THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA
LEGACY PROJECT

MEMOIRIST:  ELI SONDERVAN
INTERVIEWER:  JOHN KENT
LOCATION:  ATLANTA, GEORGIA
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<Begin Disk 1>

INTERVIEW BEGINS

Eli:  I was born in 1939 in Amsterdam [Holland] just before the war started.1 My name is Eli Sandovan and that’s what we want to talk about as far as I understand.

John:  Maybe describe your family, the home situation . . .

Eli:  My family . . . my parents got married shortly before the war. My father was a teacher and economist. He was one of the first that got [went] jobless when the whole thing started.2 I had no brothers and sisters then; I was the only one, the first-born. We lived in Amsterdam [Holland], just opposite the famous Lekstraat Synagogue, which, by the way, is now a museum . . . a kind of Holocaust remembrance museum.3 I had then grandparents that I vaguely remember. When the war started we were living in a very nice apartment in the new area of Amsterdam. We already . . . in 1942, when I was a little baby, the Germans started to concentrate all the Jews in the ghetto.4 We had to move from our house into [a] kind of apartment house, where there were

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1 Amsterdam is the capital and most populous city of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1940, Amsterdam had a Jewish population of about 75,000, which increased to over 79,000 in 1941. Jews represented less than 10 percent of the city’s total population. More than 10,000 of these were foreign Jews who had found refuge in Amsterdam in the 1930’s.
2 In October 1940, Germans authorities forbid Jews from working for the civil service and Jewish teachers were dismissed from their jobs. Many teachers then found jobs in newly established Jewish schools after Jewish children were forbidden to attend school with non-Jewish children in January 1941.
3 The synagogue at 63 Lekstraat was built in 1937 in the neighborhood known as the River District, which before World War II had about a 30 percent Jewish population. After September 1943, the synagogue was used as a warehouse for the furniture of Jews who had been deported. In the 1970’s, it became home to the Museum of the Dutch Resistance while the small shul continued to be used as a synagogue. In 1999, the museum moved to a new location and the large synagogue became an auctioneer's. In 2002 the building was designated a national monument.
4 In 1942, the Germans began relocating provincial Jews to Amsterdam. Foreign and stateless Jews living in Amsterdam were sent to Westerbork transit camp. Within Amsterdam, Jews were restricted to certain sections of the city. Many Jews in Amsterdam lived in the neighborhood around the Waterlooplein Market, in an area between the Amstel River, Oude Schans canal, Jonas Daniel Meyer Square [Dutch: Jonas Daniël Meijerplein], and Rapenburg [street]. This area became known as the ‘Jewish Quarter,’ but a ghetto like those created in Eastern Europe was not created. Instead, the Germans took advantage of the way the canals created a kind of island and would occasionally close off the bridges leading into the neighborhood when raids or roundups were conducted.
lots and lots of people in a very small space. I vaguely remember that. That was also the time
that they started to allow Jews not to buy in the stores anymore. You had to buy in the markets.
You could not ride in the streetcars any longer.

In 1940 . . . end of 1942, the first deportation started. That was [a] very traumatic area
at the time because contrary to the other European countries, where the Germans went and
picked up the people and rounded them up and put them on the trains or whatever, in Holland it
[was] not the Germans who did it, it was the Dutch police. They were too eager to cooperate with
the Germans. The Germans didn’t have to do anything. It was the Dutch police that came, picked
you up, rounded you up, and delivered you as a ready package to the Germans. In nineteen . . .
[at the] end of 1942, my parents by the way, got special papers that they were not to be rounded
up yet. My father was a teacher and was necessary to teach Jewish children that were not gone
yet. My mother was also considered a teacher they got special papers from the Joodsche Raad
[Dutch: Jewish Council], which was the community organization to organize the deportations
of the Jews. Because it was all nicely organized . . . the little yekes [Yiddish: German Jews] . . . by
the Jews themselves. There were a couple of lawyers and important people that were sitting there
who decided who wouldn’t go, and what list, and whatever. It was all very nicely organized. You
got a letter home that said on “dah dah dah” date you had to present yourself at “dah dah dah”
railway station and you had to bring “dah dah dah” luggage because you were going be
deported, or as they called it in those days, “put on a transport,” which was of course very

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5 Initially, the German civil administration allowed Dutch Jews to continue their daily lives as usual. As 1940 progressed, however, anti-Jewish measures were introduced one after the other. By the end of 1940, Jews were banned from the civil service and Jews were required to register the assets of their business enterprises so that Aryan owners may take over. In January 1941, the German authorities required all Jews to register themselves as Jews. As of April 29, 1942, Jews were required to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing. Among other anti-Jewish laws, a curfew was enacted and Jews were forbidden to visit Christians in their homes. Jews were required to turn in their bicycles, forbidden to use trams or ride in cars, required to do their shopping at certain hours, and were permitted to shop at only Jewish-owned shops. Jews could not attend theaters or movies, use swimming pools or athletic fields, or participate in any public athletic activity.

6 One transport left Amsterdam for Mauthausen on February 23, 1941, but the mass deportation of Jews from the Netherlands to killing centers in occupied Poland—primarily to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Sobibor—began in July 1942. The Jewish council [Dutch: Joodsche Raad] in Amsterdam was formed in February 1941 and was ordered to begin organizing deportations in June 1942. Jews who received deportation notices were assembled as the municipal theatre and then taken to Westerbork transit camp before being sent on to Auschwitz-Birkenau or Sobibor. The deportations continued throughout the rest of 1942 and early 1943. A major round-up in the Jewish quarter occurred in May 1943, followed by a series of raids by German and Dutch Nazi authorities to seize Jews in the city. There was substantial collaboration with the Germans in the deportation process from members of the Dutch population, including the Amsterdam city administration, the municipal police, and Dutch railway workers, as well as the Dutch Nazi party (NSB). In September 1943, the remaining members of the Jewish council were taken first to Westerbork and then to the transit ghetto of Theresienstadt near Prague. The last train left Westerbork for Auschwitz-Birkenau on September 3, 1944.
strange, even strange way of using language because what do you put on a transport? A box, maybe a horse, but to transport, to deport people . . . that already was an indication of what was going on. I mean, you were not going to travel somewhere; you were going to be deported. Nobody knew exactly where and what country to . . . the Jews in East[ern] Europe, in Western Europe, it was not . . . about the camps and all the things were not known yet. There were certain rumors about it, but nobody believed them.

One day the deportation papers for my [paternal] grandparents arrived. My father said, “This is the moment to go into hiding. If not, they’ll pick us up within two days and we’ll be gone.” Both his parents and my mother’s parents refused to go in hiding. They said, “It won’t be that bad. Let’s go and see what they have for us in the East.” He tried to convince them. They refused to. Then one day they came to collect them. As they knocked on the door, my grandmother got a heart attack and died on the spot—which saved her a lot of troubles. Because of that, because of that calamity, they left. They left us alone for a few days.

Then one day, they [my parents] took me and sent me to another city, Utrecht [The Netherlands]. There was a German lady over there, who was a good German, who left Germany because of [Adolf] Hitler, and lived in Holland already for quite some years. I think she left around 1935. She took me in. I, as a little boy, did not understand that. To me, she was a German. I hated that woman although she actually saved my life in that instant. I know one day she took me in the streetcar to the market to buy some vegetables. As loud as I could, said in that streetcar, “We Jews are not allowed to buy vegetables. Don’t you know that?” I could have given her away . . . luckily nothing happened. I saw her as a German even long time after the war—until I really was wise enough to understand that was a very stupid thing to do.

A few days later . . . my parents were not able to convince their parents to leave. They left [Amsterdam] and came to Utrecht to pick me up. Then we went to the south. The idea they had was to go to Belgium, France, Spain, and then from Spain to cross into the United States [by

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7 Eli, his parents, and his two paternal aunts probably went into hiding in the winter of 1942—1943. According to Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, Eli’s paternal grandmother, Alida (née Tas) Sondervan died of a “heart attack by razzia [German: police raid].” An obituary published in the Jewish Weekly newspaper [Dutch: Het Joodsche Weekblad] on November 20, 1942 gives November 14, 1942 as the date of her death. Her husband, Asser Philip Sondervan is reported to have died in Sobibor on March 26, 1943. He may have been on a transport of 1250 Jews that left the Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands for Sobibor on March 23, 1943. Eli’s maternal grandparents, David and Aaltje (née Leeufma) Cohen Paraia are reported to have died in Auschwitz-Birkenau on August 27, 1943. They were likely on a transport of 1001 Jews that left Westerbork for Auschwitz-Birkenau on August 24, 1943.  
8 Utrecht is a city in the central Netherlands, approximately 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of Amsterdam.
ship]. What happened is . . . before the war, my father was working with a cousin of his. They were very rich. Just as the war started, they took a boat and went to America. My father begged him to take him, and his wife, and his kid with him. He said, “You stay here. It will not be that bad over here.” [My father] decided he was going to America and leave the whole thing behind and try to do what he could from there. They came and picked me up. At night we traveled through the south, partly by bus, partly by train. It was very dangerous because you had to make sure that they couldn’t see that once there was a star [of David] on your coat. Of course, you’ve taken the star off [but] you could still [see] where the stitches had been and all that. It was very dangerous.

We arrived in the south of the Netherlands late in the evening. There we had to meet a passeur [French: smuggler], what they called it. That was a gentleman, in the middle of the night, that would help you cross the border illegally. These guys were extremely expensive. My grandfather was a world famous stamp collector.9 He had one of the most expensive collections in the world. My father got a whole envelope of very expensive stamps from his father-in-law that might help him through the war. As a matter of fact, it did because they sold from time to time stamps. With that, they got the money straight to live through the hiding. They had to pay a fortune to this passeur. He took us over the border and helped us to get to Brussels [Belgium].10

Now in Belgium, already the war was not as bad as in Holland.11 Holland was the worst of all European countries because Holland was by the Germans considered as part of Germany.12 All the others were occupied territories. Holland was not occupied. Holland was annex[ed] as

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9 According to the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands, Eli’s Grandfather, David Cohen Paraira, “was a mathematician and worked as an actuary for a life insurance firm. He was also one of the greatest philatelists [stamp collectors] in the Netherlands, specializing in the Netherlands’ first issues. David was the son of the mathematician Dr M.C. Cohen Paraira, who chaired the council of the Portuguese-Jewish community and was secretary of the Portuguese-Jewish seminary Ets Haim.”

10 Brussels is the capital of Belgium. It is located approximately 200 kilometers (124 miles) south of Amsterdam, Netherlands.

11 Eli seems to referring to attitudes among the civilian populations towards the German occupation. Although some Belgians did collaborate, there was considerable support in Belgium for resistance to the German occupation. Over 25,000 Jews avoided deportation by hiding from the German authorities. Since most of the Jews in Belgium were immigrants, they tended to be mistrustful of official appeals and were less likely to report their whereabouts to the authorities. Unlike the Netherlands, the Belgian civilian administration refused to cooperate in the deportations and it was the German military police that carried out the deportations. Compared to the Netherlands, Jews in Belgium had a higher rate of survival during the Holocaust.

12 Ethnically, linguistically, and culturally, the Dutch people have much in common with Germans. As a result of the Dutch religious stratification, a large percentage of the Dutch people could also be certified as almost 100 percent Aryan. German authorities did not want to alienate the Dutch people and anticipated the Netherlands would be fully integrated into Germany after the war. Thus, upon annexing the Netherlands into the Greater German Reich, a civil rather than military authority was established.
part of Germany. In Belgium already you could move a little bit safer. We went to Brussels, which is the capital of Belgium. My mom had an aunt in Brussels. We knocked on her door to ask her if we could stay over night. She looked at us and said, “I don’t allow Jews in.” She was Jewish herself. She was so afraid, she did not allow us to get into the house. In the meantime, my parents had, through the passeur and other people, received new papers—fake papers with fake identities. Those identities were Belgian identities . . . that we were Flemish from the west coast.

We especially went to the east so they would not recognize our accents because we didn’t speak Flemish, but we [did] speak Dutch—which is close to each other, but still different. That day, we got our new documents, and new identities, and our new names. They told me, at three years old, that my name from that moment on was Eddie D’here [sp], which . . . it’s very nice, but it didn’t sink in very well. We went to a little hotel and took a room. In the middle of the night, they knock on the door and there was [the] Gestapo. The hotel owner had told the Gestapo that there were strange people over there and he wanted to check them out.

For my mother, that was the second time because she . . . I want to go back because it’s a very interesting story . . . A few days before that, we were going to leave Holland, we needed fake papers. There was somebody that was going to make those papers. My mom had to go there with a lot of money and with photographs so they could make the papers and she could get the papers on the spot. Then we could leave with those papers. Those were papers identifying us as non-Jewish. She went to that place and knocked on the door. The door was open and the man was not there. There were five Gestapo officers waiting for her there. They took her to the Gestapo head office where she met Willy Lages, who was the most famous leader of the Gestapo in Holland—young man, German officer, very famous. On the way over there, she managed to lose all the passport pictures that she had in her purse. While she was brought to his office by the Gestapo, she managed to lose all those pictures. When he came there, they interrogated her, “Why were you there? What were you doing there?” She told all kinds of stories. She was kept

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13 The Kingdom of Belgium has three official languages: Dutch, French, and German. Dutch is generally spoken in the northern part of Belgium, while French is spoken in southern Belgium, and German to the east. Flemish refers to the region, culture, and people of western Belgium rather than a language or dialect, although there are some slight differences in pronunciation, lexicon, and expressions.

14 Willy Paul Franz Lages was the German chief of the SD or Sicherheitsdienst [German: security service], the intelligence gathering body of Nazi Party, in Amsterdam during the Second World War. He was sent to The Hague after the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940. Then in March 1941, Lages was sent to Amsterdam, where he was appointed head of the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung [German: Central Bureau for the Jewish Emigration], making him partially responsible for the deportation of Dutch Jews to extermination and concentration camps in Poland and Germany.
as his personal prisoner for two days and somehow—nobody knows why—he was released. Immediately after that, we left.

Going back to Brussels . . . that was the second time that she looked the Gestapo in her eyes and was given up again. She said, “We are from Flanders, the name is D’here [sp]” and all that. [They] showed the papers. [The] papers looked pretty good. There were no photocopies in those days but people were very good in faking papers. Nowadays, every day that I look at the Xerox machine [photocopier] and say, “My G-d, if we would have had those machines in those days, what could we have done? How many people could we have saved?” That goes through my mind today, 50 years later, almost every day, when I see this technology that we have today.

Anyhow, those papers looked, more or less, okay, so the Germans decided to take a test. There was this little boy in the crib sleeping. They decided to ask him for his name . . . they wake me up in the middle of the night, this little boy. They go, “Who are you?” I said, “Eddie D’here [sp].” I don’t know why, but I said the right thing. That saved us again. They left us.

From there, we went to eastern Belgium . . . French-speaking part of Belgium. In Belgium, there was a whole underground organization called the ‘Underground Train.’ There were Catholic priests . . . there were other people that organized a system to save Jews. They saved something like 500 Jewish children from Antwerp [Belgium] and all kinds of things. We fall in the hands of those people. They put my mother and me on a big farm outside . . . my father got to work in another farm, nearby. My mom was heavily pregnant then. What they did [was], they took us back from the farm and put her in a hospital with the nuns. They put me in an orphanage. The first thing the orphanage did . . . was baptize me Catholic so at least, if I would be caught, my soul would be saved. Mom was in the hospital. Then my brother was born and the evening that my brother was born—he was born on a Friday afternoon . . . in the evening, the Catholic priest came. He brought two challahs. He brought wine so that my dad could make

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15 It is unclear what organization Eli is specifically referring to. Belgian resistance movements hid thousands of people in monasteries, hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools, and private homes. One resistance organization in particular, the Comité de Défense des Juifs [French: Committee for the Defense of Jews, or CDJ], was very active in helping to hide people. The CDJ succeeded in saving between 3,000 and 4,000 of the estimated 5,000 children who became hidden children in Belgium. It is possible the CDJ was responsible for helping Eli’s family. In Antwerp, the Jewish population was mostly deported between 1942 and 1944 (when Eli’s family was in the area), but about 800 Jews were able to hide in the city with the help of organizations like the CDJ.

16 Challah is a braided bread eaten on special occasions like Sabbath and Jewish holidays.
Kiddush in the Catholic hospital with all the nuns.\(^\text{17}\) Those Belgians were phenomenal. That’s the way we stayed through the whole the war.

Of course, there are all kind of little war stories but they are not the big line of the story. What happened in October 1944, when the Americans liberated France . . . they liberated Paris in October, and three days later came to the little village where we were hiding.\(^\text{18}\) I remember huge fighting at night, it was like fireworks, but sometimes bigger. The whole horizon was lit up by the shooting. The Germans were still there and the Americans were coming so they were fighting all night. When we got up in the morning, the Germans were gone. They left their military vehicles behind. They were gone. We were liberated by the Americans. I remember unbelievable things. We thought a car is a car and stonewall is a stonewall. In the village there was a castle. The Americans with the Sherman tanks drove through the wall of the castle . . . just drove thought it. It was totally unbelievable, for a kid in those days, that you could take a vehicle and drive though a stonewall. There was, in front of our farm, a German half-track left behind.\(^\text{19}\) We climbed into it and found green bread with . . .

**John:** Green bread?

**Eli:** Yes, bread with green mildew on it and cheese with mildew on it. I have never seen anything like it. They explained to me that’s what the Germans eat. I could fairly well understand that people so bad eat something with mildew on it. Actually it’s supposed to be something real good but I don’t know.

What happened then: my father lived on a farm where he was employed as a farm hand. He didn’t know a thing about it. If there would have been two left hands, he would have had four. When the Americans came, he immediately decided he wanted to take part in the whole thing and enlisted in the SHAEF . . . Supreme Headquarters Allied Expedition Forces.\(^\text{20}\) He got a

\(^{17}\) *Kiddush* [Hebrew: Sanctification] is a blessing recited over wine or grape juice to sanctify the Sabbath.

\(^{18}\) On August 25, 1944, German forces in Paris surrendered. Much of Belgium was liberated in September 1944, although fighting continued as German troops offered resistance throughout the country and launched the Ardennes Offensive in December. By February 1945, the country was reported to be free of German troops.

\(^{19}\) A half-track is a civilian or military vehicle with regular wheels at the front and tracks at the back. The combination creates a vehicle with cross-country capabilities that still handles like a wheeled vehicle.

\(^{20}\) The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was formed in February 1943 to direct operations for the massive collaboration of American, French, British, and Canadian ground, air, and naval forces in Europe. United States General Dwight D. Eisenhower was in command of SHAEF throughout its existence. After the surrender of Germany, SHAEF was dissolved on July 14, 1945. After its dissolution, SHAEF continued its relationship with the liberated countries of France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway. SHAEF continued to operate Missions in these nations until as late as 1947. The SHAEF shoulder sleeve insignia
job with . . . [General George Smith] Patton. This is his arm symbol. <Eli gestures to picture that is out of frame.> He had chevron and the flaming sword. [My father] became head of the entertainment department of the army. He had to bring all the movies and all the stars to the army to get them, to keep them fighting. He stayed in Brussels. We went back to Brussels where we bought an apartment—not bought, we rented an apartment. He served at the headquarters in Brussels.

The war went on in Holland until May 5, 1945. An interesting detail is [that] Holland was one of the few countries that were never liberated and where the Germans never gave up. The war went on until the last day—the day of the capitulation of Germany. When Germany capitulated, Holland became capitulated together with them. They tried to liberate Holland with the Bridge Too Far . . . the story of the Battle of Arnhem [Holland], which did not succeed because of the treason of Prince Bernhard. The man . . . the husband of the previous queen . . . was one of the biggest traitors Europe has ever seen. That’s why the operation in Arnhem did not succeed and stupidity by ‘Monty,’ the British [Field] Marshal [Bernard Montgomery] ‘Monty’

was a black, inverted triangular shaped patch with a rainbow across a rounded top and a sword with red flames pointing upward from the bottom point.

21 The southern part of the Netherlands had been liberated in the last months of 1944 and much of the eastern and northern Netherlands since March 1945. The western provinces, however, were not liberated until May 4, 1945, when the German army in Western Europe surrendered to the Allies and ceased fighting. The capitulation of the Netherlands was signed on May 5. The war in Europe officially ended on May 7, 1945 when German General Alfred Jodl signed an unconditional surrender to the Allies in Reims, France. The following day, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel officially surrendered to Soviet forces in Berlin.

22 “A Bridge Too Far” is a 1977 American film based on a 1974 novel of the same name by Cornelius Ryan. It tells the story of the Battle of Arnhem during Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands in September 1944. The title comes from a comment made by British Lieutenant General Frederick Browning, who told Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, "I think we may be going a bridge too far."

23 The Battle of Arnhem was a famous battle of World War II fought September 17-26, 1944 in and around the Dutch town of Arnhem. British and American troops were flown behind enemy lines and tasked with securing a network of bridges and canals along the Dutch-German border. The bold plan was meant to facilitate the Western Allies’ push into Germany. However, British Intelligence had ignored Dutch Resistance reports that the SS were in the region. Stiff German resistance overwhelmed British forces attempting to secure the bridge at Arnhem. By the time the decision was made to withdraw, over 1,200 British soldiers had been killed, nearly 3,000 were taken prisoner, and many wounded were left behind.

24 Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld was a German aristocrat who married Princess Juliana, later Queen Juliana, in 1937. Together the couple had four daughters, including the former Queen of the Netherlands, Princess Beatrix. Prior to his marriage, the Prince had been a member of the Nazi Party and the Reiter-SS, a mounted unit of the SS. Various members of his family and friends were also aligned with the Nazis. During World War II, he remained in London with Queen Wilhelmina and the Dutch government-in-exile, where he took an active role in Allied planning and acted as Commander of the Dutch Armed Forces. Although the Prince proved himself to be a loyal Dutch citizen and officer, some accused his sympathies of remaining with Germany. Some suspected the Prince of disloyalty because of Dutch double agent Christiaan Antonius Lindemans, who served on his staff in September 1944. In October 1944, Lindemans was denounced as a German spy. As a trusted liaison between Dutch resistance and British intelligence, he is believed to have passed details of Operation Market Garden to the Germans.
who was a total idiot.\textsuperscript{25} Holland was never liberated until May 5, 1945. Then my father, with the forces, was relocated in Amsterdam. We stayed in Brussels. There [Amsterdam] they had the headquarters. By the way, this picture you see over there <gestures to picture> was taken at the building at the headquarters of the U.S. forces in Amsterdam where he was working. Although in this picture he’s civilian, most of the time he was wearing uniform.

**John:** As a child, how was all this explained to you? There was this war going on.

**Eli:** They didn’t have to explain it. You knew it. You saw it around you. You felt it. But the real explanations came much later and that’s where we are heading to. You saw it happening. You saw the shooting. You saw people dying. You saw people disappearing. You were in kindergarten and the next day five children were not there anymore and the next day another five were gone. This was . . . it’s very hard to explain to somebody who did not live through it but you lived in a world that was diminishing. Everyday there were a few people and then we came home and my parents were whispering, “The Nordheims have been deport[ed] today . . . this and this.” They tried not to tell the children. My parents were using a trick. They were speaking French. They thought I wouldn’t understand French, which, of course, as a kid you understand every language. Whatever I was not supposed to know, they told each other in French which I, of course, understood immediately. This was a kind of atmosphere. It was so weird, so frightening, it’s hard to explain, but you knew exactly what was going on, because every day you saw it. You couldn’t go to the market anymore. You couldn’t go to work anymore. There were German soldiers with guns waiting at the entrance of the synagogue, they’re picking out people and putting them on trains . . . That didn’t need explanation.

What happened then is that in August 1945 my dad decided it was time for his family—in the meantime, he had a wife and two children—to come back to Amsterdam. He sent us letters, he was sending me letters every week—beautiful letters with illustrations about the army and the trucks . . . my father couldn’t draw. He had no clue, but I still keep those letters. They’re unbelievable. They were written for a six-year-old, five-year-old kid with illustrations,

\textsuperscript{25} Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, also known as "Monty" and the "Spartan General," was a senior officer of the British Army and one of the Allied commanders in World War II. Montgomery was in command of all Allied ground forces during Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of France, which was launched on June 6, 1944. Promoted to the rank of field marshal, Montgomery then led the Allied forces in Operation Market Garden, a controversial strategy that was poorly executed and proved a costly failure. Montgomery's 21st Army Group advanced to the Rhine in February 1945 and finally received the surrender of the German armies on May 4, 1945. Montgomery was notorious for his lack of tact and diplomacy as well as for being a cautious, thorough strategist, often exasperating the patience of fellow Allied commanders.
unbelievable. He decided it was time for us [to join him]. He sent a jeep from the army, from the headquarters in Brussels, to pick us up and to bring us to Amsterdam. We packed . . .

I have another little, very nice story what happened in Brussels. We didn’t know who survived and who didn’t survive. We were in our flat in Brussels. One day, in the middle of the night . . . we were liberated . . . somebody knocks on the door . . . That was after May 1945, after the [English phrase, sounds like fall of the 20:43] . . . when you hear the knock on the door, you froze for fear. Being the middle of the night . . . although the war was already over but this trauma was not gone. Somebody knocks on the door. My mother goes to the door and says, “Qui est là?” [French: “Who is there?”] She spoke . . . we spoke French in Brussels. The man says, “Ton frère.” [French: “Your brother.”] Now that is a terrible grammatical mistake because in French it goes by the subject. It would be “Ta frère.” My mother knew it was her brother because he didn’t know French. He had somehow survived. He had been in hiding somewhere and he survived the war, too. The two sisters of my father, who came with us, also survived in Belgium, by the way. That was in the middle of the night. It was unbelievable because by his mistake she knew it was really him. Later on, he went back to Holland.

She sent him little packages from Belgium because there was nothing to eat in Holland. One day she sent him a package with the dried bacalao [Spanish: dried, salted fish]. You know what it is? You can buy it here in the market. It’s just dried fish that they . . . It’s haddock that they dry, that they salt and dry it in the air. It’s very famous in Spain, Portugal, in western European countries. You moisten it . . . but it stinks like hell. She sent a package to Amsterdam, to her brother because he really loved it already before the war where this fish is. She got a letter back from the United States headquarters in Amsterdam that she was never allowed to send such a stinking package again because the soldier that had to bring it, almost fainted on the way . . .

Anyhow we were picked up in the jeep and were taken to the Netherlands, to the southern part of the Netherlands. There, we were stopped by Dutch officers. [They asked,] “Where are you going?” [We said,] “We’re going to Amsterdam.” [They asked,] “What do you want to do there?” [We said,] “We used to live there before the war.” [They asked,] “Why did you live there before the war?” [We said,] “Well, that’s where we came from.” [They asked,] “Do you have papers?” [We said,] “No.” [They asked,] “Do you have a passport?” [We said,] “No.” [They asked,] “How do we know you’re Dutch?” [We said,] “You hear our Dutch speaking?” [They said,] “That’s not enough.” They picked us up and took us to Eindhoven
Holland, the city where the big Philips factories are. They had taken over a couple of buildings from Philips where they had made a kind of concentration camp. Whoever came back, whether they came back from the East or from the West, all the Jews were brought over there, and were treated very, very harsh, because the Dutch were absolutely totally unhappy that we came back. They told us, “Why did you come back?” [We said,] “Well, we came from here.” [They asked,] “Why didn’t you die? Why did you survive?” That kind of questions. We were put in there, a big, big, big hole with four layers of beds and women, children, everybody together. No privacy whatsoever and hardly no food—on purpose non-kosher food. That was a very unpleasant situation. We were there and nobody knew where we were.

In the meantime, my dad was in Amsterdam waiting for us to arrive and we never came. He stared to do inquiries, couldn’t find out. Talked to the headquarters in Brussels and they told them that the Dutch had taken care of us. They didn’t know what happened, so he became furious. He sent a colonel from Amsterdam to Eindhoven to find us. The guy came there and he asked those Dutch if they were crazy. He made an enormous scandal over there. He took us out and he took us to Amsterdam. We arrived in Amsterdam in midsummer 1945.

Only then, really, the situation of the war started to sink in because . . . some people had come back, not too many. Holland . . . I don’t know if you’re aware of it, but the lowest number of Jews that survived is in the Netherlands. Only eight percent of Jewish population survived. In Poland it was almost 20 percent. That is because—contrary to all of the propaganda after the war, all the Anne Frank stories, and all that—the Dutch were the worst collaborators with the

26 Eindhoven is a city in the south of the Netherlands. Koninklijke Philips N.V. (Royal Philips, commonly known as Philips) is a technology company that was founded in Eindhoven in 1891. By World War II, the company owned a large campus of factories in Eindhoven. Most of the Philips family fled to the United States during the war, but Frederik (Frits) Philips stayed behind. To avoid losing his influence, he was forced to collaborate with the German government-appointed director of Philips. In December 1941, he created a special division of Jewish employees called the Special Assignments Bureau (SOBU). By convincing the Germans that the SOBU employees were essential to wartime production efforts, he was able to protect these employees and their families until 1943, when they were deported to the Vught concentration camp. On June 7, 1944, they were deported directly to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where 382 managed to survive the war. The Philips factories in Eindhoven were badly damaged by Allied bombers during the war. However, after the war the factories were briefly used as a transit camp for refugees and displaced persons from the Netherlands, France, Poland, and Russia.

27 In January 1941, all Jews in the Netherlands were required to register. A total of 159,806 registered, including 19,561 persons born of mixed marriages and some 25,000 Jewish refugees from the German Reich. Between 1942 and 1944, the Germans and their Dutch collaborators deported 107,000 Jews. Only 5,200 survived. Most were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau or Sobibor, where they were murdered. Two-thirds of the 25,000-30,000 Dutch Jews who went into hiding managed to survive. In all, less than 25 percent of Dutch Jews survived the Holocaust.

28 Only approximately ten percent of Jews in Poland survived the Holocaust. In all, approximately 3,000,000 of a pre-war Jewish population of around 3,300,000 were murdered.
Germans that there were in history. Very few people came back. Those that came back started to try to rebuild life as if nothing had happened. They opened the schools again, started the synagogues, and everything as if it was just . . . as it was before. They didn’t realize that it was a new world, new situations. They started to rebuild everything as before, which was an unbelievably weird situation, because we had to go to school and learn German sentence like, “Soldaten marschieren für über.” [German: Soldiers marching about.] So on one hand, everything was as if nothing had happened, on the other hand the synagogues were empty because there was nobody. The schools were almost empty because there was nobody. Every day you heard, “Oh, he died in Theresienstadt”29 . . . Oh, he died in Ravensbruck30 . . . She? Oh, she went to Auschwitz-[Birkenau].”31 This whole thing started to only then sink in really . . .

People got total nervous breakdowns. My mom was a total wreck and made everybody crazy around her including her kids and her husband. People were crying at night in bed and were crying during daytime. People started only then started to realize what really . . . how big the trauma was. We were brought up with all those ideas. When I didn’t . . . when I left a little piece like that <gestures with hands> of food on my plate, my Mom would say, “You can’t do that. The children in the camps would have lived another week off that” . . . that kind of thing. We totally . . . that is when the second and third generation started. Because my other brother and my other sister were born after the war and my kids were born so many years after . . . are still suffering these same traumas, because they are so deep and so . . . I immediately there and then got a tremendous hatred of the Dutch. The way they treated us when we came back and when we saw them behave like . . . as if nothing had happened since the occupation.

When the war . . . when the army started to go back to the United States they offered my Dad to follow them and to become American citizen and settle in America with his kids. He did not. He said, “My job is here to rebuild the community. I have to stay here and work on

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29 The Theresienstadt (Terezín) "camp-ghetto" near Prague in the present day Czech Republic was opened in late 1941 and existed until May 1945. In the course of its existence, approximately 140,000 Jews were sent to Theresienstadt. Roughly 33,000 died in Theresienstadt itself. Nearly 90,000 Jews were deported to other ghettos, concentration camps, and extermination camps in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe.
30 Ravensbruck [German: Ravensbrück] was established as a forced labor camp for women in 1939 near the village of Ravensbruck in northern Germany, about 50 miles north of Berlin. Approximately 120,000 women of 40 nationalities passed through it.
31 Auschwitz-Birkenau was a network of camps built and operated by Germany just outside the Polish town of Oswiecim (renamed ‘Auschwitz’ by the Germans) in Polish areas annexed by Germany during World War II. It is estimated that the SS and police deported at a minimum 1.3 million people (approximately 1.1 million of which were Jews) to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex between 1940 and 1945. Camp authorities murdered 1.1 million of these prisoners.
rebuilding whatever is left of the community.” I was fuming. I was six years old then and I was fuming. I never, until recently, understood why he did it. From that moment on, I decided I wanted to live in America. [It] took me another 30 years to get there. But that’s a different thing.

**John:** Could you give just a little bit of context as to why the Dutch were so strongly against the Jews? [unintelligible, 28:37] like in Poland?

**Eli:** No, it’s a national thing. The Dutch are a Germanic people. Their culture and the culture of Germany are very close to each other. Their languages are pretty close. What happened before the war already, they had a very big Nazi party. People were very unhappy with the government, very unhappy with the Queen, very unhappy with the almost socialist government. They saw the Germans as liberators. They really—most of the Dutch—were very, very happy with the Germans coming as liberators to get rid of the old regime. Now there was a very . . . there is a very strange . . . the police and what was left of the army and all that were only too willing to cooperate with them, to get enlisted and whatever. There was a very strange situation now, because . . . the majority of Holland, particularly in those days, was very strongly reform Christian. The reform say, “Give to the King what belongs to the King and give to G-d what belongs to G-d.” They were split. Some of them were real good and helped Jews and

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32 In the Netherlands, as in many German-occupied territories throughout Europe, many people collaborated with the occupying German authorities. In some cases, antisemitism, anti-Communism, or greed and opportunism motivated the behavior. In others, coercion was the motivating factor. The Netherlands was also unique in that, initially, the implementation of the German civil administration had been a relatively uneventful transition. Many Dutch were deceived into thinking the German occupation would not be as brutal as in other countries. Dutch culture and tradition further reinforced the idea of obedience to the law and led many to believe cooperation was the best method to employ for outlasting the occupation. Religion played an important role in the political life of the Netherlands in the years leading up to World War II, when the main political parties were the Catholics, Protestants (the Reformed Church), Socialists, and Liberals. Ever since the Nazi Party had risen to power in Germany in the early 1930’s, the Netherlands also had its own antisemitic, right-wing movements. After 1940, the fascist National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands (NSB) became the only legal political party and its members actively collaborated with the Germans. Local civilian and police authorities also collaborated closely with the Germans in rounding up and deporting Jews residing in the Netherlands. Thousands of Dutch volunteered to serve the German military. Between 20,000 and 25,000 Dutchmen volunteered to serve in the Heer (the German regular army) and the Waffen-SS and about 7,000 joined the Dutch version of the SS, the Nederlandsche SS.

33 The Dutch Reformed Church is a Protestant church in the Netherlands that developed in the 1570’s based on the teachings of John Calvin. By the Second World War, it was the largest church body in the Netherlands. The reformed community was a self-contained community whose members were so centered on the rituals of their daily lives, they were isolated from what was happening in the rest of the world. The brutality of the German occupation of the Netherlands disrupted this religious and ideological isolation, causing a crisis of faith for many members, some of who actively engaged in resistance efforts in cooperation with communities that practiced other political or religious beliefs.

34 This is a reference to a story found in the New Testament. In a story repeated in the books of Mathew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus answers a group of hostile questioners trying to force him into taking a stand on whether Jews should or should not pay taxes to Roman authorities, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things
some of them were real bad. You could have in one family a husband who tried to hide Jews in his house while his wife was a Nazi or the other way around. That was a very weird situation. The majority of the Dutch said, “Let them do whatever they have to do. They are the government and let’s stay out of it and not get involved at all.” That is why many, many Dutch didn’t do a thing. The police, etc . . . they collaborated.

The only resistance that there was—and that is the one of the things the Dutch were never willing to admit when the war was over—were the Communists. They were already. They fought the Germans with their teeth or with whatever they had. They were the real resistance—not out of love for the Jews, but out of hatred of the Germans. They were not as good for the Jews as they fought Germans because of fighting Nazism, fascism. There were a lot of Jews, by the way, that were communist and were very involved in this resistance. Actually, today the only people . . . after the Soviet Union is gone, everything is gone . . . the only people that really still believe in Communism in Holland are Jews. We had been communist since the 1930’s. Old people, they are dying, most of them. There is no follow-up generation. The thing is: the war wasn’t over and they [the Dutch] started to build this myth that most people believed. Suddenly everybody came out of his basement in a blue uniform as if he had been in resistance all the war and had quickly put away his real uniform that he wore before. Suddenly on May 5, 1945, Holland was full of resistance fighters that had never been resistance fighters before the liberation. Then they started to build this myth: the Anne Frank story, which of course was a

that are God’s.” This phrase has become a widely quoted summary of the relationship between Christianity and secular authorities.

35 The Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) was founded in 1909. After the German occupation of the Netherlands in 1940, the party reorganized as an underground movement. When the Germans invaded the USSR in 1941, the party became more active in its resistance efforts. In February 1941, after a series of clashes in Amsterdam between the Dutch pro-Nazi movement and Jewish self-defense groups, the Germans initiated a large-scale pogrom. In response to the pogrom as well as the forced labor in Germany, the CPN organized a general strike, known as 'The Strike of February 1941.' It was quickly suppressed, but is notable as the first direct action undertaken against German anti-Jewish policies in occupied Europe. About 2,000 CPN members lost their lives during resistance efforts in World War II. Many died as a result of the cooperation of the pre-war Dutch intelligence services with the Gestapo. In 1989, the CPN merged with three other small leftwing parties, becoming the GreenLeft [Dutch: GroenLinks], while other factions formed their own parties.

36 In September 1944, the three large armed resistance groups LKP ("Landelijke Knokploeg", or National Assault Group), OD ("Orde Dienst" or Order of Service), and RVV ("Raad van Verzet" or Council of Resistance) were officially combined into one organization, the Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten [Dutch: Forces of the Interior], often referred to as the BS. Uniforms consisted of ordinary blue overalls, armbands, and air raid defense helmets.

37 Anne Frank was a German Jewish girl whose family fled to Amsterdam and eventually went into hiding with four others. After almost two years, they were discovered and deported to concentration camps. Anne died in Bergen-Belsen in April 1945, at the age of 15. Anne’s father, Otto Frank, is the only one of the eight people in hiding to survive. After the war, Anne became world famous because of the diary she wrote while in hiding.
beautiful thing to build this myth, [to] show how good they were and the Queen that went to . . . London [England]—ruled Holland from London as it were—and her daughter was in Canada.\(^{38}\) All these stories build up. Now one of the things they had to do, in order to build this myth, was get rid of all the resistance people. They forced most of the people that were in the resistance to immigrate to Canada or Australia.\(^{39}\) It’s why today you have large communities of Dutch in Canada, who are all Reform Christians and all were in the resistance. They’re very much anti-the royal house in Holland, where only the day before yesterday, one of the big Nazis died—the husband of the Queen, Claus von Amsberg.\(^{40}\) Holland was real bad. They were good for the Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, maybe still the eighteenth century, but in our time they were real bad partner.\(^{41}\)

**John:** Did your family go back to your old home to see if anything was still there? Were you allowed back?

**Eli:** Our house was sold to a Nazi family by the government. They stole everything. We were robbed blind. That’s why right now we finally are getting some money back.\(^{42}\) We were

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\(^{38}\) After the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940, Queen Wilhelmina, her son-in-law, Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld, and much of the Dutch government left the country for the United Kingdom. The Dutch government-in-exile, also known as the London Cabinet, remained in London throughout World War II. Meanwhile, Princess Juliana (who reigned as Queen of the Netherlands from 1948 until 1980) and her children were evacuated to Ottawa, Canada, where they remained for the duration of the war.

\(^{39}\) After the Second World War, thousands of Dutch civilians emigrated in search of work, asylum, and a better life far from the devastation in Europe. The Netherlands government actively encouraged emigration to relieve housing shortages and economic distress and entered into agreements with other governments that were eager to bolster their stagnant populations and economies. Hundreds of thousands of Dutch citizens emigrated to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. Almost one third went to Australia, but Canada was also one of the most popular destinations for post-war immigration. Approximately 15,000 Dutch farmers and approximately 2,000 war brides went to Canada in the first few years after the war. Former resistance members often emigrated when they saw how some collaborators retained their positions after the war. Likewise, many members of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (who had been active in the resistance) fled as Cold War tensions in Europe escalated and the newly established Dutch secret service began to target Communists.

\(^{40}\) Claus George Willem Otto Frederik Geert van Amsberg was the husband of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. He was a German aristocrat, born in 1926, who married Princess Beatrix in 1966 and became Prince Claus of the Netherlands upon Beatrix’s ascension in 1980. Some of the Dutch population was unhappy about the match as Claus had been a member of the Hitler Youth and had been conscripted into the German Wehrmacht in 1944. Prince Claus died on October 6, 2002.

\(^{41}\) From its inception as a country in the sixteenth century, the Netherlands has had a reputation of religious tolerance, with people of various faiths co-existing more or less peacefully alongside one another. Jews began to arrive in the Netherlands after they were expelled from Spain. Some Dutch cities were more welcoming and tolerant than others and Jewish communities began to appear in cities like Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam by the late sixteenth century. In 1796, Dutch Jews were formally emancipated and received full political and civil rights. The Netherlands, and Amsterdam in particular, remained a major Jewish population center until World War II.

\(^{42}\) In the years immediately following the war, the Dutch government attempted to return recovered works of art and property to their original owners. Some insurance policies were also paid, but efforts at restitution mostly stagnated by the 1950’s and remaining valuables or property were transferred to the Dutch government or remained assets of
totally . . . The house was given back to my family after the war by the government and some of the property that was sold by the Verwalter to Dutch museums was also given back.\textsuperscript{43} There were some paintings, there was some silverware, some very valuable and very historical family things that were given back,\textsuperscript{44} but a good part of it is still in the state museum in Amsterdam, in the so-called ‘[unintelligible, sounds like “schwassengen,” but the Stedelijk Museum makes most sense 34:05].’ It was never given back. It is still there, plainly stolen by the government.\textsuperscript{45} You may be aware [or] you may not be aware, that after the war they found all this documentation about what was stolen of the Jews. Instead of giving it back they made sure it disappeared. Only now, 50 years later they suddenly re-find it and tried to buy their conscience off with money and have given us reasonable sums of money, but still it’s nothing compared to what they stole, and the suffering, all that.

**John:** Where [you] left off a few minutes ago, is that you wanted to get to America eventually.

**Eli:** Yes.
Eli: What happened next is that I went to school. I went to high school. Then in 1959, my father died . . . very young. He was 59. I had a very bad connection to my mother, because of the war as well. She was a total nervous wreck and so was I. We did not see each other. I left home and I went to Israel. It was the only place where I could go then as an 18 [or] 19-year-old boy. I went there. I lived for a couple of years. Then I went back and met my wife in Holland. I was appointed a journalist. I got my appointments and I was sent back to Israel, where I stayed for 14 years. We lived . . .
John: Tell us about meeting your wife and what was she like. How did the two of you start out?
Eli: My wife was born during the war and as a three-month-[old] baby already put in hiding with a Christian family in Amersfoort [The Netherlands]. She was born in Amersfoort, a little town . . . one of the famous concentration camps was in the city of Amersfoort—the very same city. She was put in hiding as a little baby and stayed with a very nice Christian family. They were very simple people. He was a road repairman. He knew how to put those little bricks in the road that built roads. [He was a] very simple person. He grew . . . my wife was in a very, very bad medical situation. He grew in his backyard special vegetables to feed her and to keep her alive. She almost died three or four times during the war. He kept her alive through the war. He belonged to the good ones that gave her back after the war to her parents, which also had, by miracle, survived. But that miracle was smaller because they had a lot of money. They were real rich people. If you were rich enough, they could buy themselves all kinds of *sparen* [Dutch: save]. [You] could buy yourself safety.

Her dad and her mom both survived, although her mom died in 1946 during giving birth, because she gave birth to her little brother. She had a bleeding and there were no medicines. There was no nothing. After liberation, hospitals were like this room more or less. There was nothing. She bled to death. That gave my wife an additional trauma because she

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46 Amersfoort is a municipality and the second largest city of the province of Utrecht in central Netherlands.
47 The Amersfoort concentration camp [Dutch: *Kamp Amersfoort*] was one of three concentration camps operated in the Netherlands. It was located in Amersfoort, a city in central Netherlands near Utrecht. Amersfoort was used to confine and deport area Jews and as a prison for non-Jewish Dutch and Belgian citizens. Most of the prisoners were male, but some women and even families with children passed through Amersfoort. Between 1941 and 1945, about 37,000 people were registered prisoners in Amersfoort. Around 20,000 were sent east to German labor camps and close to 9,000 were released. Other prisoners were executed or died from torture and starvation. Around 400 survivors remained in Amersfoort at liberation.
hardly ever knew her mother. She also had terrible memories of always hiding. As a little kid she was never allowed to stay in the house, never allowed to play with children whatever, because officially she was not there. She did not exist. Those people were extremely afraid that someone . . . they had Nazis living next door on both sides . . . they were very much afraid they [the neighbors] would ask, “Hey, who is that little child in your yard?” because that could maybe mean their death. The Germans had very simple rules. If you were hiding Jews, you were shot on the spot. No court date, no nothing, no [unintelligible, 38:34] even. They shoot you on the spot. These people were very, very brave—much braver than the people in Belgium because in Holland it was much more dangerous to hide people.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**John:** What was your wife like when you met her, when you were 20 years old or so . . .

**Eli:** I was 24 when I met her.

**John:** What was she like in the beginning of the relationship?

**Eli:** We met . . .

**John:** You had similar experiences as children?

**Eli:** Yes, in a very strange way. I earned my living with photography. In Amsterdam, there was a Jewish club.48 I was asked to make pictures of the club for some publication. I was there and there was a ‘Pippi Longstocking’ lady . . . young girl with two big braids.49 She happened to be there, but she left that very same day. I spoke French. She came from France and spoke French because she was an *au pair* in Toulon in France.50 How do you call an *au pair* . . .?

**John:** A nanny?

**Eli:** . . . a nanny in France. She spoke French with a very funny accent with a lot of mistakes. I speak French. It’s my second language because of my stay in Belgium. I was really amused by her French. We started to talk, and to talk, and to talk, and the rest is history. We have

48 Eli may be referring to an organization known as Habonim, or Ichoed Habonim-Dror beHolland [the Hebrew Association of Freedom Builders], an international socialist-Zionist youth movement for Jewish youth aged 7-17, which is located in Amsterdam. A younger Eli is pictured at a meeting in a collection of photographs by Leonard Freed called “Photographs of Jewish Amsterdam in the 1950’s” at the Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum) in Amsterdam. As of February 2016, the photo can be found at http://www.jhm.nl/collection/specials/leonard-freed.

49 Pippi Longstocking [Swedish: Pippi Långstrump] is the protagonist in a series of children's books by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren. She is recognizable by her distinctive red hair that is worn in two braids.

50 Toulon is a city on the Mediterranean coast in southern France.
been married now for 40 years . . . two children. My daughter is a moviemaker in New York [City, New York]. She . . . most of the movies she makes is about either the Holocaust or subjects close [to it]. She just finished a movie you’ll probably hear of real soon called the “Hebrew Hammer.” It’s going to be presented next week at a film festival at Sundance. It’s already sold.

[My wife] has the same trauma . . . a little less, but she still has the same war trauma that we have. I just told the young lady . . . to give you an example of how we lived with it day in day out. This Sunday, we had a bar mitzvah brunch of one of the rabbis here, his son is a bar mitzvah. He happens to be my rabbi, so I’m very close with those people. They made a big brunch in Beth Jacob. We arrived there and they had separate seating [for] men and women, which is not very common even in Orthodox [Jewish] circles. As we entered, a guy that I know very well, came to us and said, “We separate here. Women left, men right.” My wife and me, we each looked each other in the eyes. It didn’t take three minutes: we were out of there, on our way. This . . . selection came so hard into our heart, we couldn’t stay. I had a lot of explanation to do the next day. The rabbi was fuming that I did that. I said, “You’re from Iran. You’ll never understand what the Holocaust means to people.” A few hours later I was in his home and his wife said, “Yes, I know exactly why [you] did it. You were right. I know exactly. I lived in Bnei Brak [Israel], among people [Holocaust survivors] with numbers on their arms. I know exactly.” She’s also Iranian. She understood exactly what happened.

John: To stay chronological, before getting into the Israel phase of your life, talk about life after the war, still in Europe, growing up . . .

Eli: That’s what I tell you—that it was very weird because, on one hand everything was dominated by the stories and the affects . . . my cousins were gone, my nieces were gone, my

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51 The Hebrew Hammer is a 2003 American comedy film written and directed by Jonathan Kesselman. The plot concerns a veteran of the Israeli Defense Forces known as the Hebrew Hammer who must save Hanukkah from the evil son of Santa Claus.

52 The Sundance Film Festival, a program of the Sundance Institute, is an American film festival that takes place annually in Utah. It is the largest independent film festival in the United States.

53 A bar mitzvah [Hebrew: son of commandment] is a rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, he is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He celebrates the bar mitzvah by being called up to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue, usually on the next available Sabbath after his Hebrew birthday.

54 Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue on LaVista Road in Atlanta, Georgia founded in 1942 by former members of Ahavath Achim who were looking for a more Orthodox congregation. Today, it is Atlanta’s largest Orthodox congregation.

55 Bnei Brak is one of the most densely populated cities in Israel and home to a large Orthodox community. It is located just east of Tel Aviv.
uncles were gone, everybody was gone. My grandparents were gone. Children with grandparents were something that hardly existed. Children had two parents like me were already a rarity. In school, there were children had one parent or no parents at all. Children with grandparents hardly . . . was not an existent thing. I was telling my granddaughter, “You know how lucky you are?” She is American. [I asked her,] “You know how lucky you are that you have four grandparents?” She said, “Yes, yours disappeared in the war, right, with those bad people?” She’s six years old, five years old; she understands it already, at her age. That was a very unreal world because we saw the *goyish* [Yiddish: non-Jewish people] children around us. They had all complete families. We did not have something like that.

**John:** What did Jewishness mean to you at that age? What did it look like as you were growing up?

**Eli:** The same thing as luckily enough again today: an import way of life, actually I would say today. I know that better today than then . . . the only way I would ever want to live because you are special and now today. Then I asked myself if this Holocaust was a curse to the Jews. Today I know it was not. Today I would say it’s the opposite. If we look around us and see how many Jews are coming back . . . now today there are more Jews than there were in 1940 around the world and definitely more Jews that keep *mitzvoth* [Hebrew: good deeds] and live according to the way we should all live.56 We all promised G-d to live that way. I think that the fact that we were punished so badly in those years is because we did not live according to the way we should have in the way we live. There’s a lot of . . . background material in the *Talmud*,57 in the *Mishnah*, in the *Megillat Esther*58 . . . Wherever you go, you can see all that what happened . . . Was it the gas chambers [used for mass murder in extermination camps]? Is it the [SS guards’] dogs? Whatever they [the Germans] did, it’s all already in the books for 2,000 years. Today I know why it happened and I understand why. That is what makes me so bad feeling because what happened in Israel today has the same cause. We have still not learned.

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56 Estimates of the worldwide Jewish population in 1940 vary, but most place it around 16 million. At the beginning of 2002, the world’s Jewish population was estimated at over 13 million.

57 The *Talmud* [Hebrew: study] is the legal code spanning 1,000 years that interprets biblical laws and commandments. It also contains a rich store of historic facts and traditions. It has two divisions: the *Mishnah* and the *Gemarah*. The *Mishnah* is the interpretation of Biblical law and the central text of Rabbinic Judaism. The *Gemarah* is a commentary on the *Mishnah* by a group of later scholars.

58 *Megillat Esther* is commonly referred to as the Book or Scroll of Esther and is a firsthand account of the events of Purim. It is read twice in the course of the festival: on the eve of Purim, and during Purim day. It is read in the original Hebrew from a parchment scroll.
John: Explain that part more, given your history.

Eli: It’s very easy to explain. If we quote Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* you have the answer. 59 Adolf Hitler writes in *Mein Kampf* the reason why he doesn’t like the Jews is because they dress like Germans, they eat like Germans, they talk like Germans; you cannot recognize them as Jews. That’s why he hates them. That’s exactly what happens. The *Torah* tells us already, “If you go and behave like the goyim, I’ll punish you with . . .” 60 Then in different places there are many different things mentioned among others. The gas chambers are mentioned in the *Psalms*, believe it or not. 61 We see when we look at the history of the Germans of the Mosaic belief in Germany around the beginning of this century, the end of the previous . . . century . . . and the beginning of the last century, we see that that is exactly what happened. 62 They were Germans of the Mosaic belief. They were Jews in the house and goyim outside. If there were Jews in the house, they ate everything that G-d forbid . . . they didn’t keep any of the mitzvot and this punishment came exactly as it was foreseen 2,000 years ago, 3,000 years ago, 4,000 years ago.

If I look at Israel, and I see all the unbelievable miracles that happened there and on the other hand those that do not happen, and I say, “Okay, part of it, part of what we do today results in miracles.” The fact that Israel is still there, that Israel still survives with this enormous amount of Arabs around them . . . it’s unreal; it cannot happen without G-d’s intervention. Humanly speaking, Israel should have been gone long ago. If you take one versus one, you take a soldier versus a soldier, a tank versus a tank . . . you say the Arabs are inferior, you take ten soldiers against one and ten tanks again one, Israel would have been gone away long ago. The fact that it survives, still is there, the fact that those bombs . . . how many people they killed, they kill less people than are killed in Israel on the roads every year. 63 That’s a miracle. There is no human explanation to that.

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59 *Mein Kampf* [German: My Struggle] is the autobiography of National Socialist leader Adolf Hitler. First published in 1925, the book outlines Hitler’s political ideology and future plans for Germany.

60 Unclear which story this references.

61 Unclear which Psalm this references.

62 Mosaic refers to a group of Jews in nineteenth century Germany that founded a reform movement, which focused on assimilation and rejected the idea of a Jewish nation. They proclaimed themselves "Germans of the Mosaic faith."

63 The second Palestinian Intifada or uprising broke out at the end of September 2000. At the time of this interview, Israeli-Palestinian violence was very intense, with both sides experiencing a high number of casualties. Palestinians often employed suicide bombing and gunfire, while Israelis used tank, gunfire, and air attacks. The death toll for 2002 was 385 people.
John: Maybe just to challenge this just a little bit. I’ve always heard from survivors that more of the religious Jews in the East tended to die and more of the secular ones in the West tended to escape, or hide, or buy their way out.

Eli: Yes, that’s . . .

John: How come most of the mainstream religious or pious ones died?

Eli: . . . because G-d does not look at each one singular. When something bad happens, if you take the history of Korach; when Korach did whatever he did . . . it’s in the Bible the ground opened and swallowed 400 people. Not all 400 were as bad as Korach was but when a punishment happens in a certain area everybody that is in that area . . . I can give you . . . I can go even further than what you said. I can give you an even stronger argument. We believe of all the mitzvoth of all the commandments that there is, the strongest and most important one is living in Israel. Everyone that does not live in Israel disobeys the most important of all mitzvoth. It’s in the Talmud . . . it says it in the Talmud. If you go back to the same very period, you will see that very pious, very Orthodox people in Europe died by the masses, while Jews that eat pig and do not keep Shabbat and whatever in Eretz Yisrael [Hebrew: Land of Israel], in Israel survived. None of them was touched. Here you can see the balance between following the mitzvoth and not following the mitzvoth. They were all saved because they fulfilled the most important mitzvoth: living in Israel. That’s one of the explanations you can give to it. I think that the fact that G-d did not select and kill that one because he ate chazir [Hebrew: pig] and did not kill that one because he followed the Torah, that too actually is already written in the Torah. In the one before last paragraph of the Torah, Parashah Ha’azinu, the Psalm of Ha’azinu, G-d says that if you behave the way you behave I will take you to the desert of people (which are the

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64 The Torah tells the story of Korach (also spelled Korah) in the book of BaMidbar [Numbers]. Korach was a very wealthy leader of the Levites, who led a rebellion against Moses and his priests. To punished Korach, G-d caused the ground to split open beneath their feet. Korach and his associates and their families were buried alive. All of their belongings were swallowed up as well. G-d then sent a plague to kill those who protested the loss of so many to such terrible deaths.

65 According to Jewish tradition, the “Ten Commandments” are ten categories that contain 613 mitzvoth (Hebrew: commandments). The ten categories are significant because they form the basis of man’s relationship with G-d and man’s relationship with his fellow people. While G-d directly gave the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people, it was Moses, who also led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, that received the tablets and brought them down from Mount Sinai. In the book of Genesis, G-d promises the Land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants. That covenant and the directive for living in Israel became a requirement of Jewish law.

66 According to Jewish law, pigs are not considered a kosher animal because they have split hooves. Therefore, pork and any food from a pig is forbidden.

67 Shabbat (Hebrew) or Shabbos (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. Shabbat observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday night and closes the following evening.
camps), I will kill you with whatever it is, and I will not show my face.68 Now lots of people say, “Where was G-d during the camps? Why didn’t we see him?” Because he promised us we will not see him. He said, “I will not show you my face when that happens. I’ll not be there for you.” He promised that 3,500 years ago. So we have no reason to say today, “Well, we don’t understand why didn’t see him. Where was he?” He told us he wouldn’t be there. When the real punishment comes, he will not be there because we deserve that punishment.

As I said, coming back to Israel, that is what makes me so sore about what happens in Israel. Now on one hand, there are miracles happening and that is because when I went to Israel in the . . . late 1950’s, there were two percent of the people in Israel were keeping mitzvot and Shabbat and kosher.69 David Ben-Gurion personally said to me—I have known him very well—said to me, “You wait another ten years there won’t be.”70 Today, 30 percent of the Israeli population is Jewish, what we call ‘Jewish.’71 It’s going the right way, the right direction. That’s why those miracles happened. That’s my personal belief. Because today . . . you think in the 1950’s you’d see someone with a kippah [Hebrew: head covering] in Tel Aviv [Israel]?72 You had a few in Bnei Brak, you had a few in Jerusalem [Israel],73 maybe Tsfat [Israel].74 That’s it. Today you see them all over Israel. There are more and more people going to back to our ancient values. We as Jews have only a right to live if we follow our own traditions and live by our own

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68 Parashat Ha’azinu [Hebrew: “portion” and “listen”) is often called “The Song of Witness” or the “Song of Moses.” It is a poem that constitutes chapter 32, verses 1-43 of the book of Devarim (Deuteronomy) and is near the end of the Torah. It is typically read between the holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot, generally in September or October. It was written/orated just prior to Moses’ death. It is an indictment of the Israelites’ sins, a prophecy of their punishment, and a promise of G-d’s ultimate redemption of them. G-d warned Moses that the Israelites would abandon their covenant with G-d after his death. G-d then directed Moses to teach the song to the community. The Israelites’ lapse into idolatry compelled G-d to threaten them with national disaster and almost with national extinction. Only then will they be in the right mindset to speak to G-d and be granted victory over their foes.

69 Kosher/Kashrut is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Kosher refers to halakhah (Jewish law) that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten.

70 David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) was one of the primary founders and the first Prime Minister of Israel.

71 According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the total population of Israel in 2002 was 6.6 million. Over 5 million or 80 percent were Jewish while 20 percent were Muslim, Christian, or other. Of that 20 percent, approximately 80 percent or 1.2 million were Arab, 10 percent were Christian, and 10 percent Druze. Among the Israeli population that was identified as Jewish, many do not qualify as Jews according to the definition espoused by Orthodox Judaism. According to government figures, only approximately 4.5 percent of the Jewish population identified as Haredi (or ultra-Orthodox) and another 13 percent as Orthodox.

72 Tel Aviv is Israel’s largest metropolitan area and second most populous city after Jerusalem. Founded by a Jewish community in 1909 on the outskirts of Jaffa, it is located on the Mediterranean coast in central-west Israel.

73 Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel, its seat of government, and the holiest city in Judaism. It is also Israel's largest, most populated and most religiously diverse city. Jerusalem has been a place of pilgrimage and worship for Jews, Christians and Muslims since the biblical era. The majority of residents are Jewish, with a sizeable Orthodox Jewish community. However, there is also a large percentage of Muslim residents and many Christians.

74 Tsfat is the Hebrew name of Safed, Israel. Safed is a city in the northern district of Israel. The city has a high proportion of Orthodox Jews and very few Arab residents.
right to live. People that say we have to give back those “territories” to the Arabs don’t understand anything of what’s going on. If they were to come to me [and] say, “Listen, we want to give Tel Aviv back.” I can understand that. Tel Aviv was never part of the Jewish heritage. Tel Aviv belonged to the Philistines.75

Interview pauses, then resumes

Eli: Where were we?

John: Can you tell us about growing up or being in Israel from 1959 through... about 1973?

Eli: Yes, I was until after the peace agreement. I was with [Anwar] Sadat on his plane76... I interviewed Sadat actually long before this whole peace thing started, when they were still at war. I was in Egypt [a] couple of times. I was in Egypt just before Yom Kippur war.77 I was taken to the Suez canal [Egypt] then,78 together with some Korean general,79 and we were shown by the Egyptians—it was part of their deception—how bad condition the army was. Tanks were rusted and the people were so [unintelligible, 52:32]. They were in the worst thinkable condition. They showed us the [unintelligible, 52:35, sounds like “ballet flat”] on the other side of the Suez Canal. That was part of deception because in reality at the place we were not, they were preparing for this war and were ready for the war. I saw through all this deception. I

75 The Philistines were one of a number of people of Aegean origin who settled on the southern coast of modern day Israel at the end of the Bronze Age, around the twelfth century BCE. They settled on the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, between modern-day Tel Aviv and the Gaza Strip, in the area that later became known as Philistia, or the Land of the Philistines. It was from this designation that the Greeks later called the country Palestine.

76 Muhammad Anwar El Sadat was the third President of Egypt, serving from October 15, 1970 until his assassination by fundamentalist army officers on October 6, 1981. Sadat was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for his diplomatic efforts that culminated in a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. His moderate policies and relationship with the West generated considerable domestic opposition.

77 The 1973 Arab–Israeli War, also known as the Fourth Arab-Israeli War or the October War, was a war fought by the coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria against Israel in October 1973. In Israel and the United States, the war is typically referred to as the Yom Kippur War because it began on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In the Muslim world, it is referred to it as the Ramadan War. The previous Arab-Israeli war, known as the Six-Day War (1967), was followed by years of sporadic fighting, which developed into a full-scale war when Egypt and Syria simultaneously attacked Israel on October 6, 1973. Thanks to the element of surprise, Egyptian forces soon crossed the Suez Canal and broke through to the Golan Heights. When the Soviet Union began to support Egypt and Syria, the United States commenced its own resupply efforts. Israeli forces soon turned the tide, surrounding the Egyptian Third Army and repulsing Syria forces. Fighting finally ceased on October 26, 1973. Israel and Egypt signed a cease-fire agreement in November and peace agreements on Jan. 18, 1974. On May 31, 1974, Israel and Syria signed a cease-fire agreement.

78 The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway in Egypt that connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez and separates the African continent from Asia. It is owned and maintained by Egypt.

79 During the Yom Kippur War in 1973, a senior North Korean official named General Han was serving as military attaché in Egypt and may have arranged for North Korean pilots to fly Mig-21s against Israel. An engagement between North Korean pilots and Israeli pilots took place on Oct. 6, 1973 when Israeli jets came upon a North Korean patrol near the Suez Canal and exchanged fire.
wrote my paper what was going to happen, because I knew the background. I knew the background that Sadat actually wanted to make a deal with the Israelis, but could only do that out of a situation of strength not out of weakness. The day before Yom Kippur when everyone was . . . the famous Yom Kippur . . . when everyone was ready to go and to pray and whatever and everybody was . . . I sent a fax . . . no fax,80 there were no faxes in those days . . . a telex to my newspaper.81 I said, “Listen, keep me informed tomorrow about every little piece of news that’s coming out of the Arab world because here in Israel it’s Yom Kippur. The radio is going down, all the news [is] going down. Within 24 hours there is going to be war.” I knew that exactly. I knew the date. I knew everything.

Actually, when the war started, that Saturday afternoon, the Yom Kippur afternoon—I don’t remember what day of the week it was—we had a press conference with Golda Meir, who was prime minister in those days.82 Golda Meir started, “Oh, those bad Egyptians they attacked us without any warning and we were not prepared for it.” I got up and I said, “Miss Meir, how come you claim you didn’t know while I knew yesterday there would be war today? Look at this telex.” She got so fuming and never talked to me anymore. We were very friendly before that. I was a very good friend . . . Ben-Gurion I knew very well . . . I was at his kibbutz and house numerous times.83 But in this politics, there’s a lot of dirty things going on. Coming back to Sadat, I interviewed Sadat before he went to Jerusalem [Israel].84 He pointed to me that never again will there be war after October. I told him on Israel television certain people thought I was an idiot. [They wondered] how could I . . . a lot of people stopped me on the street, and said, “Was that you yesterday on the television? You really sure that that’s going to happen?” Then a couple weeks, later he announced that he was coming to Jerusalem, which again was not [a] surprise to me.

80 Fax (short for facsimile), sometimes called “telecopying” or “telefax,” is the telephonic transmission of scanned printed material (both text and images), normally to a telephone number connected to a printer or other output device. The modern fax machine was introduced by the Xerox Corporation in 1964 and usage soon spread around the world. While still used by some businesses today, it has been largely surpassed by internet-based alternatives.

81 Telex refers to a network of teleprinters similar to a telephone network, used to send text-based messages. Telex was first developed in Germany in 1933 and spread around the world very rapidly. It is still in operation today but usage has mostly decline since the advent of fax and email.

82 Golda Meir (1898-1978) was an Israeli teacher, politician and the fourth Prime Minister of Israel.

83 The kibbutz, or collective community, of Sde Boker is in the Negev desert of southern Israel and is famous as the home of David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister.

84 The president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, became the first Arab leader ever to visit the state of Israel in 1977. On November 9, 1977, Sadat had offered to travel to Israel during a speech to his parliament. Israel’s Prime Minister Menachem Begin issued an official invitation and, on November 20, 1977, Sadat addressed the Israeli Knesset. The gesture was significant for breaking an Arab policy of not dealing publicly with the Jewish state created in 1948.
John: How about a real simple question: If you were the leader of Israel, what you would do now? How would you deal with the problem?

Eli: You will be shocked by what I am going to tell you. I would solve the problem in one night.

John: How?

Eli: I would take whatever can roll on four wheels: trucks, busses, [and] trains, whatever. I would evacuate all the Arabs over the River Jordan. I would get the next day a tremendous outcry from the United Nations, the United States, Russia, you name it. After 14 days everybody would be . . . the whole thing would be forgotten.

John: Explain that some more.

Eli: Because the United Nations likes to cry out and make resolutions . . . When the resolution is made, it’s over. The Arabs have an enormous world that those so called ‘Palestinians’—there were no Palestinians because there [were] no Palestinians before 1956—have places enough to go in the Arab world. The Arab world is big. They came from there. They came because the Israelis created prosperity. Now they are not allowed . . . they do not deserve to stay there any longer. It’s our land. It belongs to us. It has always belonged to us for the last 3,000 years. How often is Jerusalem mentioned in the Quran?

John: Not many times.

Eli: How many times?

John: Zero?

Eli: You got it. How often is it mentioned in our books?

John: Two or three?

Eli: Over 300. How long have the Arabs being praying next year in Jerusalem, in the last 2,000 years?

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85 The Jordan River is in West Asia and flows from the border between Syria and Lebanon southward through Israel to the Dead Sea. It divides Israel and the Israeli-occupied West Bank border the river to the west, while the Golan Heights and Jordan lie to its east. After 1948, the river marked the frontier between Israel and Jordan from just south of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberius) to the point where the Yabis River flows into it from the east (left) bank. Since Israeli forces occupied the West Bank in 1967, it has served as the cease-fire line as far south as the Dead Sea.

86 Eli seems to be referring to cross-border operations by Palestinian Arab refugees into Israel from Syria in the mid-1950’s and the increase in tensions during and after the 1956 Suez Crisis.

87 The Quran [Arabic; also referred to as the Qur'an or Koran] is the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from G-d.

88 Eli is likely referring to Temple Mount, a walled-in area in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is one of the most contested religious sites in the world. The Temple Mount is the holiest sight in Judaism, as it is believed to be the
John: Realistically though, how easy would it be to get those Arabs on those trucks to deport them?

Eli: Much easier than surround[ing] Yasser Arafat in his headquarters and then let him go in the end. In 1948, the Arabs didn’t know how fast they had to run. They run by themselves. They weren’t even told so by the Israelis. They run. You can make them run again. They have no place there. There is no place between the Jordan [River] and the [Mediterranean] Sea. You may think I’m an idiot, I’m a lunatic. You may think I’m a follower of one of the extreme right wing organizations. I’m not. I’m a very liberal person when it comes to liberties but there’s one thing that is very clear: nobody ever wanted us. They didn’t want us in Germany. They didn’t want us in Europe. We are tolerated and tolerated nicely in America. I must say that is unique in the history of the world: the way they [Americans] tolerate us and even give us a feeling to be at home here, which we definitely have. I at least have. But still we’re strangers.

There’s only place and 4,000 years ago when Jacob traveled from Arbah and he came to the city of Beit El and he had a dream of a ladder with angels going up and down, G-d told him, “This land I’m going to give to you and all the generations after you.” This is a written

site where God gathered the dust to create Adam and where Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. It is also believed to be the location of both Jewish Temples. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven from the Temple Mount, called Haram al-Sharif [Arabic: the Noble Sanctuary]. Christians also view the site as sacred, believing it is where Jesus prayed and chased away merchants and moneychangers. Today, there are multiple structures from various periods on Temple Mount, but the site is dominated by three seventh century structures: the Dome of the Rock, Al Aqsa Mosque, and the Dome of the Chain. The Western Wall—a remnant of the Second Temple—stands in the southwest side. Israel has controlled the area since 1967. A restricted amount of non-Muslim visitors are allowed to visit the site, but only Muslims are allowed to pray at the site.

Mohammed Yasser Abdel Rahman Abdel Raouf Arafat al-Qudwa (1929-2004), popularly known as Yasser Arafat, was a Palestinian leader. He was the founder of Fatah, a political and military organization, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and president of the Palestinian National Authority. Under his leadership, Palestinian-Israeli relations often turned violent. After peace was established following the First Intifada, a Palestinian uprising that lasted from 1987 until 1991, Arafat—together with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin and President Shimon Peres—was awarded the Nobel Prize in World Peace in 1994. Palestinian-Israeli relations soon grew hostile again, however. The Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, lasted from 2000 to 2005. Shortly before this interview, in June 2002, Israeli forces moved into the West Bank city of Ramallah and surrounded Arafat’s compound, only allowing him to leave after intense negotiations.

After the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, war broke out when five Arab nations invaded territory in the former Palestinian mandate immediately following the announcement of independence. Fighting continued until February 1949; when Israel and its neighboring states of Egypt, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria agreed to formal armistice lines.

The book of Bereishit (Genesis) includes a story about Jacob, who flees his father’s home in Arbah [Hebrew: Biblical location] to escape his brother’s wrath and travels to the modern day town of Beit El [Hebrew: Beth El], which is located just north of Jerusalem, Israel. There, Jacob spent the night under the stars. He dreamt of angels ascending and descending a ladder into heaven. During the dream, G-d promised to protect him in his travels. Jacob’s ladder has become the colloquial name for a connection between the earth and heaven. Most interpretations agree the ladder symbolizes a connection between G-d and the Jewish people. Some believe the dream also charges Jacob with the obligations and inheritance of the ethnic people chosen by G-d.
contract. This is a deed. That land, Beit El, belongs to us, nobody else. Now come the goyim and say, “Listen, you say you have a deed? Where’s the signature?” I’m going to tell you something you’re not going to believe. NASA made aerial pictures of that area two years [ago] for all kind of reasons. People were stunned when they saw the picture because what they saw . . . I don’t think I have it here . . . I think I have it at the other house. On the aerial picture, in the valleys between the mountains is written G-d’s name. The great name of G-d: ‘Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey’ [Hebrew, letters]. It’s written in the valleys. It’s the signature of G-d in the valleys of Beit El, in the very same place. We have a signature on that contract. That belongs to us. If I buy this house today, I have a deed to this house, and you come here and you settle in my house, I’ll throw you out. Very simple. You’d do the same. If I settled down in your house, in particular if I start to beat you up and to kill your children in your own house, what would you do?

John: Continuing with your own personal story, what prompted you to . . .

<Eli pauses, then resumes>

Eli: . . . that are meant for the time when they will be discovered. This one was put there for our time, because had Jacob discovered it, he would not have been able to read it because he didn’t know those characters. This is from . . . and we have all . . . this is what made my beliefs so strong. We look around and find in the Bible . . . all over in the holy book, we find things that connect to different times in history. We say, “Hey, why didn’t we see it earlier?” Because it was not meant to be seen earlier. If we go back to the Holocaust, for example . . . do you know the Megillat Ruth, the beginning of Esther, the Scroll of Esther? In the end of the Scroll of Esther, they hang Haman’s ten sons and the thing is over. Then the Scroll goes on . . . then Esther goes to the king and asks permission to go on fighting for two more days and asks permission to hang the sons of Haman on a tree. According to the book it has already happened. Why does she ask it again? Very interesting. If we take the Scroll and we look at the Scroll, it’s all written in one hand, one writing throughout. There are four characters there, however, that are

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92 The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is the United States government agency responsible for the civilian space program as well as aeronautics and aerospace research.
93 The Book of Ruth or “Scroll of Ruth” [Hebrew: Megillat Ruth], is the second of the Five Megillot [Hebrew: scrolls], which are parts of the Ketuvim, the third major section of the Tanakh. The Megillat Ruth tells of Ruth's accepting the God of the Israelites as her God and the Israelite people as her own.
94 The Book of Esther or "Scroll of Esther" [Hebrew: Megillat Esther], is the last of the Five Megillot [Hebrew: scrolls], which are parts of the Ketuvim, the third major section of the Tanakh. It relates the story of Esther, a Jewish girl who becomes Queen of Persia. With the help of her cousin Mordechai, Esther thwarts plans by the king’s advisor, Haman, to slaughter all of the Jews in the empire. Haman’s ten sons were killed in the fighting that followed. The story forms the core of the Jewish holiday of Purim, a day of feasting and rejoicing.
much bigger than the others. Those four characters create together a year: the year 1947. Interesting. What do we know today? That after the Nuremberg [Germany] process [trial], ten Nazis were condemned to be hanged.\footnote{The Trial of Major War Criminals (also referred to commonly as the Nuremberg Trials) was held from November 20, 1945 to October 1, 1946 in Nuremberg, Germany and was widely covered by the media. An international military tribunal tried 22 leading German officials for war crimes in Nuremberg, Germany. Twelve prominent Nazi Party members were sentenced to death. They were twelve additional tribunals including the trials of Nazi doctors, judges, and industrialists and of the Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing squads) leaders.} They were not hung in 1947 because there were appeals and it happened only in . . . 1947. When those were hanged . . . they were hanged from a wooden thing exactly as written in the Megillat. Not only that, the American corporal that hanged them, his name was ‘Wood’.\footnote{John Clarence Woods was a United States Army master sergeant who, along with Joseph Malta, carried out the Nuremberg executions of ten former top German leaders on October 16, 1946, after they were sentenced to death at the Nuremberg Trials.} Not only that, when Julius Streicher . . . when [he went] to the gallows, he asked in German, “Purim Fest? Is this a Purim festival?”\footnote{Julius Streicher was a prominent Nazi prior to World War II. He was the founder and publisher of Der Sturmer [German: Der Stürmer], a highly antisemitic newspaper and central element of the Nazi propaganda machine. After the war, Streicher was convicted of crimes against humanity and executed on October 16, 1946. As he was positioned on the scaffold, he is reported to have shouted, “Purim Fest!”} This hanging of those ten is predicted in the Scroll of Esther. You can go on like that for hours and hours. There are so many things in there that our modern day science today only can understand and can prove.

John: Continuing with your family’s history, what was happening with your mother and was your brother still in Holland when you went to Israel?

Eli: Yes. In the meantime . . . just after the war . . . I got a sister. She was called ‘Chaya,’ which means ‘life,’ because that was the new life. Then much later, just before my father died, the little brother was born. He came real late. My father died of cancer. My little brother, who lives in Holland, has a wife and four children, also suffers from cancer. He’s only 46. My mother . . . when I was already a long time . . . actually I was already back in Holland when my mother with her two other children, three other children went to Israel. My brother just has this weekend the wedding of a third daughter. My sister . . . still lives there [Israel] . . . she has four daughters. My little brother went to back to Holland. He’s not very happy there either, because the whole community in Holland is now falling apart. That’s . . . again there is a very interesting connection here. When we see that Moses went up to the Mount Sinai and he gets the tablets—the Ten Commandments—he comes down with the tablets of Ten Commandments and he sees
the Jewish people are worshiping this golden calf, mask, [or] whatever. Then he goes and he smashes the tablets. He’s not punished by G-d. The opposite: G-d praises him for that and asks him to come on the mountain again and meet Him again. Why was he praised for breaking the words written by G-d himself? That there is the link to the Holocaust again. That’s why I tell this. He saw the situation was so bad for the Jewish people there that it could not go on the same way, just trying to correct the mistake. They had to start all over again, from the beginning. By smashing the Ten Commandments, he [Moses] said, “We start again from zero. We restart it. That’s the only way the Jewish people can survive this golden calf, by starting again.” What they did—I emphasized this before—when the war was over, they tried to play as if it never happened. They did not rebuild from the ground . . . they went on that rotten basement . . . foundation and built a house that was not stable. Today, 50 years later the whole thing is falling apart. The foundation was not good. They should have restarted from the beginning after the war like was done by certain community in America today, that are really thriving, in New York . . . there’s others. They were built from scratch after the war. In Holland . . . I don’t know how it is in other European countries . . . in Holland it was not that. Today you see they don’t have rabbanim [Hebrew: rabbis], they don’t have . . . shechita is going away, Jewish stores are going away. The whole thing is falling apart because they did not start from scratch again, but went on as if nothing had happened, with the same old people and the same old things that were maybe fine when there were 130,000 Jews, but when there were only 5,000 left, it didn’t work.

**John:** But how should Jewishness have changed after the war because of what happened, or should it? Is the answer, in your opinion, to basically go back to early fundamental Orthodox Jewishness? That would have been the answer?

**Eli:** Let’s turn the thing around. There is no future for any Judaism that is not Orthodox. People may argue about it, “Yes, but there are Conservatives, there are Reform. . .” [That is]

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98 According to the book of Shemot (Exodus), when Moses went up to retrieve the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, the Israelites began to worship the golden calf, an idol made from molten gold. When Moses returned, he was so angry he threw the tablets of stone on the ground, breaking them. He then gathered those who retained their faith in G-d and directed them to slaughter the rest.

99 Shechita is the Hebrew term for the ritual slaughter of mammals and birds according to Jewish dietary laws.

100 Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written Torah and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

101 Conservative Judaism is a form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and bat mitzvahs).
all fine and nice and dandy, but they don’t have a third generation because once you go the way of Conservative and then the Reform and you get mixed marriages, then the children don’t remember that their parents were somehow Jewish, the next generation is gone. There’s no future in it. Only those that keep according to the mitzvoth and stay according to the Jewish rules and keep our rules, they will stay alive. The fact that people today know they are Jewish is because at least their grandparents were Orthodox. If you go back to the roots of American Judaism, those were Orthodox people who came from mostly from East[ern] Europe and created this Jewish community in America. They finally wanted to be modern and assimilate in the society. Assimilation says so itself: once you assimilate, you disappear. There’s no future in it. A very interesting fact is, for example, they had some figures . . . they published some figures only a couple of weeks ago, about 20 percent of the Jewish in America are Orthodox.\footnote{Reform Judaism is a division within Judaism especially in North America and the United Kingdom. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the Torah remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, bat mitzvah and women rabbis), music is allowed in the services and most of the service is in English.} Forty-two percent of all synagogues are Orthodox. Because the Conservatives, the Reform they built big temples, big synagogues where they come once a year with a nice cantor and listen on Yom Kippur and Rosh Ha-Shanah and that’s it.\footnote{It is unclear which publication Eli was referring to. However, a nationwide survey conducted by the United Jewish Communities called The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population, found that 21 percent of American Jews identified as Orthodox, 39 percent as Reform, 33 percent as Conservative, 3 percent as Reconstructionist, and 4 percent as other.} They have no Jewish life. The Orthodox, they go to shul [Yiddish: synagogue] two or three times a day. They have Jewish life. That is something you can pass to your children. I didn’t do that, to my big shame because I believe too that you can do it different. Today I know that I was wrong. I was terribly wrong.

\textbf{John:} Continuing with your own story, what was happening in the early 1970’s that prompted you to move to America?

\textbf{Eli:} No, I moved to America in the late 1980’s.

\textbf{John:} What prompted you to leave Israel?

\textbf{Eli:} First of all, my wife. She didn’t like Israel at all. We lived very secular then. Secular Israel was too Orthodox to her mind . . . unbelievably stupid, but that’s a fact. My wife was afraid for the safety of her children—although it was a lot safer then than it is today—so we left it. Everybody said, “It’s time to go to America,” but it took me nine years to get a green card. I
went back to Holland for some time. I worked on my green card until I got a green card. I must say no country has ever been as good to us as America has. In Israel, we were strangers. We were foreign journalists. We belonged to the community of foreign journalists. Most of them were not Jewish. It was a kind of life. But I won’t go back to that kind of life for any money in the world. I’ve been in Israel, a couple of months ago, for the first time in almost 20 years. It has tremendously changed.

**John:** How?

**Eli:** To the good and to the bad. How? There are many more Jews in Israel today. But on the other hand, also the non-religious secular have become much more aggressive versus the Orthodox. The situation is much more tense. Politically, it’s more . . . it’s hard to explain. Politically, a lot of things happened there that the majority of the Israeli people do not like, because even those who are secular, most of them [are] keeping kosher [Hebrew: kosher], have a Jewish mind, and they do not like what’s happening politically, which is very left wing. I mean Wye [River Memorandum], and Oslo [Accords], and all that. The Israelis detest them. They are pressed on them by the Americans. The economical situation is so bad that they have no leeway than to go against the grain of Judaism just because America keeps them fed. When you hear about peace movements in Israel and all that kinds of things, those are unbelievably small minorities. I mean they have actually no influence whatsoever. It wasn’t that they are supported by the world and not America that pushes them.

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105 The Wye River Memorandum was an agreement negotiated between Yasser Arafat, Benjamin Netanyahu, and senior negotiators for Israel and the Palestinian Authority at a summit at the Aspen Institute Wye River Conference Centers near Wye Mills, Maryland in October 1998. It aimed to resume the implementation of the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (also known as the Oslo II Accord). The agreement allowed for the building of an international airport in the Gaza Strip. Israel agreed to pull back from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank and to release 750 Palestinian security prisoners. The Palestinian Authority agreed to combat terrorist organizations, arrest those involved in terrorism, and to collect all illegal weapons and explosives. Ultimately, neither side met the specific obligations that were to be implemented in a phased approach in accordance with a detailed time line and a new round of Israeli-Palestinian violence, known as the Second Intifada, began in 2000.

106 The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). On September 13, 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Negotiator Mahmoud Abbas signed a Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, commonly referred to as the “Oslo Accord,” in Washington D.C. Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel’s right to exist in peace. Both sides agreed that a Palestinian Authority would be established and assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five year period. Then, permanent status talks on the issues of borders, refugees, and Jerusalem would be held. By 2000, the peace process had run aground.
Ruth: You said that you were living a more secular life in Israel. Were you a Baal Teshuvah or were you . . . 107

Eli: I’m a Baal Teshuvah, yes.

Ruth: Can you explain why you decided to go more towards traditional Orthodox Judaism? What prompted you and how did that . . .

Eli: Very easy, very short: I saw a movie of Yehoram Gaon a couple of years ago. 108 I realized that my heritage was in Spain and Portugal. I traveled to Spain and Portugal to find out. I went to look into the documents of the Inquisition and all that. 109 I realized that, if it was important enough for my forefathers to be burned alive, that I had no right not to fulfill the mitzvot. I did not have any belief then, but I decided that fulfilling the mitzvot was the most important thing. I slowly went that way. In the meantime, I have learned a lot. Today there is no doubt in my mind about things that I was so arrogant and so stupid not to believe. I mean atheism is absolutely unbelievably stupid. I can say that today, now that I know what I’m talking about. I believed in that nonsense for many, many years. I brought my children up with it and I’m so sorry that I did. Because the Torah, the things that we have are so clear, are so brilliant, are so full of things that there’s no other way to explain them. The Torah is so full of knowledge that a man, Moses, on his bare feet in the desert, could never have . . . it’s absolutely impossible. It’s still there, so it can only be from one source, the source that created all that.

How could the Torah tell us . . . I’ll give you an example: that we can eat fish with scale and with fins and no other fish and there are fishes that have fins and no scales, but there are no fishes that have scales and no fins? 110 Perfect, Torah tells us. There are no . . . What did Moses know about the Indian Ocean, the depth of the Pacific Ocean, about the waters of Mexico,

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107 Baal Teshuvah [Hebrew: one who returns] refers to a Jew who turns to embrace Orthodox Judaism or “one who has returned to G-d.”
108 Yehoram Gaon is an Israeli singer, actor, director, producer, TV and radio host, and public figure. He has also written and edited books on Israeli culture.
109 Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile established the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, commonly known as the Spanish Inquisition, in 1478. It was originally intended to ensure the orthodoxy of those who converted from Judaism and Islam. This regulation of faith intensified after royal decrees issued in 1492 and 1501 forced a quarter million Jews to convert to Christianity or leave Spain. The Spanish Inquisition is often cited as an example of Catholic intolerance and repression. Although records are incomplete, estimates of the number of persons charged with crimes by the Inquisition range up to 150,000, with 2,000 to 5,000 people executed. Thousands were burned at the stake in public executions. The Inquisition was not limited to Spain or even Europe—it also spread to Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World and Asia—and was not formally abolished until 1834.
110 According to Jewish law, fish is considered kosher only if it has both fins and scales. In the Torah, in the book of Devarim (Deuteronomy), it says, “These you may eat of all that are in the waters; all that have fins and scales, you may eat. But whatever does not have fins and scales, you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.”
whatever? The fact is that modern science today will tell you that they have never, ever found a fish without fins and with scales. Who could know that? Only He who created all the fish. That’s only one out of a thousands examples.

**John:** You said that you raised your kids a certain way . . .

**Eli:** Secular, yes.

**John:** . . . what were your reasons at the time for having those values even though you changed?

**Eli:** I thought that I knew better. I had read a lot about [Friedrich] Nietzsche,¹¹¹ and about other people, and about evolution theory that now I know that it could never have happened, because they were never proved.¹¹² Even [Charles] Darwin himself moved away from that theory at the end of his life. It’s still taught in schools, but Darwin himself knew that it didn’t work because he had found out why it didn’t work, but they don’t tell you that in school nowadays. Our things are so full of proof . . . scientific. I give you the proof, the thing of Beit El.

I can give you another one. The *Torah* tells you what you can eat and what you cannot eat. It tells you, it gives you all the different . . . then it tells you . . . separately it names one animal you can absolutely not eat because if you eat that one, you will die. That’s the pig. Now what did Moses know then that we know today? That the pig—of all animals in the universe—is the only one that has 99 percent same DNA as man.¹¹³ Eating a pig is cannibalism. That’s why the *Torah* forbids it. What did Moses know about DNA? We know today. Like that you can go on and on and on.

The beginning of the *Torah, Bereishit* [Hebrew: book of Genesis] tells it already that the world is a sphere with water on top and water on bottom and land in the middle. How could

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¹¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher, cultural critic, poet, and Latin and Greek scholar in the late nineteenth century. His work challenged the foundations of Christianity and traditional morality and has exerted a profound influence on Western philosophy and modern intellectual history.

¹¹² Charles Darwin was a nineteenth century English naturalist whose theory of evolution became the foundation of modern evolutionary studies. Darwin studied variations in plants and animals during a five-year voyage around the world and published his ideas on evolution in 1859 in a book called *On the Origin of Species*. The basic idea behind his theory of evolution is that all the diverse groups of species have evolved from one or a few common ancestors and the mechanism by which this evolution takes place is natural selection. Rumors of a revision of his views of religion and his controversial theories of evolution began to circulate almost immediately after his death in April 1882 and continue today, but no available evidence supports the suggestion.

¹¹³ Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is a molecule that carries most of the genetic instructions used in the development, functioning and reproduction of all known living organisms and many viruses. Although many species (such as chimpanzees, mice, and pigs) have similar DNA sequences to humans, there are also significant differences in the way the individual genes behave.
Moses in the desert know things like that? How could he know about dinosaurs? But he writes it, “And in the third day, G-d created the big amphibians.”

**Ruth:** Can you talk a little bit about your Sephardic background? What that has meant to you throughout your life and whether you feel any conflict with Ashkenazi culture that is so prevalent here in the United States.

**Eli:** First of all I wonder how prevalent it is. That’s question number one. Question number two: yes, my Sephardic heritage is very important because according to what I have learned, and what I know, and I what I feel, it’s much closer to the way of life of our forefathers during the Second Temple. The Ashkenazi have, on purpose, done lots of changes for political reasons.

**Ruth:** Can you give an example?

**Eli:** Yes, they have just taken things out of the prayers that the Christians in Europe didn’t like. They have removed them. They’re not there anymore. That is because of political expedience. Of course, they have a lot of rules that are based absolutely on nothing like just human mistakes and turn those into mizvoth . . . like not eating rice on Pesach [Hebrew: Passover]—which has absolutely no foundation to Halacha [Hebrew: Jewish law], but one stupid wife of one rabbi that once made a mistake and boiled the wrong thing and then they said, “Well, in order to prevent that we will not eat rice on Pesach.” In order not to make a mistake, we will also not eat beans,” and all that kind of stuff. [It is] totally berserk. Now that is one of the reasons why I feel a much stronger for our Sephardic heritage because it’s much more normal. It’s much closer to Rambam. It’s much closer to the [teachings of] HaAri Hakadosh. I think

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114 Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective “Sephardic” and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word ‘Sepharad,’ which refers to Spain.

115 Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews that formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000’s. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe. Large scale Jewish immigration in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century brought a large influx of Ashkenazi Jews to the United States from Eastern Europe. Today, the Jewish community in the U.S. is composed predominantly of Ashkenazi Jews and their U.S. born descendants.

116 The Second Temple period in Jewish history spans about six hundred years, beginning with the construction of the second Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 515 BCE and ending with the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 CE. Although Jewish culture was well established by this point, the so-called Second Temple period is when Jewish culture began to develop many of the characteristics that define Jewish religious experience to this day—engagement with the Bible, institutions such as the synagogue, and the notion of Judaism itself as a voluntary religious identity.

117 In addition to eating matzah (unleavened bread) during the seder, Jews are prohibited from eating leavened bread during the entire week of Passover. In addition, Jews are also supposed to avoid foods made with wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oats unless those foods are labeled ‘kosher for Passover.’

118 Maimonides, known in the Jewish world as ‘Rambam’ after the initial letters of his name (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, or Rabbi Moses son of Maimon), is of the most well known and widely studied Jewish scholars today.
it’s cleaner. Although our rabbis today have tendency today to go stricter, and stricter, and stricter, which I do not really like too much. But that’s definitely a thing.

I think that Sephardim . . . first of all there are many more of them in the world than Askenazi. I mean community wise. The communities of the East are all . . . if you go to Iran, Afghanistan, or you go to Turkey, or you go to Egypt, or you go to North Africa, they’re all following Sephardic tradition, although many of them are not even Sephardic. Iranians are not Sephardim, they were there in the days of Queen Esther. They’ve never seen Spain from afar [and] neither have those in Afghanistan, or in Uzbekistan, you name it. They all follow the same culture. The Yemenites follow the same culture. That already in itself is proof that it is much closer to the original Judaism than Ashkenazi that have all kind of things that are typically smelling after Germany in the Middle Ages.

**John:** You’ve made various comments about prophecy that various things that have happened were actually written in the past. What do you believe is [going to] happen in the coming decades?

**Eli:** I’ll tell you something. A prophecy is no longer prophecy if you can read it before it happens. If we know from reading prophecy that tomorrow something terrible is going to happen, we will prevent it and then prophecy will not happen. It never was prophecy.

**John:** What things did . . .

**Eli:** Prophecies . . . you can only read them after it happens. [One can] say, “Look, that’s written there and it happened exactly.” Like the Kabbalah writes us about September 11 [2001] in detail. It tells us that in the big city, which of course is New York [City, New York].

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Born in Spain in 1135, his family fled to Morocco, Israel, and finally Egypt to avoid persecution by Muslim rulers. Maimonides served as physician to the sultan of Egypt and wrote numerous books on medicine. His major contribution to Jewish life remains the **Mishneh Torah**, his code of Jewish law. He also published a commentary on the entire **Mishnah**, and wrote the philosophical **Guide to the Perplexed**. He served as a leader of Cairo’s Jewish community until his death in 1204.

119 **HaAri Hakadosh**, also known as Rabbi Isaac Luria, was a sixteenth century mystical poet who is considered to be the father of contemporary Kabbalah.

120 Mizrahim are Jews who never left the Middle East and North Africa since the beginnings of the Jewish people 4,000 years ago. The Mizrahim and Sephardic communities are often confused with one another. There are some commonalities between the two and the Sephardic Jews that immigrated to the Middle East or North Africa often assimilated into the predominantly Mizrahim communities, but each retains distinct cultural traditions.

121 **Kabbalah** [Hebrew: Jewish book of mysticism; also spelled ‘Kabala’ or ‘Cabala’] is at one time a method, discipline and school of thought. In Judaism, it forms the foundation of mystical religious interpretation. **Kabbalah** seeks to define the nature of the universe and the human being, the nature and purpose of our existence, etc.

122 The attacks of September 11, 2001, also known as the ‘9/11’ attacks, were the deadliest terrorist attacks on American soil in United States history. Nineteen militants associated with an Islamic extremist group hijacked several commercial airplanes and attacked targets in New York City and Washington D.C. by crashing the planes.
. . . on, on. It give us even the date on the . . . sixty-seventh day of the, sixty-third day of the Omer,\textsuperscript{123} the three big buildings will fall over and they will be destroyed by a dog, because the person, whose name is [Osama] Bin Laden,\textsuperscript{124} is not a person but a dog—they even give the name ‘Bin Laden’ in the \textit{Kabbalah}—and the whole economy of the world will collapse as a result of it. That’s in the \textit{Kabbalah}, written 1,800 years ago. But on September 10 nobody would have understood this prophecy. On September 12, it was suddenly clear. There was, a couple of years ago, a television series about a guy that in Chicago [Illinois], got the next day’s newspaper.\textsuperscript{125} Then he went and changed history according to . . . the paper said somebody who died all that, and he went and changed history. That is what would happen with prophecy. Then there wouldn’t be prophecy anymore.

\textbf{Ruth:} Could you talk about coming to the United States and what your impressions were of coming to this country?

\textbf{Eli:} I took an airplane and I landed in New York, picked up my car in the harbor and drove to Las Vegas [Nevada] where I had to be at the tradeshow—not to gamble, because I don’t gamble.\textsuperscript{126} That’s very simple.

\textbf{Ruth:} What kind of tradeshow?

\textbf{Eli:} Computers. I had a stand in the COMDEX show in Las Vegas.\textsuperscript{127} It was very good.

\textbf{Ruth:} Can you tell a little bit about your education then? Did you go to college or did . . . what career did you end up having?

\textbf{Eli:} Because of the war, our education was broken off and was incomplete because [of] two reasons. First of all, when we went first to school, we were too old to start at the bottom, so the bottom is missing. Then when I was in the middle of my high school time, my father died. He was sick for a year so I was too nervous to really finish my school the way I should. Then I went into buildings. The attacks caused extensive death and destruction and triggered an intensive effort to combat terrorism in the Middle East and around the world.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Omer} refers to the forty-nine day period between the second night of Pesach (Passover) and the holiday of Shavuot. This period marks the beginning of the barley harvest when, in ancient times, Jews would bring the first sheaves to the Temple as a means of thanking God for the harvest. The word \textit{omer} literally means “sheaf” and refers to these early offerings.

\textsuperscript{124} Osama bin Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden, or Osama Bin Laded, was the founder of al-Qaeda, the organization that claimed responsibility for the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, along with numerous other mass-casualty attacks against civilian and military targets.

\textsuperscript{125} “Early Edition” is an American television drama series that aired on CBS from 1996-2000.

\textsuperscript{126} Las Vegas is a city located in the Mojave Desert in the U.S. state of Nevada. It is a resort town famed for its buzzing energy, 24-hour casinos, and endless entertainment options.

\textsuperscript{127} COMDEX (an abbreviation of Computer Dealers’ Exhibition) was a computer expo held at various locations in Las Vegas, Nevada each November from 1979 to 2003. It was one of the largest computer trade shows in the world.
to technical school and then my father really died, so that messed up. Then I went to Israel. So I do not have formal education in that formal way because the war and all those things caused too much turmoil really to finish an education. Others did, but, for certain people, the trauma was bigger than for others. Whatever I have reached in life I have done myself with my own hands.

John: Is there any connection with that cousin who had left right before the war who didn’t let you all . . .

Eli: No. He had the audacity in 1946 to come to Holland to visit us. There wasn’t very much to eat or whatever. Those were very hard times. My mother baked from whatever she could find together . . . baked some kind of a cake with egg powder and all kind of things that were hard to come by in those days. He came to see my father and she served him. He said, “No, I don’t eat bread.” It was last time we ever talked to him. What else? I think we have . . .

John: You said that you and your mother were similar in terms of how all the turmoil affected you. How has it affected you and your wife over the years in terms of your relationship and raising kids?

Eli: From time to time, it was different. There were periods . . . that’s very short, the period very shortly before I came to America that I had a complete nervous breakdown. I started to realize that I was alive because somebody else went to the camps on my number. I got worse, and worse, and worse, and worse, and was almost suicidal. Somehow I overcame it. I don’t know why but that was a period . . . I was crying day and night. I heard a sentence then that I still find it a little hard to reproduce. It’s a sentence about a girl. She was in school and she got a three on the scale of ten for geography, but the next day she knew exactly where Sobibor was. I still get something in my throat when I repeat that, but she was my age, you see.

John: What’s been called survivor guilt?

Eli: Yes, very strong until today.

Ruth: Was that at all any kind of a motivating factor in your return to . . . along with your Sephardic heritage, did the Holocaust play any factor . . .

Eli: Not in the beginning. No, definitely not. I . . . while starting to learn Judaism . . . getting, looking for answers . . . I would say secondary. I started to find answers to questions that were open for many years but that was not the primary reason. That was a . . . probably a very

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128 Sobibor [Polish: Sobibór] was an extermination camp that was established in March 1942 near Lublin in southern Poland and went into operation in May 1942. About 250,000 Jews were murdered there before Sobibor was closed and razed in July 1943.
strong result. Suddenly finding answers to questions that had been open for years and years and years where I didn’t know the answer for. Like the one: where was G-d? The questions everybody tells us. Now I know where he was. He was not there on purpose. Now I also know that what the Germans did I mean was real bad, but they did it because G-d wanted them to do that. That does not say that therefore there is no blame for them. G-d just looked for the worst people in the world and let them do the dirty job. He didn’t take the French to do it. He didn’t take the Americans to do it. He looked for who was willing to do the job and used them as an instrument.

**John:** Just to keep stirring things up on such a difficult subject: what would be your response to the complaint that the reasons why the Israelis are so militant and hard core and all that is because the Holocaust is still traumatizing everybody . . .

**Eli:** No, I don’t agree with that. I think we have to be that because if we want to survive, we have to do that. If we don’t, then we will be gone. Don’t forget one thing: they always claim that the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] was created to “end the Israeli occupation.” Now the occupation was in 1967.129 [The] PLO was created in 1963. There’s your answer. They have only one intention: to drive us out of the *Dar El Islam* [Arabic: The House of Islam], out of the house of Islam. They don’t want Jews to be in the *Dar El Islam*. They don’t want anybody else, but definitely they don’t want Jews. Therefore, there is no way we could ever make a deal with them. All this dreaming about peace contracts and negotiations, forget about it. It will not work. They don’t want it. They want it as an instrument, but they don’t want to make an agreement with Jews ever. They cannot. Islam does not allow them to do it, even if they want it. All these stories you hear in America about Islam is taking for a ride here and these people—these ‘fundamentalists’ as they are called—they are the real Islamists, because that is exactly what the *Koran* teaches. All those people that talk about how good Islam is have never read the *Quran*. I did read the *Quran*. It’s in there. That’s exactly what the *Quran* wants. The *Quran* writes that Jews are worse than pigs and you should never trust them.

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129 The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is an organization founded in 1964 with the purpose of the "liberation of Palestine" through armed struggle.
130 At the end of the Six-Day War in June 1967, Israel took control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The Sinai was returned but the other territories were incorporated into Israel. Originally, those territories were referred to as “Occupied Arab territories,” ruled via the Israeli Military Governorate system from 1967 to 1982. Today, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory generally refers to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and much of the Golan Heights. Much of the continued tensions over the area revolve around the occupation of East Jerusalem.
John: Assuming they [Arabs] wouldn’t get on those trucks voluntarily it sounds like all-out war is the only inevitable conclusion.

Eli: No, they will. If they look into the barrel of a gun, they will go. If that is the . . . but it will not happen because it will never happen. The rulers of Israel today are not brave enough to do the real thing. They are under pressure from the Americans, under pressure here, under pressure there. It’s the only way Israel can survive is if the Arabs leave the country. Even in the circumstances you have today, even if the Intifada and all the fighting would stop tomorrow morning and they would nicely live in peace—the Israelis would go to Ramallah to buy pitas and the Arabs would come to Tel Aviv to buy radios and everybody would be happy—then in 20 years from now, in the year 2024, the Arabs are the majority in the area and they’ll throw the Jews out by law. They’re already nearly Arab majority. They don’t even need this Intifada. They have time on their side. But we have G-d on our side.

Ruth: If we can go back just a little bit to something you were talking about a couple of minutes ago: you were saying that at the point that you were about to leave Holland for the United States, you felt a lot of emotional turmoil as a result of your experiences during the war. Was that feeling alleviated when you finally left Europe and came to the United States?

Eli: Totally.

Ruth: Can you talk about that?

Eli: Yes. In Europe, I had nightmares every night that they were coming to pick me up, they were knocking on the door . . . for years and years and years—not for a short period, for years and years. I couldn’t sleep at night. I was looking at everybody in the street, [wondering,] “What did you do?” or “What did your parents do?” That was over the day I landed in New York. [It] never came back. I had dreams that I was hiding, that they were knocking on the door . . . I had nightmares all over. That was over the day I landed in New York. [It] never came back. No, that’s really . . . listen, we were liberated by FDR [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt].

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131 Intifada is an Arabic word meaning “shaking off” although it is popularly translated into English as “uprising” or “resistance” or “rebellion.” The First Intifada in Israel lasted from December 1987 to 1993. The Second Intifada began in September 2000 and lasted until around 2005.

132 Ramallah is a Palestinian city in the central West Bank located 10 kilometers (6 miles) north of Jerusalem. Historically a Christian town, Muslims form the majority of the population today.

133 Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the 32nd President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-twentieth century, leading the U.S. through a time of worldwide economic crisis and war. Popularly known as ‘FDR,’ he collapsed and died in his home in Warm Springs, Georgia just a few months before the end of the war.
Whatever politically I may not agree with FDR, he liberated [us]. I am here today because he went in there at the last moment.

**Ruth:** What do you remember about the day that you realized that you had been liberated?

**Eli:** I just told you about it. It was an unbelievable day. It was an unbelievable experience to see the Germans were gone. They were coming to our farm every day, to get the eggs, to get the butter. They wanted everything—never paid for it, of course. They [felt they] were due to it. They were suddenly gone.

**John:** During those about 14 years after the war, until you actually left Europe can you talk a little . . .

**Eli:** That’s a much longer time . . .

**Ruth:** You said you left in 1959?

**Eli:** In 1959, I went to Israel.

**John:** You were still in Europe for 14 years?

**Eli:** I was in Israel until . . . I came to America in 1987.

**John:** For those years after the war, you were still within Holland?

**Eli:** Yes, as a kid. I went to school and all that. We talked about it.

**John:** Can you give a little bit more about what life was like after the war . . .

**Eli:** We talked about it extensively, about the . . .

**John:** I’m always curious . . . the people . . .

**Eli:** If you can ask specific questions maybe. I think we talked about it extensively.

**John:** I’m just always interested in what people made of the war after it was over, in terms of . . .

**Eli:** I just told you. On one hand, they tried to play the games as if the war never took place, it never happened. We went to school. We had to learn German . . .

**John:** Yes, I remember.

**Eli:** On the other hand, there was this trauma of all the people gone, and everything gone, and the destroyed cities, and all that. That was a contradiction that was—specifically for children—very hard to swallow.

**John:** You didn’t sense any acknowledgement or remorse from the rest of the population, not from the Jewish but . . .
Eli: No, because the Dutch were so good, remember? They had done everything to save the Jews. There was Anne Frank and whatever, remember? They almost feel that we owed them to be thankful for whatever they did.

Ruth: What did you tell your children about your experience as they were growing up? Did they grow up . . . I don’t know how old they are. Were they born in Holland or in Israel?

Eli: In Israel.

Ruth: In Israel?

Eli: Yes.

Ruth: What was that experience like, raising children in Israel? What did you talk with them about?

Eli: We talked about the war a lot. That’s why my children are second-generation Holocaust survivors. You don’t even have to talk about it. Your whole life is colored by it. Everything that you do is related to it. My daughter, specifically, she is exactly like it. I mean she also says when she sees some little food leftover that children in the camps could have lived for days and all that. She has the same trauma. We definitely did not give that on purpose [to my daughter] . . . the opposite: we tried not to, but it’s so deep ingrained, there isn’t too much you can do about it.

Ruth: Did you ever have any discussion with Israelis that said that the Jews in Europe were weak, not like the sabras [Hebrew: Israeli Jew that is born in Israel], other survivors . . .

Eli: Yes, but that’s not an argument. In a way they were . . . today it’s unbelievable how 500 people could be deported by three armed Germans. Today it’s unbelievable that it will happen, but given the conditions of those times, it’s very well explainable. But it’s not a point of an argument. People who did not live through that time will never understand.

John: Three men with machine guns can do a lot of damage.

Eli: Yes, but you can also overcome them. If you are willing to sacrifice a few of you, then the others can overcome them. That plane that crashed in Pennsylvania is an example of how it should have happened.134

Ruth: As long as the one that are sacrificed isn’t your mother or your sister?

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134 Flight 93 was a Boeing 757 operated by United Airlines that left from Newark, New Jersey on the morning of September 11, 2001. While en route to San Francisco, California, the flight was hijacked by four members of a militant Sunni Islamist organization known as al-Qaeda and rerouted towards Washington D.C. As passengers attempted to overcome the hijackers and break into the cockpit, the hijackers intentionally crashed the plane into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. All 33 passengers, 7 crew members, and the hijackers were killed. The passengers and crew have been hailed as heroes because their actions potentially saved the lives of many more people.
Eli: Even if. They were gassed anyhow. Then again, if in 1928 someone would have killed Hitler, he would have been a terrible murderer of a friendly guy. Nobody would have ever understood what a big deed the guy did by killing him. Historical perspective . . . it’s like prophecy, you always have it only afterwards. Then it’s very easy to judge, but then it’s too late.

Ruth: How did you end up in Atlanta [Georgia]?135

Eli: That’s a story that has nothing to do with this. I had . . . I was trying to get to America. In the meantime, I had a daily radio program in the Netherlands, which I used to do. My producer—a very nice older man—had a daughter who was married to a United States Air Force officer. My wife and me, we were deciding whether to go to New York or Los Angeles [California], one of the two concentrations. He told me, “That’s absolutely stupid. You should never do that. Don’t go to either of the two, because in New York they are . . . in San Francisco [California] they’re all flakes and in New York they’re all arrogant. You won’t make it.” He said, “But there’s a little town where it’s going to have . . . where the boom is going to be next coming in 20 years, that’s Atlanta.” I said, “Is that where they gamble?” He said, “No, that’s Atlantic City [New Jersey].”136 That summer I took my wife and my kids, and we took the car, and drove from New York to Atlanta. As I entered the city limits of Atlanta, I fell in love with it. There was a never a doubt in my mind where I wanted to live.

Ruth: What did . . . you said that was 1988?

Eli: Yes, that’s about 14 [or] 15 years ago.

Ruth: You came here and you joined Beth Jacob?

Eli: No. I never joined Beth Jacob until today. We have our own Sephardic community.

Ruth: I was wondering about that.

Eli: Ner HaMizrach.138 Yes, we have a very beautiful synagogue just opposite Beth Jacob on the other side of the street. I joined it only six years ago, after the Teshuva [Hebrew: literally “repentance” but refers more to a “turning back to G-d”].

Ruth: I didn’t realize that the Teshuva was quite a recent . . .

Eli: Yes, the last six years or so.

John: What’s important to you now? What are you working on now or what are you . . .

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135 Atlanta is the capital of and the most populous city in the U.S. state of Georgia.

136 San Francisco is a city located on a peninsula in the northern part of the U.S. state of California.

137 Atlantic City is a resort city on the Atlantic coast in the U.S. state of New Jersey that is known for its many casinos, wide beaches, and iconic Boardwalk.

138 Ner Hamizrach is a Sephardic Orthodox synagogue on LaVista Road in Atlanta, Georgia founded in 1991.
Eli: What’s important?

John: Yes, from now and into the future. We talked about the past and about history. What are you working on now?

Eli: Try to do it as I can as a proud Jew, fulfill my objectives as a Jew, [and] try to get my daughter married with the right person. That’s it. Try to make a little bit of *parnassa* [Hebrew: livelihood] as well, but I don’t see that as the most important thing.

Ruth: Can you talk a little bit about this wonderful collection of *Judaica*—how you got started in that and what that means to you?139

Eli: It means to me . . . I like to look at it. They are beautiful things. I like to collect them. It started in a very strange way. It started when we were in a Russian place and this guy had all kinds of icons. There were three *yads* [Hebrew: literally “hand” but refers to an instrument to read *Torah*] that were obviously stolen from some Jews in Russia. I decided to redeem them. I paid a lot of money for them, just to get them out of the hand of this *goy*. That’s how it started. I started to collect. I buy all the time. I see something and I put my mind on it. I buy. I have a lot of money buried in it. Believe me, it’s a good investment because it doesn’t go down like the stock market. They will be there for my children and my grandchildren one day.

John: Tell us about your wife a little bit too. How is she? What is she doing?

Eli: She’s by profession a teacher for special education. She studied, among others, in the *Bar Ilan* University in Israel, where she got her degree.140 No, she got her degree in Holland. Today she is the office manager and she wants me very urgently to call her back.

John: Is there anything else maybe you want to mention we didn’t get into?

Eli: No, I don’t think so. I think we went into every little detail, except my coffee that got cold.

Ruth: Thank you very much.

Eli: You’re welcome.

<interview ends>

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139 *Judaica* are literary, historical, or artistic materials such as books or religious items, that relate to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish life or customs.

140 *Bar Ilan University* is a public university in the city of Ramat Gan in the Tel Aviv District, Israel. Established in 1955, Bar Ilan is now Israel's second-largest academic institution.