

**THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

MEMORIST: HENRY BIRNBREY
INTERVIEWERS: JOHN KENT
RUTH EINSTEIN
LOCATION: ATLANTA, GEORGIA
DATE: 2001

INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Start Tape 1>

John: Please give your name, and when, and where you were born.

Henry: My name is Henry Birnbrey. I was born in Dortmund, Germany.¹ Interestingly enough, the day I was born [November 29, 1923] was the day that the German inflation reached its peak.² My father [Edmund Birnbrey] had found or gotten a two and a half dollar gold piece during his service in World War I. That two and half dollars was the cost of my birth—hospitals, doctors and everything involved with it. I am also happy to say that, as far as Jewish history is concerned, my date of birth also came [on] the day of the famous United Nation partition [plan] for the state of Israel.³ My birthday's almost the same as the birthday of the state of Israel.

John: Can you describe what your world was like before the war?

Henry: Before the war, we were middle class people. My father was a merchant. He had a store, a commissary that he operated for a labor union. He also had a circle of customers in another town that he used to sell things to. My father had been a World War I veteran. He was very active in German politics in the Social Democratic party.⁴ As a matter of fact, he even had made campaign speeches for one of the people running for President of Germany. We lived in a

¹ Dortmund is a city in northwest Germany. In 1933, the Jewish population was 4,108 (out of 540,000). By 1939, emigration and persecution had reduced it to 1,222.

² The cost of paying for World War I and the resultant reparations severely damaged the German economy. A period of hyperinflation plagued Germany between 1921 and 1924. To combat the inflation, the government began printing exaggerated amounts of money. The result was that German bills became essentially worthless—paying for even small items could require huge stacks of money.

³ In April 1947, the U.N. General Assembly set up the Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). This committee recommended that the British mandate over Palestine be ended and that the territory be partitioned into two states. On November 29, 1947, the U.N. General Assembly passed the partition plan.

⁴ The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) [German: *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*] is Germany's oldest political party. It advocates the modernization of the economy but also stresses the need to address the social needs of workers and society's disadvantaged. During the Weimer Republic, it was part of several coalition governments. The SPD was outlawed soon after the Nazis came to power in 1933, but was revived in 1945. Today, it is one of the country's two main parties.

nice apartment. We had help in the house. We were not millionaires—We did not have a car, but a lot of people didn't have a car—but we had people working in the house. Our city had a Jewish public school, which I attended. In our city, all kids went to school according to their faith. We had a Catholic school, a Protestant school, and a Jewish school, and none of them mixed. In this Jewish school, we had education in the general studies as well as in Judaic studies almost similar to the day schools of today, except we didn't quite have the 50-50 split of Judaica to general studies. Our synagogue was a wonderful, magnificent looking building, which was later destroyed on Kristallnacht.⁵ I was *bar mitvahed* in this synagogue.⁶

Things went fairly well with us until [Adolf] Hitler came into power [in 1933].⁷ We saw an immediate change in the population. There was a lot of antisemitism starting almost in the early days of the Nazi period [1933-1945]. I witnessed the burning of the books, which was the first Nazi event in most cities.⁸ I happened to be at the square where the books were being burned on a bonfire. I witnessed even as a child when some Orthodox Jews⁹ were taken on the street, had their beards shaven off, and were forced to clean the street with toothbrushes.¹⁰ It was very degrading. It made a very lasting impression on me as a child.

⁵ A synagogue was first built in Dortmund in the mid-nineteenth century and a new synagogue, considered one of the most beautiful in Germany, was consecrated in 1900. The synagogue was one of the largest in Germany with a seating capacity of 1,200-1,300 and was the cultural center of the Jewish community. In 1958-1965, an opera house was built on the site. In 1998, a stone memorial plaque for the synagogue was erected on the site.

⁶ A *bar mitzvah* [Hebrew: son of commandment] is a rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, a Jewish boy is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He is now duty bound to keep the commandments, he puts on *tefillin*, and may be counted to the *minyan* quorum for public worship. 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.

⁷ Amid an economic depression and increasing political instability in Germany, Adolf Hitler and his party, the National Socialist German Workers' Party [German: *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; also known as the NSDAP or Nazi Party) rapidly rose to power. In 1932, the Nazi party was elected to fill more seats in the *Reichstag* (parliament) than any other party. In 1933, democratically elected President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany, a position responsible for leading the *Reichstag*. As Chancellor, he began transforming his position into a dictatorial one. When the President died in 1934, Hitler declared himself head of state and effectively became absolute dictator of Germany under the title of *Fuhrer* (German: *Führer*).

⁸ Beginning on May 10, 1933, Nazi-dominated student groups carried out public burnings of books they claimed were "un-German." The book burnings took place in 34 university towns and cities, including Dortmund. Works of prominent Jewish, liberal and leftist writers ended up in the bonfires. The book burnings stood as a powerful symbol of Nazi intolerance and censorship.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ There were many locally organized antisemitic actions against Jews in Germany and in Austria after the Anschluss. Jews were increasingly singled out for abuse in public forums, often forced to perform humiliating tasks such as scrubbing the streets on their hands and knees in the middle of a crowd of onlookers.

The neighborhood was placarded with these boxes, which featured the anti-Jewish publication, *Der Sturmer*,¹¹ which was a publication put out by Joseph Goebbels.¹² It was difficult for a child to walk by there and see all these antisemitic caricatures. In a very short period of time, neighbors would not associate with us. The children couldn't play with me anymore. It was a very quick change.

In 1936, I was *bar mitzvahed*. By then, some of our relatives had already made *aliyah* to [Palestine].¹³ We no longer could afford a big party. I still have a photograph of my bar mitzvah party with ten young men coming over for lunch. It was nothing like the galas that we have here today.

In about 1937, my father was working in a small town near Dortmund. He visited a customer and told him he couldn't deliver certain piece goods that this customer had ordered. The customer's son, who was a [Nazi] Party member, tried to force my father to make a statement against the government. [He] kept asking him, "Do you think the German government is at fault for you not being able to deliver those piece goods?" My father said, "No, no, no." Nevertheless, this young man swore out that my father had spoken against the State and my father was arrested.

We did not know anything about his arrest. We knew that he didn't come home that night. My mother [Jennie Jacobson] and I spent about 24 hours at the train station, looking at every train to see if he was coming in. About two or three days later, we found out that he had gotten arrested. The father of this person who accused him, testified on behalf of my father. The judge was an old friend of my father's. The judge took my father aside and told him, "What I'm going to ask you to do is just not come back to this city [and] abandon your business here, so that they think I sent you off to a concentration camp."¹⁴ My father was spared the misery of a

¹¹ *Der Sturmer* [German: *Der Stürmer*] was a "tabloid style" newspaper published by Julius Streicher from 1923 almost continuously through to the end of World War II. *Der Sturmer* played a significant role in the Nazi propaganda machinery. It often ran obscene materials such as antisemitic caricatures and propaganda-like accusations of blood libel, pornography, anti-Catholic, anti-capitalist, and anti-communist propaganda, in order to appeal to a larger spectrum of readers, but especially targeting the working class.

¹² Josef Goebbels was the Propaganda Minister in the Third Reich.

¹³ *Aliyah* (Hebrew: ascent) is the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel. It is one of the most basic tenets of Zionism.

¹⁴ Shortly after coming to power in 1933, the Nazis began to set up a series of concentration camps across Germany. Those were mostly local initiatives: facilities that the SA, SS, and police established on an ad hoc basis, where they would detain and abuse real and imagined enemies of the regime. By 1934, there were over 100 of these early camps in operation. Both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans perceived to be opponents of the regime were systematically persecuted. Political opponents (Communists, Social Democrats, liberals) were some of the first victims. Jews,

concentration camp, but had to abandon his business. From then on, things went downhill fast for us financially.

We were very cognizant of what was going on. As children, we affiliated with Zionist organizations for the purpose of making *aliyah*.¹⁵ Some of us were able to go on a *Hakshiva*, which was a preparation place for *aliyah* to [Palestine].¹⁶ We got very involved in learning Hebrew and what we had to do if we finally got in to Palestine.

My mother actually signed me up for a visa to New Zealand, to the United States, and to Palestine, hoping that one of the three would come through. The week that Hitler invaded Austria, the Jewish organizations got very concerned that this may be a war and that this may cause the borders to close.¹⁷ They got some emergency affidavits to the United States. I left my home on about 24 hours notice. I was told that I could go to the United States. All I had to do was go to the American Consulate in Stuttgart, which was in southern Germany.¹⁸ Here I was fourteen years old and I had to go by myself to Stuttgart to be examined. In those days, the United States would not admit anyone who had any kind of illness—even if it was a cold. Then I had to go from Stuttgart to Hamburg, where I joined some other kids and we had a mini-*Kindertransport* to the United States.¹⁹ I arrived in the United States in April of 1938. I was

homosexuals, Freemasons, Jehovah's Witnesses, clergy who opposed the Nazis, and any others whose behavior—real or perceived—could be interpreted as being in opposition to Nazi political and racial ideologies were also persecuted and incarcerated.

¹⁵ Zionism is a movement that supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890's Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.

¹⁶ After Hitler came to power in 1933, thousands of Jews resident in Germany attempted to obtain visas to any country that would take them. However, many did not have the family, financial or professional connections to make this possible in the face of immigration restrictions around the world. This was particularly true of young persons. German Jewish organizations prepared guides on how and where to obtain visas; but it was evident that many prospective emigrants needed training in agricultural or technical skills in order to qualify. This, in turn, led to the establishment of "training" centers all over Germany. Between 1934 and 1938, at least 29 centers were established. Some were run by Zionist organizations and focused on training persons for agricultural work in Palestine, but others trained people in various skills necessary to immigrate to any country. The centers had an average capacity of 40-50 young men and women, and trainees remained for anywhere from 3-6 months. Some even attended more than one camp.

