Q: Did you see any collaborators or perpetrators being tracked down -- rounded up, anything like that?

A: No, I didn't. I didn't see anything of that nature. Although, in Munich, the -- there were some Jewish kapos. That means Jewish people who obtained preference of ser -- supervising the Jewish working force and -- and used their force by beating Jewish people as well as the Germans. And if they came and were recognized, they suffered the consequences.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Well, you know, if somebody came in there and the -- the -- and somebody recognized them, and people suffered under the -- under their treatment, they had now an opportunity to get even with them. So, to what extent I cannot describe, because sometimes they were brutal and sometimes they were not as brutal. So it -- it all depended upon the -- the force. It could have been two people, it could have been 10 people who -- who were together and suffered, you know, and they got even with them. But it was, in my opinion, the -- in my o -- in my opinion, legitimate and it was r-right to -- for the revenge. So, it didn't happen very often, so, you know, it is -- it is a matter of -- that the card -- the card have turned. You know, it is a -- a fact that the people never thought that they going to face the -- the facts, and the day of judgment came.

Q: This was in Munich, you said?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you -- you saw -- you saw this? Did you witness some of the [indecipherable]

A: At occasions I did, yes.

Q: Can you think of one that you remember, in particular?

A: Well, the -- I -- I remember two or three of them in Munich, you know. In Munich, it was a -- a point, you know, a meeting point and that was the Munich museum. And th-the Jewish people met there, because it was a very large place where you could congregate. It was not within the traffic, it was out of the -- out of sight and that's where people met and it was known all over Europe. So even people from Italy and Poland, or whatever, you know, they heard about and that's -- if they looked for somebody, that's where they went to see and meet people. And that's where -- where these things happened, you know, and it didn't take much, because there were a lot of people there, to create the -- the -- you know, tumult. And that's -- that's where it happened.

Q: Go ahead, sorry.

A: Now, it -- it also happened at the Jewish office in -- in -- in Munich, where people met to register for certain purposes, and there was also a meeting point there, so it also happened there, but not very often.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It happened more at the Jewish mu -- at the -- not Jewish, but at the museum in Munich. So, it was a very knowledgeable point and it was very well done, I must say.

Q: What -- What would happen when they were recognized?

A: Well, they were physically attacked and beaten and that's all. They were not shot or killed or some like that. But they were beaten up. They got their -- their point -- their -- their point across in that -- that respect.

Q: D-Do you remember hearing of them say anything in -- to justify or defend themselves, to how they'd behaved?

A: Well, naturally they -- they -- everybody who gets attacked or something like this, always says something to defend themselve, but the -- the main issue was that they said, you know, "We were just prisoners like you and somebody had to do it, and we were selected, so we had to do it." But, you know, there's a difference, like the same thing with the Germans, that you can do something, and you can do it two ways. You can do it just to do it or you can put some personal hatred and force behind it and make it worse than it could be. And that is the issue and that's what they did, because the same thing the Germans, I mean, they we -- they were soldiers, but they were soldiers to defend themselves, but to go and put the personal atro-atrocity in the -- in -- in the -- in the movements, in the facts, that what killed so many people.

Q: Yeah.

A: Hitler did it. Hitler said to -- to arrest the Jews and put them in camps. And he -- Somebody else say, "Well, while they in the camps, why don't you kill them?" And that's what they did, you know, they just carried it further and further, so it was more personal hatred in it, than there was a -- more of to carry out -- to carry out an order.

Q: Yeah, yeah. I jumped ahead of myself a little here. You were in the -- the house in this -- is it a small town? It was a small town?

A: Yes.

Q: How long did you stay there and how did you -- di -- wa -- did you have money? How did you get by?

A: Well, at that time, money was no object, because we didn't get any money. We didn't need any money because the food we needed to live on, we got from the soldiers and from the German, t -- who had to look for our well being, so that part, there was no -- no need for. We -- We got some shirts and dresses and all that from the POW, which at the time, one shirt was enough. We didn't live like -- like you live today, that you change your shirt every day. And our job for the time after the war, where there was nothing available and everything that we had was -- for us was appreciated and grateful, because we were in the camp, we had only one shirt on for months and months and months and we were full with -- with the lice and all that, so i-it was hundred percent improvement. So we sort of kept -- kept going.

Q: All right. Were you -- Do you remember what it was like? Do you remember the first thing you ate that tasted good, after having such horrible, horrible, and virtually no food during the war?

A: Well, we were very lucky, because in the POW camp, there was a doctor and he told us and warned us not -- not to eat too much and to overeat, because our stomach was not in -- in the condition to absorb a lot of foods and especially not any fat food. So we took

that -- took it under advice and we contained ourselves to dairy products and -- and it worked, because -- well, it didn't work with me, but it worked, because I later on found out that I had -- have a peptic ulcer and when I came to the United States, I found it out and, you know, and -- but, by and large, a lot of people died after the war, from being fed by the English army, more food and fat food than they should have had. So there was a lot of people that died after the war, on account of the liberation and eating things that th- their stomach was not equipped to handle.

Q: Do you remember what you ate? Anything come to mind, that --

A: Well, I ate like a -- the -- like you call today, oatmeal and grits -- grits, and pudding and milk. A lot of cheese. Not much butter, and eggs and a lot of vegetables. And that helped me to stay a little bit healthy than the -- than the other people were after the liberation.

Q: Yeah. Did you mention something about a Nazi factory?

A: Yes, there was a -- there was a farm attached to this house -- not directly to, but it belonged to the house and there was a wood -- wood sawing factory, belonging to the owner of the house and that was up for grabs, because the -- he liquidated it -- not liquidated it, he left the -- there -- vicinity of his -- you know, na -- in other words, he escaped the -- the consequences of being a big German officer or whatever in -- in the town. So, they said, "Well, he's not going to come back, maybe he's dead," and so on, so on. But it was just after the war by hearsay and I don't know how it would have worked out once a nephew would have returned or something like that. But, I would have had the

good chance, if I would afford it, to -- to be the owner of it, because he was a high ranking German.

Q: Do you know about how long you stayed in that house, before you left for the DP camp?

A: We stayed in that house about, I would say a month or so, or maybe a week longer than that.

Q: Okay.

A: Because it started to get a little nudgy to be by ourselves and in those days there was no television or anything of that nature that we knew or seen what's going on in the world, other than the radio and the contact with the army personnel, which at that time already, has dwindled down to people were -- were being repat-repatriated back to England and America and it got less and less people. And the camp was just about to being resol -- dissolved, and wefe -- we seen the trend and seen that we would be -- is only -- would only have association with -- with a German at that -- at that particular time, we didn't care much about it, to be with the Germans.

Q: So, it was your brother who found out about the -- about the DP camp? He went to Munich and found out about that?

A: Well, he went into Munich, like I mentioned before and he met some people that we -- knew about it. And they said, "What are you doing out there? You are all by yourself, why don't you come and join us," you know, and -- and that's what we did.

Q: And where was the camp?

A: It was not the camp, it was --

Q: The DP camp. No?

A: No, no, no, it was not the DP camp, it was in the city of Munich, and it was in a private house that we got a -- what was it, it was two rooms and that also was that a big German officer who left and his wife was there and she remained in the house and we just occupied two bedrooms. And that's where we stayed til we left Munich.

Q: I see, okay. How long, about, was that, would you say?

A: Well, it was -- I le -- I came in '45 to Munich and I left Munich in '46, but at the -- at the interim, I located my father and I bought him over to Munich and we moved into a different house, in Munich.

Q: Okay, I want to ask you about that, but I need to turn the tape over.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fred Bachner. This is tape number one, side B. Got to remember where I was. Tell me about finding your father. How did you do that? How did you even know he was alive?

A: Well, it is a unique -- unique s-situation. You know, like I mentioned before, that word of mouth can work just as well as a radio or a tel -- not a te -- yeah, even television, but the only difference is that it takes longer and it is not instantly. My brother was going on the -- was at that museum and a person approached him that we knew from before the war, and said, "What are you doing here? Your father is looking for you." And he was

astonished and said, “My father is looking for me, and I am looking for him. So where -- where is he, where can I find him?” So, he gave us the location where the village where my father was, where he met him and he spoke with him. So, the next day, my brother says -- not the next day, but the same day, my brother said, “I’m going to find Father and I’m going to see what I can do to bring him here.” So, at that particular time, there was no transportation yet available. They had no airplanes, the train was not going and it was only going with the help of the American army. So, we went to the DP camp, to the officer in charge and told him what we -- what we found out, that we need some help and to give us a note that the American army should help us and take us along whenever possible, which they did. But, there were trains going -- there was one train going in the morning in that direction where we had to go. So instead of standing in the street with the thumb, my brother took a train in the morning, for Munich, at six o’clock. And people were hanging on on the train outside and inside and any -- any which way. You never seen a train with people like that -- was just like a Christmas tree. It -- Unbelievable, where people was -- was on the outside, hanging on, just to be on the train. So, my brother took that train and then he came into a town and he had to go through Czechoslovakia and into Poland, because that particular part used to be under Germany, but it was occupied by Poland. So, after a three day travel in all kind of ways, my brother finally reached the place where my father’s supposed to be. So he came there and he found the address and he found the house and he found the apartment, and guess what? My father wasn’t there any more. My father had left back to Berlin, because he figured

that if we survived, we would go back to Berlin, where we originally are from. And he -- he came there and it was already three days that he was -- four days that he was gone, and there was no mail, there was no telephone to get in touch with me, to tell me what's going on. So he started on his way back, which also took about three days. And he finally arrived a week later, back, and I thought he would come back with my father and he said, "Guess what? You know, I came there and there was there and Father was gone, he was in Berlin." So he said, now I should travel to Berlin to find him. I said, "No, you have the experience. You go and you travel to Berlin." So we waited a wee -- a week and -- til he got rested up [indecipherable] and then, about a week or 10 days later, he started out to th-the travel to Berlin and he met -- he traveled to Berlin, which also took him about three days or four days and he met my father in Berlin. So --

Q: Do you know how he found him?

A: Well, he had the address, when he an -- when he went to Poland, to that apartment there, people knew him and my father left an address, that in case somebody comes to look for him, that that's where he's going to be. And he met him there and naturally the -- the joy was grateful and -- and my father was -- was very sick and it was a friend of his, woman friend, that knew him from before the war, and cared for him. And she went with him to Berlin. So, there was a big discussion about going to Munich and finally they decided to do it. And the transportation and the situation started to stabilize a little bit and we decided that -- to wait another month or so for them to come to Munich. So, he came back and then they waited a month or so and they started out to come and join us in

Munich. And meanwhile, we got into a bigger apartment in Munich, and when they came, which was shortly after, we were ready for them and had the -- had the apartment and all that, so it was a nice welcome and to -- to see them after all these years. And my father was very sick and he -- he felt much better and you know, and he had to be nursed back and she did a good job on doing that. Meanwhile, they got married, by the way.

Q: Oh, okay. Tell me ab-about seeing your father for the first time. Where -- Where were you and what -- what happened? How -- How did that go?

A: Well, the both of us were at the railroad station and we again went --

Q: Both of you being?

A: My brother and me -- and I, we were at the railroad station and we met them. It was a very dramatic move to -- to be confronted, and you know, after all, it was about three years or so that we didn't see each other and under the circumstances we didn't see each other was very, you know, very moving. So, we took him and you know, and we proceeded to the apartment. We had a dinner there and you know, and celebrated.

Q: Hm. What was he sick with? Do you know what was he sick with?

A: I -- I don't -- I don't remember what it was, I -- but it was a -- he had a -- he had a -- with his heart he had something wrong.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: He was very sick man when he -- when he -- when we seen him.

Q: Did you talk with him then, or afterwards about what you each had been through during the war?

A: Well, we sort slowly and surely told our stories, you know, because you know, to talk about it very -- each one of us to talk about it, it takes hours for each one to tell you the story. So, you know, it took days, when we were sitting down for dinner or for breakfast or something like this, you know, and we memorized it, you know, wh-when -- last time I had breakfast in -- in this and this camp, you know, and it was like this, it was like that, you know, and then we had to go to work outside, in March and it was raining and it was snowing, it was cold, it was freezing. You know, all these things came -- came out after you met and you talked. So it was a very, you know, it was a very discu -- big discussion every time the subject came up and it came up very often.

Q: It did?

A: Yes, it did.

Q: You had -- You had mentioned in your videotaped interview that you chose to get on a transport train out of one of the camps, because you had heard your father would be coming to that camp and you couldn't bear to see him mistreated?

A: No, actually, actu -- actually, I was in the camp when I found out that my father is in that next transport that's supposed to come into the camp. And knowing what I said then, I say that again, that you know, to be together with your father and see the atrocities that are being done to people, and not be able to defend yourself, I personally -- the type of a person that I am, I don't think that I could s -- could stand still and -- and watch it. So, I choose to leave that camp and go to -- I -- I choose -- there was an opportunity, let's put it that way, which it was, you know, to leave the camp and go to another camp and not be

together with my father. And here, again, I must say, you see how news travel, without -- without electronic help. Without a radio and anything else, you see? It just -- that -- if you have a name and you are known, and people know you, or something like that, word gets around and that's how I found out about it. Again, you know, that my father is on the transport, you know. And is -- is bound -- is bound to be at the same camp, which actually happened.

Q: Yeah. Did you tell him after the war, that you had left, knowing that he was coming?

A: Yes.

Q: Cause that's -- that's quite a choice to make, really, isn't it?

A: Yes, yes, I told him, and he said that I did a good choice.

Q: Did he say why?

A: Well, I -- He didn't have to say why, because this is self explanatory, because about the -- the living conditions, the -- the way it was -- you were subjected to certain punishments sometimes, because you didn't work fast enough and you didn't do -- walk fast enough and all -- all kind of things, you received beatings from the German guards. So, you know every time you see somebody get sent, you know it's -- it's like -- like you get hit yourself, because you had to be a -- a witness of it and you know, it is like one Jew is -- is like your -- your brother, you know, and you feel that -- the -- the pain you go through by being treated that way. So, it is a -- a natural instinct.

Q: Yeah. You -- So at this point, it's your brother, yourself, your father, his --

A: My stepmother --

Q: Your step -- Your stepmother. Was your friend still with you as well, or no?

A: No, at that time, we -- we didn't -- didn't have the friend.

Q: Okay.

A: My brother had a friend from -- from -- from that time that he was in the camp with. He was -- When I came into -- to Dachau, I was all by myself, because everybody I had, or I knew, was either not alive any more. I was walking with one friend of mine, from the -- on the Death March and he said -- we stopped one night in to -- in the barn and he said, "I'm not walking any more, I am going to hide here." And I told him, "Don't be silly, you know what they going to do, they're going to take matches and burn the barn down, in case somebody's hiding there. And I don't have no interest to be burned. So I -- I'm going to go." He says, "I can't any more." And he -- he remained in the barn while the transport continued to walk and after the war, I met him, he made it, yes.

Q: That's amazing.

A: Well, he was liberated about six months before me.

Q: Where did you find him?

A: I -- I found him, I think it was in -- in Israel I think I found him.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah, and there was a meeting of the Holocaust survivors from all over the world.

Q: Oh, how interesting. Okay, so you're in Munich. At this point there are four of you, at -- do you -- are you looking for your mother, or have you -- do you real -- know she's --

A: Well, I -- I bil -- never -- I been looking for my mother ever since, and -- but I know that -- I -- I know from Auschwitz, because I know that there was a -- some person in the -- what they called the Sonderkommando -- that means a special detail and he worked in the crematorium and he was from that particular town in Poland where we lived before the war. And he knew the transport that came and he knew the people he bor -- he burned, and among them was my late mother. So, he told me that in Auschwitz, after -- when things started to get uncertain, the people who were working in that kommando, were not permitted at the time to mix with other prisoners. But a-at the -- at the time when things started to come to a end in Auschwitz, they allowed the prisoners to mingle with the -- with the spi -- Sonderkommando with the special detail and he told me that -- that my -- that my mother was -- was burned and I got that information from some other people as well.

Q: How did you find that out? When was that?

A: Oh, that was in 1945.

Q: You found out right away?

A: Well, da -- that was at -- when I still was in Auschwitz, at the end of ‘44 and ‘45, that was when things started to get rough in Auschwitz and the Russian army came and they were so -- sort of fi-figuring on liquidating Auschwitz.

Q: I see. So you knew then. But you said you’ve been looking for your mother ever since?

A: Well, I tried through -- through the Red Cross and tried through the several -- Yad Vashem and all the other things, you know, register. There's no answer.

Q: Just in case they were wrong?

A: Just in case they were wrong, yeah, well, you know, we never give up the ho -- you never give up hope.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yeah, that's right. You never give up hope, so that's what I did, what -- what I -- I know pretty much that, unfortunately, it's -- it's the truth, that she -- she vanished in -- in Auschwitz.

Q: Mm-hm. Did I miss a chapter, or was there a point at which you -- your family did go to a -- a Displaced Person's camp?

A: We did not go to a Displaced Person camp, no. We -- We -- We were in Munich and we were in touch with the Jewish community. We were in touch with the Joint Distribution Commits -- Committee. We were in touch with the UNRRA, which was the department from the American government and we kept abreast of all the going-ons that was -- that was to be known.

Q: So Feldi-Feldifing?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was that?

A: That was the name of the village -- of a German village --

Q: I see.

A: -- where this Displaced Person camp was established.

Q: But you were not there?

A: We -- We were there maybe for a day or two, that's all, you know.

Q: Oh, I see, okay.

A: But we seen the camp-like situations and we had enough of that, so we thought we fend for ourselves, what -- what you can do, you know?

Q: Okay, I got you. So, you're living in Munich and how do you figure out where your family will go? What made you decide to come to the United States? What were your choices at that point?

A: Well, my brother and I, we were talking about it and we felt that Germany is not going to be nothing, it's just going to be pieces of land and [indecipherable] wouldn't be any future for us, because it is going to be a very controlled country, because what Germany did and carried on and little did I know that there would be a martial plan and all the other things that put Germany into -- pro-propelled Germany into a top position and the way it is today. And today I am sorry that I did move out from -- from Germany, because I could have been financially the better situation to come to the United States [indecipherable] was. And I could have re-reaped from the fruits of the Black Market, and like I said, I could be in a better position in the United States as a refugee the way I came than I -- if I would have waited another two years, is all.

Q: Oh. So you think if you did it over again, you might have stayed?

A: Well, if you ask me, then yes, I -- I -- I will say -- I will say so. Because I -- I -- personally left for the solid rea -- solid reason that I thought that Germany will be no more Germany, it will be a poor country, it will be a -- under control. It would not be given the liberty that it enjoys today and enjoyed right after the war. And I -- I -- I must say I was wrong, because politics sa -- play -- play -- are strange bedfellows. That's wa -- That's what it boils down to. But you cannot look into a crystal and know what -- what the -- the future brings, because lot of people would commit suicide if they knew what -- what -- what would happen to them in the future. But, nevertheless, the way it is, you know, it is -- it's came, but in a -- in a different way and a harder way, that I had to learn a lot of experience by being here in the United States.

Q: So how did you -- how did you decide to come and how -- how did you get here? How did that all come together?

A: Well, like I mentioned before, we decided that -- that since we figured that Germany is not going to be any more anything in the -- in -- in -- in this -- in the world, it is better to go to a country which is going to give us some possibilities. And at that particular time, there was a note at the Joint Distribu-Distribution Committee that President Truman gave 20,000 visas to Displaced Persons. And being that my brother was working in the office of the -- of the Joint Distribution Committee, he knew about it and he registered us to -- to go to the -- to the United States.

Q: And did that -- did it come together fairly quickly or did it take a long time?

A: Well, no, it -- it came -- it came pretty quickly, because we were -- we got the permission to go in 1946, in June, but unfortunately, a seaman strike developed in the United States, and the ships did not go to the United States. So we had to wait til the strike is settled and then we were able to go to -- into the United States.

Q: And did all four of you come together?

A: Yes, all four. We came together.

Q: Tell me about that trip. Where -- What were you -- What -- What did you sail on, where from and -- and where did you land? Did you know specifically where you were going, to what harbor?

A: Well, we were told to go to -- in September 1946, we were told that our ship is going in September to -- to United States, that we should proceed to the staging area -- area in Bramer harbor, which we proceeded to do so. We arrived in Bramer harbor, we found out that the ships are not going and we waited in Bramer harbor three months, until the sh -- the strike was settled, and in January third, I believe it was, 1947, we boarded the USS Ernie Pyle, which was a troop carrier ship, and proceeded on an eventful trip to the United States. The eventfulness was that it was a stormy -- very, very stormy voyage. For a week, we did not leave the berth. The ship was cordoned off with ropes. We could not move it, because that's how the ship was moving, up and down. And the captain took a side trip over, to avoid the storm, to get out of it, over Canada, which was worse, because it was very icy there. So, in all, the trip took us about 14 -- 14 days and we arrived here in -- in New York, on January the 14th or 15th, 1947.

Q: Tell me about that moment, you -- you sailed into New York harbor? Was that --

A: Yes, yes, we sailed into New York harbor, and to see the Statue of Liberty and all that was a very, very moving event and it was docked on -- I think it was on pier number 86, and we were greeted by the press and all that, you know. And then we were also greeted by the Joint Distribution Committee, who took care of us and lodged us in the Hotel Marseilles, on 103rd Street and Broadway. And we were really glad to feel some solid ground under our feet and that -- that was the event of our voyage, as far as that is concerned. I -- I was -- I was lucky I didn't get seasick, but 99 percent did.

Q: Do you remember what you were thinking as you came into New York, seeing the Statue of Liberty?

A: Well, all kind of thoughts went through my mind. How am I going to get a job, how I'm going to work, how I'm going to make a living, or -- you know, all these things this come -- come to -- to your -- to your mind. And it is a, you know, it is, you know, it is a moving, moving situation. It -- You know, it -- as a young man, you -- you -- you don't know what -- what you -- I didn't have a profession and here I'm 20 years old and you know, it -- I'm sorry, I'm 22 already -- am about to be 22. But it leaves -- it gives you fa -- some food for thought. So, we landed in va -- at the Hotel Marseilles and we met some other people here who came with -- two transports before, because we were only the third transport to come from --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fred Bachner. This is tape number two, side A. I wanted to ask you, you mentioned when you landed on the pier, that there were press people there?

A: Yeah.

Q: What were they doing there, and what did -- what were they asking you? What was that all about?

A: Well, at -- at that time, to have people surviving from a concentration camp come to the United States, it was a rare situation, and the press ask us about our experiences in the camp and about the voyage and all that, because we were way overdue, on account of the storm that we had on the Atlantic. So, that was the reason there was the press there. And at that time, you know, to have people survive the concentration camp, it was a novelty, not -- not like today. I mean, 50 years later is -- is more than 50 years ago, you're right. It is -- It was a novelty here, to be a survivor and the press was there, hungry to have news from -- from the concentration camp that we were -- were in.

Q: Did you talk to them, do you know? Did you -- Did they interview you?

A: I personally, no. I didn't talk to them.

Q: And your brother and father?

A: No, no

Q: No. Oh.

A: They selected who they wanted to talk, you know, it -- and to be honest about it, at that particular time I was more interested what's going to be and where I'm going, that to get -- to give a -- a -- an interview.

Q: Yeah. How many of you were on that ship?

A: I would say maybe 150 or so, ma-maybe less. It was a troop carrier and there weren't many people there.

Q: Mm-hm. What -- What were your impressions of New York? That must have been something, to be landing. Did you have anything with you? Did you have any belongings at that point?

A: Perhaps a small suitcase, that's -- that's all. I mean, the -- the clothing that we acquired in the time that we were liberated, because don't forget, from 1945 to 1947 is only three years and we were not in the -- financially in the -- in the great position to -- to ob -- to obtain anything, and we all -- and I felt that Germany is not going to be my home, so why should I go out and settle myself with things and clothing? If I go to America, the style is not the same and, you know, so you have to get rid of it anyhow. So that's why we just had a small suitcase and -- and that's all.

Q: So what were your impressions of New York on that first day?

A: Well, I was overwhelmed by the -- by the big buildings. Don't forget, I was -- I used to live in the big city, Berlin, which doesn't compare to New York, but it's nevertheless a big city that I think, [indecipherable] million inhabitants. And the -- the city in itself didn't make a big impression on me, just the big buildings and tall buildings and how

everything worked, and you know, how it feels to be in a -- in a tall building and not being afraid of the [indecipherable] when there's a strong wind.

Q: Did you have to go through any kind of medical examination? Did they -- Did you just go through passport -- how did tha -- how did you actually come into the country?

A: We just went off the ship. That's all.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah. No, no, no examination, no nothing. It's -- Went right straight -- straight through. No car -- I -- I -- I don't believe we had any customs, I don't believe that either, no.

Q: And did you know that you'd be going to the Hotel Marseilles?

A: No, we didn't know that we'd be going to the Hotel Marseilles, but we know that we are going to be greeted by the Joint at the pier and they will take us to the -- to the hotel and they had buses to take us to the hotel.

Q: Tell me about the hotel. What was that like?

A: Well, it -- it wasn't the -- the -- the Park Plaza, or it wasn't the Waldorf Astoria, but it was an acceptable hotel, it was -- it was nice there, the kitchen there for us, where we could obtain food. And it wa -- it was occupied I think by elderly people and not the transients or something like that. So, it was -- but when we moved in, it was -- it changed completely because the Joint opened an office there and people came and you know, and some people found relatives and you know, they came and visited and all that, you

know? It did -- started to be a different -- a different picture than it was before. And, you know, it -- I think that the Joint moved the hotel up in prestige.

Q: Sounds like it was sort of a community for -- for survivors at that point.

A: Yes, yes, yes. Because, well, it -- it made -- it made an impression on me like I had in -- in -- in Germany during the war, when we got -- not during the war, but when we got liberated and in Munich, the museum, that people came, they met there and all of a sudden, here in New York, it was the hun -- 103rd Street Hotel Marseilles. So, that's where everybody came and you know, and other things happened there, I mean a lot of things happened that -- family members met there that haven't seen each other for 30 - 40 years. And it was quite -- I should say interesting, yes.

Q: So there would be reunions of people there?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, yes, many reunions. And something happened to me personally, is that while we were there, we received a -- a newspaper from -- which caters to German clienteles and being from Germany is -- I had interest of reading it, and we notice that there is a Purim dance. That is a holiday, festive, joyous holiday and they have a dance on -- I think it was on 47th Street in New York. So my brother said, "You know, let's go there and see if we meet some people." I says, "Yes, what-whatever I g-got to lose," you know? So, we went there and lo and behold, I all of a sudden see my school friend from Berlin there. We -- We were buddy - buddy, you know. We used to go to school together, we used to play together, w-we used to stay with each other. His parents knew me and I was in their house and you know, it was a very familiar relationship. But I knew, and I

said goodbye to him in Berlin when he went to Crooba. And very little did I expect him to see in New York. So then I -- I went there and I confronted him, he didn't know what to think, whether it was that the dead people got recreated or whether, you know, he didn't know what to -- what to think. So, I said, "Yeah, it's me," and so on, so forth, you know and we cu -- hugged each other and kissed each other, and you know, and the parents were there and it was -- it was an unbelievable picture. And with him also were two other friends that I knew, and I was befriended with and -- also from Berlin, from the same class that I used to go with and we became friends again and still -- still as today, we still friends, and see each other and go to each other's occasion, weddings and Bar Mitzvahs and all that here. And that what happened. His parents passed away meanwhile, but we -- we still are very much in touch with sha -- with each other. And that happens out of the blue sky. So, you know, it -- things -- things happen in life. Never, never thought that that would happen.

Q: How do you explain that to yourself? I wonder if your experiences during the Holocaust have -- have made you think of those sort of happenings in a certain way?

A: Well, to be honest about it, there's no explanation there. That's -- It's the same way I met barba -- my brother, after five years in the camp, you know, I never thought it would happen. And here, you know, is like -- like -- like you say in -- in Jewish, it is pershared, you know, that it is meant for you to -- to go through this experience. So, I take it in that respect. That, you know, it was meant for me to meet him.

Q: Hm. So it doesn't feel like luck? It feels more determined than that.

A: Luck? I -- I wouldn't say that it is. It's -- It's meant to be, you know, like some people cross the street and get hit by a car. An-And so how -- how do you explain that? It's being in the wrong place at the wrong time or right time, or whatever it is. So -- But it happens and that's -- in my opinion, that's the way life is, so you know, it is a unpredictab -- unpredictable situation that you can -- you know, your -- you encounter in your lifetime. So it is, you know, God -- God steers your way in life, and that's -- that's why you go to synagogue on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, you beg for forgiveness and beg, you know, not -- not to die in the course of fire or in -- by sword, by -- by -- or by a gun or so on, so forth and -- and then it's up to the Almighty -- Almighty. So this is the -- a matter of, how you call, destiny, yeah.

Q: I'm curious, when you were -- during the war, when you were in the camps, watching many people die around you, knowing that some of your family had died or not being sure that they died. Did you have that same sense of God means for me to survive this, or is it -- did you have that sort of same guiding principle in your mind at that time?

A: Yes, yes, I -- I believed very much in it, because the way things have happened to me and the way things are in my life, you know, I always say that God is with me and -- you know, and steers me the right way. So, that's -- that's one outlook I have in my life and nobody -- nobody can -- can -- can foresee his own destiny, because things change and they can change very rapi -- very rapidly, without your [sneezes]

Q: Oh, bless you.

A: Thank you -- without your having any -- [sneezes]

Q: Bless you.

A: Oh, I'm sorry.

Q: No.

A: -- with ha -- without having any control over it, y-you see, and there's nothing you -- nothing much that you can do about it. You have accept it and live with it and make the best of it. And that's the way I feel.

Q: Were you able to -- I should have asked you this in the -- in terms of the time in Munich, too, but also when you came to New York -- reincorporate religion into your life. I mean, did it -- did that come back quickly, or --

A: Well, I must say yes, it did. Because, when the war ended, I said, what -- what is it good to be and believe in God, when things have happened and I have seen and noticed and be par -- was part of it, that God let this happen. And believe me, I've seen a lot -- a lot of atrocities, a lot of children die, a lot of innocent little children die, a lot of people die and it's a -- it's a time that I said, it's enough, but then I found out that without religion, without believing in somebody, you can't live. So, I turned back and became -- became a Jew. It didn't take long, only about four weeks or so.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: What happened?

A: Well, I -- I -- I felt I was missing something in my life and I knew that what I was missing and I turned back.

Q: Were there actually places to go worship in -- in Germany at the time? I mean, were you able to participate in sort of organized religion or was it more on your own?

A: Well, in -- there was a -- the army initiated the services that were every Friday night and so on, so forth. And then Passover came and Rosh Hashanah came and you know, there was services available and all that, so I sort of participated in it and you know, and felt that that's what it -- that is what I was missing. So, if you want to call me a return Jew, I don't know. But, it was the -- it was the fact that -- that, you know, after all you see and ask yourself, where is God? And then -- And then you miss it, then you return.

Q: That's interesting to me. It sounds like there were points during the war at which your faith was very deeply shaken, that maybe --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- did you -- did you doubt that God existed? Did it -- How far did that go?

A: Well, during the camp, I -- I -- I had -- I had occasions and instances where I was saved and I could have perished and I wasn't -- I -- I didn't perish and you know, it's -- it's -- it -- I had my -- my strength to believe that there's a God and the God is -- wants me to live and you know, that's what it is. So, at the particular time I was in camp, I believed in, but when I came out of the camp and I knew the -- the exorbant amount of people who perished in the Holocaust, six million people and what they did -- accomplished by -- by destroying the Jewish people, I sort of had my -- my second thought about it. But, then I found out that you have to have something to believe in. So, that's when I started to be Jewish again.

Q: And that was when, would you say?

A: That was right after --

Q: Right after the --

A: -- yeah, right after, yeah.

Q: Okay. So, you've come to New York, you're -- are you living still with your brother and father and step-mother?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: You're all in the Hotel Marseilles?

A: Yeah.

Q: Then what happens? How -- Where do you end up and how does that all come together?

A: Well, I was diagnosed to have a par -- peptic ulcer here, I was sent to a hospital to -- for treatments and nervous depression, all kind of other things. And the Joint tried to give me a job and they went as far as sent me to Rochester because I had an address there from a friend of mine -- from a friend of mine from the camp who had a sister living in Rochester, and they gave me the address of the Joint, thought they have somebody, so they sent me to Rochester and this didn't work out, I came back. They finally got us a -- got us in a -- an apartment in -- in the Bronx and -- and furniture and the -- so we moved out of the hotel to the apartment in the Bronx. And to get a job at that time was pretty hard, because the American soldiers started to return from the army and they all had the

right to get -- get their job back, so it was pretty hard. And then I finally found a job and I was working there 56 hours a week.

Q: What was the job?

A: The job was in the automobile trade, as a -- I s -- wanted to be a mechanic and they told me that they will teach me to be a mechanic.

Q: Is this in the Bronx?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: In the Bronx.

Q: What wa -- Do you remember the company? What we [indecipherable]

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What was it called?

A: Weissman and Company. Weissman Incorporated.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Is wa -- It was a Lincoln - Mercury dealer. And I worked there 56 hours a week for 30 dollars a week.

Q: Wow.

A: And there was a time that I felt I was working just as badly as in the concentration camp. And honestly speaking, if I had money, I would -- would have returned to Germany, because I was just a prisoner of war here, and going to night school and I had to help the family maintain the apartment. We had to pay rent, we had to pay grocery

bills and all that. And f-for me, there was little left from the 30 dollars, because taxes were taken out and I was left maybe with three or four dollars in my pocket and here I had my friends and we went out. Although, everything cost not like today, in 1999 that you pay for a pack of cigarettes, two and a half dollars. In those days it cost 25 cents. And -- But 25 cents is 25 cents and if you don't have it, no matter what it is, it is not there. And i-it's -- it's started to -- to drain on me that what did I need it for? I could have been in Germany, I could have been being German -- not citizen, I never wanted to be a German citizen, but having certain advantages in Germany, I could have made -- made some money there, better than here. And the only thing that -- what held me back, that I didn't have the money for a passage on a ship. Because airplanes, tha -- those days cost an enormous amount of dollars and I was -- I -- I -- I was determined, you know, if I save enough money, I might go. But, to save money with four dollars a week, wouldn't -- it wouldn't go very fast.

Q: Why a mechanic's job? How did that happen?

A: Well, I was very much interested in cars. I had an uncle who had a car business in Berlin and whenever I had the chance to be in his shop and in his business, in the showroom, it's where I was, and you know, and he sort of spent time with me and explaining things at that time, and you know, it sort of caught on. I knew it -- my -- my dream, to become a professional was gone, because you need a lot of money for high schools and colleges and all that. And I didn't have anything to look forward, to obtain the kind of finances that I need.

Q: What was that dream? What -- What had you thought you might become?

A: To become a professional, either a doctor, or -- and -- but unfortunately, I could not make these dreams come true, because we had the family, we had the obligations, we had the rent to pay and like I mentioned before, it's not only the rent, you h-had the electricity and you had, well heat was with the rent, but --

Q: Mm-hm. Was your brother working as well?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What did he do?

A: My brother was a commercial artist. He painted pictures and he was decorating windows and he was making signs, you know, advertising signs.

Q: Now, did you speak any English at this point, when you first came?

A: When I came, I spoke a few -- well, I was not completely knowledgeable in the English, but I went in -- my time when I went to school in Berlin, I took -- we had English classes, so I had English instructions and English knowledge about the alphabet and all these things, you know. I had the basic knowledge about the English language and I spoke a few words, to make myself understood. But to carry on a conversation was -- was not enough.

Q: So, when you were working at this car dealership, you couldn't really communicate, it sounds like, if you didn't know much English. That must have been difficult.

A: Well, like -- like I mention, I could communicate to the extent that I could make myself understood, but I couldn't carry on a complete sentence. I mean, I couldn't pick

up a telephone and answer the telephone and ca-carry on a conversation, or tha -- tha -- things of that nature. But I knew how to write English and I, you know -- but I wasn't dumb and I learned fast, so I went to -- to high school and -- on a night course, which I graduated after couple of years.

Q: Did you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Wow. Where -- Where was that?

A: It was the Theodore Roosevelt High School in -- in the Bronx.

Q: Oh. Was that a common thing? Were there other survivors who were also doing the same thing?

A: Whoever wanted to, th -- went, you know, took that night school and -- and graduated to get a diploma, so -- so you can further yourself in your life.

Q: Mm-hm. You mentioned you were treated for nervous depression.

A: Well, you know, these things did not leave any -- leave a mark -- didn't leave any mark, because we had quite -- quite a bit of tense moments in our lives. And it's -- it's a -- it di -- it -- it left it's mark, you know, it does not just wash off your shoulder. So, you know, there's certain things that were left and that had to be treated.

Q: Can you talk about that at all? What -- What that -- What you went through with that?

A: Well, [indecipherable] it'll take another four hours here, for me to ta -- you know, my life is -- is -- is very, very complicated and a few sentences I want to -- I want to mention them to you, so it'll be recorded, but when we went -- when we went from Berlin to

Poland, and Poland was overrun by Germany, the Germans were looking for people to take them and send them into the camp. That's when my brother was taken, in 1940. But, there was a certain resistance in the younger people. They communicated with each other by t-telling -- you know, looking out the window and shouting to each other, or something like this and -- and one guy went over six houses to da -- to a friend of his and told them what we heard, that there's going to be a -- a aktion tonight, that kids are going to be taken out of the home. So we went -- acrossed fields over to an abandoned house that was miles away --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fred Bachner. This is tape number two, side B. You were just saying there was a soap factory?

A: The soap factory, and we went there many a times to hide from them and then, being a young person like I was at that time and trying to do things to stay alive and know we had a radio in the attic, hidden in that particular building that we were, and we were listening to BBC London to get the foreign news, what's doing in the -- on the war scene, or on the war front. And if you get caught there, that's the end of you. To see through that particular town where I lived, it was only about 15 kilometers away from Auschwitz. We seen the buses going through every day, with the windows painted black and yelling and crying and all that. At -- That was before I got into the camp. I was in the camp, I was

sick of typhus, which is the deathly disease. We didn't have any medications in the camp, we didn't have a thermometer in the camp, le-let alone enough food to get you back to be strong, and people died like flies. And in -- in Auschwitz, I was in -- in a -- when the camp started to be liquidated, the doctors didn't want to go, they wanted to have a full sick camp, to be -- to say that we are needed, you got a full camp here, you know, sick bar -- sick barrack. I got into becud I -- because I had a rash on my chin. And the sick barrack had two da -- two doors. One where you got in and the other one where you got out into the oven, to the crematorium. And I was on a transport from -- fo -- after the Death March, we came into a camp which was close to the Russian border -- not Russian border, but Polish, Germany border and this camp would have been liquidated in another week or so, and they started to liquidate, having transports going out there, which, it was wintertime and yes, wintertime in the eastern section of Europe is pretty strict, is temperatures below zero constantly. Snowfall is in feet measured, not in inches, and the -- the trans -- I was attached to a transport going to Dachau in an open car, a railroad car. And subjected to the snow, the frost and the cold and all that. And 75 percent of the transport died. And when we came to Dachau, the camp commander gave us quarantine. That means that we were isolated and not subject to go to work, which is very, very rare in German concentration camps. And so I -- I -- I feel that these things that happened to me and I just mentioned few of them, are very significantly my -- my -- my life. So, you know, it is -- and then, afterwards, you know, that I -- I managed to escape from the transport with my brother and getting out -- you know, when we escaped, and we ran into

the woods, I -- I don't want to go into details, but that -- there were -- the situation that we were confronted with the German army, where they ask us, "What are you doing here? You're going towards the front. I mean, we going away from the front. What are you going there for?" We ran into German soldiers that were dug in, in the woods, you know, to wait for tanks to come, to attack the tanks. And we also ran into a farmhouse that was full of German soldiers. I mean, you know, I -- I -- I -- I got instances, more than one, but I don't want to go into these -- these details to stretch it out, you know, to make it -- make it a lengthy interview and people might not be interested to listen to it.

Q: Of course --

A: So that's why I'm just getting the most important points and tell you about what happens. So that's -- that's my point of view. So, you know, it is a -- a very eventful fact of my life and you know, and is -- naturally it takes a t-tolls in different ways and you know -- which I personally have to overcome.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Were there people who you could talk to when you came to New York? I mean, were you treated by any doctors for depression, or was there any sort of therapy?

A: No, no, I did not -- I was not treated by doctors for depression, it -- just time itself, you know -- you know that and you know, my association with -- well, I didn't have any association which [indecipherable] with any particular Jewish group here, because I didn't know anybody and I didn't -- I -- I -- I've -- I've -- didn't have any occasion to have any association, but I had people, they were working all -- they were eager to know

what -- what happened and all that and I talked to them and you know, about the camp, the time and all that, the same thing as I do today, I go to schools and churches and all that -- colleges and talk about th-the Holocaust, so I got my s -- my satisfaction that way and sort of my -- my -- my psychonal -- my psychiatry treatment that way.

Q: You were -- You were mentioning that when you were working so hard at the -- at the car plant, that it wa -- didn't sound like a very happy time, if you were working that hard.

A: It was a time that I sort of felt I had to work and I -- you know, it is -- I had to go, I had to earn money, and that's what I choose to do and that's what I was successful in, keeping the job and -- because there were a lot of other people looking for jobs and that's -- that's the way it worked out.

Q: How long did you work there, and then -- then, what did you do after that?

A: I worked there, I think it was three years, four years, but it was interrupted -- it was interrupted by me being inducted into the army -- into the United States army.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: You see, I'm washed with all waters.

Q: I'm sorry?

A: I said, you see, I'm washed with all waters. I was declared -- which we all were, under the orders from President Truman, to be 4F, and I was curious to know what is 4F and I wrote a card to the draft board, "Wh-What does 4F mean?" So they answered me with a report to the draft board, and the draft board said, "You are eligible for the army, now you go for a physical." So I went for a physical with all kind of letters from doctors that I

am not fit, I'm sick, I got an ulcer and a nervous condition. And I'm to be e-excused from the army. So then I got a letter to report for induction in Whitehold Street.

Q: In New York?

A: In New York, yes. And I reported to Whitehold Street, and there was a Viennese doctor, who said -- a Jewish Viennese doctor, who said, "I now -- I realize, I see that you were in a camp and -- but, I'm going to put on the paper that you are sick, that you are due for limited duty. But they're going to induct you." I said, "Why do you do that when I'm a sick person?" "Well, if you are sick, you're going to be released from the army and that's all going to be." So that's what happened. I got inducted, I went through basic training, a limited duty. The sergeant carried my bag. I got transferred to Atlanta ja -- fa -- I was inducted in Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. I had my basic training there. I was -- After I finished my basic training, I was transferred to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland and I was there, on limited duty, I didn't have to go on marches and parades and all that. And after finishing the basic training -- that was the advanced basic training in Aberdeen Proving Ground -- I found out that the company I was in, was slated to go to Korea. And after four weeks of training in Aberdeen, we will go to Atlanta, Georgia, and from there to San Francisco for shipping to Korea. So I said to myself, "That's enough." I reported for sick bay every day and then they couldn't do anything more for me. They took me -- well, it's a whole long story anyway, they -- they took me by the commandant's car to a hospital in Georgia from the second army. I was evaluated, I was returned to the barracks and I was asked to take out my personal belongings and you

know, stay in my bed and that's all. About two hours later, the -- an orderly came and said for me to get my bag together -- my stuff together and report to the sick bay. I went to the sick bay, I was put on the stretcher. About an hour later, the -- the ambulance came and transferred us to the airport and I was put aboard a plane with wounded soldiers from Korea, returning to the States. And I was -- that was Labor day weekend.

Q: In what year?

A: 1940 -- no, not 1940. 1951 I think it was.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I was transported, then the plane did not go to it's destination, it landed somewheres in California, near the Mexican border, in the Air Force camp. And not knowing what's going on or where we going, I was permitted to get out of the stretcher, into a bunk in the barrack and on Labor day, we were transported by plane to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, we were transported to another camp. I forgot the name right now, it's a very famous camp, but I forgot the name. It's -- Maybe I got the name. Anyway, I was there and I was in the bed and I was receiving no treatment and after being a week there, I was called to the commandant and he said, "If you want to get out, we can give you a discharge, an honorable discharge, for the convenience of the government." That means that I cannot get any pension from the army, that they aggravated my -- my sickness. Well, hearing that, I was glad that I had a chance to get out of the army and I grabbed it and I was discharged on my birthday from the army. So, that was another experience in my lifetime.

Q: Well, how did that make you feel? Do you remember what you were thinking at that point, about what your situation was and how you were being treated by the government?

A: Well, first of all, I felt very bitter against the doctor, because I had all the legal and rightful documentation that I'm not a person fit to be in the army. And then, I mean, the others did -- did their job, but then again, President Truman issued a -- an order that the people -- diplace pers -- Displaced Persons, who come from the concentration camps, not to be inducted into the armed services, which actually took -- happened. But me, wanted to know what is going on, why other people are going to the army and not me, I wanted to know what that 4F stands for. Is nothing wrong with finding out what is in your record and why -- why you are still, you know, entitled to know. So that's what happened with my army. So I got in there and I would have stayed in the army if I would have been transferred to Germany, but not -- not to Korea.

Q: Did -- Did the -- the other soldiers who you were with, know you were a Holocaust survivor? How -- How were you treated or received by them?

A: It became known, because I was sort of a special person in the -- in the company. Everything that had to be done, if it was a hard job to do, I was excused. And they wanted to know what kind of duty do I -- what kind of a soldier am I, that I am being accused from all these things, you know? So, I had to tell them, you know, that my past experience and my condition. So, you know, the lieutenant also wasn't very comfortable with it, because you know, there's somebody that's better than -- than the others, which does not make any -- any good impression at -- on the company. But, we survived, yeah.

Q: Was there -- Did you encounter any anti-Semitism?

A: No, no, no, nothing.

Q: Not that.

A: Nothing of that sort.

Q: How about in -- in New York?

A: In New York? No, I didn't encounter any anti-Semi --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So when I got discharged, I went back to the job, because he had to take me back and I rested there another couple of months and then I went out and look for another job. And I found another job, and in 1951, I got married, in December.

Q: Tell me about that. You didn't do get married. How did you meet your wife?

A: Well, I met my wife by -- again, by chance. I went to a Jewish organization, they had the -- a meeting -- social meeting on -- on a Sunday. I met -- I went there and met my -- no, not with my brother, my brother went someplace else. I'd a -- We -- I met my wife there and we started to -- to date and so on, so forth. And we got engaged.

Q: And, do you remember how soon after you met her, did you talk to her about -- did you talk to her about being a survivor and your experiences --

A: Oh yes, she -- my wife is also a survivor. She is a -- She survived the -- she was hidden in the convent.

Q: In a convent?

A: In the convent in Belgium. And she got -- She's -- Well, she wasn't in the camp, but she was separated from her parents and her brother. She was all by herself in the -- in the convent in Belgium. And they tried to convince her to be a nur -- not a nurse, a -- a sister.

Q: A nun?

A: A n-n-nun, yes. So, that's -- that's -- my wife was -- was al -- is also a survivor, yes.

Q: Was it important to you to marry someone who was Jewish, first of all?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes, yes. It was important to marry in my same faith, because my youth and my upbringing was Jewish and my holidays and all that and you know, and here I have a Jewish girl, who knew what -- what -- what's all about and -- and not only that, but she understands me, she understands my background. And we're the perfect match.

Q: Do you think -- Was it helpful that you had both been -- lived through the war experience? I mean, was it important for you to marry another survivor, for example?

A: It was not that important for me to marry another survivor, but it was important for me to marry another Jewish woman. That -- That was -- That was important.

Q: Yeah. And did you -- did you talk much at the beginning, about what you had been through?

A: Well, naturally we talked about it, because it is a -- it is something that my behavior, my things are not normal. I -- You know, I-I -- I have things that I acquired in the camp

and that they stick with me and you know, that's a -- it's soma -- somebody who understands me. That's -- That's what it is.

Q: What -- What do you mean, things you acquired in the camp that's -- that --

A: Well, these are -- these are little, little things and I only going to mention one to you. Being starved in the camp, every crumb of bread and every piece of meal, is always in a -- a very important factor in my life. And I can go out with my wife and have a good piece of di -- no, I wouldn't say be -- I mi -- I have a good dish and I never would take a piece and say, "Here darling, would you like to taste it?" I don't do it of not being a good husband, I do it because the -- the -- the think that this piece, little piece is still in my mind that I need it for myself. Not realizing it -- it da -- it doesn't mean nothing, you know, today, what is -- a-and -- and these -- these stupid things are still with me, that, you know, that piece of bread means -- means so much and so mu -- or piece of -- some part of dish is so important that I -- I don't take a spoon or knife or whatever it is, from the dish and take a piece and offer it, you know. That doesn't [indecipherable] that I'm bad, but it's -- it's something that -- that sticks with me.

Q: Yeah. And she understands that.

A: Yeah, she understands it. Otherwise, there would have been big fights about it. But she understands it, she's very understanding.

Q: Tell me about -- y-you married in '51? 1951?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. And you moved out of the house in the Bronx, or did you stay there?

A: No, no, we moved out of the Bronx in 1957, I think. And we moved to a new garden apartment project in Queens.

Q: And what are you doing at this point? Are you -- You're working? What -- What were you doing?

A: Yeah, I still -- I still was working. I worked all along. Huh?

Q: What were you doing?

A: I was doing as a mechanic here in the -- in the place, in the dealership.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Ne-New car dealership.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. And I -- I make my living that way.

Q: And you have children?

A: I got two wonderful daughters, they both are married. I got four lovely grandchildren and my oldest daughter lives in Scarsdale, married to a physician and my younger daughter lives in Andover, Massachusetts, with two lovely grandchildren and biomedical engineer, as a husband. And she also is a nurse with an MBDRN, something like that. And she is -- She also has a very important position in the -- the company manufacturing some drugs. And my other daughter helps her husband, keeping the books. And by and large, I accomplished a wonderful li -- wife. I have a wonderful family and grandchildren, daughters, son-in-laws, and it's a very, very well family.

Q: When your -- When your daughters were growing up, did there come a point at which you wanted to talk to them about the war? Did they ask you about it?

A: When my daughters were growing up and they became the age of seven or eight years old, I let them watch television, where they had movies from the Holocaust and I told them that I was in there and all that and I told them about it. They were very understanding. And as of today, they still try to be active with the Holocaust, and they know about it and they are very supportive, at -- as far as that is concerned.

Q: Mm-hm. Ho-How much a part of your life with them does that occupy, would you say? I mean, do -- is it a significant part of that dynamic that you have? Your background?

A: Unfortunately, not a dynamic part, because I was very gentle about it and my daughters understood what it was all about and they didn't want to dig into it too much. And I did want to press the issue too much and you know --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: We -- We were just talking about -- about your daughters and -- and what -- what they knew about -- about your experiences.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Did you ever take them back over there? Did you take any trips with them?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. Tell me about that.

A: I took my youngest daughter -- I -- I wanted to take my two daughters and their husbands and show them where we come from and what I went through and all that, you know, and unfortunately my -- not unfortunately, but my daughter became pregnant, the eldest one. So I just took the youngest daughter. And I showed them Berlin, and that was our first stop. And I arranged there to talk to German kids in the school, about the Holocaust and they were treated from the German government to -- they paid for their hotel and the entertainment. They showed them -- they took them to the opera and, you know, for a week. But we -- we only stayed in Berlin two days. And I took the same train that we always used to take when we went to Poland, to Time and all that, from Berlin. No, I'm sorry, I -- we traveled from Berlin in -- in normal times, in 1938 and so on, we went on daytime, but to save time, I traveled at night from Berlin to Poland. And we took them to Auschwitz. I showed them Auschwitz. I showed them the gas chambers and the barracks and all that. And from Auschwitz, we went at the night train, to Vienna, where my wife was. And then, from Vienna, we went to -- from Vienna we went to Holland. I

have an aunt there. She is 91 years old, which I visit frequently, because she has nobody. And then we went home. That took us, I think three weeks.

Q: How -- How was that for you, to be back in -- in Auschwitz, specifically?

A: Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I missed Munich.

Q: Oh.

A: Be -- We stopped in Munich and we visited Dachau. I showed them -- my son-in-law Dachau, and my daughter. And from there we went to Holland, then we went home.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I forgot we went to -- to Dachau.

Q: What was -- What was that like for you? How did --

A: Pardon me?

Q: Was that the first time you had been back to the camps -- to visit the camps?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Uh-huh. And what -- what was that like? How did that affect you?

A: Well, actually it's not the first time I went back. There was an -- in 1970 that I went to Auschwitz by myself. I told my wife, "I have to go there and I have to see it." [indecipherable] And I went back by myself, to Auschwitz.

Q: You said you had to see it?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why?

A: Psychologically. Yeah, I know. Had to say goodbye to my mother and to -- you know. And that's why I went back for. And -- And I went back when I was invited from the German government, to come back as a sort of -- as a, you know, a friendly gesture, so to speak of.

Q: How did that come about? They invited you?

A: Well, they have a program, you know, they invite all the ex-Berlinners back to -- to Berlin. And I must say, they -- they paid the -- the air fare and the hotel and they showed us in the opera and the circus, and -- not the circus, there's no circus in Berlin, but th-they showed us around and gave us a good time and took us back. And I still get letters from -- you want [inaudible]

Q: No, I'm fine, that's fine, thanks.

A: They still, you know, have this program and letters from all over the world. They -- They take people who used to be in Berlin, you know, to invite them back. But they had categories from people who were in a concentration camp and people who were elderly and you know, then the younger ones, and so on, so forth. My friend who I met [indecipherable], he just went last year -- last year? Or this year, I think he went back apar from the city of Berlin -- to Berlin, yeah.

Q: And, you were speaking with students? Was it --

A: Yes, yes, in the school.

Q: How did -- How did that go? What did -- What did you tell them and how did they receive you, what did they ask you?

A: Well, it's -- it's a -- it's a very ticklish question to ask, because you're talking to people who -- who don't know anything and who have a certain mind and they have all kind of antagonizing questions, and -- not question, answers that -- put -- put it that way. So, you know, to handle them needed a little diplom-diplomacy and like I got the question, "Why are you so mad ta -- towards the Germans, when you getting reparation?"

Q: Why are you so mad towards the Germans --

A: And I'm getting repatriation.

Q: Reparation?

A: Reparation, yeah. I said, and so -- so what -- what could I answer? I said, "Do y-you think that by giving me money now, that it will bring my family back? My mother, my aunt?" You know, and so th-that shut her up, but, you know, it's a -- it's a -- a very, very ticklish question to ask and t-to give you a proper answer.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know, in other words, they feel that they giving you the money, they should be resolved from the -- from the things that they have done, which is not the case. So that's -- that's na -- another subject. And then I have a tape from a -- a radio station, there was a -- a question and answer radio program on the German radio and they -- the pupils that were permitted to call up the station and ask them questions, you know. And all kind of other questions came up, you know, which I personally didn't care for, you know.

Q: Can you think of some?

A: Well, there was one question, I said, you know, that Germany never had the resistance and you only had about two of -- two or three people within the army on the 20th of June, I forgot the year, that they tried to revolt against Hitler and they -- unfortunately didn't succeed, you know. So they say, "Well, that's not true. We had so many this, so many that there." I said, "You say that, but I never read about it in the paper, nobody ever knew about it," you know. That -- th - th -- somebody did some -- some terrorist attic in the -- in the factory, you know, that somebody got injured by doing a certain thing. But, by and large, nobody knew about it, nobody heard about it, because it would have any effect. It would have been [indecipherable] that the guy blew up a factory and 200 people got killed. Or -- Or the -- the SS commando was -- was bombed or something like that, you know, like you -- like you read today in the -- in the paper, about Israel, that they blow up a -- a Jewish army post, or whatever it is. So I -- I -- I couldn't answer that, because it was -- was the -- called into the radio station here, but I got [indecipherable] within, you know, it -- it doesn't mean anything, because it's one in a thousand.

Q: Why did you think it was important for you to go to -- to participate in that -- that program, to talk to the students?

A: I grew up in Berlin and I was 13 years old when I left Berlin. And I wanted them to know what a fellow student had to go through in his life on account of anti-Semitism and on account of Hitler. And I wanted them to know that I went through it. That's -- That was the purpose. No other purpose could there be, but wh-what else could I do? I mean, this is the new generation growing up and they -- they are innocent, in my opinion. It's

not their fault that they are born by a German people. And I hoped that they might learn something from it, by me telling them what -- what took place. So, I did that, you know, and I -- I did if for their sake, so to speak of. Like I'm going to -- I'm -- I'm talking here to -- to -- here, mel I -- I didn't succeed, but I wanted to talk here, there's a German school here, in White Plains that has German students there and I wanted to talk to them, but it never materialized.

Q: Why not? Do you know?

A: I don't know. I can't -- I can't say. Although I met the -- the principal and I know that the Jewish -- the Westchester Holocaust Commission is in touch with him, but I don't know for what reason nobody is able to talk about the Holocaust to their -- to their students.

Q: Did -- Wha -- The trip that you took to Germany, did you -- do you think it -- it was worthwhile? Did you come back thinking that you had accomplished what you had set out to accomplish?

A: I think so. I think so. I -- I got a very good reception from the principal. He gave me a book as a -- as a remembrance. And I think I -- I left some -- some important points there. That fellow German, although I'm not German, but the fellow who lived in Germany, was all of a sudden subjected -- subjected to these kind of treatments and endurances in his life. So I -- I think that I accomplished something in that respect. I mean, I go here and I talk to kids in the school and you should see the letters I get back from the -- from the kids, you know, that the impression they get, of what I will -- what I told them, you

know -- I didn't tell them all the -- the bad things, but you know, th -- they -- they -- they got -- kids get something out of it.

Q: Do you think they do understand it, or as much as they can?

A: Yes, yes. Most definitely, because kids today are definite -- than kids when -- when I was a kid. Kids today have radios, they got computers, they got all kind of -- all kind of help and they know -- they learn earlier than we started to learn and education is -- is admitted in a different way than when I went to school. So, it -- it's a different ball game.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I mean, you talk today to a three year old, he answers you already like a 15 year old. And you read in the paper that there are kids that are 12 and 13 years old, are capable of going -- of going to college in the next three years or so. And they are very few and far in between, but it happens. Never happened when we grew up.

Q: What -- What's your motivation when you speak to kids here, as opposed to the kids that you spoke with in Germany? Wh-Wh-Why is that important?

A: My motivation here is that, first of all, to tell kids that were -- things that can happen to one in this lifetime and to be aware of it, that things can happen, even here, with a democracy and with all the freedom that you enjoy. Because, if you stop to analyze things that are going on around the world, we s -- we back in the same boat that -- that we were before. Not in the same -- to the same extent, but it does happen, you pick up the paper and you have it in -- in Yugoslavia, you have it in Russia, you have it in India, you have it -- you have it all over the world. So, people didn't learn yet, so it's still going on.

And something has to be done eventually, to -- to stop all that, although they -- they created the UN -- the United Nation. The United Nation didn't do much to stop the killing.

Q: You mentioned that you had gone to Israel for a reunion of survivors? Was that -- When was that?

A: Yes, I went -- I went three times to different places in the -- in the United States and to -- and to -- the first one was to Israel.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in 19 -- I think it was in 1974 or '75. I -- I could be wrong with the year.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But it was a very eventful gathering in -- in Jerusalem. And at that time, you know, we -- we were told by -- by the -- by the margaro -- by the organization that sponsored it, of which I am -- I was there on the executive board, that they spoke with Yad Vashem and it was brought up that the survivors might want to establish a -- a section in Yad Vashem for the people that perished in -- in -- in Auschwitz. And they got the permission to bring a -- a gravestone with them. I mean, not a big gravestone, but a small headstone, something like that, a gravestone, whatever it is, with the name and the -- you know. And believe -- believe me that everybody in the group had one, including me. And Yad Vashem was not prepared to accept all these -- these stones, you know? So, they told us to put it on the side, you know, in Yad Vashem, and -- which we did and the -- it took them three years to find a -- a place and place them properly. And I took a stone there and

I had it engraved with my late mother's name and all that. And I went to -- to Yad Vashem and I -- I located the stone. Believe me, it's a -- it's a wonder -- here again we go, it's a wonder, from the hundreds of stones that were there, that I found my late mother's stone. And, you know, it -- it's a -- but the Holocaust meeting in -- in Israel was very, very meaningful. It was only on the hotel on the wall, you know. And, again, we had the dignitaries, the Israeli dignitaries address us and you know, and all that. So, it was -- it was quite a -- quite a meaningful and thoughtful event that took place. But, then we had one in Washington, in -- in Philadelphia, I think, with President Reagan and he was also very, very thoughtful and meaningful with that. So --

Q: What do you get from those meetings? What -- What meaning do you take away from them? Why do you go?

A: Why do I go? It's a good question, I don't know. It's a -- It's a -- It's a satisfaction to remember -- to remember the Holocaust, that -- that what it is, it's a -- is -- is self-satisfaction that you do for the people who perished, that they are remembered, that things like this has happened. That what you been through, that you meet people that you haven't seen for years and that's all I can say, as far as I'm concerned. Without -- Without getting any deeper into it, because, you know, it is every -- every subject is -- has a lengthy explanation.

Q: Mm-hm. I wanted to -- I realize I didn't finish up your life in New York, you -- were you a mechanic?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you stay a mechanic the whole time?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your whole career?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did very well, I think. You're living in a lovely house. You --

A: Well, I can say I did very well. I sent my daughters to colleges, I -- I have a lovely house, I have a lovely family. I didn't do bad, but I could have done better. I have a car and -- and you know, I mean I -- I -- I -- I'm -- I accomplished things in my life. Not the way it could have been, but I'm not starving, so that's -- that's one -- one good resolution. So -- But I went through a lot in business, and then, you know, and everything is -- everything was not bedded in roses. So, it's a -- was a constant -- constant struggle, but I managed.

Q: Did you end up owning your own business after awhile?

A: Yes.

Q: You did?

A: I had my own business.

Q: It was a auto -- car repair -- car dealership?

A: No, not a dealership.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: To have a dealership, you need a lot of money and I don't have that. But I -- I had the shop and employees and service vehicles and all that and -- but it didn't bloom to the

extent that it could have bloomed and -- but whatever -- what I mean, it didn't expand large. I had problems getting help, which is common things here. And -- But I had -- I had my -- I kept my head above the water and didn't sink, so that's -- that's the important end of it.

Q: Mm-hm. Did -- Did you tend to hire other Jews? Did you hire -- I'm just curious whether that happen --

A: I -- I -- I didn't make any -- any discrimination of Jewish or colored or whatever it is. Whoever came to me, asked for a job, he give me a day's work and was honest and showed up to work, without any excuses, I didn't care. Jewish or not Jewish or whatever. It didn't matter to me.

Q: Did you ever -- Did they, do you think know that you were a survivor of the Holocaust? I'm wondering if you ever talked about that with any of your employees.

A: I -- I -- I -- I talked about being a survivor very often. Not -- Not to gain any -- any preferences, but it's my nature. So, inadvertently sometimes it came over us in the -- in the -- in the discussion, you know, what did you do during the war, or, you know, where were you, what -- when did you come to the country and why did you come to this country? An how come you came to this country? And you know, they're all kind of -- all kind of answers to give. The Holocaust always comes into the picture. So n-not that I got any better treatment being a Holocaust survivor. I would say sometimes I met people who -- who gave me some preferential treatment, I wouldn't say no, but I went to the bank and deposited a hundred dollars and told them I had a -- I'm a Holocaust survivor,

they didn't give me credit for 200, so you know, so it -- it has -- has it's limits, you know? And then people always, they say, "Ah, you know, you hear about the Holocaust constantly. That's enough of it, it's gone, zzz," you know, so you -- you have all kind of people that you encounter with and -- and you know, different -- different people have different opinions, so you have to -- you have to face every situation and be ready to -- to accept it and -- and deal with it.

Q: Have you heard that frequently from people? The Holocaust is over, why are we hearing about it so much?

A: I wouldn't say I've heard frequently about it, but I did hear about it, yes.

Q: And what do you -- What do you say when you hear that? How do you react? How do you respond?

A: How do I explain? I says, "Yes, it's over, but the damage it did is not over yet, because people still suffer from it. Psychologically, mentally, physically. So, how can you say -- how can you say it's over?" I mean, if you got -- get hurt in a -- in a -- at the job where you work for -- for three or four years, and it's 10 years later and you still suffer from it, you still say, "I got this from there and there, where I worked, and you know, and I wasn't taken care of there properly." So, you know, it's something that sticks with you.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So they have no answer. Because I always confront them with realities.

Q: Now you mentioned when you came to New York, you hadn't encountered anti-Semitism. In the time since then, did you run across that in -- in -- in your career or since you moved to Westchester here?

A: Oh, well, I -- I encountered anti-Semitism occasionally, but it's -- it's something that everybody again, encounters, you know, and it's something that you have to accept, because unfortunately it's -- it's in existence and some people show it and some people don't show it.

Q: How have you encountered it?

A: My -- The remarks people make. The disassociation which -- with the Gentile people and it's -- it's a -- you know, it's noticeable that -- that you are a Jew, that they don't accept you or they don't want you, or -- you know, it's -- it's something -- not that I am very -- how should I say it? Not that I am very hurt by it, but I am very touchy by it, but it is noticeable and it is -- I -- I feel it, you know, and so do other people feel it, too, but it's a personal [indecipherable] was anti-Semiti -- anti-Semi -- anti-Semitic.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So it is a, you know, is -- it's noticeable, you -- you feel it, believe me.

Q: I wonder if you feel it more as a survivor?

A: Well, I would say that we are ea-easier to detect it than -- than other people, I would say that, because we experienced it.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fred Bachner. This it tape number three, side B. You notice it more, you s -- you think, as a -- as a survivor?

A: Yes, yes. Like I say, experience is the best teacher. You know, it is more noticeable and I can see if -- if people hide it and people try to -- you know, try to be anti-Semitic about it and without showing it to you. And it's a -- it's -- it's more noticeable to me than to some pa -- somebody else.

Q: I've heard some survivors say that they can sort of instinctively tell when someone else is a Holocaust survivor, without knowing anything about them. I'm curious if you agree with that or no, if that's not what your experience has been?

A: I agree with it.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah. We survivor are a -- a different people and I -- I don't know, y-y-you know, nowadays people who came to this country before the war, they all of a sudden became survivors. So, now we have to start to distinguish th-the survivors. A Holocaust survivor who was in a camp, for me is very easy to detect, on his behavior, on his way -- the way he talks and y-you know, it -- there are certain -- I -- I don't know, there's certain -- certain ways that -- that I can recognize a -- a survivor. You know, the -- we -- we had the language on ourselves by doing certain things a certain way, and I -- I noticed that when they play the football here, you know, the -- the coach stands in the side and he makes like this, you know, all -- all kind of moves and you know, to tell the players how to act

and -- and what to do, what not to do. We had that same kind of a language with -- with us, because when -- when we seen a guard came in, you know, and he had something to do and started to hit people or grab people, you know, to be executed or whatever you want to call it, we -- we -- we sense it and kn-knew it, you know, and we gave each other notice of it and tried to hide or tried to do something that -- not to be on the -- in the front, to be the first one to be caught. So, in case there was anything going on, you know, we tried to warn each other, but it was to no avail, because they did anyway, what they going to. So, in that respect, I would say yes.

Q: What do you think it is that you see in other survivors that I wouldn't notice, for example?

A: Intuition. Intuition, you know. It's certain behaviors that we have that is not a normal behavior, let's put it that way. Like, I don't know, I don't know how to tell you the certain behavior is, but there's -- there's certain instances where I can see how a survivor would behave and behaves, you know, and I can say that this is -- this is a survivor of a camp, not -- not from -- from -- coming early to this country.

Q: I'm wondering if there are things politically around -- either in this country or around the world, that have happened since you came here, that have resonated particularly with your experience during the war? Vietnam war, Civil Rights movement? Any of the number of sort of big events that have shaped this country. Have any of them sort of affected you more specifically because of your past experience?

A: I am thinking back and I don't -- I don't think that anything has affected me personally or -- I admired the colored movement with Martin Luther King, that they finally established themselve. And I don't see anything -- there's certain things pol- politically that I don't agree a hundred percent with and -- but here is a country where I can state my opinion without going to jail. And in discussions sometimes -- rarely -- I do it, but by and large, that -- that personally I -- I am not affected by it, that it should change my way of life or shape my way of life, or anything of that nature.

Q: You mentioned the -- Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement. Did you -- How did -- How did you -- How did you view that, as that was happening?

A: How did I view it? Well, he was a -- in my opinion he was a man who wanted t-to elevate the colored people into a better position that they are -- they were and -- and to a certain degree, he accomplished that. And he -- unfortunately it -- he paid with -- with his life for it, but it -- it -- it -- it was due, because the colored people here in the -- in the United States, sooner or later would have been treated like the Jewish people were treated in Germany. If you stops back and think about it, that they couldn't be on the same bus and they couldn't be here. We had the same thing in Germany. I mean, one thing leads to the other. And then -- And then -- In south, the way the colored people now are being treated, not -- in certain respects, not any better than we Jews were treated in Germany.

Q: So you think it -- it could have backslid back towards slavery or something like that, if it hadn't -- without the Civil Rights movement?

A: I don't think that there would be any slavery here, but the detention in camps and all that, that could have been in some shape or form, be accomplished. It's no big deals about it. You had -- I mean, you had the Ku Klux Klan here, you got all kind of other people who are on the right track on trying to accomplish these things and fortunately they -- they getting stopped here by the government. But nevertheless, you have the redskins, you got the other thi -- the-there so many factors in-involved here that it's impossible for -- for a plain citizen to keep track of it. And they do take place every day of the week.

Q: Are there political groups or causes that you have gotten involved with, supported, maybe financially or with your -- with actions. Anything you've done --

A: No, not at all. I don't support any democratic or republican party or any other party, Right for Life, or whatever it is. The only -- The only thing that I support is Yad Vashem and the United Jewish Appeal and some other Jewish organizations. But I don't support any -- anything.

Q: It sounds like you're very involved in those groups.

A: No, I li -- oh, in the Holocaust, yes, yes. I'm very involved with Yad Vashem, I'm very involved with the museum in Washington and I'm involved here with the Holocaust Commission in White Plains. I initiated here in this town where I'm living, a Holocaust committee, which I am the chairman of and I must say I'm successful. On Yom HaShoah services, I have about 350 people partaking and I will have a new library -- part of it dedicated to the Holocaust -- studying the Holocaust with computers and video games --

not video games, I'm sorry, video machines for the movies from the Holocaust. I'm very much involved with the -- with the Holocaust, yes.

Q: Did your brother or your father get involved in that way also? What was their -- How did they come back --

A: I believe my brother is involved in -- my brother lives in Florida, so -- and he tells me he is involved and to what degree, I don't know, but yeah, I know that he's involved, yes.

Q: And your father, did he live on his own with his new wife, after you --

A: My father lived with his wife and he passed away about 10 years ago.

Q: Oh. How did -- How did he cope after the war? You mentioned he'd been sick. How did -- How did he do?

A: Well, he -- he was a sick man, he had heart problems and -- but he -- he managed. He coped with it and he was -- he tried to be very religious and he passed away on the eighth day of Hanukah and although that there was no eulogy permitted for the eighth day of Hanukah, the rabbi gave a eulogy because he was a -- a good -- my -- I -- I don't know how to express it, he was a good person and a -- was religious and he -- they had a lot of respect for him.

Q: And where was he living?

A: He was living in Queens.

Q: In Queens.

A: Yeah.

Q: So not too far from you at the time, when he was --

A: No, I -- I been living out here 35 years, so he's -- he's -- the -- it's about an hours away from here.

Q: Did you stay close?

A: Yeah, you know, stay close. I went to see him wa -- you know, every once -- so often and I had him out here to come and visit the grandchildren, and all that, you know, so it was a close relationship.

Q: I wonder as you -- as you look back on all that has happened. What -- What do you think kept you going?

A: Perseverance. Perseverance. The faith that everything will be all right, so that's -- that's what keeps me going. Today is today, tomorrow is tomorrow. I used to live in the concentration camp from hour to hour. So, you know, it's -- it's one step ahead, to live from day to day. We -- We advance 24 hours, right? That's the advance we have. I don't believe to get attached to anything, as far as physically is concerned. To a house or to anything. It's just -- just my nature, what I have lost in life, you know, it's -- I -- I realize how fast you can lose what you accomplished. So -- And there was nobody who could replace it. So why get attached to something? When I had sold my house, my -- my daughters came at six o'clock in the morning, to -- to have a last look at the -- at the -- that room where -- where they were, you know? So, I felt good that they had the feeling, you know, but I personally, it -- it's nothing. Just a house, just stones and bricks and all that, you know. And they don't talk.

Q: You mentioned why get attached to things. What about to people? Those got taken away very quickly, too.

A: That's another story. I have my mixed feelings. I got attached to my family and -- but other than that, I -- you know, it's -- you get attached to people, they -- they here today and gone tomorrow. And during the war, you got attached to people and they here today, next hour they're gone. So, you know, it is -- and -- and -- and getting attached to somebody and loving somebody and all that is -- it's -- it's a very painful situation. And you lose somebody you love and somebody you're close to and you know. Or somebody from the family, a cousin, an aunt, an uncle or that, you know, it leaves a scar in your -- in your body. So, y-you can't -- you know, it's -- it's a -- it's a personal thing, you cannot generalize it. You know, I feel one way, you feel the other way and it's a -- like my -- my children, they know that they have t-two cousins and you know. Then --Not -- Not two cousins, they got more than that. They got [indecipherable] just two, and then they have some -- some other cousins in -- in Philadelphia and they got other cousins in Los Angeles, but they never met them, never seen each other, you know, it's -- it's one of those things, you know. Like here, and in America, the distance is so big that it's a problem to have a family close together. Like in the old -- old times, he used to live in the city and everybody used to live close by and everybody used to see each other on the weekend, because it was a custom that you would -- what do you -- what you doing this weekend? I'm going to Aunt So and So and to Uncle So and So and tomorrow we going there and it was a family situation. But that's all gone, because today you want to go and

see your brother, you have to go take an airplane and travel three hours, four hours and by the time you get to the airport and from the airport, so it's a days a -- a day lost.

Q: How do you think -- it sounds like you came out of the war with a fair amount of distrust of attachment. How do you think you were able to form a bond with your wife, for example, that's lasted as long as it has and you've created a family that's been very stable together.

A: Well, my li -- it's a different situation, you love a wife, you love the family and you establish a relationship and it's a -- it's a different -- different situation between my wife and somebody else. I mean, you know, I can like somebody, I can love somebody, but it's not the same love that you have with your wife. So it's -- it's a -- it's a different ball game, because you can have a favorite aunt, you can have a favorite cousin, you can have a favorite like this, you know, but you like them because the way they react, the way you li -- the understanding you with you're cousins or with your aunts and uncles and all that. It's -- It is not the same than between -- like between a wife and a husband. So, you know, it's -- it's a different. You feel very bad if an -- an aunt dies or a cousin dies or something like that. But you can't say that you actually loved the person. So, there's a distinction.

Q: Mm-hm, sure. I think we can stop there. Is there anything else that I didn't -- didn't get -- give you a chance to talk about that you want to -- that you want to add here?

A: A chance of what?

Q: Anything else that you wanted to talk about, that you didn't get a chance to, before we stop.

A: Well, there are so many things that are -- that are to be talked about, but I guess we covered the major items in a broad way and if there are any specifics that you would like me to talk about, I'd be more than happy to talk. And if you review the tapes or something like that, and you -- you think or feel that there are things, you put them down on paper and [indecipherable] come back and spend some time with me and I'd be more than happy to fill you in on these things and you know, we'll make another issue out of.

Q: Great. Thank you so much.

A: You're welcome. My pleasure.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fred Bachner.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview