

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Leo Bretholz**  
**June 4, 1998**  
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## **PREFACE**

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: Just make sure we're recording here. Why don't you just say a few words and -  
- say your name.

Answer: A few simple words? Leo Bretholz is my name and recording Holocaust stories is my game. Although, I like to stay away from it, base -- I never bring up the subject when we sit. It's not -- I'm not a -- a dweller on -- on the -- on the events. I don't exult in the word survivor, because that, to me, is almost like a -- become an object of -- of curiosity. Those who are no longer here, they are the real people that should be paid attention to. Because if we don't remember them, you know, we'll kill them all over again. But the word survivor to me connotes something that's always a -- a special group and you know, when I speak to people and then they say, "Do you have a number?" I say, "No, I don't have a number, because if I were -- had been in a position to get a number, chances are 99 or 999 out of 1000 that I wouldn't be speaking to you here. So once I don't have the number, I am no longer that object of curiosity and I'm losing some -- I'm lo-losing some credibility, you know. They want to hear that oh, you're in Auschw -- well, if you're in Auschwitz, you're not here to tell the story. Some of them are, but the majority of them are not. It's enough that I escaped from a train and even that was -- in that train out of -- out of 1000, only seven -- out of 1000, 773 were gassed on

arrival. So, even that is sort of a -- a -- a percentage to -- to -- to be -- to be taken into consideration, you know, so anyway. Now I said more than what you wanted me to say.

Q: Let me make sure I'm getting all this on tape. I want to begin with talking about the events, maybe the weeks or days leading up to the end of the war and where you were and what you were doing.

A: Well, the end of the -- the days of the end of the war, after I had lived through the liberation in France. Paris was liberated on the 25th of August, 1944. And then the war ended in '45. I was still in France and originally I had papers to come to the United States in 1941, but that was negated by the fact that there was Pearl Harbor and the Americans [indecipherable] entered the war. So, the papers that I had then, which was the affidavit of support, which we got from our relatives here, that expired. And of course after that, I went through all my adventures to deportation and the escape and the jail and everything. But in '45, at the end of the war, I was in France and was awaiting the documents that my aunt, who lived in Baltimore sent me, which is an affidavit of support, at the end of 1946, I received my visa of entry into the United States. And in January of 1947, the 19th of January 1947, I went to LeHavre in France and took the John Eriksson to the United State, a 10 days crossing. And I arrived in New York on the 29th of January, 1947, which is now a little over 51 years. To some people, a lifetime, to me it flew by just like this and it's hardly to be believed, that's 51 years have gone by, yes. So I was in France at the end of the -- of -- of the war and came to the United States there. At that point, I didn't know yet what had happened to my family, although the -- the indications were quite ominous

that a tragedy had happened, because we knew already what had happened on the camps and I knew that my mother -- hadn't heard since '42. So that was, to me, an indication.

So I came to United States, I -- I was then s-still ignorant of the fact what happened to my mother and sisters.

Q: I'd like to ask you about that in -- in a little bit, but do you recall -- I think I re-recall reading something about liberation day and you were in a town in France where they were -- German soldiers were being led through town?

A: Yeah, that's in the book, also. That is in my book, the book will come out at the end of this year -- towards the end of the year now. Probably November of 1998 and the book will be called, "Leap into Darkness - Seven Years on the Run in Wartime Europe". It's co-written by my good friend Michael Oleska, the -- actually, he was the -- he motivated me to write it and then he was editing it f-for me and we did mutual project, was -- it went very well. Taught me a lot and gave me an opportunity. But, at the end of the war, in Limoge, I was in Limoge. That's where I was when France was liberated. And the garrison, the German oc -- the German garrison in Limoge was not the same as it had been before June of 1944, because some of them were sent to the war front. The landing in Normandy took place on the sixth of June. And on the 10th of June was the burning of the village of Orodure, to which I was a -- almost witness, because I was on my way there and got off the train when I saw a German transport going there and I didn't want to go into the same direction. That village was burned to the ground and all it's inhabitants, except a few, burned with the village. And I was just about maybe 10 - 15 miles away

from them. Everyone that had a ticket for Orodure, to get off, which I had -- was taken into station, was part of that massacre. So there again, I was lucky in a great, great way. You see, my escape is not so much survival and -- and that's why I say I don't exult in it. It's a -- it's a question of -- of fear and luck. The fear is the motivater and then you got to be lucky for -- for it to succeed or to -- to get away. So, that was just -- before the liberation, after the liberation, we had these -- the remnant of the German garrison in -- in -- in Limoge. They were taken down the main street, down towards the station by a ragtag outfit of the resistance, whom the Germans considered dispensable, just a few weeks earlier. And here, this ragtag outfit that didn't have matching shoes, had the nerve. Anything to -- to -- to -- to hold on to basically, except their pride and their joy that the -- now, the war -- the end of the war came. Those Germans acted like little sheep, you know. Their -- a few weeks earlier they were the masters and at that moment they walked with their hands on top of their heads and looking scared. Why? Because they're human beings. And some of them were young. I mean they were in the hands of these underground people and they knew that these undergrounds had a bone to pick with them. They knew that wh-wh-wh-when we are in their hands, we are not in the hands of - of a -- of -- of an enemy's ha -- high command, where they have to deal with -- with protocol and war amenities. The amenities of exchanging and of fairness, imprisonment. These -- these underground, th-the -- the resistance, they were bent on -- on vengeance.

Q: And you are -- were a member of this ragtag [indecipherable]

A: I -- I was -- I was not -- I -- I was a member of the -- of the Sixth. The -- the Sixth was a group that was engaged in clandestine performances, like doing false identification cards and -- and documents. We did that already, before the liberation. But, we were all under a -- taking orders. Some were connected with the FTPF, they were called. In French it's Front Tereur Partisain Francais. Front tereur means snipers or guerrillas. Partisain -- partisans, you know. They were a tough -- oh, how do you say it? Rough, rock and tumble outfit. They didn't go by -- by orders or by command. There was another group was called FFI, the Force Francais L'Interiore. The French Forces of the Interior. They took orders from DeGaulle in London. And there was this conflict between the two groups. The one wanted to go the -- the legal -- the -- the proper way. The other said, "We're going to get the enemy whichever way we can." So this -- this was the group. And under -- we were usually under these orders. But the partisans that arrested the Germans, they were the ones that had come out of the woods carrying their rifles. Some of the rifles -- most of the rifles were not loaded. But the rifle looked good and inspired -- if -- if -- if not fear, at least respect.

Q: Do you remember what you were feeling that particular day, after -- after so many years on the run and so much uncertainty?

A: Well, it -- it -- it -- it was -- there was elation. There was jubil -- jubilant attitudes, you know. In the streets it was festive, carnival-type. And people were rejoicing that -- that -- to see that the Germans had been defeated because the atrocities -- in fact, I write that in the book, down the street, th-they were -- they were carrying placards, "Remember

Orodeure", that's the town that they burned down, you know. Euphoria, that's the word.

Wh --

Q: Mm-hm. You -- you were feeling euphoric, yourself?

A: Yeah, yeah. The mood was euphoric. And then with it came a sobering moment, mixed in with that euphoria. That while the war is finished, there are families somewhere from whom we hadn't heard. So, to us this was the beginning of a new chapter of finding out and searching. And being here dealing with things. When Paris was liberated, in '44 - in August '44, we knew that Germany was not defeated yet. In fact, that same year, in the -- in the fall, came the Battle of the Bulge. And in that counter attack by the Germans, they advanced far enough for Paris to feel that there might be another -- a re-occupation. That never happened. The allies -- allies prevailed. But that was that moment. Germans were still kicking -- alive and kicking. And when the landing took place in '44, during that period, in June of '44, the deportations from southern France, from Vichy, France towards Drancy and Auschwitz were still going on. So even that euphoric moo-mood, about the landings, had to be tempered with -- with the knowledge that people are still being sent away. But then when -- when -- in 1945, in May of '45, the armistice was signed, there was a different attitude. Now, we knew that the war was ended and we had to deal with the aftermath. For many of us, that had to do with family, because we had left our families and loved ones and some of it -- some of them left with their families, but in the process of fleeing, of going to France and living on the Vichy, some of those fa-families had been separated. Young men were hiding out while their parents were



deported. That happened quite often, you saw that in the movies with -- with “Au revoir mes enfants” and you had so many other things and -- and so in Freedman in the wrote -- the wro -- who wrote that book, “When Memory Comes”, he was taken to a convent and his parents were deported and never came back. And finally he got back to his Judaism, because he -- he was converted by the padres and -- no, bu -- bu -- no, he went to a -- not to a con -- he went to a monastery, I think. So anyway, we all had to deal with these things and knowing that the war was over was very good, but there was the family’s story and the history of -- and the aspect of -- of dealing with it -- dealing with it from emotional standpoint because we -- we -- it was the great uncertainty, who had survived and who had not survived.

Q: And how did you go about beginning to deal with it?

A: I tried to start searches. Red Cross and other venues and did actually not find out until 1962 what had happened. That was from ‘47 to ‘62, 15 years -- what happened to my mother and sisters, which is also in -- in the book. And how I dealt at the moment? At that moment I was -- in 1946, I was 25 years old, I had survived the war. I had received my papers to come to America. And frankly I was looking forward to getting away from the continent there. It had not been too kind to me, to say the least and of course, France, beautiful country. Countries are always beautiful, it’s what the people do that’s not so good, often, you know. But France to me was -- was a country that I wanted already to get away from because I had been in jail and I had been deported and I had been beaten up and so on. I -- I looked forward to coming to America, wh-where I knew I had family

and start a new life. And that's what I was dealing with. I did not dwell too much on the fact that I better stay in Europe and try to find my mother and sisters, because I had reached out to Red Cross and other agencies and I never heard anything. And of course at that time, the communication system had not developed to the point where you knew who had survived, who had not survived. So I -- I wanted to be just getting away from there and I knew that staying there wouldn't advance anything from me emotionally, because I'd only be still under the -- the impact of what happened to me. And I looked forward to make a break. And that's what happened. I came to the United States. I did not dwell too much on the sentimentality. [indecipherable] stay here and -- and -- and -- and - - and f -- and fight it to the end, because the continent was no longer for me, you see? I wanted to get away from it.

Q: How did you support yourself? You were a young man and for those two years before you came to America?

A: Well, we were all -- the American Joint Distribution Committee, they were in charge, even during the war, with some of the aid that they distributed to us. And in Limoge I worked for a aid committee, the Corshazod committee -- com-com-Committee d'Assistance Sociale est Secouron a Reconstruction. A -- a reconstruction of every -- we helped people who came back, who were repatriated or people who came out of hiding. And to -- to establish themselves with -- with ID cards and rejoining families. I worked for that committee and -- in Limoge and that committee was also in charge of distributing the Joint Distribution -- the American Joint Distri -- A -- the -- AJDC -- the JDC,

American Joint Distribution Committee -- Committee. They sent funds into Europe and they were the arm that extended into the -- into the Jewish community of friends and other countries in the -- in the area, Belgium and Holland, Luxembourg.

Q: Can you tell me about your --

A: And by the way, on that committee, I got paid for working there. Nominally, but I didn't need to go to fancy restaurants, you know or something like that.

Q: Tell me about your -- your trip to America in 1947.