¹⁷ After a succession of threats and the pressure of military feints, Germany forcibly annexed Austria into the German Third Reich on March 12, 1938. The Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg was deposed and the Nazi puppet Arthur Seyss-Inquart was put in charge. German troops marched into Austria, Hitler did a triumphant entry parade into Vienna and Austria ceased to be its own country. After World War II, it became its own country again.

¹⁸ Stuttgart is a city in southern Germany, located approximately 236 miles [380 kilometers] south of Dortmund. It is a manufacturing hub and home to both Mercedes-Benz and Porsche's headquarters.

¹⁹ '*Kindertransport*' is the name given to a series of rescue missions that assisted Jewish children in leaving Nazi-occupied Europe. The United Kingdom took in nearly 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Nazi Germany and the occupied territories of Austria, and ex-Czechoslovakia. The children were placed in British foster homes,

sponsored by the American Council of Jewish Women's Birmingham [Alabama] chapter.²⁰ I spent nine months in Birmingham, Alabama²¹ and then moved to Atlanta [Georgia] in January of 1939.²²

Meanwhile, in November of 1938 was the infamous *Kristallnacht* in Germany, in which our synagogue was burned down.²³ I did not find out all of the details until much later, but the moment I came to Atlanta, I was notified that my father was dead. Only years later did I piece together exactly what happened to him. As a matter of fact, when I filed a restitution claim for my father's life, the court said that everything I said was a lie.²⁴ This was a post-World War II court. They said I had no evidence, and there was no evidence in Germany that he got killed, and my whole tale was a lie. What we found out [was] that my father got beaten up very bad on *Kristallnacht*. It was so bad that he needed to be hospitalized. No German hospitals would admit

hostels, and on farms. Similar to the *Kindertransports*, Henry was one of the "One Thousand Children" or "OTC," which refers to over 1,400 Jewish children who were rescued from Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied or threatened European countries, and came directly to the United States between 1934 and 1945. The rescue efforts in the United States were strictly non-governmental. The children were rescued through the organized efforts of private American citizens and organizations in the US and Europe. Most of the children came through official programs run by private refugee agencies such as the German Jewish Children's Aid (GJCA), The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (colloquially known as "the Joint"), and the Society of Friends (Quakers).

²⁰ The Birmingham Chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (CJW) was organized in 1898 in Birmingham, Alabama. The group hosted weekly study groups for members, joined in civic and philanthropic projects, and lobbied against child labor and for prison reforms.

²¹ Birmingham is a city located in the north central region of the U.S. state of Alabama.

²² Atlanta is the capital of the U.S. state of Georgia.

²³ On November 8 and 9, 1938, the Nazis started a state-sponsored nationwide pogrom. Across the country (and in Austria) Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses were looted and burned, Jews were attacked on the streets and 91 were killed. Thousands of Jewish men were sent to concentration camps for several weeks and released only when they agreed to leave the country as soon as possible. The Jews were made to pay for the damages to their premises. The pogrom was called '*Kristallnacht*,' which means 'Night of Broken Glass,' because of all the damage done to Jewish shop windows. Thousands of German and Austrian Jews were arrested after *Kristallnacht* and deported to concentration camps in Germany. In Dortmund, 600 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen. Most of those arrested were released within a few weeks, but often only if they promised to immigrate immediately, leaving their property behind.

²⁴ Between 1945 and 1947, the Allied governments enacted various legislation dealing with reparations to be paid to the victims of Nazi oppression. The Jewish Agency presented the first official claim to the Allied governments in September 1945. The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) was established in October 1951 to help with individual claims against Germany arising from the Holocaust. The Claims Conference initially recovered \$100 million from West Germany, with direct compensation to Holocaust survivors paid in installments. In 1952, the government of West Germany reached an agreement with the state of Israel and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany to pay reparations for material losses and injuries incurred during the Holocaust. Three separate German laws, known as the West German Federal Indemnification Laws, were adopted in 1953, 1956, and 1965. They further provided for compensation in the form of one-time payments and monthly pensions to Holocaust survivors. In the years since, other agreements for reparations have also been reached.

a Jew. At the end of January, a Catholic hospital in a suburb finally admitted him. A few days later, he died. I knew that much of the story, but still did not know the whole thing.

Two years ago, I was back in Dortmund. I've been there a number of times since World War II. I did some research on my own. There was a notorious SS jail in Dortmund,²⁵ which was headed by Klaus Barbi—the same person who was later the ‘Butcher of Lyon.’²⁶ This [was] where he did his experiments. I found the records of where my father actually had been there. The only thing [I can say] in defense of the court is they may have been over-technical or just did it on purpose . . . My name is spelled B-I-R-N. On the documents it was spelled B-I-E-R-N and the rest the same way. The court could have said there was no B-I-R-N Birnbrey there to call me a liar. I found out that he was actually in this jail where all this torture was documented since then. He died as a result of it. He was one of the about a hundred people in Germany who died on Kristallnacht or as a result of *Kristallnacht*.²⁷

My mother passed away a few months later. I never did find out exactly how and why, but she died shortly thereafter. I lost both of my parents at age fifteen, within the same year, and had to say *Kaddish* for about 18 months.²⁸

²⁵ The Steinwache is a memorial museum in Dortmund, Germany. Originally, it was a police station built in 1906. In 1928, a prison was added next door. The Gestapo took over the prison in 1933. Over 66,000 people were imprisoned and tortured there between 1933 and 1945, earning it an infamous reputation. The structure survived the war intact and was opened as a memorial in 1992. In addition to a permanent exhibition, it also houses an archive.

²⁶ Nikolaus “Klaus” Barbie (1913—1991) joined the SS in 1935. He began working with the Security Service [German: *Sicherheitsdienst*, or SD], which served as the Nazi regime’s intelligence network. In 1936, he was assigned to Dortmund, Germany, where he monitored the activities of religious and right wing political groups. In 1940, Barbie was assigned to intelligence work in Amsterdam. In the Netherlands he is believed to have participated in the roundup and deportation of Jews. In November 1942 he was sent to Lyon, France. As the local Gestapo chief, Barbie earned the nickname “the Butcher of Lyon” for his brutal actions towards Jews and members of the French Resistance. In all, it is believed that Barbie was responsible for the execution or murder of over 4,000 individuals and for the deportation of 7,500 Jews, most of who perished in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Barbie returned to Germany at the end of the war and assumed a new identity. In June 1947, he surrendered himself to the U.S. Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) after the Americans offered him money and protection in exchange for his intelligence services. In 1949, Barbie and his family were smuggled by the Americans to South America. Assuming the name of Klaus Altmann, Barbie settled in Bolivia and continued his work as a U.S. agent. He became a successful businessman and advised the military regimes of Bolivia. Barbie also served as an officer in the Bolivian secret police, participated in drug-running schemes, and founded a rightist death squad. In the early 1980’s, a liberal Bolivian regime came to power and agreed to extradite Barbie to France in exchange for French aid. Finally, on May 11, 1987, Barbie went on trial for his crimes against humanity and was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison. He died of cancer in a prison hospital in 1991.

²⁷ Although murder did not figure in the central directives, *Kristallnacht* claimed the lives of at least 91 Jews.

²⁸ *Kaddish* [Hebrew: holy] is a hymn of praises to G-d found in the Jewish prayer service that is recited aloud while standing. The *Kaddish* is one of the most important and central elements in the Jewish liturgy. Mourner's *Kaddish* is said at all prayer services and certain other occasions. Following the death of a parent, child, spouse, or sibling it is customary to recite the Mourner's *Kaddish* in the presence of a congregation daily for 30 days, or 11 months in the case of a parent, and then at every anniversary of the death.

I have gotten very interested in genealogy and Holocaust research. I've been back to Dortmund a number of times since World War II. Last year, I actually spoke at a high school in Dortmund, which got a lot of publicity both on television and in newspapers. All of a sudden, a lot of people came out of the woods that used to know us, and wanted to reestablish contact, and so on.

During World War II, I wanted to get to our hometown, but I could not because the British Army was over there and we were a little south of there. My experience as a soldier I think is worth mentioning. First of all, we were in the neighborhood of Magdeburg [Germany] on reconnaissance.²⁹ We [smelled] this horrible odor. We didn't know what was happening. It turned out to be one of the freight trains full of Jews being shipped from one concentration camp to another.³⁰ Therefore, I was able to personally witness this terrible inhumanity that was taking place. All of these were my fellow Jews, and brothers, and everything else . . . They were almost . . . They had been reduced to such a non-human state it was impossible to communicate with them. All we could do was to try to get them food and ask for help. There was nothing we could do. These people were half dead [and] half crazy. They'd been locked in these cars. They'd lie on the floor. It was just a horrible thing to witness and something I'll never forget as long as I live. Later, I saw some smaller concentration camps that were liberated. I didn't get to any of the large ones.

Because I was able to speak German, the Army asked me to become a counter-intelligence agent. I interrogated a lot of civilians, and former members of the Army, and servicemen during the war. I always like to tell people this because it shows the whole German psyche, the whole way they feel about things. I never talked to a prisoner who had just been captured fighting the Americans whose first words were not, "I did not fight on the Western front. I only fought out on the Eastern front in Russia. I never fought the Americans. I just was against Communism." Over and over again, you'd here the same denial everywhere you went.

²⁹ Magdeburg is a central German city on the Elbe River.

³⁰ On April 13, 1945, the 30th Infantry Division encountered about 200 starving and ill Jewish prisoners who had escaped from a nearby transport. Two tanks were sent out to find the train. When they located the train, they found approximately 2,500 prisoners in about 50 rail cars. Three trains left the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 10, 1945, intended for Theresienstadt concentration camp near Prague, Czechoslovakia. This train got as far as Farsleben, near Magdeburg, Germany before it was abandoned by most of the SS troops guarding them.

We captured a fellow who was involved in the V-2 [rockets].³¹ [He had been] one of the scientist in the big V-2 [rocket production]. I did not want to let on that I could speak German while we were talking to him, but I knew that every intellectual German who had a college education, knew French and English because I was part of the German educational system. One of the men said, “Why don’t we just kill the son of a bitch?” All of a sudden, [the German] spoke in the most perfect English that you ever wanted to hear. Much to my disgust, a week later I read in the newspaper that he was working in Huntsville, Alabama with all of the other scientists.³²

My mother was one of ten children. My father had two brothers. We had lots of cousins. I’ve been very involved in genealogy. Out of my mother’s entire family, two first cousins survived. That’s children of the ten siblings that she had. They survived because they made *aliyah* to Israel. On my father’s side, I found one cousin. Just two years ago, by looking in the telephone book in Berlin [Germany], I found the widow of another cousin. These are all of this entire family that survived World War II. My father’s family was all . . . As a matter of fact, I read in a document recently that this was the first town that evacuated the Jews. He was born in Stettin, in eastern Germany, in Pomerania.³³ They were the first Jewish community that was taken—transported en masse—to Poland. They were all killed there. My mother’s family: most of them died at Auschwitz-Birkenau.³⁴ I don’t know what else to add.

³¹ The ‘V weapons’ were the V-1 and V-2 rockets that were used by Germany at the end of World War II. They were the world’s first cruise missiles. The V-2 rocket was more sophisticated than the V-1 and was really the world’s first ballistic missile. The area of destruction of a V-2 was 800 to 1,200 yards wide. It was developed during World War II in Germany as a “vengeance weapon,” designed to attack Allied cities in retaliation for Allied bombing of German cities. The first V-2 attacks were launched against Paris and London on September 8, 1944. Nearly 1,000 V-2s fell on London and the surrounding area (as well as in Belgium) after September 1944. In total the rocket weapon killed or wounded over 6,000 people and seriously injured and maimed another 18,000.

³² Henry interviewed Walther Johannes Riedel (1903-1974), a German engineer who headed rocket engine development at Peenemunde in 1944 and was Director of the Development Facility at Karlsruhen. In 1947, he began working with Wernher von Braun in the United States as part of Operation Paperclip, a program that helped Nazi scientists to resettle in the US in exchange for their research work. Von Braun and Walther Riedel worked at the newly formed Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

³³ Stettin, Germany is today known as Szczecin, Poland. Szczecin is a major seaport near the present-day German border. The town is in the historical region of Pomerania, on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea in Central Europe, split between Germany and Poland. The city became part of Poland in 1945; previously it was part of Prussia. In January of 1940, the Nazis decided to make Pomerania “Judenfrei” (free of Jews) by deporting Pomeranian Jews to towns in the Lublin and Nisko area in Poland. Pomerania was deemed “Old Reich” territory and the plan was to resettle ethnic Germans there. On February 12-13, 1940, approximately 1,300 men, women, children, elderly and sick Jews were marched in below freezing weather to Lublin. The Jews of Stettin were the first group of Pomeranian Jews to be expelled.

³⁴ 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

John: I have so many things to ask.

Henry: Go ahead.

John: What was your understanding of the German psyche, and how and why that developed?

Henry: First of all, there was latent antisemitism through the Church that has always been there. Everybody knew it. Martin Luther certainly made many antisemitic statements.³⁵ The Catholic Church was involved in many antisemitic acts. But the way that Hitler got into power was probably still because of defeat in World War I. The Germans wanted to get back to their prior greatness and so on. Hitler was the vehicle to get them started and, of course, the scapegoats were the Jews. [We were] a very easy scapegoat because the church had preached it. There's not much to add. [The Jews were] just a very convenient scapegoat. One thing you've got to understand and we knew that as children: Germans love uniforms; they love flags; they love militarism and marching. These were all natural things for them. The Treaty of Versailles made them reduce all of this for a while.³⁶ There was a lot of agitation that would get back to it.

I'll tell you a story. My father, in one of his political speeches, spoke about a guy that later became a Nazi hero, by the name of [Albert Leo] Schlageter . . . Schlageter became a very big hero in the Nazi lineage.³⁷ What Schlageter had done [was] he either derailed or bombed a French freight train during the French occupation. The right wing made him a national hero and the left wing said that he made things worse on us.³⁸ My father made a speech that this guy really hurt us; he didn't help us. [My father] got beaten up at this rally by some right wing people.

these prisoners.

³⁵ Martin Luther (1483—1546) was a German professor of theology, composer, priest, and monk. Luther is one of the most influential figures in Christian history. He was the seminal figure in the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, a movement that reformulated certain basic tenets of Christian belief and resulted in the division of Western Christendom into Catholics and Protestants. His anti-Jewish statements and writings—including a 1543 treatise titled “On the Jews and Their Lies”—had a significant influence on German antisemitism.

³⁶ On November 11, 1918, fighting in World War I came to an end following the signing of an armistice between Germany and the Allies that called for a ceasefire. The war formally ended with the signing of the Versailles Treaty (or treaty of Versailles) on June 28, 1919. The treaty forced Germany to forfeit 13 percent of its European territory (more than 27,000 square miles) and one-tenth of its population (between 6.5 and 7 million people), as well as all of its colonies outside of Europe. The treaty also demanded the demilitarization and occupation of the Rhineland. The army was limited to 100,000 men and conscription was not allowed. Navy vessels were restricted to less than 100,000 tons and a submarine fleet was forbidden. Moreover, Germany had to accept complete responsibility for initiating World War I and pay for all material damages. For Germans, the treaty appeared unfair and excessive.

³⁷ Albert Leo Schlageter (1894—1923) was a right-wing German nationalist. His activities sabotaging French occupying troops after World War I led to his arrest and eventual execution by French forces. Schlageter became a popular figure in Nazi propaganda.

³⁸ The left–right political spectrum is a system of classifying political positions, ideologies and parties, from equality on the left to social hierarchy on the right. In Germany after World War I, the left consisted of the Communists

The Germans have not changed that much. Things that they're not proud of, they like to forget. The Holocaust was not taught in schools until the "Holocaust" movie appeared on television and children started asking questions.³⁹ This movie that was produced in America had the biggest impact on Holocaust education in Germany.

When I spoke to the school [in Dortmund] last year, I was absolutely shocked at some of the questions that children asked me because it was just never discussed. Just like [the Germans I interviewed after the war] said, "My son did not fight on the Western front. He only fought on the Russian front."⁴⁰ They never admit their bad side. It's a disease. There are some people that I am in contact with that are fighting it. There's a very active group of people. They're called the Christian-Jewish . . . I can't think of the exact name, but they are doing research and they want to educate the masses. It's an uphill battle. What you have [is] the generation that I'm a part of and might be five or ten years older than me is slowly dying off. They're the generation that's carrying that guilt and they don't want to admit it. It's a tough call. It's a very tough call.

John: What was your outlook at the time of liberation and the end of the war? You had no parents . . .

Henry: I had no parents and I started searching for family. I knew [about] the two cousins on my mother's side and I thought that the cousin on my father's side had survived but I didn't know where or how. I advertised on *Kol Yisrael*, which is the Israeli radio network.⁴¹ After the third attempt, she showed up.

I wanted to have nothing to do with Germany for a while. As a matter of fact, I was one of the last people to file a restitution claim for myself. I just didn't want to deal with them,

(KPD) and the Social Democrats (SPD). The parties on the left were strong supporters of progressive taxation, government social welfare programs, labor unions, equality and economic opportunity for women. They were less nationalistic, militaristic and antisemitic than the parties on the right. The right consisted of the German Nationalist Party (DNVP) and the National Socialist Party (NSDAP, or Nazi), which were strongly nationalistic and in support of a large military.

³⁹ *Holocaust* is an American television miniseries broadcast in four parts in April 1978 on the NBC television network. The miniseries followed a fictional German Jewish family's experiences during the Holocaust.

⁴⁰ Germany's military engagements in Europe during World War II are generally divided into two separate headings—the Western Front and the Eastern Front. The Western Front included Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Germany. The Eastern Front included conflicts against the Soviet Union, Poland and other Allies. The war on the Eastern Front was the scene of the largest military confrontation in history and was particularly brutal.

⁴¹ *Kol Yisrael* is Israel's public domestic and international radio service. It was originally an underground Haganah radio station that broadcast from Tel Aviv. It started consistently broadcasting in December 1947 under the name *Telem-Shamir-Boaz*, and was renamed to *KolHaHagana* ("Voice of the Haganah") in March 1948.

but then I figured, “What the hell. They owe me,” although I didn’t get anything. I represented about 75 clients in their restitution cases—most of them were concentration camp witnesses, but I still did not want to go to Germany. Then finally, when my aunt—who was not a blood aunt, I call her ‘aunt’—told me about the burial of my father and mother and explained it to me, I decided to go to Germany to search for the burial spot. When I found it, I bought some headstones according to Jewish law.⁴² I never will forget: when I got there, the guy quoted me a price. I said, “Fine. It’s good.” Then he said, “But I have to charge you tax on it.” I exploded. My wife thought I was going to have a heart attack. I said in some very unkind language, “You mean you people killed my parents and now you want me to pay a tax?” I refused to pay it. I guess the merchant absorbed it in his price, but I paid only the original price.

Then, I’ll tell you something interesting. The city took me on a tour of the city. They showed me the new Opera House. I said, “You know, this Opera House is where our synagogue used to be.” When the mayor asked me how our tour went, again I used some very tough language. I said, “You know, you bastards burned our synagogue down and there’s not even a plaque marking that this is where the synagogue used to be.” When I came back a year later, there was a beautiful marker there to remember the synagogue that was there.

We also . . . Interestingly enough, [the synagogue had] hired a Chazzan,⁴³ a Cantor, who was a singer in the Cologne [Germany] Opera.⁴⁴ Of course, when Jews had to leave these kinds of positions, he applied for this job as a Cantor.⁴⁵ We used to see on many *Shabbatzim* [Yiddish: Jewish Sabbath day] that non-Jews would sneak into the synagogue just to hear him sing for free. People who wanted to hear his voice or had heard about him came just to hear his voice. Then they’d sneak back out. There was some of those kind of people, too.

⁴² Showing proper respect for the dead is intrinsic to Jewish law. Setting a tombstone at the gravesite has been a custom among Jews since Biblical times. The tombstone should be made from stone or granite and follow the customs of the cemetery as far as sizing and style. It is customary to engrave the deceased’s name, his or her father’s name or relationship to other family members, the Hebrew date and year of passing on the tombstone, as well as the Hebrew letters *תנצב"ה*, which translates to, "May his (or her) soul be bound in the binding of eternal life." Markers typically also include the date of birth and the heading *נ"פ* [Hebrew: Here is buried].

⁴³ The *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

⁴⁴ Cologne is a 2,000-year-old city spanning the Rhine River in western Germany, approximately 53 miles [85 kilometers] southwest of Dortmund.

⁴⁵ In the years between 1933 and 1939, Nazi Party leaders began to persecute Jews through a series of antisemitic legislation that included more than 400 decrees and regulations restricting all aspects of their public and private lives. The anti-Jewish policies brought radical and daunting social, economic, and communal change to the German Jewish community. The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service was passed in April 1933 and excluded Jews from civil service. Germans also began boycotting Jewish businesses in 1933 and Jews were soon effectively expelled from almost all professions and commercial life.

John: How much time did you spend in Europe after the war?

Henry: As a soldier, none. I mean I was on occupation duty from May [1945] until August or September [1945].⁴⁶ I don't remember exactly, but I've been back about seven or eight times since then.

John: You went back to the United States in 1945?

Henry: As a soldier, yes, and I lived here before then.

John: How did you continue with your life after that?

Henry: I opened this accounting office in 1946. Then, under the GI Bill, I continued and went to law school and became an attorney as well.⁴⁷ From day one, I became very active and involved in Jewish affairs. First, I was very active nationally in the Zionist movements, then with the [Jewish] Federation.⁴⁸ I've been on the board since the Federation began. I'm an original board member.

John: What was the Jewish community like in the mid-1940's in Atlanta?

Henry: It was totally different. First of all, we had about 3,000 or 3,500 Jews. There was very little affiliation between the Orthodox and Reform Jews,⁴⁹ or German Jews, or Eastern European Jews. There was very little contact. The only meeting ground was the Federation because both [the Orthodox and Reform community] had been involved there for many years. There were no day schools, of course. We tried to have a community afternoon school, which I was very much involved in [and] which succeeded for about five or six years, but fell apart because of synagogue politics. Most of our Jewish life was at the Jewish Educational Alliance, which

⁴⁶ After Germany's defeat in the Second World War, the four main allies in Europe—the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France—took part in a joint occupation of the German state. The Allies agreed to a joint occupation of the nation's capital, Berlin, with each country taking charge of a sector. Upon British insistence, France joined Great Britain and the United States in the occupation of West Germany and West Berlin, while the Soviet Union managed the affairs of East Germany and East Berlin.

⁴⁷ The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the 'G.I. Bill,' was a law that provided a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans. It provides low-cost mortgages, low-interest loans to start a business, as well as educational assistance to service members, veterans, and their dependents.

⁴⁸ The Atlanta Jewish Federation was formally incorporated in 1967 and is the result of the merger of the Atlanta Federation for Jewish Social Service founded in 1905 as the Federation of Jewish Charities; the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation founded in 1936 as the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund; and the Atlanta Jewish Community Council founded in 1945. The organization was renamed the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 1997.

⁴⁹ Reform Judaism is a division within Judaism especially in North America and Western Europe. 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.

preceded the Jewish Community Center, which was on Capital Avenue.⁵⁰ Our life as kids very much revolved around basketball, and parties and dances. The only thing that made us a little bit different were our activities on behalf of Palestine. We all went out and solicited names and petitions to ask for a Jewish state in Palestine, to ask people to support it.

Most [Jewish] people then lived on the south side, in the neighborhood where the Fulton County Stadium or Turner Field [were].⁵¹ I lived where that hotel used to be . . . I forget. It used to be a Howard Johnson's.⁵² It's something else now. By Turner Field, there's a little hotel that faces the expressway. That's exactly where I lived. Rabbi [Harry] Epstein lived about a half a block from there.⁵³ Nearly the whole Jewish community lived in that area. We had four high schools: a girls' high school and a boys' high school,⁵⁴ which was for strictly boys or strictly girls; Tech High School,⁵⁵ which was technical training; and Commercial High,⁵⁶ which was co-ed. Commercial High was probably 50 percent Jewish. I know when I go to some of the high school reunions, it seems like 85 percent of the Sephardic community particularly attends that reunion.⁵⁷ We had three Jewish social clubs. The Standard Club was already in existence there.⁵⁸ The Standard Club and the Progressive Club were both on Pryor Street.⁵⁹ Then we had

⁵⁰ The Atlanta Jewish Community Center was officially founded in 1910, as the Jewish Educational Alliance. In the late 1940's it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the 'Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.'

⁵¹ The Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium served as the home ballpark to the Atlanta Braves of Major League Baseball (MLB) from 1966 to 1996. The stadium was built in Downtown Atlanta in what had previously been a residential area and the center of much of Atlanta's Jewish community from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. The neighborhood was razed in the early 1960's to make way for Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and its parking lots. In 1997, Centennial Olympic Stadium, which was built to serve as the centerpiece of the 1996 Summer Olympics, was converted into a baseball park to serve as the new home for the Atlanta Braves of Major League Baseball (MLB). Turner Field was located less than one block from the site of the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and was in use until 2016.

⁵² Howard Johnson's is an American chain of hotels and motels located primarily throughout the United States and Canada. It had also once been a chain of restaurants for over 90 years and its name was widely known for that alone.

⁵³ Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903-2003) served as the rabbi of Ahavath Achim Synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia from 1928 to 1982.

⁵⁴ Boys' High School was founded in 1924 and is now known as Henry W. Grady High School. Girls' High School was founded in 1872. In 1947, the school became co-educational and renamed Roosevelt High School. The school closed in 1985.

⁵⁵ Tech High School in Atlanta, Georgia was only for boys interested in the applied sciences (electricity, automobiles, aviation, skilled manufacturing, etc.). Tech High and Boys' High merged in 1947 to become coed Grady High School.

⁵⁶ Commercial High School began as a department of Girls' High School in Atlanta, Georgia in 1889 for girls who wanted to learn business skills. They taught bookkeeping, typing, math and history. In 1910, it became Atlanta's first coed high school. It closed in 1947.

⁵⁷ Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants.

⁵⁸ The Standard Club is a Jewish social club that started as the Concordia Association in 1867 in Downtown Atlanta. In 1905, it was reorganized as the 'Standard Club' and moved into the former mansion of William C. Sanders near

the Mayfair Club.⁶⁰ Of course, now we have only the Standard Club. The Progressive Club had a very famous basketball team of natural stature. Synagogues . . . we had three or four synagogues. Ahavath Achim was here,⁶¹ the Temple,⁶² Shearith Israel,⁶³ and the Or Veshalom,⁶⁴ and the Anshi S'fard.⁶⁵ These were our synagogues in Atlanta. Every Jew knew each other. I think we knew the entire Jewish community.

Then after World War II, a lot of us veterans got very involved in veterans affairs only because of the Temple bombing.⁶⁶ I don't know if you've heard of the Columbians.⁶⁷ There was

the site of Georgia State Stadium (formerly Turner Field). In the late 1920's the club moved to Ponce de Leon Avenue in Midtown Atlanta. Later, the club moved to what is now the Lenox Park business park and was located there until 1983. In the 1980's, the club moved to its present location in Johns Creek in Atlanta's northern suburbs.⁵⁹ The Jewish Progressive Club was a Jewish social organization that was established in 1913 by Russian Jews who felt unwelcome at the Standard Club, where German Jews were predominant. At first the club was located in a rented house until a new club was built on Pryor Street including a swimming pool and a gym. In 1940 the club opened a larger facility at 1050 Techwood Drive in Midtown with three swimming pools, tennis and softball. In 1976 the club moved north to 1160 Moore's Mill Road near Interstate 75. The property was eventually sold as the club faced financial challenges and the Carl E. Sanders Family YMCA at Buckhead opened in 1996.

⁶⁰ The Mayfair Club opened in 1938 at 1456 Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta. The two-story club was a focal point of Jewish life in the city for more than 25 years. The club was founded in 1930 and first met at the Biltmore Hotel. Eleanor Roosevelt, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, mayors Ivan Allen and William Berry Hartsfield, senators Herman Talmadge and Richard Russell, and Governor Carl Sanders visited the club. Fire destroyed the Mayfair Club on December 4, 1964.

⁶¹ Ahavath Achim was founded in 1887. In 1921, the congregation constructed a synagogue at Washington Street and Woodward Avenue. The final service in that building was held in 1958 to make way for construction of the Downtown Connector (the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 through Atlanta). The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958.

⁶² The Temple, or 'Hebrew Benevolent Congregation,' is Atlanta's oldest Jewish congregation. The cornerstone was laid on the Temple on Garnett Street in 1875. The dedication was held in 1877 and the Temple was located there until 1902, when it moved to Pryor Street. The Temple's current location in Midtown on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The Reform congregation now totals approximately 1,500 families (2015).

⁶³ Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960's, they removed the barrier between the men and women's sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.

⁶⁴ Or VeShalom was established by refugees of the Ottoman Empire, namely from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. The Sephardic/Traditional congregation began in 1920 and was based at Central and Woodward Avenues until 1948 when it moved to a larger building on North Highland Road. The current building for Or VeShalom is on North Druid Hills Road.

⁶⁵ Congregation Anshi S'fard is an Orthodox synagogue located in Atlanta. It was founded in 1911 to provide a home for Hasidic worship and fellowship for Jews from Poland, Galicia and the Ukraine who had settled in Atlanta. In 1913, a wooden building at the corner of Woodward Avenue and King Street was secured. A few years later the congregation moved to the corner of Woodward and Capitol Avenues. After 1945, Anshi S'fard moved to its present location on North Highland, in the Morningside area. It is the oldest Orthodox congregation in Atlanta.

⁶⁶ The Temple on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia was bombed in the early morning hours of October 12, 1958. About 50 sticks of dynamite were planted near the building and tore a huge hole in the wall. No one was injured in the bombing as it was during the night. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was an outspoken advocate of civil rights and integration and friend of Martin Luther King Jr. Five men associated with the National States' Rights Party, a white separatist group, were tried and acquitted in the bombing.

⁶⁷ The Columbians Incorporated were the nation's first neo-Nazi political organization, which arose in Atlanta

a real Nazi group that started in Atlanta that was going to wipe out the Jews and blacks and all that. All of us veterans went to their big rally one time. We decided to go an hour early and take all the seats so nobody could get in, which ensued into a fight. Then the state closed them down and then the bombing of the Temple occurred by the same group. We, as veterans, were very involved in that. We also . . . When they had parades on national holidays, very often the Ku Klux Klan in full regalia would be part of the patriotic parades.⁶⁸

John: How did you substitute for a family then?

Henry: I was very fortunate. I was placed with a family by the social workers of the former Jewish Family Children's Service. I became part of that family and still am with . . . they're my cousins, and my brothers, and sisters. We're very close. I've been very fortunate in that respect and where I was taken in and the way it worked.

John: When you saw that train full of dying Jewish prisoners, how did that affect you?

Henry: It was something I could never get out of my mind. The stench, the way these people—you hate to use this word, but—almost were like animals, the way they were.

John: Did you make that connection that that could have been you if you had stayed?

Henry: Probably, yes. It was a tremendous shock. The people that were in my Jeep with me were all non-Jewish and they went to pieces. Later, what happened when this medical group came over, this head of this medical unit went to a village and evacuated the entire German population of that village and established a temporary hospital out of that village. I didn't see that; I just heard it. I never saw it.

John: How did you meet your wife?

<Interview pauses, then resumes>

during the summer of 1946. Describing themselves as a "patriotic and political" group, its founders applied for a charter as a nonprofit organization from the state, which they received in August 1946. The group pursued a campaign of intimidation against the city's minorities, patrolling those neighborhoods most vulnerable to racial transition, and threatening with violence those residents who dared cross the city's "color line." Although they attracted some support from Atlanta's working-class whites, the Columbians were uniformly condemned by the city's press and targeted for arrest by its political establishment. After two incidents in October 1946 involving violence and demonstrating by members of the group, elected officials, members of the press, and local ministers all condemned the organization as a public menace requiring immediate attention. In November state officials moved to revoke the group's charter. By summer 1947, the group had dissolved, following the conviction of its leaders on charges of usurping police power and inciting to riot. Although the Columbians' existence may have been brief, their appearance nonetheless dramatized the racial tensions that characterized the postwar South. George Bright, one of the men tried in the 1958 bombing of the Temple in Atlanta had once belonged to the Columbians.

⁶⁸ The Ku Klux Klan (or Knights of the Ku Klux Klan today) is a white supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-black secret society, whose methods included terrorism and murder. It was founded in the South in the 1860's and is still in existence.

Henry: Interestingly enough, I met my wife at a young Zionists convention. I was President of the Southern region of Massada, which was a young [men's] Zionist group.⁶⁹ She was active in Young Haddassa.⁷⁰ We had a convention in Birmingham, Alabama. That's where we met and got married. My wife passed away in 1988. I've since then remarried. We have four children and fifteen grandchildren. I figure that's one way of making Jewish life go on and continue. My whole activity in those years was involved in Zionist meetings, and Zionist conventions, and traveling from city to city to organize young people to support the Zionist movement.

John: What is it about the Jewish culture and Jewish religion that is personally meaningful to you?

Henry: This is a difficult thing for me to explain; especially to my friends and people I go to synagogue with. We belonged to a synagogue in Germany that was considered Reform. Yet, the service—with one exception—was exactly like the service I go to in my Orthodox synagogue, Beth Jacob, where I belong today.⁷¹ The only difference was we had an organ. Other than that, it was entirely identical—men and women were sat separately; we wore *tallit*;⁷² the service was in Hebrew.

When I came to the United States, I didn't fit anywhere. The [American] Council of Judaism in Birmingham was a Reform oriented group and they wanted me to start going to a Reform temple, which was very difficult for me to understand and accept. Of course . . . the Reform movement in the South was very different from the Reform movement outside of the South. The Southern Reform movement was primarily very anti-Zionist. It was a base for the

⁶⁹ Masada, Young Men's Zionist Organization of America, grew out of the Zionist Brotherhood, a group founded in 1928 by young Jewish men in Cleveland, Ohio. The Brotherhood's purpose was twofold: to interest young men in Zionism, and to encourage and enhance Jewish culture in America. The Brotherhood was affiliated with the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). In 1929, the group assumed the name Masada, and in 1930, the ZOA recognized Masada as part of its movement and supported the formation of chapters throughout the country. The Zionist Organization of America was instrumental in mobilizing the support of the U.S. government, Congress, and the American public for the creation of Israel in 1948.

⁷⁰ *Hadassah*, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, is a volunteer organization founded in 1912. It supports health care and medical research, education and youth programs in Israel, and advocacy, education, and leadership development in the United States.

⁷¹ Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue on LaVista Road in Atlanta founded in 1942 by former members of Ahavath Achim who were looking for a more Orthodox congregation. Beth Jacob is now Atlanta's largest Orthodox congregation. The congregation first met in a rented grocery store on Parkway Drive. It moved to a permanent location on Boulevard when it purchased and renovated a two-story apartment building. In 1956, it converted the Tabernacle Baptist Church on Boulevard to a synagogue. It built its current synagogue building on a five-acre lot on LaVista Road in 1961.

⁷² A *tallit* is a prayer shawl fringed at each of the four corners in accordance with biblical law. The wearing of *tallit* at worship is obligatory only for married men, but it is customarily worn also by males of *bar mitzvah* age and older.

Council of Judaism,⁷³ which was the anti-Zionist group that adopted the Pittsburg Platform, et cetera.⁷⁴ Really on my own, I got very interested in and involved in Jewish things. I was the co-founder of a Conservative synagogue in Atlanta that no longer exists⁷⁵ . . . The more I kept learning, the further I got, I eventually affiliated with the Orthodox movement. I've been learning *Talmud* for thirty-five or forty years now.⁷⁶ I have a feeling for it. My parents on the other hand—while we were synagogue goers, we did not observe *kashrut*.⁷⁷ We ate a lot of things that were very un-kosher . . . but, on the other hand, we were synagogue attenders.

When I had my *bar mitzvah*, for example, it was totally the opposite of what I've experienced in the United States. Kids didn't have the Jewish education they have to day. Kids at a *bar mitzvah* . . . read from the *haftarah*⁷⁸ and not from the *Torah*.⁷⁹ In Germany, I read the entire *Torah* portion but never did a *haftarah*. I learned how to read a *Torah* as a child in Germany. This custom was totally unheard of in the United States. Through the fact that I've always been affiliated in . . . had such a deep interest in Jewish [religion], it's just guided my whole life. For twenty or thirty years, my main activity has been with the Greenfield Hebrew Academy.⁸⁰

John: With studying the *Talmud* for thirty or forty years, how do you fit the Holocaust into that? How do you integrate that?

⁷³ The American Council for Judaism (ACJ) is an organization of American Jews committed to the proposition that Jews are not a nationality but merely a religious group, adhering to the original stated principles of Reform Judaism. The ACJ was founded in June 1942 by a group of Reform rabbis who opposed the direction of their movement, including the issue of Zionism.

⁷⁴ The Pittsburgh Platform is a pivotal 1885 document in the history of the American Reform Movement in Judaism that called for Jews to adopt a modern approach to the practice of their faith.

⁷⁵ 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*).

⁷⁶ The *Talmud* [Hebrew: study] is the legal code spanning 1,000 years and based on the teachings of the *Bible*, the *Talmud* interprets biblical laws and commandments. It also contains a rich store of historic facts and traditions.

⁷⁷ Kosher/*Kashrut* is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Food that may be consumed according to *halakhah* (Jewish law) is termed 'kosher' in English. Kosher refers to Jewish laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten.

⁷⁸ The *haftarah* is a portion from the Prophets read after the reading from the Torah on Sabbaths, festivals, and fast days. On Sabbath days, the *haftarah* is selected because it relates to the day's Torah portion. On holidays and special Sabbaths, the *haftarah* is selected to coincide with the calendar.

⁷⁹ *Torah* [Hebrew: teaching] is a general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the *Talmud* and other rabbinical works. '*Sefer Torah*' refers to the sacred scroll on which the first five books of the *Bible* (the *Pentateuch*) are written.

⁸⁰ The Katherine and Jacob Greenfield Hebrew Academy was the first Jewish day school in Atlanta, and was founded in 1953. As of mid-2014 the Greenfield Hebrew Academy (grades pre-K through 8) and Yeshiva High School (grades 9-12) merged into one college preparatory day school now called the Atlanta Jewish Academy.

Henry: You can't. Last week on Friday, I was giving the [*parshah*] *ha-Shavua* . . . Every Friday at our dinner table . . . every Friday night.⁸¹ I've done it forever. Last week we were reading the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁸² I mentioned that that is the *parshah* that was read following Kristallnacht. The Jews who could go to service—most of them had their synagogues burned—but those who could go and hear the Torah read, that's what they read. What Sodom and Gomorrah really tells us is that our Jewish life has to be so exemplary, so special that we don't have any more Sodoms. Of course, Germany was a Sodom also. What happened with Abraham's [nephew, Lot, who chose to move to] Sodom, is he wanted to get away from Jewish life. He was affluent. He was looking for a different society really. Abraham gave him the chance to be with him, but he wanted to live there. I still feel that somewhere out there, you can't explain the Holocaust. There's no way you can explain. Some people went away from Judaism totally and others got closer to it because of it. But when you see how we survived, and the state of Israel was created, and so on, you've got to feel that perhaps there was a purpose. Perhaps . . . I don't know.

John: Your trips back to Germany have been in recent years. How extensive do you think the remorse and the learning has been?

Henry: I've asked the same question that you just did and I don't know. There are some people who are so sincere. I have one lady in particular whom I hear from constantly. She's spending her entire wherewithal, her entire time, her everything on redressing this. Every place that there's even any inkling of antisemitism, she's out there protesting. She's out there getting people together. But it's hard to gauge. It's so hard to . . . The question really is: If Germany had won the war, what would be the attitude today? Because, admittedly, there are a lot of people who the only thing they're sorry for is they lost the war. Every time we see people, we ask the same question. I can't give you an honest answer. It's very difficult . . . Suppose I meet a person your age. Is he going to say, "My father was a murderer?" Does he want to say, "My father was a murderer?" It's a tough call.

John: Let's switch back to your life in America. Tell more about what life was like in Atlanta in the early days, and how you pieced your career together, and so on.

⁸¹ *Parshah ha-Shavua* (popularly known as just '*parashah*' or '*Sidra*') is the weekly *Torah* readings scheduled to correspond with the Hebrew calendar.

⁸² Sodom and Gomorrah were two notoriously sinful cities in the biblical book of Genesis, destroyed by sulfur and fire because of their wickedness. Only the family of Abraham's nephew, Lot—who was deemed the only righteous resident of the city—was allowed to escape Sodom before its destruction.

Henry: When I came here, I was being supported by the community, which just went completely against my nature, so I immediately got a job. The first Saturday I worked as a clerk in a clothing store near Five Points, I made \$2.30.⁸³ I always remember that number. I went to work at eight in the morning and got home about midnight. I was getting five percent of what I sold. I've held jobs ever since and gone to school. What happened is [that] in Germany, some of our education was so far ahead of American education—particularly in mathematics—they didn't have a math class to put me in when I was fourteen years old. When they gave me tests and credits, the last years of high school, I went to school one or two hours a day, mainly in English courses—English literature and so on. I worked the rest of the day. I always held down part-time jobs—first in a pawnshop; then in a wholesale dress house. Then I went to work for an accountant and learned a trade, so to speak. I went to Georgia State [University] at night.⁸⁴ Georgia State was where the . . . Tabernacle on Lucky Street is, where the kids go for concerts now.⁸⁵ That was Georgia State.

Ruth: The Rialto?⁸⁶

Henry: No, not the Rialto. Further down, about five blocks away from there. I know some of my grandchildren go there for concerts. That was Georgia State. I went there and took accounting courses. When I got back [from World War II], I took an exam and started practicing. The guy I worked for left Atlanta because his parents ran a chicken farm in New Jersey. They were very busy with the war effort and they needed all the help they could get. They made him back up there and work for them. I didn't have a job, so I just started out on my own.

⁸³ Five Points refers to the downtown area of Atlanta. It was the central hub of Atlanta until the 1960's, when the economic and demographic center shifted north toward the suburbs.

⁸⁴ Initially intended as a night school, Georgia State University was established in 1913 as the Georgia Institute of Technology's Evening School of Commerce. A reorganization of the university system of Georgia in the 1930's led to the school becoming the Atlanta Extension Center of the University System of Georgia and allowed night students to earn degrees from several colleges in the university System. In 1947, the school became affiliated with the University of Georgia and was named the 'Atlanta Division of the University of Georgia.' The school was later removed from the University of Georgia in 1955 and became the Georgia State College of Business Administration. In 1961 the name was shortened to Georgia State College. It became Georgia State University in 1969.

⁸⁵ Tabernacle is a mid-size concert hall on Luckie Street in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The Tabernacle building has a rich & storied history. It opened in 1910 as The Broughton Tabernacle, serving a large Baptist congregation. The congregation relocated during the mid eighties and the building lay vacant until the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, when it was converted into a House of Blues club. After the Olympics, the building continued to operate as a music venue under a variety of different owners. The Tabernacle is currently operated by Live Nation and hosts many music concerts and comedy tours.

⁸⁶ The Rialto Theater was built in 1916 and was the Southeast's largest movie house with 925 seats. In 1962, the original Rialto was torn down and a larger Rialto was erected on the same site and remained open until 1989. Georgia State University renovated it into the Rialto Performing Arts Center in 1996.

[Atlanta] was a very small town. I tell my kids, for example, I dated a Jewish girl who lived on a farm, which is [now] the corner of Dunwoody [Road] and Mount Vernon [Road] . . . I used to go out to the farm to pick her up.

John: How would you describe the attitude towards black people in those days?

Henry: That was a . . . I don't know how to say that. It took many years for me to comprehend it. When I first came to Birmingham and I saw the word "colored," I didn't know what colored meant. When I saw the two water fountains and the two entrances in every business—the entrance for blacks or colored and for white, and the segregated . . . Let me go back a little further. I landed in New York [City, New York] in April of 1938. A social worker took me on a train from New York to Birmingham. We stopped a little bit south of Washington [D.C.] and I didn't know what was happening. I didn't understand it, but all the blacks had to go to one side of the train and the whites to the other side of the train. This social worker took a piece of paper out and tried to teach me about the Mason-Dixon line in two easy lessons.⁸⁷ I never could comprehend it until many years later. That was my first experience. This Jewish social worker was trying to explain to me what was taking place south of Washington D.C.

The first time I sat next to a black person was when Jackie Robinson played in Atlanta.⁸⁸ We had a triple-A team here in Atlanta and they had an exhibit with the [Brooklyn] Dodgers.⁸⁹ [Robinson] said the only way he would play was if the stadium was integrated.⁹⁰ That's the first time I sat next to a black person.

Then as an accountant, I got involved in the Southern Regional Council.⁹¹ If you read your history of the integration . . . the black-white problem, you'll find out that the Southern

⁸⁷ The Mason-Dixon Line was surveyed between 1763 and 1767 to settle a borderline dispute between Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia (then Virginia), setting their borders officially. Until about the mid-eighteenth century it was regarded as a cultural boundary between the North and the South but after Pennsylvania abolished slavery in 1780, it became the demarcation line for the legality of slavery.

⁸⁸ Jack Roosevelt Robinson (1919-1972) was an American professional baseball player born in Cairo, Georgia, who became the first African American to play in Major League Baseball in the modern era.

⁸⁹ Triple-A (AAA) or Class AAA is the highest level of play in Minor League Baseball in the United States. The Atlanta Crackers and Brooklyn Dodgers were Triple-A teams in the 1940's.

⁹⁰ In 1949, the Brooklyn Dodgers played a series of exhibition games in Macon and Atlanta, Georgia. The tour met vocal opposition from Ku Klux Klansmen, who vowed to keep an integrated team from facing the all-white Atlanta Crackers. Nevertheless, Robinson was met by enthusiastic fans and drew the largest crowds ever assembled at that time for a sporting event in the state. On April 10, more than 25,000 spectators—10,000 over capacity—filled the Ponce de Leon Ballpark for the last of three games against the Crackers. Many of those were African Americans from Cairo and other parts of South Georgia, who came in busloads to see the local hero play.

⁹¹ The Southern Regional Council (SRC) is a reform-oriented organization with headquarters in Atlanta. The SRC considered the successor to the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, with which it merged in 1944. The SRC sponsored the formation the Georgia Council on Human Relations (GCHR), in 1956, focused primarily on school

Regional Council is the granddaddy of all the organizations. I was the accountant, but then I was invited to go to board meetings to give the financial report. The Southern Regional Council believed in two things: one, in equality between the races and to upgrade the status of the white tenant farmer. They thought if they didn't get the white tenant farmer in a better position, this thing would never end. The Southern Regional Council was the sole organization that was responsible for the first black policeman in Atlanta. I was at those meeting when it took place.

Eleanor Roosevelt was on our board of directors.⁹² That's another story. When I was sixteen or fifteen . . . I can't tell you when it was. Wait a minute; I can tell you exactly when it was. It was after Hitler invaded Poland, which was in September 1939. About a month or two later, I became a delegate for Fulton County, Atlanta to the Junior Red Cross to go to the American Red Cross Convention.⁹³ Here I was, sixteen years old [and] two years in the country, invited to a tea party by Eleanor Roosevelt. I was in the Rose Garden of the White House.⁹⁴ I had breakfast with the Vice-President [John Nance] Garner—Cactus Jack Garner.⁹⁵ It was the thrill of a lifetime for somebody in my position. It's something I never will forget. Then I met Eleanor Roosevelt later with the Southern Regional Council.

I got very involved in that and very interested in that. Actually, that opened my eyes to what was going on much more than anything else. The Southern Regional Council was mainly supported by some of the more liberal churches and had a very fine staff. They had blacks and whites working together. This was way before integration took place. At first, I just didn't comprehend the whole thing. Of course, we participated in it. When you got on the bus, there was a pecking order: first, ladies—white ladies, white men; black ladies; black men. You stood

desegregation in its early years. The GCHR worked to keep Georgia's schools open in spite of threats by the state legislature to close the schools rather than integrate.

⁹² Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) was the wife of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the President of the United States from 1933 to 1945. She supported the New Deal policies of her husband and became an advocate for civil rights. After her husband's death in 1945, Eleanor continued to be an international author, speaker and politician and activist.

⁹³ The Junior Red Cross is the student's wing of the American Red Cross, also known as The American National Red Cross, a humanitarian organization that provides emergency assistance, disaster relief, and disaster preparedness education in the United States. It is a students' movement organized within schools that began in the late nineteenth century. In 1939, the American Red Cross opened its annual convention for members of the American Red Cross and Junior Red Cross on April 24 in Washington, D.C.

⁹⁴ The White House Rose Garden is a garden bordering the Oval Office and the West Wing of the White House in Washington, D.C., United States.

⁹⁵ John Nance Garner III, known among his contemporaries as "Cactus Jack", was an American Democratic politician from Texas. From 1933 to 1941, he served as the 32nd Vice President of the United States.

in line [but] you got on the bus in that order, no matter who was first and who was last. That was just the way it was.

John: What was your opinion about it personally?

Henry: As I said, at first, when I lived in Birmingham, I don't think I really comprehended it. World War II is when I really started feeling it. I got discharged from the Army. I was sent back from Fort Jackson to Atlanta. Five of us took a taxicab. There were three rednecks⁹⁶—I'm using that term purposely. They were genuine rednecks—myself, and a black soldier. We stopped at Costa's Drug Store in Athens [Georgia].⁹⁷ We wanted to get a bite. Costa wouldn't let that black soldier in. Those rednecks nearly killed the guy in the drug store. They were so upset. The same people who were probably brought up being against blacks saw a fellow soldier being denied service. They were vicious, violent about it. But the Army was segregated. Every outfit was completely segregated so I've got to admit I didn't experience it or really have a feeling until the war was over, I think.

John: Was there any rationale given in the Army about why it was segregated?

Henry: The Southern senators and congressmen ran every military committee in [the United States] Congress. [Carl] Vinson, for example, ran the Armed Services committee forever.⁹⁸ Senator [Walter] George⁹⁹ . . . The Southern Democrats ran the Congress in those days.¹⁰⁰ I think

⁹⁶ 'Redneck' is a derogatory slang term referring to poor, uneducated white farmers deemed to be insufficiently liberal, especially from the Southern United States.

⁹⁷ Athens is a city in northeast Georgia, known for its antebellum architecture and as the home of the University of Georgia. It is approximately 70 miles (112 kilometers) northeast of Atlanta.

⁹⁸ Carl Vinson (1883-1981) was an American politician from the state of Georgia. He was a Democrat and served for more than 50 years in the United States House of Representatives. He was known as "The Father of the Two-Ocean Navy". In 1931, Vinson became chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee. Following World War II, the House Naval Affairs Committee was merged with the Military Affairs Committee to become the House Armed Services Committee. Vinson served as ranking minority member of the committee for two years before becoming Chairman in early 1949 and held this position, with the exception of two years in the early 1950's, until his retirement in 1965.

⁹⁹ Walter Franklin George (1878—1957) was an American politician from the state of Georgia. He was a long-time Democratic United States Senator and was President pro tempore of the United States Senate from 1955 to 1957. He served as Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee from 1941 to 1946 and generally supported Roosevelt's handling of World War II. After the war, George emerged as a leading opponent against efforts to end racial segregation.

¹⁰⁰ In the 1930's, Southern white Democrats constituted a powerful block in Congress. Southern members of Congress who had opposed race reforms in the 1910's and 1920's soon became influential enough to thwart such "interferences." Accruing seniority, many ascended to powerful positions on Capitol Hill during the 1930's. Benefiting from the longevity conferred by their party, which held a virtual lock on elective office in the South, many served long terms in secure districts, earning important leadership posts and perpetuating the disenfranchisement of African Americans.

[Dwight D.] Eisenhower¹⁰¹ was the one who desegregated it after World War II, when he was President.¹⁰²

John: How would you describe the attitude toward Jewish people or Jewish culture here?

Henry: When I came to Birmingham, I was the first Jewish person to come out of Germany to Birmingham. I became a centerpiece. Every Sunday, I was talking in church and I could even speak English hardly. There was a lot of interest in it. I did not experience a whole lot of antisemitism. There was always some. I mean I experienced some in the Army, some in Atlanta, some in business even, but on the whole, not a heck of a lot.

John: Can you describe what kind of philosophy or worldview you picked up from your parents?

Henry: Probably very little. I was too young to be involved in those things. I think whatever I picked up I picked up on my own later, I'm afraid to say.

John: How would you describe your personality and nature as a teenager?

Henry: When I first came over, obviously your first objective is to assimilate, to be like everybody else. Only through my exposure to these other things—in particular the Zionist youth groups—did I change any. My first goal was to be like everybody else—learn how to Jitterbug,¹⁰³ to play basketball . . . All these things were important. This happened to the many Jews who assimilated in prior generations because their first goal was to make a living. That's why many Orthodox people gave up the Shabbat, gave up this, and gave up that. It's because your first goal is to survive. I guess I wasn't any different.

John: Sounds like you were unusually outgoing and confident to join all the committees, and start programs, and be a delegate. How is that you could be like that?

¹⁰¹ Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969) was the 34th President of the United States, serving from 1953 until 1961. He was a five-star general in the United States Army during World War II and served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe.

¹⁰² On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, committing the government to integrating the segregated military. It abolished discrimination "on the basis of race, color, religion or national origin" in the United States Armed Forces. The executive order eventually led to the end of segregation in the services.

¹⁰³ The "Jitterbug" (initially called the "Hop") first became popular in the 1920's, although its popularity was limited primarily to Harlem. The name "Lindy" was appended to the "Hop" in 1927, supposedly in commemoration of Charles Lindbergh's famous flight across the Atlantic. In the 1930's when white dancers discovered the Lindy, the name "Jitterbug" often was used to describe the dance. It was accompanied by jazz music, which by the 1930's was also called 'Swing.'

Henry: I don't know. It's just some people . . . Everybody looks for things to get their kicks I guess. It could also be being with people who are interested in that sort of stuff, who had an interest.

John: How did you go about learning to be a father and to be a family man, since your own childhood was cut short like that?

Henry: I may not have learned it yet. I don't know.

John: I'll interview your kids on that one.

Henry: Yes, you'll have to ask them. I don't know, but I think that's something everybody has to learn. Necessity is the best teacher.

John: Describe your adoptive family—who they were and what that was like for you.

Henry: This was a widow who had two children. She happened to be . . . In those days, her family was the largest Jewish family in Atlanta as far as numbers. She was related to almost everybody in town. Because of her personality, her house was always the center of family meetings and get-togethers. I was accepted.

John: Which family?

Henry: Her name was Fannie Asman, but you wouldn't know her by that name.¹⁰⁴ You know the Lichtenstein's¹⁰⁵ that are involved in the Federation [and] the Alterman's?¹⁰⁶ All of these people were family. Meyer Balser was a cousin.¹⁰⁷ I [could] go on and on. They used to go to her house to . . . meet. She just sort of had that kind of personality.

¹⁰⁴ Fannie Schoenberg Asman (1885—1947) was born in Latvia and had one son, David, and one daughter. In 1940, she lived on Washington Terrace in Atlanta, Georgia and had five boarders, including Henry.

¹⁰⁵ The Lichtenstein family refers to descendants of Morris Lichtenstein (1868-1926), who was born in Russia, immigrated to the United States in 1890, and settled in Atlanta in 1892. In 1913, he entered the insurance and loan business and organized the Mutual Savings Company later known as the Morris Lichtenstein & Company, General Insurance & Loans. Other interests were the Montefiore Relief Association, the Morris Lichtenstein Free Loan Society, the Jewish Educational Alliance and the Federation of Jewish Charities. Lichtenstein was chairman of the Free Loan Fund that was founded in the 1890's and renamed the Morris Lichtenstein Free Loan Fund as a tribute after his death. The Free Loan Fund was an important source of capital for Jewish merchants. It became a functional department of the Federation of Jewish Charities in 1912, the forerunner of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta.

¹⁰⁶ The Alterman family refers to descendants of five brothers who, along with their father Louis Alterman, founded the grocery business, which operated the Big Apple and Food Giant grocery chain that once commanded nearly one-third of Georgia's retail grocery business. The family has long been active in a wide variety of Jewish community organizations.

¹⁰⁷ Atlanta native Meyer Balser (1908-2004) was a business and civic leader. He served as chairman of the Red Cross and Community Chest (predecessor to United Way) campaigns. He was twice named 'Man of the Year' of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, where he was a leading insurance agent for many years. He received numerous accolades and awards for his leadership in Atlanta's Jewish community including the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and the Atlanta Jewish Federation.

[Fanny] had a daughter and a son. The son went into [military] service when I did. When he came out, he made *aliyah* to Israel, fought in the War of Independence,¹⁰⁸ and then became a professor at Hebrew University.¹⁰⁹ We're just like brothers. The daughter lived all over the United States and retired to Atlanta about five years ago, basically because of me. She's a widow now.

It was a very interesting household. I guess I was just very lucky that it happened to me.

John: What was it like to go to Germany as a soldier, considering what had happened just a few years earlier?

Henry: This question was asked of me all the time by non-Jews. They couldn't understand. [They wondered,] "How could you fight against the homeland?" To me it was an absolute pleasure to do this. I was turned down for military service because, under the law, I was an enemy alien.¹¹⁰ I had a German passport. I had to file a Presidential appeal to get into the Army. I had no question that's what I wanted to do, that's what I ought to do, and that's where I ought to be. I was at Normandy.¹¹¹ <Points off camera> That's my original Normandy invasion map. I had to do it. Even today every once in awhile, non-Jews can't understand it. [They ask,] "How could you fight against your homeland?" To me, there was not even a question. I met a number of boys who had come over from Germany and we were all in the service. We were all glad to be there.

John: Talk about your wife and kids. What are they like?

Henry: My wife passed away in 1988. By profession, she was a journalist but never practiced it when we started having children. She was also a musician. She played in the Birmingham

¹⁰⁸ 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.

¹⁰⁹ Hebrew University of Jerusalem is Israel's second oldest university, established in 1918, 30 years before the State of Israel. Hebrew University has three campuses in Jerusalem and one in Rehovot.

¹¹⁰ An 'alien' is someone who is living in a country but is not a citizen or national of that country. They become an 'enemy alien' during times of conflict with the country where they retain citizenship from. During World War II, Japanese, Italians, and Germans who had not become American citizens were legally considered enemy aliens and were subjected to many restrictions, which often included internment. Although Jewish-Europeans like Henry were political refugees, they were still considered enemy aliens.

¹¹¹ Normandy is a region of northern France. The Normandy landings (codenamed 'Operation Neptune') were the landing operations on June 6, 1944 (termed 'D-Day') of the Allied invasion of Normandy (known in its entirety as 'Operation Overlord') during World War II.

Symphony and then in Atlanta, she played in some amateur symphonies. She actually had as much or more of this Jewishness than I did in terms of observing, and practicing, and so on.

My oldest daughter made *aliyah* to Israel in 1976. She opened up a bookstore in Jerusalem. It became very famous. It's still written up in all the tour books. When my wife got sick, she came back to Atlanta. She's been here ever since. She and her husband are in the library manufacturing business. They manufacture library supplies. They have three children. Their oldest son is now at a Yeshiva and wants to become an Orthodox rabbi.¹¹² They're very involved in the Jewish High School. They're in leadership positions there and [are] also involved in the Hebrew Academy. My son-in-law is assistant lay rabbi in the synagogue. When the rabbi goes on vacation, he takes over, reads the Torah, and so on.

My number two son is in the accounting firm with us. He has four children. He went to the University of Georgia.¹¹³ My oldest daughter, incidentally, went to Washington University in St. Louis [Missouri]¹¹⁴ and the Hebrew University.

My number three child is another son. He's a CEO of a big . . . regional real estate company. He has three children.

My youngest daughter is an artist. She's married to an attorney. They both live a very Orthodox life. They also have five children. I'll tell you an interesting story on Judaica. When the Coca Cola Company had the split off with Coca Cola and Coca Cola Enterprises many years ago, it was one of the major stock issues in this country. [My son-in-law] handled that whole stock issue. They were his client. When all this was going on, they had an emergency meeting on Shabbat. Because of him, they changed it to a Sunday. [That] shows it can be done. You can lead a Jewish life and Jewish existence and pursue your affairs.

Then on top of the four children, we adopted—not adopted, we signed an affidavit for—the children of a Cuban cousin during the [Fidel] Castro thing, so we took in two more children.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Yeshiva* [Hebrew: sitting] is a Jewish educational institution for religious instruction that is equivalent to high school. It also refers to a *Talmudic* college for unmarried male students from their teenage years to their early twenties.

¹¹³ The University of Georgia, founded in 1785, also referred to as UGA or simply Georgia, is an American public research university in the city of Athens in the U.S. state of Georgia.

¹¹⁴ George Washington University (GW, GWU, or George Washington) is a private research university in Washington, D.C. It was chartered by an act of the United States Congress in 1821. GWU is consistently ranked as one of the most prestigious and expensive universities in the United States.

¹¹⁵ Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz (1926-2016) was a Cuban Communist revolutionary and politician who governed the Republic of Cuba as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1976 and then as President from 1976 to 2008. He was leader of

<End Tape 1>

<Start Tape 2>

Henry: When Castro came in power, one of my cousins wanted out. He couldn't get out. When he wanted help for the children, I said, "Without any question, we've got to take them because I remember my own parents . . ." When I tried to get an affidavit for my mother in Birmingham, nobody would sign an affidavit. I went as a fourteen year old kid, trying to get people to sign an affidavit and nobody would sign anything. Next thing I knew, she died. Without any hesitation, we took in these two girls. They're living in Atlanta.

Then in 1990, I got married again. This woman and her husband were best friends with my first wife and myself. Her husband died also. The children had known each other for thirty years. They were always good friends. She has four children also; so now we have eight children, eight [daughter- and son-]in-laws, and twenty-five grandchildren between the two of us . . . I forget what your question was.

John: Just who was in your family. What would you say you've accomplished in your work in the last fifty years that you are proud of?

Henry: I don't know. I guess most of it's what I've done for the Hebrew Academy in terms of helping it grow [and] a number of things I've done for the Federation. I've held every office over there at one time or another. I never was President but I was acting President while the President was overseas for three months. I started a lot of policies at the Federation that are still in existence. I chaired the first committee for what is now the Jewish Vocational Service. I chaired the first committee for what is now for the Retarded Children. I chaired the committee that began the Jewish Educational Service. I changed the policy at the Federation of gifts in kind. A number of things are still here that I began, but most of my activity has been for the Hebrew Academy.

John: I've got an abstract question. Do you ever think back to the 1930's? If you had been an older, more influential Jewish leader in Germany, would you have done anything differently? Do you ever imagine yourself in those days?

Henry: No, I don't think so. I can't address it. I know I probably wouldn't have been an accountant or an attorney. At the age of fourteen, you have to go into an apprenticeship in Germany unless you go to a higher school of learning, which was impossible for Jews. My father

the Cuban Revolution, an armed uprising in Cuba that overthrew the government of Fulgencio Batista on January 1, 1959.

had taken me to a guy who manufactured barrels. I was supposed to learn how to make barrels. This happened a week before I came to the United States.

John: How much discussion was there after the war about your particular life and what happened to your family? Did you process the past at all?

Henry: I did not for a long time. I was like many other people. I couldn't get myself to file a restitution claim. I did not speak about it much until much later, when the children started asking questions. At that point, I got involved in genealogy and put together a book on our family, which is also at the Federation . . . There should be two. One was on the genealogy. Of course, it was the result of a lot of research that I had done. Then I figured, you've got to talk about it and you've got to let people know. It's . . .

John: How do you suppose your particular past has affected or colored your life as compared to anyone else your age?

Henry: I'm more vigilant. Everything that's Jewish [related] bothers me. When things happen in Israel, I go to pieces. The first few nights of this latest episode, I couldn't even sleep. I'm serious. I just take it too hard. That's—fortunately or unfortunately—my lifestyle.

John: Another abstract question: If you were an influential Jewish leader, what would your suggestions be? Would you make any changes or take different approaches?

Henry: You mean to the Israeli situation?

John: On that topic.

Henry: No. I have learned over life, that you can't change people. You can't change things. There will always be people who feel like you and there will always be people who feel the other way. You just can't . . . You have to lead by example and hope that people will follow you. But to change things other than by example, it's beyond us.

John: Did you try to teach or raise your children any particular way, with any particular values, to give certain messages?

Henry: Yes. Our Jewish existence has always been a major part of raising our kids, without any question. I always tell people: when my son was about to be *bar mitzvah*, we got a phone call from a family wanting us to do a carpool because the kids had to go to synagogue so many *Shabbitzim* before the *bar mitzvah*. I said, "We don't carpool to a synagogue. Either we all go or nobody goes." We always went to synagogue as a family. We didn't send a kid because he had to go. Friday night is I guess where I set the limit. I don't ride and all that on Shabbat. Friday night

has always been special in our family. For many years, Friday night we always had anyone with children, grandchildren, sitting around our table on Friday night. When my kids were in high school, Friday night was where I drew the line. We've encouraged all of them to get involved with the Jewish community and all of them are, thank G-d. I feel good about it. Nothing's ever 100 percent. Not everyone does it to the same degree. I'd be lying if I told you that, but we did influence them greatly on that. Our house was kosher and all the kids knew it. Now, three out of the four of them still observe *kashrut*.

John: How much has anger been a part of your life, or has it?

Henry: I don't know. I can't tell.

John: Tying it in with that long process of doing reparations and getting denials . . .

Henry: During the time I was filing those claims, I was pretty angry. You could tell by some of the correspondence I had with some of the courts. I had a client who had stomach problems that was directly related to his time starving in the camps. The German court turned down our claim because he didn't go to a doctor twice a year to check on it after three doctors told him, "There's nothing we can do." The letter I sent to the court is one of those letters you don't send to the court. I said, "Suppose if somebody lost an arm. Would he be denied compensation because he didn't try to glue it on every year?" I made these comments all the time. In those days, the courts were just looking for any nit-picking thing to deny a claim—just like [how they said] I was a liar.

I mean, my father's dead and . . . I forgot to mention this and I'm sorry. The hospital, on the death certificate, did say that he died from heart failure. That became exhibit number one and that's why I was turned down basically. This was normal as was proven later. [They claimed that] the Germans didn't kill anybody; people died from heart failure.

John: Or shot while trying to escape . . .

Henry: Yes.

John: Is there anything else you would like to mention that we haven't covered or asked about?

Henry: No, not that I can think of. Like I said, these things have to be documented. When you read Holocaust deniers, they . . . When our generation is gone, there's going to be no one left to speak for it. I believe in it and I appreciate it.

John: What's your understanding of why people would deny this—not old Germans as you've already remarked on that generation? Why would other people deny this?

Henry: It's purely antisemitism because largely you can't deny it. There's no thinking person that can deny that with any honesty. It has to be a different motivation altogether, which is antisemitism and nothing else. I mean, there's Deborah Lipstadt that made a fool out of Irving.¹¹⁶ I'll tell you an interesting thing. I have a client who is a history professor at Emory [University].¹¹⁷ He and I were discussing this trial and I was shocked at his answer. He was telling me that he didn't understand it because Irving is a respected historian. He used his books all the time. Of course, during the trial we found out that he can be a respected historian; nevertheless, he didn't even finish high school. How the historian community can look at him as a respected historian baffles me. This was the discussion I had with an Emory history professor.

John: How much interaction have you had with other survivors and people of that generation?

Henry: Quite a bit. Yes, I know most of the community of survivors in Atlanta. A lot of them do business with me. A lot of them I see socially. Of course, everybody has a different story to tell. There's no two alike.

John: How does it make you feel that you fortunately got out early as opposed to what a lot of these other folks had to go through?

Henry: I feel very lucky about. I just always regretted that I could never bring my parents here. I desperately tried to get affidavits. I have letters from my mother in which she desperately signed up for countries I'd never heard of in those days.

John: Do you have any kind of belief or conviction of why you managed to survive like you did?

Henry: No.

John: Just luck?

Henry: Just luck, faith, or *bashert* [Yiddish: destiny], or whatever you want to call it.

John: Any last things you might want to mention?

Henry: No.

¹¹⁶ In 1996, historian and Holocaust denier David Irving sued Emory University Professor Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin Books, seeking damages over Lipstadt's 1994 book, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, which he claimed had generated waves of hatred against him. In April 2000, the courts ruled in favor of Lipstadt.

¹¹⁷ Emory University is a top-ranking private university in Atlanta.

John: Thank you for that story.

Henry: Thank you.

<End Tape 2>

Interview Ends

Cuba Family Archives