A: I was in a -- on the Jo -- SS John Eriksson. I was -- I think about a 37 -- 37,000 ton former liberty ship. And it was a -- a January voyage. 80 percent of the ship got seasick. Most of us, while we were seasick, slept on deck, because in the cabins it was too -- the smell wasn't so good. There was -- with the disinfectant and so on. I -- it was a -- a -- a pleasant ship to be on. It had good food and a piano where one F-Frenchman was playing swing music. It's interesting -- was an interesting voyage. We were seasick and overnight the seasickness stopped, because we got into calm seas when we passed the Gulf Stream. So on the icicles that were hanging on the -- on the railing started melting and the waves were pretty high, I was one sitting there where this fella that played on the piano, he was a -- quite an artist. He improvised music and arrangements. Arrangements of popular tunes, especially American tunes. And there was a young lady, who was a war bride and she came to America to rejoin her fiancé. And these two fell in love. And then we landed in New York, Hoboken or Brooklyn. Never forget that scene. We landed in New York, she and that young man walked down the gangplank and her fiancé, the former GI and

his folk were standing there with flowers to wait to -- to receive her. And this young man walked down with her, carrying her suitcase. And actually big suitcases were taken in by the porters for the customs, but these little handbags carrying something for her. And we observed that, because we were already aware of that, because that was the talk. She says, "I don't know what to tell my fiancé." We were friends on that -- on that ship, you know, I have a few pictures that show us together. And then they walked down to her fiancé and his folks and she says, "I have to tell you that I fell in love on this ship and this is the man." I don't know what the words were that they exchanged there, but this was one of the scenes of that arriving -- arriving in America. There was one young lady who said she's going to Eagle Pass, Texas. A Parisian woman. Eagle Pass, Texas, that's at the Mexican border. I mean, this is an outpost where you -- where the cows walk in the streets and watermelons [indecipherable]. Well, with her I was in correspondence after I came here, for a few weeks or a couple months or so. And she wrote to me she doesn't know how to deal with that, but from Paris to Eagle Pass, she never knew that it would be this way. And then she -- she devised a -- a subterfuge where her mother was writing her a letter from Paris that the grandmother is very ill and is about to die. So she told her husband, he was her husband already, that she's going back to Paris, to the funeral of her grandmother. Later I found out that she wrote to him that she is not coming back to Eagle Pass. And [indecipherable], these are these spur of the moment situations where people in the war get together, fall in love, don't know what the future will be and then you

transplant somebody from Paris to Eagle Pass, you're -- you're crossing a -- you're going in to -- all together different culture there.

Q: And -- and what was the future for you? What -- what were your plans?

A: My plans were to be in -- in -- in Baltimore and start working. To maybe -- you know, earn -- earn my -- my keep. I had family here. My aunt, my father's sister, Aunt Sophie. And ma -- Aunt Minna and Uncle Sam, whom I had been with in Luxembourg after I escaped from Vienna. They had come here and my aunt was in the rag business, metal and iron, scrap metal and iron, but I never expected to be in that business and I came in January, lost my Uncle Sam, whom I loved very much. I came in the 29th of -- of January and in the middle of February he died. I hadn't had much chance to even tell him -- we had a chance, but not much chance to communicate about these years that had past, in between, in the interim. So, but -- end of February -- a month after I came here, I worked for Barnes Clothing, down on Baltimore Street and was my first job and I joined the textile company. Some people say I should have gone to college and furthered my education. Which would have been alright if I'd had enough money to pay rent. At first I stayed with my relatives, then I moved in with a friend of mine. Rented a -- a room in a place -- a little apartment. Didn't want to be a burden to my relatives all the time. So -- but I worked for a textile firm, starting in 1947 til the early 60's. And my goal in America was to -- to live a -- a normal life and -- and to make a living, you know. That's not -- no great ambitions or -- or great aspirations other than settle down and -- and quietly. I was a good salesman, I turned out to be a pretty good salesman and made a good living

working for the textile firm and later did other things. But th -- the first few months in America were also not entirely satisfactory as far as my daily life was concerned.

Number one, the death of my uncle affected me very much. And the change from France to America is also a culture shock. Then came the very hard winter in -- in -- in '47, was a hard winter, which is fine, but then the very hot summers in Baltimore, which were very oppressive for me, I cannot tolerate the heat too much. And before you know it, I was into the hay fever problem, which I did not have in -- in Europe. So the first year in America, I had second thoughts and the correspondence I had with my aunt in Paris and with some of the friends was that there is a possibility I may come back. In the back of my head, there was also still -- and that I couldn't help -- the idea of my mother and sisters. And in America I was far away from it, so the combination of not quite acclimating immediately to the American culture and the climate, plus the fact that I was still laboring with the thoughts of what had happened to my family, because this -- there was this guilt from the moment that I left them, in '38, although my mother urged me to leave.

Q: You still had that guilt?

A: That was with me, yes. So, a combination of not quite acclimating and wanting to be closer to where I might find out the truth. And still thoughts in me -- I was toying with the idea of perhaps going back, if not -- if not to stay, but at least to try again, because I could have gone back, but I wasn't -- I wasn't a citizen then. So it was a little more difficult for me to -- back and forth, but I had to reassess this whole thing. And it didn't

take long before I got acquainted with the language fully. I had some elementary school English knowledge. And I developed a circle of friends and once I started working, I became more involved in the daily life, acclimated in that respect. The language started to come easier and then when I started going on the road, I developed more and more of -- of a sense of what America means to me, because I like to travel aspect of meeting people and -- and earning a living, and --

Q: This was your sales [indecipherable] for the textile --

A: A salesman for the textile company. I was -- I became a -- a sales representative for them within about ni -- eight, nine months.

Q: So you got to see the country and --

A: County ah -- I traveled the rest of Maryland and the Eastern Shore and onto Delaware and the Baltimore - Washington area. Montgomery county, western Maryland.

Developed a circle of customers, yes. The firm handed me about a list of about 25 inactive customers. And when I left the firm in 1961, I left them with 250 to 300 customers. So that I had built up, you know. Nor -- I went to Norfolk, Virginia, went to the northern -- northern North Carolina area. I traveled basically from North Carolina to - to Pennsylvania. You know, into --d-different days, different directions. But I became -- I acclimated fast, yes.

Q: Did you travel by car?

A: By car, yeah.

Q: What kind of car?

A: Well, my boss sold me his -- that was 19 f --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

A: Well, my boss sold me his -- that was 1947 - '48 I bought that. He sold me -- he sold me his '46 car, Plymouth four door. And two years later I had to trade it and two years later I trade it again and two years later I trade it again, because I put on 50 - 60,000 miles a year. So my first car was a Plymouth, 1946, a gray Plymouth, 1946, a four door.

Q: What was it that you were selling, what product?

A: Textiles. Linens, domestics. Sheets, pillowcases, blankets, spreads, curtains, diapers, yardgoods, cretonnes, white goods, you know. The -- the department stores, five and 10 stores they are -- five and dime stores, they're a little bit out of -- out of -- no longer in existence, these places, you know, they're all big chains now. But you know, I had quite a good circle of -- of customers, yeah.

Q: And your -- your English was getting better at this point?

A: Well, it was getting better, yes. In the beginning I had a little difficulty and then as I describe in the book, in some of the places on the Eastern Shore, some of the merchants actually mocked me. I came into a place, the Rising Sun, where I encountered actual animosity. That used to be a little bit of Ku Klux Klan territory. So, but I -- I could cope with that.

Q: What happened?



A: Fact is, I describe it in the book. The -- on the Eastern Shore, I was sitting in the hotel, adding up my sales that I had made for the day and there were two fellas there, one from Philadelphia and one from Brooklyn, both in the shoe line. And we started talking and they recognized I had a little -- I spoke with an accent. "Where you from?" And, "Yeah, I just came here a year and a half ago, two years ago." That was maybe in '48 - '49. But I said, "I just started traveling here on the Eastern Shore and I find it a little different from traveling in Baltimore and Washington." They say, "How you mean that?" I say, "Well, the people have sort of a hostile attitude towards me, like they're mocking me. When I said, "Towel," they said, "Towel? What are you talking about?" You know, this and that. I said, "I feel a little bad about it." And they wanted make me feel good and one -- both of them said, "Don't worry about that. I'm from Brooklyn and he's from Philadelphia. They don't like our accents either. So we are -- we are in the same boat." So it made me feel better.

Q: How did you learn your trade?

A: Well, it was af -- I -- I worked about eight or nine months or 10 months inside the -- the office on -- in Baltimore. Anyway, ha -- in the -- in -- in the s -- in the wholesaler outfit distributorship. People came in and bought their merchandise and -- and I learned the difference between this type sheet and that type sheet. They had types, you know, sheets have types. There are -- there are muslins and percales and that type 128 and type 140 and type 180 and type 200. That has to do with how many threads there is in a square inch, you know. And qualities and yard goods and when you apply yourself, you -- you

learn the -- the -- the details of the trade and the -- the boss. He -- he instructed me pretty well from time to time and -- then I said, "Well, be good if I could go outside and become more -- you know, a salesman outside." I felt there was more opportunity in that than staying inside and also this way I get to learn the country and -- and get to know the country and -- [indecipherable] so I worked for 13 years for that firm, from '47 to '60 or '61, yeah.

Q: And what was it that was appealing, did you like the independence?

A: Yeah, it was independence, it was I could make my own schedule, basically. I -- I decided where I go, what day. Of -- of course that is in the beginning, later the schedule became more regular. I knew already which days I go to Washington, which days I go into other areas, because I knew the schedule and the -- the -- the stores, their openings, their closing -- closings and -- and became acquainted with -- with the owners and some of them became not only acquainted, but became friends of mine. And when I came to Norfolk, had a few customers there that I had to always let them know when I'm coming, because that night, one of them, they invite me to dinner. Or would take me to his home to visit and be with the family. And traveled to the Shenendoah Valley, which was a little bit reminiscent of the foothills of -- of Vienna. I always liked the mountains better than the seashore.

Q: It's probably no coincidence that you -- you had been on the run for so long, that you -  
- that you took a job that allowed you to continue moving, traveling.

A: It -- perhaps that was the extension of it, that I had this wunderlust in my -- in my veins. That is possible. Well, I was always perhaps a little Gypsy at heart in that respect, because I remember when I was a kid and I was on the railroad station, I would look at the trains as they departed and inhale the odor of that railroad station. These were the steams of the coal and -- and f -- locomotive furnaces. I would -- I would feel quite nostalgic, quite nostalgic about th-things like this, yeah. I always imagined this train goes somewhere and goes into the distance and it's winding up somewhere. These tracks begin here and will have to end somewhere. This was sort of -- a little bit of romanticism there, you know? So, perhaps you are right, that the -- the -- the desire to travel was in me -- by -- by nature perhaps, by -- by a vicarious thrill I got perhaps from that -- you know, to be going places and seeing new things. A friend of mine once said that applies to me, I'm -- a friend of mine once said, "You know, I'm nos -- I am homesick for places that I've never been to." And perhaps that applies to me.

Q: You said you made -- you began to make a lot of friends. Who were your friends in -- in those early years?

A: Well, here in the area, yeah, in fact a man is coming this evening, we have dinner with is -- was one of my first good friends in Baltimore. He's a retired pharmacist now. And I was his best man as his -- at his wedding and my wife was a bridesmaid and that's where Flo and I met. So this was one a -- family and then we met friends in various organizations I was involved in -- in some -- there was a Zionist group here in Baltimore which I -- in which I made many friends. We had meetings and -- and then came the

establishment of state of Israel in 1948 and we got together for celebrations and that sort of thing.

Q: Were most of your friends Jewish?

A: The majority, but not exclusively. Had some friends that I made in my business connections and dealing with customers. I know Mrs. Twick, a Catholic woman on Linwood Street. We were the best of friends when we -- when I called on her and -- and exchanging cards. But in my circle of friends here, my -- my family, friends, they were mostly Jewish, but as I said, not really exclusively. And this is still the case today.

Q: And did you experience any -- you talked about the fear, a little bit of fear that you had when you went to the Eastern Shore. Did you -- did you experience any overt discrimination [indecipherable]

A: Well, I wouldn't call it fear on the Eastern Shore, it was uneasiness. I felt set back or - or -- or set apart. I wasn't part of my surroundings. No, I did not encounter anti-Semitism, but I encountered situations that I didn't like.

Q: Okay.

A: Such as, my Uncle Sam, before he passed away, worked at a -- at a laundry. A major laundry, what was the name? Regal -- Regal Laundry. And he was in the printing shop there. They printed their own laundry tickets on stationery and he was in the printing shop. Uncle Sam once took me -- it was in these few weeks before he passed away -- we were very close. I came down to meet him there, so we can go to have a bite somewhere, or whatever. He wanted me to see the place where he works, see how it is in America.

And as I'm waiting for him to come out of his office, or his workplace, it was five o'clock in the afternoon, I needed to go to the bathroom. And before I walked into the bathroom, I saw outside of the bathroom, two sinks -- not in the bathroom, but outside of the bathroom, two little sinks against the wall. And -- and each sink had a mirror above it. And above one mirror it said, Negro, colored and the other said white. So here's what I did. This is the mirror, right. In my naiveté, I stood in front of these mirrors and I did this.

Q: Back and forth.

A: Back and forth, I was waving my body back and forth and I tried to see the difference in the mirror. Why would this be colored and this white? And I wanted to see how this reflects in the mirror. At that moment my uncle came out. And he says, "Leo, what's this, a new dance you're doing?" I said, "No, no, Un-Uncle Sam," I said, "I'm just wondering about this," -- first time I'd seen it. "Oh," he says. "Well, let me explain this to you." And he went to explain it to me. To me this was a shock. I had just gone through this thing with being Jewish and having to wear the yellow star, see? And we were told we are different. The Jew, the Nazis say, you can recognize a mile away. The way he acts, the way he talks, the way he behaves. He looks -- then comes my question. If we are so easily recognizable, why do we need the star? School kids, when I talk to them, they have the right answers. And here, I wondered -- we were separated there by Jewish and -- and designated by a star. What designates whom here? I -- I couldn't -- I couldn't make it out. It didn't make logical sense, it didn't make any kind of human, realistic sense to me. And my uncle explained it later, that this is what we are living here and -- and we're coping

with. "See, I'm not working together with Negroes. I am not working to -- we work in different building, we eat lunch, we sit in different place." "Oh," I said. "And that -- that," I said, "is -- that's not nice." He said, "Well, don't talk too much." You don't want to talk too much about it, you know, because you could -- you could encounter resistance and maybe he didn't want me to be hurt, didn't want me to be disappointed. He didn't want me to -- to -- to -- to regard this as a place that I may not want to live in, you know, after they just brought me over to this country. That was one of the things that -- that was quite -- it was a shocker to me. And --

Q: How did you come to terms with that?

A: Realized that I have to -- to stay with my attitude and opinion that it is wrong. And whoever -- whenever anybody will talk to me about it, I will immediately stand up to that person and speak back and talk back and stand up. I made up my mind that if anybody, at that time, will tell me something about a nigger, which I learned after a few weeks and months that this is the word that is not supposed to be -- of course some of the black people call each other that way, but that is the -- to differentiate between me and you. I am the good black and you are the nigger. I found that out that that's discrimination among the groups themselves. Jews, blacks, Catholics, others. We all human beings. But, as soon -- I made up my mind that I will not keep quiet in the face of adversity or bigotry or prejudice, bias. Because I've learned my lesson in Europe. Because if you keep quiet, you prob -- be -- you become a -- a co-conspirator. When you keep quiet you become part of -- of the system. If you keep quiet, that means in the face of the person that -- that

-- that mentions these names or says these names or demeans anybody else. If you keep quiet, that person walks away in the knowledge -- or in the -- with the opinion that you agree with him. They will never think that you might disagree. Oh, he has nothing to say, he agrees with me. So I made up my mind, if anybody will speak about -- to me about a nigger, I will immediately reply to that person, "You know what you just did is very offensive to me. And I'm not so sure that when I turn my back to you, where you have been speaking very nicely to me, I'm not so sure that when I turn my back to you, you will not call me a kike. That goes hand in hand." And my friend Herbie, that I mentioned to you, the one -- Freedman, the one who I -- was one -- one of the first friends. When we went down to Broadway and we took a cab home at night after we had taken some girls we went out with, friends and -- and dates and taking them home we grabbed a cab on Broadway in Baltimore and asked him to take us back to Parkhats Avenue. The cabbie said to my friend Herbie, who was perfect in English, of course, he went to school here, went to the military and everything. So, Herbie got the cab and he told him, "Go Parkhats Avenue." So the fella says to him, "Oh, that's Hebetown." You know what Herbie said? "Pull over to the side. Pull over to the side, we want to get out of that cab." That taught me a lesson right then and there, too. That Herbie and I, we were on the same page, you know. There -- naturally America is -- was a society that was not in every respect to my liking. But on the other hand, I felt also that it was a place where I could -- I had no longer -- I did no longer have a fear of -- of saying I'm Jewish. See, I have -- I have the -- the opportunity to come back in kind if somebody says to me, "You can't live in my

area.” I can say, “You don’t live in my area.” Or -- as bad as it is, but I have a comeback. I am -- I am on an equal footing with everybody. So I realize that in spite of everything, it was still a country that I can acclimate myself to.

Q: How long did it take you to realize that it was safe to say that you were Jewish, because it was so unsafe to say that in Europe?

A: You know, when I went here to a synagogue and I didn’t see people outside sneering or -- or -- I -- I -- I knew that right away. But took awhile to -- to realize all that and that I was not afraid to -- and that I’m -- to say that I’m Jewish, came almost -- within a -- within a very short time. Because I had my -- my examples there, of my friends. And -- and I also knew that there was support for me when -- when something might go wrong with me, from people who are not Jewish.

Q: And Herbie was -- was not Jewish?

A: No, no, Herbie was Jewish.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah, Herbie was Jewish. He s-still is.

Q: Mr. -- Mr. Bretholz, did you -- I understand you -- I believe I read in your memoirs, in your epilogue that -- that you didn’t talk about your Holocaust experience for a long while. Can you talk about why that -- why that was and when you did first start talking about it?

A: Well, I didn’t talk for 14 years. It was too hard to reflect on it, to come to terms with it. And I hadn’t heard anything from my mother and sisters and the guilt was there and --



the knowledge that you can't do much about it, was a heavy weight. And I worked, so I had my work and I had my friends. In 1960, when I had left Standard Textile and went into partnership, into the liquor business, I heard a radio program. It was one of those talk hosts -- talk show hosts, who -- earlier -- years -- that dates back now, over 30 years of course. And the man who ran that program, who was the -- the talk show host was a -- a Methodist minister by the name of Luther Starnes. We became very good friends. Luther had a call-in program and it was at the time when a marine, a young marine died while he was exercising in Paris Island with the -- in training. And a mother called -- a woman who may have not been the mother of one of those marines. And the debate went on, how should this training go to toughen our boys and to make them into men and make them into -- for the defense of the country. Oh, here's the man there. Oh, excuse me. Will -- will that disturb you with that?

Q: Well, a little bit.

A: This is Mr. Pitt.

Q: Okay.

A: So the lady said to Luther Starnes, Luther, if it's necessary for defense of our country to toughen our boys, let's train them to be killers. Let's train them to be good soldiers is one thing, but let's train them to be killers, bothered me. So -- so there was the -- the break in the -- in the program, during the commercial break, I picked up the phone and called Luther and I told him what bothered me. He says, "You know what? Let's have lunch together." And we had lunch a couple days later, which was exactly on the sixth of

November. Sixth of November, 1961, I believe. '60 or '61, whatever. And it was on the day -- the anniversary of the day that I had escaped from -- from the train and we became very good friends and we formed a group, of which I was the initiator, basically, with him, called Prejudiced Anonymous, like Alcoholics Anonymous, Prejudiced Anonymous, based on the premise that when we're prejudiced, we have an illness. We don't admit to it. It's colorless, it's odorless, you know, it's tasteless, it's very insidious, but you're prejudiced. And when you're prejudiced you have to admit that you are before you can cure it. Just like an alcoholic. So we called it Prejudiced Anonymous and it formed -- it turned into a group of over 100 - 150 people -- member -- members. And then it fell apart because people moved away and those who went, we went out to speak to groups. Did a lot of programs, got a lot of material on that that I still ha-have on hand from them -- from then. And that's how I started speaking. Because I realized that unless I speak up, I -- I will promote wh-what they are espousing. Yo-You can't let the bigots get away with their attitudes. And Prejudiced Anonymous was that -- I have a plaque downstairs on that and everything, this dates back. This is now what's it, '98? This is 37 years of, whew -- time. Got a little older since then, you know.

Q: So that's when you first started talking in public --

A: That's when I first started talking.

Q: -- to friends and to other people.

A: Yeah, other people and to meetings. I found my language, I found the way to express it and nat -- not to become shy -- gun shy in the face of adversity. And when we went to

these groups, we had flak from those groups. Why you goody - goody, bleeding heart, this sort of thing. No. Because if you don't learn the lesson from history, who was that, Santanyana said that? If you do not learn the lesson from history, we are condemned to repeat it. And by that -- on that premise, we went out talking, like we -- we had blacks, whites, Christians, Jews, atheists. We had a group of people, of -- from all denominations and walks of life. And one fella came up with a saying -- and -- in those days it was the liberty lobby that -- that promulgated the -- the -- the -- the -- the slogan, "America, love it or leave it." Well, this fella was a -- a minister. And he was also a marriage counselor. He says, "I can replace that slogan. America, love it and change it, for the better. Let's all do it together." And then we had one fella who spoke -- black fella who actually had served some time in jail and then joined us because he educated himself. He came up with the saying -- I'll never forget that, people applauded him. "We're getting an A in moon, but we're flunking earth." So we -- we were a group who became -- we called it a group whose time had come. We called ourselves Prejudiced Anonymous. Patterned after the panel of American women. Have you ever heard of that?

Q: No.

A: In those days, in the 60's, there was a group of women, who went out to speak to organizations and churches and synagogues and institutions and they had a panel where they discussed the aspects of prejudice and -- and what can be done about it. And was called the panel of American women. So we said, let's have a panel of fellas, men. The women can do their way, they -- they have -- they have time during the day perhaps, to

do their meetings. We are -- because in those days women were not still involved in a two -- two family earning pattern and so women stayed home and -- more in those days. So they had time during the day to go out, instead of going in a -- go to a coffee clutch, they went to have a meeting in a -- in -- in a church or a synagogue or in a school. The men were working during the day, so we got together in the evenings, or on weekends. I never forget -- we went to Washington a snowy morning. On a weekend [indecipherable] to the Omni -- it was I think Omnibus. It was a -- in Washington there was a program called Omnibus. We went to Arlington, Virginia, a few blocks down from -- from a -- a -- Rockwell's. Rockwell's headquarters, the Nazi Rockwell. In -- on -- on Wilson Boulevard. What was his first name? Lincoln Rockwell. He was the -- the American Nazi. They flew the flag there, the Nazi flag on Wilson Boulevard. I once wrote about that and said, "Our troops went to Europe to -- to get the Nazi flag down from the Eiffel Tower, to the Acropolis in Greece and you come to Arlington and you see a -- you see an -- a swastika flying." Whether it's in Arlington, Virginia or in Lincoln, Nebraska, you know. Anyway, that was the group that we formed and so I found -- I found my -- my voice. And then in 1962, I got notified by the Vienna Jewish community, that the names of my mother and sisters do not appear on the list of those who have returned. In the book I call it quite a euphemism. Instead of saying they were murdered at Auschwitz, their names are not listed -- do not appear on the list of those who have returned. You know, that's a nice way of saying it. But by that time I'd found out what happened to my mother and sisters and I could begin to reconcile things although the guilt stayed with me

for many years until someday later, in fact maybe eight, 10 years ago, I went to a psychiatrist and consulted and had a few sessions. And he said to me, you know, "If your mother were able to come back for just a moment -- if she were coming back for just an hour maybe and -- and say one sentence to you, she would probably say, "I'm glad I urged you to leave.'"" Because it was she who urged me to leave Vienna in 1938. She was the one. If not for her, I would not maybe have gotten my stuff together and left. B-But she says, "You must go because for men, for boys, this is not a place to be." See, she was very prescient.

Q: And that --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

A: -- this is not a place to be." See, she was very prescient.

Q: And that was the guilt that -- that lingered --

A: That lingered with me. The na -- the other guilt that lingered with me, to know that these people were left in that railroad car.

Q: The survivor's guilt.

A: From the -- from the baby, to the old people, you know. That's -- that's described in the -- in the chapter of my escape in the [indecipherable] -- in one of the chapters. But the survivors, yeah, that's -- we are laboring under that. All of us, in a way, but I'm not dwelling on it. And being that I wrote the book, I know I have done what I wanted to do to get it -- to -- to get it and -- my friend Mike Waleska said to me, "Over so many years you've written all these Op-Ed pieces and the articles th -- in the Sun paper. Put it together in -- in reading form." And so I say, "I'm not organized, I am not disciplined enough." He says, "Well, let me help you with this. All you have to do is just write your narrative. The escape here, the escape there. Later we'll put it together chronologically. Give me your narrative on the escapes. And on all the other things that you have experienced. And I'll work with you, edit it here, there --" And in fact, in the book, he wrote a lot of the -- the historical aspects to it. I wrote about this and that in Vienna, this or that in France. And he picked up what happened, historically there, in the war or so, you know, with -- so that were cooperative effort. Edit it and helped me and when I wrote about 30 - 40 pages on this legal lined paper. You saw what it is, the -- all block lettering.

He came back with a print out -- computer print out of 135 questions for me. He's a journalist. All right, this -- this is very -- real story there, with this lady on crutches in the -- in -- in -- in the cattle car. But that lady had a face, that lady must have said something, must have done something. She looked like some -- what did she wear? This man that was praying there, what was the reaction of the other people? And for every -- I had 135 points to go and elaborate on, rather than write a narrative of what happened, go into details -- m-more minute details.

Q: Did all of this help also? Help you come to terms with --

A: Yes, come to terms. Because I had to dig up things and realize that I'm here now to tell a story and I cannot let the past be overwhelming me with these emotions when I've got -- I've got a family now and I got a life now and let's face it by attrition and by the passing of time. My mother wouldn't be here now anyway, which does not eliminate the fact that she was murdered, but I have to come to that -- to that realization and I have to come to that reconciliation. And I called Michael up like every other night. I say, "You know, I'm -- I'm now on pa -- I'm now on question 18 and this is 135 quest -- and I've had it already for about two weeks." He says, "I'm not rushing you. You take your time, you do -- put your -- put your -- your thoughts into it." And before you know it, I had answered all 135 questions and that was the book? No, it was not the book, this was the book, this was three or four chapters of it. And then after that my writing came much easier, because I already knew what the -- the essence of it is, not just that I was in a labor camp and worked on th-the so and so, but I was surrounded by things and I spoke to

people and people had reactions. So, I could reconcile it and -- and -- and find this a very -- a real catharsis. And when I was finished with it, I felt -- I'd like to do more. I -- I felt a letdown. It was good to know that it was finished, but there was a letdown because I hadn't -- I -- I was actually looking forward to every new chapter, every new paragraph wh-when I was doing it. And I wrote til three, four in the morning, because I'm a night person. And when I woke up during the night and a thought came to me, I went to this tab -- this table full with papers. I went to it and I wrote down my -- more notes, you know. [indecipherable]

Q: I think you wrote in your memoirs that the war didn't really end for you until 1962, when you got the news about your sister and your mother.

A: That's what I just referred to. That when I got this, I had -- there was a -- this was a milestone. So I had a -- a closure of some sort. It was the closure to know what had happened to them. Not that I had many doubts that this was it, but when you don't have the fin -- the -- the official word, you still have some hope. Because people, after so many years, as you'll read from time to time, get together and find each other. But it was a closure. And the only way it can ever be a closure is that I do not know where they're buried. That is the -- that is the -- the big thing, because most people do not realize the luxury of -- that they have in knowing the burial place of a relative. Father, mother, uncle, aunt, grandmother. Even if you never go to that gravesite, the knowledge that it's there and that you can go if you would want to, is very comforting. And it is almost a luxury for those who have that comfort, have that knowledge. Now, I do -- to me there's



something like a surrogate for that. When I go to the Holocaust Museum and I see that mound of shoes there, I look at it with -- with some form of -- devotion of some sort or reminiscence or -- what do I want to call it? I look at it with some sort of a solemn feeling that perhaps, perhaps by the f -- most farfetched possibility, one of those shoes belonged to my mother or my sisters. So I use that as a reference, as a point of reference to give me some comfort and solace. And we have to do that. Just like some people go to Auschwitz and step on the ground and say perhaps the bones and the ashes of my family are here, so I'm here on hallowed ground. To me those shoes mean that. Those combs and toothbrushes there, that are -- you -- you know, there -- at the museum. When I'm going to that cattle car, I get shivers, you know. A cattle car, the way it is constituted there, could not have allowed me to escape, because the bars are bolted to the outside. Solidly bolted, I -- I would have never touched them. I would have never been able to bend them apart like I described doing it at my -- that point of my escape.

Q: How often do you go to the Holocaust Museum?

A: I go probably more often than I would like to and would I -- that I would volunteer to go. I was there a day before it officially opened, with the WJZ. I have the tape of that, JZ TV, they went there to do a -- a program and I -- they took me along to do some color -- explanation and get my i-input. Then there are these bus trips that schools take, organization ik -- invite me to come as a dossent. So I speak about it on the bus going there, what they might expect. I tell them right away, this is not a trip into serendipity. This is not a -- a pleasure excursion. When you will come out of there, you will feel tired,

you will feel abused and you will have a lot of questions. And a lot of questions that will never be answered. And tell them a little bit about -- what my story, show them my star and so on, so forth. Then, on the way back, sometime there are questions on something that they saw and they would like something explained or elaborated on. Most of the times, it's silence. The majority of the trips back, I do not get questions, although I say right away, when we're -- if you have any questions during this trip, please don't hesitate. That's it. I leave it at that. No urging, no prodding, no encouraging it. But, very seldom. The people are really thinking. And the majority of them, when we leave and we get back, say that they will have to go back at least one more time, because you can't really absorb it, it's -- it's too much.

Q: Yeah. Can we go back a little bit in time? We skipped over the meeting of your wife, your future wife. Can you tell that story, how you met her and how your marriage came to be?

A: Flora and I met at a wedding. My good friend Herbert Freedman married Joyce Herman and Flora had a friend who was also a friend of Joyce and they became bridesmaids to Joyce. Flo's friend, Sandra, bridesmaids to Joyce and I was best man to Herbie. That's how we met. That was in November of 1951 and we were married in July of 1952, which will now be 46 years and Herbie was best man at my wedding, in '52. So that's how I met Flo, in -- at -- at a wedding in 1951. I was -- just about four and a half years after I had arrived in this country. In '52 we were married, in July and in August of

'52, a month later, I acquired American citizenship, five years after my arrival. And that is the -- that is the story of my -- of my meeting with -- with Flo.

Q: Wh-When was the first time you told her about what had happened to you during the Holocaust?

A: I did not speak too much about it in the beginning, but little by little it -- it came out, because in '54 we went to Europe to meet the remnant of my family, my aunt in Paris and my cousin in England. And a cousin that had survived who was an Austrian, she met us in Switzerland. I write about that. And as we came to Paris and spoke to my aunt and -- and then my other relatives that were still in Belgium since then, my uncle died, my aunt died, my cousin. Time takes it's toll. And during that trip to Europe and on the way back, I started to tell Flo more and more because she had met the family. But in general, I did not elaborate too much on -- on it, because I didn't want to dwell too much on it. Seven years ago, when I spoke to Social Security agency, in Woodlawn, a young lady came up to me and she says, "Leo," she looked at me, "Leo, I didn't know these things." I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, you are?" "I'm Jane." "Jane, my God. How time goes by," I said. It's a girl I had taken out, dating, good friend. And there she was so many years later, maybe, I don't know -- maybe some 30 -- some years later. "But you know what you just -- what I just heard you tell, you never told me about that." I said, "Jane, in those days I didn't talk about it. I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't feel like talking about it." But that was much -- much later than -- than when I took Flo to -- when Flo and I went to Europe in '54. Of course we lived together and it had to come out, correspondence and

pictures and -- and the star, I had the star with me and I told her a few things here and there. And Flo was always very, very understanding in these things and very compassionate about these things. Much more than the average person I would think. And understood it and -- and -- and even today, when she reads about these things or hears about this, "How could that -- how could they do that to -- to the children? How could they do that to the old people?" And she understands it. In fact, one of her first friends, girlfriends in -- in Baltimore was a girl -- a young woman who -- who had survived a -- a camp and -- and came back after the war, from Sweden. So Flo always understood a lot about these things and was very understanding and compassionate and -- had strong feelings about it.

Q: Did she not s -- tell you that -- encourage you to confront the -- the past? I read where you -- you said something about that.

A: Yeah, she did. Yeah, she did, it's a -- be good to -- you know, to -- to find out and to do the best you can with -- of -- of course when we had children later, I had to be very careful with the kids, not to inflict some of these post traumatic syndrome aspects on them, or pass it on to them, which in many families has become a problem. Many children of survivors are very actively involved. My kids are not so involved, although they know of it -- of it, but my son never wanted to hear anything about it and he was strongly affected by it. So we had to moderate my memories and expression of the memories with -- with the aspect of -- of the family. My -- my cousin in London -- I'm not going to give anything away, but as I didn't -- didn't know there is an ending to this

that -- that is a very interesting ending, pertaining to my cousin in London -- never told her kids anything about her family. The kids grew up entirely sheltered from it. Now, I didn't shelter them. They -- they knew that I had meetings. They knew I had the meeting with Prejudiced Anonymous and they knew that in Prejudiced Anonymous I spoke about my experiences, because I had found my voice. And some of it was reported in the papers. A fella by the -- Lou Panos followed us from one meeting to the other and always described our meetings -- was very impressed with what we were doing. But they knew about it, because evidently I did speak about it at those meetings, because that was the essence of what I wanted to tell them. Look what prejudice did in Europe and how it can affect us all here if we do not -- if we do not speak up and talk back and stand up for what we think is -- is right. But Flo, yeah, encouraged me to -- to a -- to -- didn't discourage me to talk about it, but she was also encouraging and -- and saying you have to -- you have to make up your mind and all that -- how to deal with it and deal with it the best way you can and you can't let your life be affected by it for the rest of -- of your years, you know, so.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Three.

Q: And did there come a point where they came to you and asked you to talk to them more about it or did you ever sit down with them?

A: No. We sat down in a family and sometime it happened at the dinner table, sometime - there was never too much reaction from them on -- on an -- on an -- they understood it,

but then on emotional point. But -- but my son was definitely affected by it. Whenever we spoke about something, about the -- these events, the Holocaust, he would walk out of the room. He could not -- he could not cope with it.

Q: And how did that affect you?

A: Well, I-I didn't -- I tried not to do it when he was -- when he was present, you know. Then he went to college and we wa -- we moved over to Holland for two years, from 1975 to '77 on business. So I lived in -- we lived in Amsterdam, so.

Q: And they're grown now [indecipherable]

A: Oh, they're grown, yeah. I have four grandchildren. The son isn't married, but the daughters are. One lives in Elicott City, one lives in Virginia, over in Herndon and we're going there this weekend, to Herndon, Friday and Saturday to be with her.

Q: Do your grandchildren know about your experiences?

A: Well, they're too young.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I have one granddaughter who is nine and a half and she knows. She has heard me talking in school, Hebrew school, she learns a little bit about it. But her sister is six, she doesn't know anything. And then the boys are five and three, so they're -- they're not --

Q: Now is -- is Flo American?

A: B-Born in Baltimore.

Q: Baltimore. Jewish?

A: Jewish.

Q: Okay. And tell me what it was like to become an American citizen, what that was like for you?

A: Well, it was a ve-very -- it was a great experience. I felt very good about it, I felt I now have a -- a -- an identity, a passport that is respected, that ha -- that -- that is meaningful. That's -- that's the way I felt about it. And you know, I finally got over some of the nightmares that I had in the beginning. And still, from time to time, I -- I get some weird dreams that recall the past, like you know. But as -- when I became American, that was -- it was a very good feeling for me. I was some -- it was something -- it was a feeling of achievement. And proudly when we went to Europe in '54, I then traveled on a -- with an American passport and -- and I didn't have to -- and another thing, in -- well, in school for instance, in Austria, we had on our -- on our certif -- on our reports, yearly reports, was not only our name, but also our religion was marked. And this in -- in -- in America, I didn't feel -- felt was no longer the venue, you know, yeah.

Q: What did it mean to be an American, to you?

A: Well, when you -- when you become -- when you become an American citizen, you feel that something special has happened to you. You have become a person within a system that considers you a person. On par with everybody else. And what it meant was exactly what the judge told us. You -- most of you -- all of you -- these were Russians and Poles and Czechs and Romanians and Italians. Most of you come from countries where when you walked into a room, or a schoolroom, or an office, you had the picture of the leader of the country. We don't have this idolization of a -- of a -- of a person. The

president lives in the White House and he is your tenant. Never forget the judge said. And when it's time to evict him, you doing it. He gave us the metaphor, you know. He is your tenant. And you come from all backgrounds, from all areas of the world and you're just a continuation of that influx that came here at the turn of the century. Unfortunately, latel-lately these attitudes have changed, forgetting that what Emma -- what what's her name said, [indecipherable] Emma Lazarus said on the Statue of Liberty, both foreign born and native born have made this country great. Go through the history of America and you see how many of -- of the -- of the pioneers, what they have done for America. So I remember what the judge said, and that always stuck with me. You come from many areas, but here nobody will malign you because you come from here, from there, because we are all alike. We are all -- we all came basically on the same boat, at different times. I did and you did and your neighbors did. The judge made a great impact on me and I felt very good about becoming an American. And I don't wear the flag on my sleeve, but when I lived in Holland, I did, because in Holland, oh, you Americans, you -- you don't know from tragedy and pain and bombing. What do you understand about the miseries of the Dutch, you know. In the meantime, they segregate the Moloccans and the Moroccans and the Turks. But they harp on the black man here. And I said, "You just come and talk to the black American and see whether he would prefer to live in your country or whether he would prefer to stay in America." And that's when I had to defend America. And they said, you do not understand what it means to be suffering. Because they had just gone through that World War Two thing and the Nazis and persecutions and hardships and



hunger. Famine and all this thing. Deportations, bombings, from which I am to understand by what they say, and they say you do not understand me and you have never had that, therefore you can't understand. But we, because we had it, we have become better for it. We understand what it is and when you understand something, you apply it in your life and you become better for it. But that isn't the case. So I said, "Have you become better for it? Look at the Moloccans. A cab driver wouldn't pick him up to take him to his apartment, because he says he is going to Battonfeld and Battonfeld is one of the suburbs where the Moloccans live, or the Moroccans. So the cab driver would say I can't take you. This is -- have you become better?" And this is the arguments that I had with them, you know? That's where I stood up for America. And I was proud to do that. I said to Flo, "Now, let's get back to America and relax. Now we are Americans, we know what's good about it, we know what's bad about it and we know what we want to change and we know what we can't change. And we know that it will always be the same, basically, f -- because people are people." But the times have evolutioned, you know. But in Holland, we had to stand up for America. It made me feel good. It made me feel real good when I went to the consulate in -- in 1976 and I voted. I voted in absentia.

Q: You talk about having nightmares. How long -- what were the nightmares about, how long did you have them?

A: They were sporadic. One of them that I describe in the book is mainly -- I'm coming into a h-house that is being destroyed, torn down. And there is a wall and the wall is being hit with these ac -- picks, you know they -- that they tear down from the inside.

And in it, behind the wall, is the body of a woman. It's a recurring theme. And also, I'm walking in the street and I'm coming to a barrier, almost like a construction type barrier, but instead of construction, beyond are Nazi brown shirts. I've had that sporadically, on and off. But not recently. This was in the 60's. 50's - 60's - 70's, up to the 70's, not recently. From time to time I do dream about swimming a river or talking to my mother, my sisters. And th-that -- that would sometime be a reflection on what we might have talked about the night before at dinner, or maybe -- you know, I never bring the subject up. When we are at dinner, unless somebody will say, "So how are you coming with your book?" I [indecipherable] fine, yeah. "What do you -- h-how was this? Did you hear about what so and so said? You hear about Switzerland, whats --" I sit in a restaurant. I walk into a restaurant and I see somebody stand in line there in front of me, or somebody is just walking out. I know the person. He rush -- or her -- they walk over, "Hi, how are you doing, Leo?" And I'll motion to Flo, watch this. "You know Leo, I meant to call you and ask you, you know I read something about the Holocaust Mu --" I -- immediately when they see me, they -- they think I am the authority on the Holo -- I don't want to be an authority on the Holocaust. I don't want to be -- I want to be Leo Bretholz. I -- in nine out of 10 cases, they'll come and ask me something about the Holocaust. When are you going the next time? Do you know a bus that'll go there, because I like to go alone. Do you know my son --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

A: "When are you going the next time? Do you know a bus that'll go there, because I like to go alone. Do you know my son or my nephew, they have a project in school, they would talk to -- like to talk to someone. You think he can give you a call?" "Yeah, ask him to give me a call. Yeah, do that." Some of them call, some of them don't. But it's nine out of 10 cases when somebody sees me in a -- in a -- in a place, the subject will be the Holocaust. I don't -- I don't relish it. I don't exult in that th -- sort of thing. Because it's -- it's part of me, it's my past, that's -- yes, but I don't go to a fella who is a -- a shoemaker and say, "You know what? I meant to tell you, I -- I bought a pair of shoes and --" wh-wh-wh -- I give you that as a -- as an example. I don't go to anybody who is a doctor and would say, "You know, I meant to call you. I had a pain here that -- what do you make of that?"

Q: You're more than the Holocaust.

A: I'm more than the Holocaust. I don't want to be an -- oh, I'm sorry, I don't want to be an object of curiosity. I -- he's a survivor, you know. "This is my friend, Leo, he's a survivor." You know, spare me. Spare me the title, please, sir. We are all survivors. Do you realize that if Hitler had won that war and become what he wanted to be, the thousands [indecipherable] encompassing the whole world, that we wouldn't be sitting here, talking? In that re -- in that -- in that way, we are all survivors. Don't think of the others as survivor, please, do me a favor. [inaudible]. Do you understand?

Q: Sure.

A: Can you personally understand it?

Q: Sure.

A: Aside from this being an interview, if you and I were talking over a cup of coffee, I would not bring up the subject, but if you would bring it up, I would certainly tell you what you want to know. That's common courtesy and common procedure when somebody wants to find out something in the process that -- that could be possibly a learning a process, yes. But this is not my achievement. My achievement is that I am alive. Let's dwell on something positive. I have a family and these are the -- the new branches of the old tree, you know, it's --

Q: Well, let's pick up on some of the more positive achievements, then. I think we left off in your career with you starting a -- a liquor business.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about -- more about your work and how that --

A: Well, the -- the work in the liquor business was a very lucrative business. It was good, it was from 1960 -- '61 -- '60 - '61 to 1968 and then came the riots and we could not get insurance any more, so we sold it. We sold the property and the business.

Q: The riots -- the civil rights?

A: Civil rights, yeah. And this is an aspect that I want to bring out and was thinking of bringing out if it came up. That while the liquor stores were closed for two weeks curfew, by edict --

Q: And this is in Baltimore?

A: Baltimore.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Every night, around -- between 11 and 12 midnight, we got calls from the area of people that were standing there, watching, assuring us, "Leo -- Mr. Leo," Mr. Bender was my partner. "Your place is okay. We will not let anything happen to it." We felt that was a tribute to us by the people there, who knew who we were, who knew how we treated our customers. This is where my actions, my words -- my words and our meetings with Prejudiced Anonymous, showed some results, in fact. That it wasn't just that we spoke words, but that we acted it out in our daily lives in our business. Stores were burned down on Lombard Street and this corner liquor store at Lombard and Central, remained intact -- where others lost their businesses. Now naturally we couldn't stay there -- without insurance you can't run a liquor store. And we sold the property later to someone else and that was fine. So that was the liquor store. And that was til 1968 and I went into a -- into the book business in partnership. And my partner had the place in -- my partner had the place in Amsterdam, a book place in -- with another fella, in partnership and this fella wanted to come back to America, so I went over to manage that store for two years. Took my wife and my two daughters. My son was at Georgetown University and he finished his study. Took my two daughters over there. One went to the international school, the younger one. The older one went to an extension of Syracuse University in Amsterdam. She had just a -- about a -- had a half a year left here in high school. And did her tests with a proctor and came back in '76 to graduate on -- on the stage, with the kids, then we went back. And -- and when I came back -- when I came back from Amsterdam,

I just went to work for my former partner -- also managing his store -- also book stores.

And then in 1992, I retired from the book business. I was in the liquor store business and the book business. And at first a traveling salesman for a -- a textile company. So that -- that is basically no great -- no great shakes, but I always made a living and then -- then I wrote this book.

Q: How -- how do you think your experiences during the Holocaust shaped your belief system, or --

A: Well, the belief system is a -- is a very -- is a very -- I was raised, actually, by a quite liberal father. He -- my father was never raised -- he died when I -- when I was nine, so I wasn't really raised by him. But he was never a religious man, but he was a very activist man in social causes. And the Holocaust shaped me to the extent that there is a realization that unless you assert yourself in the face of hatred and adversity, you will -- you will become a victim eventually. Now, you have to stand up for what's right when your neighbor is being maligned, and your fellow man discriminated against. That's the way we raised our kids. Because if you don't do it at that moment, then it'll come back to haunt you because there's somebody there waiting for you -- to -- to malign you. And the -- the evil of -- of prejudice and hatred, has to be recognized for what it is. That's the lesson of the Holocaust. If, from that negative experience of the Holocaust, there is only one positive thing that come out of it, it's the creation of an awareness that it can happen, so that you can fight it. Now, you have to fight it before it establishes itself as a governmental entity. Before the government has been established with that ideology. You

cannot let it get to the point where it becomes officially a government policy, then it's too late already. [telephone interruption] -- we shouldn't. So fight it before it is established, because then it is too late. The Nazis have shown it to us. Other -- other dictatorial regimes have shown it to us. The -- the -- it -- it's like a web. The dictator is like a web -- in a spider in a web, I mean. The dictator's the spider. Now, this is metaphor, again. The spider gets that insect and enmeshes it in the web. But the spider isn't finished. He goes for more victims. He gets more, until this web is filled up with -- with insects, then he builds another web to catch more, you see? That -- that is -- that is what we have to learn from it, to fight when you see it. Now, can we always do it? Do our -- d-does our -- our character, our -- our temperament always allow us to immediately speak back -- or talk back, I mean? Sometime not, sometime you have to say, well, you have to watch out, maybe that person didn't mean it, you have to make allowances. But we cannot make many allowances. When there is a pattern that repeats itself. Whether it's in the school, or at work, you have to speak back. [indecipherable] can't talk. You have to talk back. And when people tell me, "Leo, why did other people not run? Why did you run?" I say, "I was afraid, I was scared." Fear was my motivater. Then I have to give examples. It's easy to say, why does somebody not run. Well, I ran, I was free, I was single. If I had been with a family, I couldn't have done it. If I -- one elderly person, I couldn't -- a woman, a child. And in the whole history of deportations from France, there were less than a dozen attempts to escape, out of 80,000 - 85,000 people. Book shows it. But -- but when somebody says, "Why did others not run?" Almost like demeaning them

for not having attempted. I have one simple example to these people. You're working in an office, you're working in a factory, in a business. And you have a supervisor, you have a manager, you have a foreman, you have a boss and you come home day after day after day and you're complaining to your husband or to your wife, "He goes on my nerve." Or, "She annoys me. I can't stand it, I hate to go into -- I hate the thought of going into that office." There's nobody standing there with a gun. You can quit. All you are giving up is a job and you have to find another job. But nobody's standing there with a gun, threatening you and you say people should run away when they are in line, being assembled to be taken into a train, surrounded by guards with weapons? They should run away, but you can't get away from a job where there's nobody there with a weapon? It's always so easy for someone else to tell others what they should have done, when they themselves don't know what they would have done.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And you have to understand also the other person that is being prejudiced against. As I said before, the nigger in the pr -- in -- in -- in the hater's eye, becomes the kike or the wasp or the wop.

Q: You talked about the lesson of the Holocaust and I wanted to read you this quote from Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel. You may have heard of -- heard him or read his -- this, from April 24th. "This is the lesson of the Holocaust, this and only this. That the existence of the Jewish people is tied to Jewish sovereignty and a Jewish army that rests on the strength of Jewish faith." Do you agree with that?



Q: Well, after the Holocaust, we have seen that nationhood for the -- for the Jews was a survival necessity. Had there not been a Holocaust, there probably would not have been a Jewish state. But had there been a Jewish state in the 30's and 40's, I am convinced that there would not have been a Holocaust. All you have to see is Entebbe. Absolutely. That -- that is my conviction, because we lost a million and a half children. A million and a half children. As somebody wrote -- a woman wrote, Gerta Weissman Klein wrote that they're ordinary children, but a lot of them could have become very extraordinary. Luxembourg is a nation with 350,000 people or 400,000 people. There were a million and a half children who could have grown into a nation of 30 or 40,000,000, had they been allowed to live, but they didn't. Had there been a state of Israel, these children would not have died. In that respect, yes. With other things, I can disagree with Netanyahu, but he was elected. And perhaps the -- the labor government is more acceptable to a lot of people, because they were, perhaps, more -- more amenable. But Rabine also was not a man who was going to have his country commit suicide. I am sure he was not that kind of a man. In fact, Rabine was a general and Netanyahu was not. But Netanyahu is also a man who wrote an important book about terrorism, he is an expert on that.

Q: You said something interesting, had there not been a Holocaust, there would not have been a Jewish state, and -- and made me wonder, had there not been a Holocaust, how would your life have been different? Do you ever reflect on that?

A: Well, had there not been a Holocaust, perhaps I would never have come to America, that is possible. But the Jewish state was already in the stages of -- of -- of planning, or infancy or a incubation with the Balfour Declaration, 1917. Of course, in 1895, Hertzl wrote The Judenstat, a Jewish state, which he became aware of through the Dreyfuss affair. And he said, if we will it will not be a -- if we will it, it will not be a dream. But, while it was in -- in it's infancy, then the -- the -- the idea, it -- it became -- it became a -- a dire necessity after the Holocaust, simply because -- because the proof was there, that nobody -- nobody was accepting the Jews. The world knew about it. The -- the ship Saint Louis came to the American coast in 1939 and Gustov Shroeder, the captain with the swastika on his lapel, called the Coast Guard, ship to shore, pleading with them, "Let -- don't let me take these people back." He was crying, a Nazi. Was he a Nazi or was he a -- a -- a cripto antagonist, perhaps, you know. But he wore the swastika and he was the captain of the ship, from the Hamburg - America line. And he's, "Don't let me take these people back." And those who wound up in England were saved, but the ones that depo -- disembarked in Holland and in France and in Belgium, they wound up in the -- in the death camps. So the captain -- Nazi captain was right. And when you take that in history - in the context of history, you -- you -- you will see that -- that's conjecture, naturally. But the impetus was there for the state and the -- and the sympathy was there for the state and it -- and it became. And today there are problems. There are problems within that state. We know them and we hope they will overcome them.

Q: A couple of things that I didn't ask you about, in -- in talking the -- about the chronology of your life and that is your trips to Europe -- going back to Europe in the -- late '54 and then later. Can you talk about what impressions those trips had on you?

Q: Well, I told you the impression that I had when we lived in Holland, with the Dutch, that I had to stand up -- I had to drape myself in the American flag, because I was an American. We came back in '54 and then we went to England in '54 to meet my cousin. I learned a lot from her, what happened to her during the war, she was in a -- in a -- lived in a building that was bombed in the blitz and she narrowly escaped. I also learned that during the blitz, when the people went into the shelters, in the underground, metro, shelters. That where they may have been at odds with each other, racially or in -- n-n -- by na -- racially or by nation or by religion or whatever. Where the -- whether West Indians in England or where some of the Asians in England were perhaps second class citizens, but when it came to going into the bomb shelters, they all slept under the same blankets. They all were together, threatened by that one common enemy. So it just shows how some situations can make human beings into real human beings, not just a species, but in action, you see? That's what we learned at -- that was during the war -- in the war. We -- we -- we went back to France in '54, to meet with my aunt and with relatives in Belgium and my cousin from Vienna came to join us in -- in -- in -- in Switzerland. Very little -- very little was mentioned about the tragedy of the war, it was too fresh. Much too fresh for my cousin in -- in Vienna, who had lost her father. This is described very vividly. My aunt in Paris who had lost her husband. My uncle in -- in Belgium, whose

son was deported and murdered at Auschwitz. So these were things that were tacit -- tacitly part of our -- of our make up, but it wasn't much talked about. 1970 -- in 1970, we went to Israel to visit our family on the kibbutz there, my mother's youngest brother was there. It's interesting. He was there and we went to visit him with the family on the kibbutz. He is no longer alive now. And we went back to Europe and traveled by car through Europe. Again met with my aunt in Paris and my cousin in Vienna and I just mentioned my family on the kibbutz lately. We received this picture from them. This is my Aunt Sarah here, who was 90 and on her 90th birthday, this is the clan. These are her daughter and two sons, their children, grandchildren and her by that -- by that measure, great-grandchildren. What does this picture signify? That one man, Uncle Jacob, my mother's youngest brother, left Europe in 1930. One person, of one family, in 1930 and this is -- this is the result of one man's leaving Europe and not having to go through the Holocaust. This is the result. Can you extend it into -- into more people, if of our family, another five or six or 10? My father was one of nine and my mother was one of 10. If they had possibly had the foresight to go that -- at that time my Uncle Jacob was a pioneer. He was an idealist. He went to a kibbutz as a farming, you know, this was idealism. And -- and so he went there by conviction. Although, he knew what he was running away from, because Poland had had pogroms, he had lived through some of the pogroms in his hometown.

Q: Wh-What was it like going to your hometown in Vienna, going back?

A: Traumatic, the first time. 1970, very traumatic, couldn't wait to leave. I was in Vienna for one week. As I describe it in the book, I felt that I was -- when I left Vienna, I felt I was leaving a cemetery. See, the hills were there, the buildings were there, the trees were there, but the heart and soul was gone and all those who could have made a difference, namely people and faces and arms clutching you -- that was not there. So you -- so you had a -- a very traumatic -- I went back in -- that was 1970. I went back in '92, that was already different and I went back in '96 to Vienna, that was almost -- well, almost reconciled. And Flo enjoyed it very much in 1996 also, when we were invited by the Vienna government to come. [indecipherable] welcome service. This is a sort of a make up to us, you know, in a way. But it was very enjoyable, in a way, that I went back to some of the places, took some photos. And Flo keeps saying, "You know, I would like to go back to Vienna." And I -- I would go -- I would go back, in fact I -- I have a cousin who still lives there. She's about my age, about a year younger. But will we or won't we, I don't know. I believe we will. I would like to retrace my steps in France, where I -- mainly -- which is mainly the -- the -- the locale of -- of the book and I maybe -- maybe I get some interviews on -- on the -- on some of the radio shows and I can really promote it. I would like the schools to get that book. That was -- would be my major -- it's not -- this is not what you might call a -- a money-maker. The book will sell for 16.95, a hard back. And they're working on the layout now, with all im -- with all the -- the cover and so on, so forth. But, I would like it to be accepted in -- in schools as a -- as a learning text and also as an encouragement to some of the young people, not to give up when things go

badly and stick to it. Because I -- in the face of adversity, I -- I did not give up and I think escaping from a train is probably a -- a great form of resistance. And there's not many that did that. Because we were going to hell, straight to hell. So that was 19 -- I said 1970 - 1992 - 1996, we went back. And I would like to, as I said, go back again. If you want to know any more details about -- there was not much there. I -- I roamed through the streets of Vienna, went back to the synagogue, which was no longer there, where I was Bar Mitzvahed. This is now an apartment building and it has a plaque outside, designating it as a scene of a conflagration, destroyed by the Nazi hordes. It's an apartment building. So I'm watching this and I'm reading this and a lady coming out of the house, this building, she sees us and she says, "Can I help you in any way? Looking for anything?" I said, "No, this is the place that I went to say my prayers when I lived in this area." "Oh, oh." And she walked away, because she's now a tenant in that place. And then steps back for one moment and she says, "I want you to know, we are living on a holy ground here." So she admitted that to herself, that this used to be a synagogue and to her, her apartment building is -- has been erected on holy ground, you know. The Austrians are 99.9 Catholics. And I knew -- probably knew just as much about Catholicism when I lived in Austria as I knew about my own religion. But that's what it was, that was the reaction there. Others were nice and -- and forthcoming. There were other people who were standoffish and didn't want to hear about it. And in 1970 -- that was '96, I'm there talking about, but in 1970 when we were there first, I walked into a

store to buy stamps and I said, "How much are stamps for America?" "Oh," she said,  
"you're American?" I says --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

A: I walked into a store to buy stamps and I said, "How much are stamps for America?" "Oh," she said, "you're American?" I says, "Yes, but I was born in Vienna." And I said that to her in German. I have a cousin who wouldn't want to honor them with German, she's so upset, she's -- she will never talk German. But I talked in German, "Yeah, but I was born in Vienna. I'm from America, but I was born in Vienna." "Well, so not everybody did get killed, that's -- that's fortunate." Then she added that's fortunate, you know. I mean, she didn't have to say not everybody got killed. I should have ask her, "How many really survived?" And if we survived, it wasn't due to your efforts. It was due to my effort. Cause if you had it your way, we would not have survived.

Q: How do you think your efforts of -- of doing what you had to do, you know, using your wits, using fear, using whatever motivating factor you had during the war to -- to survive. How -- how did it make you what you are or how did you -- how did it shape you and what impact did it have on your -- on the rest of your life?

A: Well, my wife will tell you that when I hi -- when I am on the road in the car and I hear a siren in the back of me, I think they're after me. And I'm also not one to give up, even in present life. When I'm looking for something, when I'm on the road looking for something. When I'm trying to find something in the house, when I'm trying to -- to correct something. I'm not one to give up easily. I s -- I -- I stick to it. You lose something, I -- I -- I -- I trace back the steps that I've been to. I go and look again and look again. My wife would misplace something, I would say, "Well why don't you look



here?" "No, I looked there." "Why don't you look again?" And then she says, "Would you believe it? I'm glad you told me, I found it here now." And -- and the same thing with my kids sometime and I -- I -- I -- I just don't give up too easily. And in fact, when we had escaped from the train, I told my friend, "You know, 30 years from now -- 30 years from now -- we will be talking about this like it's a dream." He says, "How can you think of 30 years from now?" he said. "You don't even know what's going to happen three hours from now. We have no papers, we have no --" I said, "You know, now that we have escaped from that train, I don't think anything will prevent me from surviving the war." Because that situation was such an extreme situation that I think I will never be presented with another situation that could be that extreme. And I made all the efforts possible, never to get back to Drancy again. That's where I escape from another train, you know. This -- I -- I -- a couple of train escapes. You saw that, probably, in my write up of the --

Q: Yeah, I was going to say you're -- you -- you call yourself the ghost of Auschwitz, I was going to say the Holocaust Houdini.

A: Maybe something like that. Maybe. Some people say that, too. Yes, I had several escapes. I had a escape from the gendarmes after my trial, they caught me back. Caught me like -- to -- after a couple days and I served two days extra in jail for that. Was added to my sentence, you know.

Q: Are there other sounds or smells that remind you? You said the sirens sometimes get you --

A: Well, farm smells, yes. When I'm going to the farms. When we used to go on trips through the farm, in the country with the kids, and the open window, the odor came in from the -- manure odor. Th-Th-Th-The smell of stables -- smell of stables was very reminiscent to me, because I spent one night -- the second night after my escape, sleeping between two cows that were chewing their cud. And that is a very reminiscing feeling to me.

Q: I think you describe it as a perfume, cows [indecipherable]

A: Where did you -- did you [inaudible]

Q: I think that's in your memoirs, no?

A: I-Is it in the -- in the memoirs or is it perhaps in -- did you listen to my interview with the --

Q: Maybe that was [indecipherable]

A: -- the transcript of the interview --

Q: That might have been it.

A: -- that I did with Linda -- Linda Cosmac. Dr. Cosmac, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm, might have been.

A: Hold it for a second --

Q: Sure.

A: Let me show you something. Read this book about Vienna and I told you before about this lady in Vienna. You know how they can be very charming and so, but then they come with that big -- there was a playwright in Vienna, by name of Nestroy -- N-e-s-t-r-

o-y. Nestroy wrote satirical plays. And he always poked fun, as well as of himself -- o-of other people, also of him -- of himself. He poked fun and in this little chapter, in this book about Vienna. It's called, "Vienna, my Vienna." "In his masterpiece, Judith and Holofs -- Holofernese, Nestroy attacked" -- he always attacked people, see -- "attacked another cherished Viennese institution, anti-Semitism. By the brilliant device," that -- that's where he was so brilliant with -- "of disguising Viennese characters as Jews and holding the Jews up for laughter while actually exposing the Viennese for their weakness and meanness, their outward charm and lack of inner conviction." In the 1850's, very funny plays, we used -- when we were kids we used to go to Nestroy's plays, you know. He -- he had a play that was called -- the vaschwenda, "The Spendthrift".

Q: How -- how do you think your -- your wartime experience has affected your spirituality?

A: You mean religiously?

Q: Religiously.

A: I was always traditionally very much involved with -- with Judaism, but I was never a -- practicing in the Orthodox way, although I relate more to the Orthodox mood, because that's the synagogue I went to in Vienna, than to the Conservative or the -- the Reform. But I was more traditional in keeping the holidays. That's -- was my mother -- my father wasn't that way, my mother was in that way, very much devoted to the -- to the tradition, background. I have never failed in my -- in my feelings as -- as a Jew. Nothing to do with religion, it has to do with my background, my cultural inclination, my feeling about the --

the ethics of Judaism, due -- because our religion goes by the rela -- by the relation with man. Between man and man, not with man and God, because if you do good by your fellow man, you do good by God. We don't have a middle man, but I was never a very practicing Jew. We raised the kids as Jews, with some of the Sabbath meals and the candles and taking the holidays and [inaudible], my son was Bar Mitzvah. But not in the Orthodox sense. Often -- often, my wife and I talk and we say we wish we could have really been stronger involved in -- in religious venues. Although the holidays are kept. I never worked on a Jewish holiday. I made it a point not to. And I wanted to maintain that. When a -- when -- on Passover, I am very strict about not eating bread, because again, it's a -- it's perhaps a symbolism, but it makes me what I am. And I'm thinking of my mother, who said, "You take along your religious articles." You know, the phylacteries and the tallith and the prayer shawl. They got damaged when I swam through the river. But she wanted me to, because -- "it will remind you of who you are. Never forget who you are, because if you forget, there'll come a time when somebody will remind you of it." And if the Nazis could remind us, at the end of a gun, who we are, certainly we owe it to ourselves to know who we are without -- without the gun. And that is the -- that is probably what motivates me to be a Jew. I never shied away from -- from saying it or from admitting it. "You Jewish?" "Of course, who isn't?" That's what I would say. I come back with that. We went to -- on a cruise in February, we went to Jamaica. My ca -- the fellow that drove the -- drove the jitney, that -- that little, you know, that little bus that they had for us, turns around, to me, "Are you Jewish?" Said,

“Yes, I am, but what difference does it make?” “Oh,” he says, “you are --” Oh, I could have given -- I couldn’t have given him a check, because I didn’t have -- I’m sorry. I -- I said, “You--” “You Jewish?” I said, “Yes, wh-wh-why you asking that?” “Well, over the ages, your people have been punished.” And he gives me a lecture on Jesus. The Jamaicans are very religious, they’re very Christian. Then when we got to that place where he took us, at a vantage point like a -- a vista, I took him like on the side and I said, “Why did you ask me that? Why did that make any difference?” And I said to him, “Do you know if Christ came back on earth today and he came to Jamaica --” Oh, I ask him, “Is there a synagogue in Jamaica?” “Oh, yes, in Kingston. It’s one of the oldest in the west.” I said, “You see, if Christ were coming back today to Jamaica, he would look for that synagogue to go to, not to your church.” I had to come back to him some -- somehow. I said, “We are all -- we are all the same. Christ was Jewish.” I had to give this man a lesson. Why did he pick -- why did he pick on me? You know, people never actually -- not knowingly, take me for Jewish. They think I am Lebanese, Greek, Italian, what else -- South American. Because of my coloration maybe, my skin color. “But, what difference does it make,” I told him. And, “Yes I am.” I will never deny it. But my spirituality -- it’s often this way, if you are -- if you are just a little bit inclined to be who you are, as a Jew, for instance and -- and a catastrophe comes, it can easily extinguish it. But if you have a strong feeling about it and a catastrophe comes, it’ll reinforce you. Because you want to prove, I have survived. It’s like again the metaphor with the wind and the flame. if you have a very small flame, and a harsh -- a strong wind blows, it’ll

blow out the flame. If you have a big flame and a wind blows, it'll enlarge the flame, you see? But, being that I have been persecuted as a Jew, I think it's a duty to be committed as a Jew for the rest of my life. Because they wanted me to be gone and I have survived and if I am not what I am and show what I am, I'm giving them a victory. That would be posthumous victory, wouldn't it? If I say, no, I want to give up my Judaism, that's all that Hitler would want. Hey, take Isaac Bashivasinger, the writer. The Yiddish language was supposed to have been obliterated. And they were supposed to brag about that later, what they did to that culture. And there he comes and writes and wins the Nobel Prize for literature, writing in the Yiddish language. If Hitler had been alive then, he would have committed suicide again. Because this language was no -- was not supposed to have survived. So that is what you call it, a vindication. A -- an assertion. You're here, you live and one of the phrases that the Jews always sing in the song and you may have heard that in Hebrew. Have you heard Im Israelhaim? The Jewish people who lives is alive. The word chaim means life. And you may be Jewish even. Are you?

Q: No.

A: No, you're not. All right. What business is it? Why do you ask that? But you know -- yes --

Q: Do you have friends who were survivors?

A: Oh yeah. Quite a few, yes.

Q: Is there a connection that you have with -- that you -- that you -- you could never really -- never really feel with people who aren't survivors? Is there a commonality?

A: There is a commonality, but I am just as often more comfortable with people who are not survivors. We -- I have friends who are survivors, who have become -- in social matters, very -- what I call callous. Not what I would say as Jews we should be. Even to the point of some of my friends saying, "W-We really should do something about the immigration laws." These are survivors. "We really should do something about so and so." Whether it's the blacks. I prefer a fella who is not a survivor and lives by -- by the rules of -- of -- of good human mankind, rather than [indecipherable] I mean there's -- some of the survivors are -- I -- I -- I have only a connection because -- because we belong to a same survivors group or -- or we belong to a -- to an organization that's the -- the Holocaust ca -- com -- mem -- Holocaust Memorial -- not Memorial -- commemorative -- council of -- the Baltimore Jewish Council Ho-Holocaust Remembrance Committee. Holocaust Remembrance Committee, so we -- we do often go together on panels and speak to classes. But I have a lot of friends who are -- this fellow here that just called me and so many others that -- that I am -- that I'm just as comfortable, often more comfortable than with survivors. Because with survivors, they're -- often the -- the conversation turns on those -- on those subjects, you know. We have one lady that unfortunately is very ill, who when-whenever you see her, it has to be that subject to be talked about and it weighs on her day and night to the point where she is probably unstable mentally because of that. But that's -- that's -- that can happen, but I -- as I say, I feel I can acclimate in -- in -- in my surroundings and feel comfortable both

ways or uncomfortable both ways. That's -- depends on the situation, the person and the -  
- and the personality.

Q: One thing about the perfume -- stable perfume and the cows --

A: Yes?

Q: When you smell -- when -- you said you took drives out in the country with your family and you smelled the -- the stables, what feeling did that evoke?

A: It's good feelings. Feelings of -- of being sheltered, feeling good. Viscerally invigorating. Because, I slept between two cows, after -- the -- the second night after my escape and I felt that nobody can find me and I heard them chew the cud and the odor was so nice, I felt I've pro-protected. I was in -- in goo -- in a good surrounding and peaceful. Pastoral. Nice. Like -- like hearing a -- a -- a nice melody play or something like that. Yeah, it's -- it's a -- it's a good reminiscence. I call it Chanel 65 or something like that. Yes, it's -- it's -- it's -- it -- it brings back -- it brings back the memories -- just like the buckets that overflowed in the car, bring back the other olfactory senses of -- of despair.

Q: The buckets?

A: In -- in the cattle car.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That flowed over. That overflowed. We used it to -- to relieve ourselves. That was one bucket for 50 people, now you imagine that. That brings back despair.

Q: The smell of outhouses.



A: Yes, was putrid. Awful.

Q: You call yourself a g -- a ghost of Auschwitz.

A: Who called me that?

Q: I thought you did.

A: I was never in Auschwitz.

Q: Well, then you'd never -- then you never -- you -- you escaped it.

A: Yeah, I --

Q: Th-Th-Therefore you were a ghost, you never --

A: Yeah, I never got -- yeah, I was a -- a would be -- a would be Auschwitz internee or victim in the book -- in the book of the deportations of Jews. I am listed as one who was gassed.

Q: That's right, I wanted you to talk about that.

A: Because I do not have an asterisk next to my name. Because I wasn't in France to have an input when the book was printed. My friend with whom I escaped has an asterisk next to his name.

Q: So the official record shows --

A: Shows me as one that died in Auschwitz. In that book.

Q: And you saw that book when you went back to France?

A: No, no, no, I -- I saw it here when my friend Herbie Freedman, who lived then in Norfolk, got it from a cousin in France and I looked it -- I looked into it and found my name in there. I had shivers run down my spine. Then my aunt sent me one from Paris.

That was the book, yeah, that's -- that is -- has to [inaudible] -- has my name in it and my date, where I was born and my name is actually misspelled and -- B-r-e-h-o-l-z.

[indecipherable]

Q: How old were you when you saw that? What year was that?

A: In '78.

Q: In '78. And you said it made shivers run down your spine?

A: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely, it was -- was a realization. I'm here, but in the book I'm -  
- I'm -- I'm a victim, you know. I was then -- that was '78, I was 56 years old then. I'm --  
I'm now 77.

Q: I -- I -- I don't have many more questions. I don't know if there's something --

A: Well, that's good. And you know what? You may have some questions, but I may not even have any more answers.

Q: Do you have anything that you wanted to say that I didn't ask you about?

A: No, you have the questions and as I said, my life is -- was rather uneventful after -- after I came here, except for the trips, and the reminiscences and -- and no major achievements. You'll have some people that will wind up to be professors and teachers and -- and -- and big businessman and inventors and scientists. I'm just here and I'm alive and I'm glad I'm alive and -- and I'm happy with what I am and what I have. And if that is a matter of being at ease, so be it. There are probably some things that -- that I would have done differently if I had -- had different opportunities perhaps. I would have studied people. My wife says, "Leo, you sh -- could have been in law, you could have

been teaching.” And some people tell me I could have been teaching, because I speak to schools and get that reaction. But then again, it was -- it wasn’t and in hindsight, I am alive and that’s more than -- than I can say for my mother and sisters and of course so many, many, many others. I lost over 30 members of my family. But, if being alive is an achievement, so I have achieved something. And if being alive is just run of the mill -- what everybody does. They get born, they live and they’re alive and then some of them die, sooner or later. So I have -- I have my -- my life as it is and try to relax and sometime it’s a little hard, when you worry -- worry sometime about -- you know, now you worry - - that you’re a grandfather, you worry about your grandchildren. And I guess, as long as your alive, that’s part of it. It wouldn’t be -- it wouldn’t be all that challenging if you didn’t have something to -- to be concerned with, you know. You always want the best for -- for your grandchildren, so you -- from time to time you worry, you know.

Q: Has your health been good?

A: My health’s been -- I -- I would say, yes it’s been good. I have a slight case of angina and I’m on medication, but we’ve been talking and I’ve kept up with it, huh?

Q: Yeah, absolutely.

A: The emotions sometime get a little bit ahold of me and perhaps you noticed that and I can’t help that. That’s again part of -- of the make up, you know, as I said, there was a book written in the 50’s, “You Are What You Eat.” And in your emotions and in your emotional make up, you are the sum total of your life’s experiences. So that is one thing that is part of me and I’m coping pretty much with it. [indecipherable] friends are coming

here at five o'clock. In fact, we are going to a dinner theater tonight, so I'm going to enjoy myself.

Q: Do you feel as though you've led a blessed life?

A: Well, I feel that I'm probably married to the best woman in the world. I have my children and grandchildren. I have been very lucky. Very, very lucky. If not for that night on the sixth of November, 1942, we would not be sitting here talking to each other. So I am very lucky, there is no doubt about it and if you want to call it blessing, which gives it the -- the divine connotation, yes. If you want to call it lucky, which is more secular, you call it that. And I have a very good friend, Father Gallagher, who writes some very beautiful pieces. And he and I have been getting together, Catholic priest who used to be with the archdiocese here. And we get together from time to time and we do a little bit of philosophy and we do a little bit of reminiscing and as far as writing and words, we have a lot in common. And he just sent me this book. That's the second book he sent me. He writes -- he writes free -- free verse poetry and this is Father flannery -- Father Gallagher. And he writes -- he dedicates it. Can you read that?

Q: "For Flo and Leo, with keen admiration, Joe Gallagher."

A: And we get together quite often and I -- I have -- talking before, you have Jewish friends? Yeah, I have Jewish -- I have a -- a -- a priest who is my friend. And we -- we get together and we have our moods and -- and our discussions and very, very nice man. And so I'm blessed. Yeah, I'm blessed with family, I'm blessed with friends. And I'm not averse to using the word blessed. Because to be alive, after all, this is -- is basically a

blessing and that -- that I -- I to -- I told it yesterday when I spoke to the FBI in the field office here in Baltimore. I said, "When I escaped from the train, little would I have thought then that I was going to survive, let alone speaking to one of the wanted law enforcements agencies in the world, telling them how I circumvented the law." But those laws, to me and to many others who could have -- would have done it if they could have, these laws were supposed to be circumvented, because if we didn't, we wouldn't survive. These were bad laws, done -- instituted by bad people. And after that a couple agents came to me and said, "Mr. Bretholz [indecipherable] very interesting and I'll tell you something. You made us feel very bad." "How is that?" "You made us feel bad about ourselves. What we can become when we don't act properly. I hope all of those who were here took your -- your talk to heart. But we were interesting in how you managed to get away, because we always want to find out how people manage to get away." I said, "Did you find out?" I said, "I hope I did not in any way or -- offend you or -- or challenge you with that." "No, no, this was very interesting." I said, "Yes, those laws were so bad that we had to get around them. And escaping was against the law."

Q: How often do you think about that night, November sixth, 1943 --

A: '42.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: How often do you think about that night, November sixth, 1943 --

A: '42. Quite often. I had to -- I could have given you the answer quickly, quite often, but I want to put it into context. Every time the sixth of every month runs around, I have an anniversary. There's that yearly anniversary in November. But when it's the sixth of whatever month it is, it always jumps out. And there's another thing, I was born on the sixth of March.

Q: That's my mother's birthday. In fact, you were born on the same day as my mother.

A: '21? Is your mother 77?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Well, see -- now look at this. Now look at that great coincidence. I was born on the sixth of March and every sixth and most of the day -- most of the things that happened to me, most of the events happened in the first 10 days of the month.

Q: What do you do on the anniversary, the yearly anniversary, November sixth? Do you do anything special?

A: Nothing special.

Q: No.

A: It'll be s -- it'll be 56 years now and when the book comes out, it'll be the 60th anniversary of Kristallnacht, which is the ninth of November. That was the day I crossed into Belgium in 1938. And then I'm in touch with that nun that I contacted after the -- after the -- while I was writing my book. A nun in whose care I was in the hospital in Limoge when I had a strangulation hernia, on the eighth of May, 1944, it is again the first 10 [indecipherable]. And I woke up -- I woke up in that ward and I was afraid -- I was -- I

had been afraid that I would be recognized as a Jew in that Catholic hospital in Limoge. I'm circumcised. They don't do that in France. And also false papers and I'm under anesthesia. And who knows what can happen while I am -- I'm -- I'm o -- great fear. I -- I didn't want to be taken to the hospital. And there's this voice telling me, "As long as I'm in this ward, you have nothing to fear." And was the voice of Sister Jeanne d'Arc. Joan of Arc. 50 odd years later I wrote to the hospital, if they have a trace of her and they gave me her address where she is now. And I'm corresponding with her. Just got a card from her this week. Joan of Arc.

Q: Can you read it?

A: It's French.

Q: Can you translate?

A: Sure.

Q: If you don't mind.

A: This is Sister Joan of Arc. I had sent her a card for -- I had sent her a card for Pentecost -- for the Pentecost, you know, which is a holiday seven weeks after Easter, which is a Jewish holiday also, we have Passover and Shabouth. I sent her a nice flowery card. Let's see how she puts across here. She's in castra, she is now in her 80's. I contacted her. And she sends me this -- this little book marker. "Pour la metier inexistent en neelia neeta, near frontier." French. For friendship, no limits, no borders exist. She says, "Dear Mr. Bretholz. I don't have the beautiful flowers for you or to -- to thank you -- to thank you for yours." Because I sent her a card with flowers. "But I'm only asking that

this little barge that is depicted on this post card,” this is a canal in Paris. She doesn’t live in Paris, but she -- this is a canal in Paris. “That this little barge will cross the ocean and will cross the ocean towards you and you can imagine the distance and the ocean would not prevent it from bringing you my best souvenirs, my best remembrances. I’m very touched that you have thought about my situation here.” I ask her how are you, are you well taken care of? Are you well installed in this home that you are -- Saint Joseph? As a nun, she is. “Nothing I’m lacking -- I am not lacking -- I am not wanting anything and not for want of anything and the house is very well equipped and I am surrounded by my sisters, of whom some -- some of whom were also nurses with me in the hospital in Limoge in 1944. Give my friendships to Madame Bretholz, your wife and your whole family. You are always present in my prayer, that God will bless and will keep -- that -- may God bless you and keep you. Believe in my -- in the expression of my most sincere friendship. Sister Jeanne d’Arc.”

Q: Something.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Maybe that’s a good stopping point.

A: Maybe it is. I’m sure it is. Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview



