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Donald Bender interview for The Survivors of the Holocaust Oral History Project

Donald Bender

Julie Orenstein

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Donald Bender
7/11/84
by Julie Orenstein

001 Tape One Begin Side One Donald Bender T1S1P1

002 jo This is an interview with Donald Bender by Julie Orenstein conducted July 11, 1984, in the kitchen of his home. Can you tell me your full name?

005 db Donald Henry Bender.

jo And may I ask your age?

db I'm 70.

jo And where were you born?

db In Wappertal. That was part of Prussia and now they are twin cities, now. They have been combined. They're called Elberfeld and Barmen.

jo And did you grow up there?

db Yes, I did.

010 jo What was it like? Was it a big city or a small town?

db Well now we never considered the borderline between one town and the other, therefore it was around 500,000. Idyllic located among mountains around there, or hilly, I mean, not real mountains.

jo And was it a big commercial center or...

015 db Yes, very much textile and surrounded by family-owned hardware producing enterprise. Small places, where-you may be familiar with the name Solingen Zwillingwerk cutlery and reimsig household appliances. Washing machine and such, grinders, and so on, and a lot of these small factories that were family owned and run by the family members in Barmen was a lot of textiles, spinneries, I mean, where they got the yarn and also rubber bands quite a bit.

020 jo And do you know how or when your family came to that city?

db Well my family originally came from another part of Germany, the Maifeld region near Koblenz and Mayen. I don't know whether you

025 know these towns or not. In fact my parents were cousins and my father was born in Münstermaifeld which is a small city and my mother was born in Polch which is a small overgrown village and-you could walk it in an hour and fifteen minutes, the distance.

jo What did they do for a living?

db My father was a typesetter, and hand typesetter, you know, mother never worked.

- jo And what kind of education did they have?
- 030 db They all had grade school education.
- jo And did your father ever go to college at all?
- db No he did not. He served his apprenticeship as a typesetter four years and then he went to Elberfeld after eight. Besides later on in life when he had already bought him home he also did beauty care and such for animal, I mean dogs. And I mean trimming and clipping ears and all this kind of stuff that goes with it, so he had a sideline to supplement the income.
- 035 jo And he did this as you were growing up?
- db Oh, yeah. In fact I had to help him sometime to hold the dogs.
- jo And were they very religious?
- db Uh, my mother was somehow religious. My father was not.
- 040 jo He didn't go to temple?
- db No.
- jo Did your mother send you?
- db I went to Hebrew school in preparation to be bar mitzvah and I was bar mitzvah against my own will because I was dead set against it. I had a difference of opinion with our Hebrew teacher. I resented his favoring the children of the rich people and I told him off in class and walked out.
- 045 jo That sounds just like my husband.
- db I walked out on him. I said I wasn't coming back and I didn't. I had to be coaxed by the cantor, you know, that I be prepared for bar mitzvah. I didn't want to be bar mitzvah at that time, you know. So, I got bar mitzvah and I used to know how to read. I made it my purpose to forget all about it and I can't read anymore.
- 050 jo Did your father want you to be bar mitzvah? Was...
- db Uh, that was more like my mother more than anything else.
- jo Did you have brothers and sisters?
- db I had one sister.

- jo Was she older or younger?
- db She was just less than a year younger-or older.
- jo And did anybody else live in your house with you, grandparents or aunts or uncles?
- 055 db No, no. No family members. We had tenants.
- jo You had tenants?
- db Yeah.
- jo Did you live in an apartment building?
- db No, no, we owned a private home, but the upstairs was divided into apartments and we had three tenants.
- jo Do you remember what they were like at all, were-or did they change all the time?
- db No they didn't change too often, but there were about 40 people lets put it that way. All Gentiles.
- jo Were they men-Gentiles?
- db Yeah, Gentiles.
- 060 jo Usually men or couples?
- db They were families.
- jo What language was spoken in your home?
- db German only.
- jo No other languages?
- db No other languages.
- jo Your parents didn't practice or learn in school any other languages?
- db No.
- jo Did you at all? Learn in school?
- db Beg your pardon?
- jo Did you learn in school, any languages?

- db I did not.
- 065 jo What was your social standing? Did you think of yourself as a little richer than everyone else or a little poorer?
- db No!
- jo Just average-
- db We were a family of the laboring class, working family.
- jo And did your parents have any Jewish friends or any Gentile friends?
- db No. Almost exclusive Gentile friends.
- jo And so they were pretty much assimilated into-
- db Definitely.
- jo They didn't live in a Jewish neighborhood?
- 070 db No.
- jo Did they go to any social events at the synagogue?
- db My mother used to attend services and my sister sometime would go. It was the male part of the family didn't show much interest in this.
- jo That's interesting, because usually the women didn't go and the men did.
- db No, no.
- 075 jo So that was the opposite. Did they belong to groups, then, outside the synagogue? Did they belong to clubs or-
- db Yes. My father was very much interested in dog breeding, racing, and my mother used to have all kinds of fowl for hobbies. I mean chickens, geese, and ducks, and turkeys--all this stuff--and used to join organizations that way, I mean. In fact, he used to raise prize-winning Pomeranians. Had a house full of silver cups and all this stuff and personally when I was growing up I belonged to the Socialist Labor Youth. I was a Socialist. I'm still a Social Democrat by heart and so was my father.
- 080 jo That was a little risky, wasn't it?
- 085 db I was very active and later on I joined the Reichbanner which was the Socialist militia and I was well known and that's why later on things began to happen.

- jo Yeah. When you were young did your parents go to the theater or to concerts?
- db Once in a while yes. I mean I used to go to variety performances with my dad and so on. I used to go see it sometimes. See some of the operettas. Operas—I never could understand what they were singing about even in German. Operettas, yes, I mean "Fliedermaus" and "The Merry Widow," something like that. And we had the necessary supply of records of the orchestra music. And my father used to raise canaries. When it comes to animals we like 'em all. And my grandparents lived in the country, both sides, they usually had cows and horses and that was a joy to me. I used to make pets out of the horse or the cows.
- jo So your childhood—In your childhood you were pretty much surrounded by animals.
- db Oh, yeah. On the average we had about a dozen dogs, I mean we were breeding anyhow, and one or more cats. Yes.
- jo And do you remember very much about your childhood before you started school? What it was like?
- db Uh, not too much. I spent part of my really early youth with my grandparents—World War I. See I went to school at my grandparents home until I was almost close to 8, I mean, one or more years of school there because they had something to eat and there was nothing to eat in the city. In fact my sister and I were split up. My sister was with my grandparents on my mother's side and I was with the grandparents on my father's side.
- jo So that was for economic reasons because they...
- db Because there was no food in the city. World War I, in the aftermath, yes. I was about 8 years old when I came back home and started going to school in my hometown.
- jo And what year was that when you came back home, when you were 8?
- db Well, now, let's figure it out. 8 years—I was about 8 years old. That was about '21 1921 or '22, something like that.
- jo OK, let's see and then when you came back—well, when you were with your grandparents were you in public school?
- db Yeah, in fact in the city where I was with my grandparents they didn't have any real public school, they had a seminary school where the seminary students like interns taught in their last years of their education. We had a different teacher each hour. Almost—it was a good school, yes, and in fact the teachers were not allowed to lay hands on us. If we misbehaved we stand in the

120 aisle and the—I don't know what they called him, the name. The
guy who was in charge of the church. Not the priest. Used to
come every hour around and ask, "What did this one do? What did
that one"—and he used to beat the devil out of us. Oh, yeah, I'll
never forget his name. He used to do a good job.

jo So he could spank you, but not...

db I got it only once, that was enough. He used to use the hickory
125 stick you use to hang the sausage in the smokehouse with so-very
effective.

jo I imagine.

db Yes. So I went to school there for almost two years and then came
home and then I started going to public school. Well, I was a
fire redhead and very quick-tempered and consequently at school I
130 did not tolerate a female teacher to spank me and I found that I
changed schools. Oh, I got nasty grades, too, on account of it,
because when she put me over her knee, I had a safety pin in my
lapel and I used it. She didn't attempt to spank me anymore, so.
Then I switched to a school which was free of that action and that
135 was a Catholic school, I think, or whatever, I don't know. Any-
ways there I was alright. I used to fight, I mean, I was short,
but I could fight. Consequently, I got along. Somebody call me a
dirty Jew, I'd slap their face before I even knew it. The fight
was on. Or any name. So I went through school and as far as
140 qualification was concerned I never had any problems with the sub-
jects. I was always among the leaders. I used to have competi-
tion for a prize where composition is concerned or math I was
among the first three at all times and after that my father wanted
to send me to higher education, but I was afraid of my dad. I
145 figured, if I flunk it once he'll beat the living daylights out of
me. Because when he found out I got a spanking at school I got
another one at home. That's the way it was. So I didn't want to
go. So I became apprenticed plumbing and tinning four years,
took my exam, I'm a journeyman plumber and tinner. I still have
my diploma. Oh, yeah.

jo How old were you when you started your apprenticeship?

db I left school when I was fourteen. I mean that's the usual time
150 over there. That's when you're done with grade school. Now,
there when I was apprenticed I also attended the occupational
school one day a week and took additional courses in mechanical
drawings and such. In other words, I got a complete education as
a plumber and tinner including copper spinning. I mean I still
can do it, but the thing is that my first master—we had a differ-
155 ence of opinion. I didn't want to work overtime and he fired me
so I got a second master to finish my apprenticeship and I got
fired from him because he cheated me out of part of my wages. I

160 got paid for the first year instead of getting the second and third year apprenticeship, so the minute I got done with the third year I got fired, naturally, and I was unemployed. In fact I did my pieces for the exam in another man's shop. Alright, so I was unemployed for a while.

jo Uh, let's--let's go back to your public school years. Was there a lot of anti-Semitism in the school?

db Uh, not too much.

jo You weren't treated--

db Every once in a while you were called a dirty Jew and that's when the fight started, I mean, I used to beat the hell out of 'em.

165 jo Just the other students, then, no--teachers didn't--

db No teachers, no, no, you didn't feel it especially in the school without religion. It was a more Socialistic direction and we got along fine and besides that I used to fight so well that if someone were foolish enough and we got into each other and realized we were an even match then we became friends. Oh, yeah.

170 jo And then during your apprenticeship were you apprenticed mostly to Gentiles?

db Only. Exclusively.

jo And they never treated you badly?

db No. Oh, my second boss, he made a mistake once, he slapped me once and he never repeated that because I threw a piece of equipment at him and missed him. If I woulda hit him it woulda killed him.

jo Oh, boy.

175 db Like I said. I was quick-tempered. And I just warned him that he better never do it again. He never tried it. No, uh, then I was unemployed after my apprenticeship was up and drew unemployment compensation which wasn't very much. Any rate the fifth of March, 1933, was the last so-called legal election--

jo How old were you then?

180 db Well, uh, let's see 1933. I was 20 years old. They broke into my parents' home to come and get me. But before that they once threw a bomb in the house that went off and I slept right through it. Yeah. We lived on the main floor, but I was sleeping on the third floor. I never heard it.

jo Now why did they know you? You said you were well known.

185 db Because I was active as a member of the Socialist Labor Youth and also later on with the Reichbanner which is the Socialist militia. Each party had their own militia.

jo When did you join the militia?

190 db When I was about 14 years old. Something like that-15. I also was a member of the labor union. I was active. So, at any rate, the fifth of March, 1933, they broke into the house-they're coming for me. And I went out the back fence into my neighbor's place which was a restaurant and a bowling alley, and that woman politely opened the door for the stormtroopers to come and get me. And they come in, they surrounded me, one of them laid the, uh, hit me with the rubber truncheon across my chest and later I had blisters underneath the skin. At any rate-and then started to lead me out and the minute I was out the door I threw my arms
195 around-I used to be strong-threw them aside and started running zigzag at first, but they were getting too close and they were firing at me, but they were getting too close, and then I abandoned zigzagging and ran straight. I got hit in the lung because I spit blood. I knew it was in my lung and a little later on I got shot in the knee, but I still could run and I got to the
200 police station. And at that time they were not formed as member of the political party and there I asked them which hospital to go to, because I knew which one of them was fair and they called an ambulance and I was taken to the hospital. And I spent four
205 years-weeks in the hospital and while there I had a brace on my leg up to my seat and I used to take that darn thing off and go to the bathroom and that made that made my knee swell up again and they had to apply it again for a while longer. At any rate, when I was released from there-it was a Catholic hospital. They were
210 very good to us. The Nazis, they were not allowed to come in, so, uh, I mean, just to show you something-you see that one?

jo Oh, yeah.

db That's the bullet hole.

jo Right there by your knee cap.

db It just grazed my knee cap. It didn't, uh, bother it. However, I still maintain a high sensitivity over here (indicates the area where the bullet existed on the outside of his left leg). In fact, for a year I couldn't stand a sheet on my leg. I had to
215 sleep with my leg stuck out. Well, so, the day I was released--
the same morning I took off on a bike and started visiting all my
relatives. I had some in Cologne, I had some in, uh,
München-Gladbach and I was heading toward my grandparents in
Münstermaifeld, visited all of them, kept on going, and procured
220 some spending money by knocking on a Jewish family's door, so, uh,
in Jewish they say a schnorer.

(both laugh)

jo I know the meaning.

db Because I had to have some money, see, I did that for a while and I stayed with a relative in a small place, Kaisersesh, I mean, not too far from the (near Kochem on the Mosel). And then I
225 decided to move on and I worked my way into the Saar Basin. On
the border I got rid of my bike and I smuggled across the border
without a passport. Hell, I never had one in my life 'til I came
to this country. Then--

jo What border did you cross? Into what country?

db Uh, the Saar Basin was separate. I mean the French were
230 occupying that after World War I and you had to cross the border
at night. So I got into the Saar Basin. I had to work my way
down to the French border and in Forbach I went to the police
station there. I mean a Jewish organization and they referred me
to the police station--Now wait a minute. Back, back, back. I
235 went to the Sheriff's station down in--is your, are you running
out?--Anyway, I forget now, I can't think of the name of that
place down there, oh, in Saar Basin I went to the Jewish help
station and they referred--told me where to cross the border into
France. I mean, you have to walk across. At night time I walked
across and that night I spent in the woods. The next day I went
240 to the foreign office. The foreign office which was in the police
station in Forbach. It was French. Still is. And there I got a
so-called passpartout instead of a passport which allowed me to be
245 a political refugee. I was political, because they knew my whole
story. And then they shipped me off to Metz and in Metz I got
asked, "Would you like to go to Paris?" Now, Paris was like a
magnet, you know. The city of lights. Naturally, I wanted to go
to Paris. So, fine, first we nearly starved to death because we

250 got down, I think it was a Saturday then. I'm not sure. Yeah, we
had to wait for the Sabbath was over before they fed us. At any
rate, the next day we had to go to welfare to get a ticket, and
255 the ticket was as big as a legal paper, to go to Paris, but in
Paris we were referred to the Jewish Hias and report there which,
uh, provided us with a place to stay and meal tickets. Oh, it
sounded so good. They gave us lodging at the palais de peuple
260 that's how they present it, "peoples palace." You know what it
was? Salvation Army. Yeah, Salvation Army. Well, we got over
there, we had a cubicle there and one meal a day. I nearly
starved to death. Besides I was a heavy smoker and I was running
out of money. I used to sell some of the meal tickets to buy
265 tobacco. Well I stayed there. Then they moved us from there-
Salvation Army-to a Kasern on the perimeter of Paris. No, first
they moved us outside of, uh, I can't think of the name anymore-
not to far from the side of the Seine, in Kaserns, and then they
270 tried to ship us into the south of France as agricultural workers.
And I'm not gonna go, I told 'em, I got a trade. So they shipped
us back into town, I mean, the ones who didn't want to go and we
were in a cecern on the boulevard. I was in one for a while and
then later on into a small pension/hotel combined in town-one meal
275 a day. I nearly starved to death. So I started working as a
plumber without permit. You need a work permit in France. Just
for meals. There were some huge restaurants there and they had
some plumbing to do so we did it. Any rate, after I'd been there
nine months in Paris, that was the heavy season of the year, I got
280 tired of starving. I mean one meal a day, I lost weight. I went
back to Germany. Which wasn't-I mean back to the south. I just
went back to my relatives. And they didn't like the idea, when I
wanted to go back to Germany.

jo When did you go back, what year was that?

db I was certified a political refugee, I mean, it seems like a fool.
I went-I got shot, and so on. I went back in '34. That was in
285 '33 when I went over and in '34 I went back and I bummed around
from one relative to the other, when my parents wrote me when it
would be safe and to come back. Be alright. Well, now, we were
corresponding under an assumed name. I mean they never knew my
address. It used to be, uh, whatever they call it, poste
restante. You know that system?

jo No.

290 db Well, in Europe you can-in other words, it's a post office box
anybody can use.

jo Oh, I see.

db poste restante means "resting mail," you know, it rests until you
pick it up. So we used to correspond that way. I never had a

return address or anything, I just-where they sent it to the poste
restante. So then, after much hesitation, I mean, first off I
295 went to some of my relatives and the first time I got there for a
Friday evening meal I couldn't hold it. I was down to ninety-five
pounds. I was sicker than a dog. I was half-starved. At any
rate, I bummed around and eventually I went back home and I didn't
feel so good coming back, but they left us alone and I was drawing
300 unemployment insurance. Things were not too well, I mean, but you
weren't bothered too much. They came out with one decree after
another, quite a few decrees to limit your movements. You were
not allowed to have-I used to have a motorcycle which I had-my
305 father sold later on. And you weren't allowed this and that, and
at any rate, I saw an add in the paper-somebody wanted a plumber
and tinner-and I went and applied, but I told him right away,
"Now, I want you to know I'm Jewish. And that man told me, "I
don't have any city orders, it doesn't make a bit of difference to
me." And I offered to work for him for one week, if he wouldn't
be satisfied, he wouldn't have to pay me, because I knew my trade,
310 and so he took me on and I got paid after a week and I worked
there until papers came through from my relatives here signed for
me to go to the States. I quit the job. And I got out-

jo What year was that?

db Uh, '37.

jo And you'd been communicating with your relatives here about coming
to the United States?

315 db Yeah, but they only signed for me, not for the whole family.

jo Did the rest of your family-they didn't want to go?

db They perished. No, they perished. They didn't sign the papers
for them and that's one thing I still hold against my aunt who is
still alive. She's 96 years old.

jo Did-and your-Did you parents want to go?

db Sure, they wanted to go.

jo Why didn't she, uh...

db (shrugs) They had enough money to do it, believe me. They had-at
320 that time I didn't speak English, but I saw they had \$100,000
there, in real estate there, and all this stuff. So that is some-
thing I-inside of me I still hold against them, because I was
young and I was able and ready to work. I would have supported
325 them. So, uh, at any rate I went back and I worked for the man.
I had letters of recommendation and all. I still have it. So I
came over here and I didn't speak the language, I had about 2 or 3

hours of lessons in English. In the meanwhile, I had learned enough French in Paris that I got along very well. In fact I took my wife back twice, I mean, the first time we went to Paris—we spent last October—we spent 18 days in Paris and I didn't have any trouble. I speak about 70% French, but when it comes to grammar forget it. Uh, I said it unintentionally, the French word grammar. But I am not that good. I talk okay. I know it, however, I can converse and, uh, get along.

jo Did you meet your wife in Germany?

335 db No, right here. She's a native Daytonian.

jo Oh, really. So, how old were you when you came over, then?

db I was twenty-two years old, around there. I came in '37, I was—no, I was 23.

jo Now let's go back a little bit. In 1930 it was beginning-to-anti-Semitism was beginning to increase...

340 db Well, at that time it wasn't so bad, I mean, you had the storm troopers building up. I mean, you were living in Kaserns and so on. They had demonstration marches that they marched and so on, they used to have their nasty songs already, but at that time I was active on the other side and at times the Communists and Socialists combined to fight the Fascists. In fact, before, we beat the hell out of them a couple of times they were not even allowed to show their uniform. I mean the uniform was forbidden for a while. Hitler attempted to come one to Wuppertal, but he realized that was too dangerous for him. My home town was red and Renscheidt, I mentioned before, was red also. They had mined the place where he supposed to speak. I mean my home town was always more socialist or communist than anything else. So he changed his mind and he arrived in Dusseldorf he didn't come to Wuppertal. 355 Goebbels was raised with Catholic money in my home town, and educated with Catholic money. And he was hated like poison, too. The Nazi movement was starting and they were gaining more and more votes during the elections and it kept on building up from '30 to 360 '33 when the old man who practically was in his second childhood turned over the government to Hitler as the chancellor and that's when they came with the so-called law, special law, to give him power and they start outlawing the opposition parties. When they 365 set the Reichstag on fire and blamed that poor Dutchman and killed him for it and all these subterfuges. Then they outlawed all the opposition parties. After the election of 5th of March, 1933, they came with the so-called auxiliary police who were nothing but storm troopers carrying weapons. They went on the rampage taking 370 revenge. They killed one of my friends. They were doing this in his own doorway, they shot him to death. I don't know whether it will be worthwhile mentioning the name or not, I've forgotten his

375 first name but his last name was Zeigfried Laufer. In his parent's home they shot him to death, I mean, in the doorway. And that's the same way they came after me, they were gonna take revenge, they were gonna kill me and I knew that and I'd rather get shot to death than beaten to death. I had that choice. No! Uh, ask a question. It may be more pertinent.

jo I guess what I'm wondering is, was that--was it in 1933 or so that you began to feel that your political activities were not going to be able to stand up against the Nazi party?

380 db Well they were outlawed then.

jo Yeah, and that was when you began to think about just leaving instead of fighting?

385 db Well, I always had the notion to go to the 'States. You see over there everybody thinks the gold lays on the street, you just bend down and pick it up. Well, it isn't so, you work for it. But freedom and everything else--it wasn't as much--I mean originally my plan as you were asking refers to my telling him that he would have lived a very different life if the rise of the Nazi party had not forced him to leave his homeland was very simple: I was a journeyman. The next step would have been the master exam. We had a place where I would have had my shop, already, it was an addition to the house that was planned, but due to all this business then and stopping bullets and so on I was more tempted to leave and go to the 'States.

390

jo So that was a thought that had been in the back of your mind...

395 db Oh, yeah. Yes. And then they signed the papers there was no holding me then. Get ready, get all the--get the passport and so on, get all the permits and clearances and I felt a sign of relief when I was on aboard ship, it was an American ship.

jo And that was 1934.

400 db That was 1933 when I left Germ--I arrived in the States on February 27th and I could even give you the date when I--we left Hamburg, because I got the old passport yet. I don't recall right now off-hand how long it took, but we left the tenth or 12th. I don't know it took that long to come over. I came over on the President Roosevelt which was later sold to the British government and was

405 sank in World War II. It had a sister ship, too, you know.

jo So, you arrived in the United States Feb--

db 27th

jo 19--

410 db '37, yeah. And I stayed overnight in New York with a relative of mine. I had a cousin there and an aunt and then the next day, practically, on the bus I came to Dayton.

jo Why did you come here?

db Because the aunt who signed the papers for me was living in Dayton.

jo And what about was her age at that time?

415 db At that time? Well, now, let's see. This was '37 that makes it 47 years ago. At that time I was 23 and she in 96 now. Then, how we gonna figure that out? Well, she was about 42 years old.

420 jo And was she married?

db Yeah.

jo And you moved in with them at that time?

db Uh, I stayed with them until I started making the marvelous sum of 12 dollars a week and then I moved out and I rented a room on
425 Cambridge Ave. I, uh, they got me a job as an errand boy, an apprentice in an optical place, I mean, as optician. I became the errand boy.

jo What was the name of the company?

db It was the Valley optical company. It was owned by
430 Dr. Le Montree. Maybe that name has shown up here, who had three nephews who he put through school and they all were optometrists and the second one passed away not too long ago. They were the Slutsky brothers there's a younger one yet, Jerome, yah. I became
435 an optician, I mean, a benchman. That means you cut lenses. I mean, you, uh, you pick out the lense you need for the prescription, like, they hand you the prescription, mark 'em and cut 'em in a machine that grind the edges and drill holes in them if necessary or bevel them on the machine, and put 'em in a frame, or-I
440 know you can't see without your glasses. I can see that, too. I can tell what kind of prescription you have. You are very near-sighted, I can tell by looking at you. So you learn that and you don't forget anymore. So I worked there until I, uh-oh, by the way, I forgot to say when they reestablished the compulsory service in the military in Germany I had to muster. And the same day
445 when I had to go muster I spit out the bullet which was in my lung. They couldn't remove it. I spit it out.

jo Isn't that something.

db It worked up. I still have it. It was a 32 caliber. So, I
450 mustered and I was found qualified, however, they would not take
any Jewish citizens. And when I came to this country when the
draft came I had to muster again and I was found qualified and my
455 boss, a man by the name of Gordon Krauss—I don't know whether he's
still alive or not. He should be a little bit older than I am, I
don't know if he's still alive. Well, he applied for deferrment
and I didn't care. One way I thought I was missing something, the
460 other way I thought I didn't care, so he kept getting them one
after the other and suddenly there was no more deferrment and in
my job he was going to replace me with two women, not just one—two
of 'em. So in '42 I had my choice, they asked me whether I was
465 ready or willing to bear arms for this country because I wasn't a
citizen yet. I had taken my citizen course and all this stuff, in
fact I was close to becoming a citizen—five years. So I came over
470 here with the idea of staying and also you can't just take you
have to give and so I thought "Yes I'm ready, I guess," so I was
in the service and I was drafted. It didn't take too long to
become corporal and I was an optician—I tried to get in the
475 medical corps, but, uh, you know the army selection—they call so
many names off the roster and "step over there" and some more
names and "step over there." I ended up in the signal corps. I
became a wire chief eventually.

- 480 jo I'd like to ask you something, to just go back a little bit.
I've talked to a few people and listened to some interviews and it seems very common that people who had skills in Europe came here and ended up working in very different professions. Now, how is it that a plumber becomes an optician?
- 485 db I tell you why. When I attempted to approach plumbing enterprises, including Jewish ones I was told, "Well, it's unionized, you'd have to start as an apprentice again." And you know what I told 'em then. I mean, I don't want to go into details, but I
490 had no intention of being apprentice for four years again. That's why I didn't follow my trade. And without bragging I knew my trade and I still can do my trade, but I'm not interested. Now, like in this house, I took out all the galvanized pipe and
495 replaced it with copper. I don't need anybody else to do it for me. No, that's the reason why I didn't follow this trade. Now, I was working there and I never was one to do job-hopping from one to the other, so I stayed with them and eventually I was making a decent wage, too. So then Uncle Sam wanted me worse than the
500 boss and I was in the service and I went in and within six months or so I was a corporal and it didn't take much longer to become a sergeant, too. I was in the signal corps, I mean, I must have done alright in school, I mean, uh, you know, school. Went
505 overseas as a buck sergeant. Overseas eventually I applied for military government or counter-intelligence and I ended up in counter-intelligence.
- jo Uh, where were you first when you went overseas? What country did they send you to?
- 510 db Well, we landed in England and we flew to France and then I was a member of a flying attachment that looked for German equipment. I was as far as Dresden in the Ural--in the, uh, I don't know what
515 kind of mountains over there looking for German equipment and I specialized--I was a member of the Air Force then. They had a landing system which was better than ours. We used a gyro for
520 each function and they had one gyro for all of 'em. The for-foreigncare system I think it was called. I forgot. At any rate we went after that and the Russians were already there. We went after the equipment as far as Dresden and further our and
525 back--I was in Stendal on the Elbe when Germany surrendered. The German Fifth Army Corps surrendered to us. I was temporarily a guard in a prison camp. I had the unpleasant job of guarding SS women. Now there--
- jo Now, where was this again?
- 530 db In Stendal on the Elbe. And there I didn't have any doubt about it that I would shoot to kill. I want to give the impression that "you want them to flee, I shoot to kill." I meant it. I had a shell in the chamber I wouldn't hesitate one moment because

535 I hated the sight of SS. In fact, when wer were on the move into
Germany in Traben-Trarbach I was given a SS man as a prisoner.
540 Now, I went overseas with the idea that the first one I meet as
long as we are armed, one of us is gonna die. However, he was
disarmed and I'm not a murderer, so I couldn't do it. In fact I
545 had the pleasure of taking the police chief in Windsheim/Aish
prisoner. He had forgotten to indicate on a form-I mean, I
remember he was SS. Now we were always digging and one morning I
walked in there and I had my pistol in front of me. "Alright
give me your weapon" then I saide-I told his assistant there,
550 "Lock him up." Now, we had found out he was a member in the SS.
That was in the questionnaire.

jo Now, this is still during the war?

db Oh, yeah. I mean, after Germany surrendered. That was when I
was an investigative officer. Counter-intelligence.

jo So this would have been '46?

555 db I was overseas 'til '47, working as a counter-intelligence
officer.

jo So your job was pretty much to find SS members and take them into
custody?

560 db Uh, my job was counter-intelligence activity, to dig in the
records and so on and find them out. And also reviewing what
they had on the questionnaires. Oh, I had a mess of people under
me and commissions to move around and I continued when I came
565 back to this country. I was in the service til '49,. I ended up
in the Intelligence Section First Army Headquarters Governor's
Island. There I had all the German scientists under my control.
570 They were limited in their movements. They had to get permission
and I also had control over construction. Aerial photography. I
had to approve whether they could get through or not.

jo This was after you came back to this country?

db Yeah, back from overseas.

575 jo You were observing the German scientists who were working on. . .

db They were over there after the war, yes.

jo . . .The rockets?

db You see, they were forced-in fact I participated in some of this
gathering of German scientists. I won't disclose any details,
580 but we'd just come in with a few vehicles, and that was in regard

to map-making, and we'd come in where they were making—you
know, "You go with me. Pack a little suitcase, you're on your
585 way," you know. I mean just like that. "Your wife, your family
can join you depending after a year," and they were on their way
to the United States. Whether they liked it or not. Russia was
doing the same thing. That was how we got scientists. So after
590 this we did some of these things. We had operational things
which I won't mention because we—somehow I feel obligated—the
undercover details which are secret, you know, top secret, I
don't tell about them. I had a top secret, secret clearance in
595 New York. Oh, yeah. Amazing as it seems, I was a foreign born,
they send me back to Germany and they gave me a top secret
600 clearance here, too, while I was in the service. Well, at any
rate, that's about it in a nutshell, unless you have some more
particular questions you want me to answer.

jo Well, I'm curious about just a few things. When did you meet
your wife?

db I met her when I came to this country. I used to go to the
605 Massada for awhile. In fact, after I was able to converse—I mean
I learned it whether I liked it or not—I was taking out a
different girl almost every night for while. Oh, I got to know
610 quite a few of 'em. I got to know her and, well, it got kinda
serious and I got in the service and eventually I got sent over
to Saint Louis —to Saint Louis for awhile. Couldn't even think
615 of the name of that darn place. Walter Winchell used to call
that place the hell hole of the Army. I thought I was in the
army.. I was still a member of the air force, but there the
thirty mile hikes and all this stuff. At any rate she came down
620 there and actually we got married by the Justice of the Peace
down there, but we didn't consummate any marriage. Back in August
suddenly I had a—I was transferred all of a sudden I got a leave.
625 No, I think I was down South. I shipped in new recruits and I
got a leave. I had to borrow the money to come home, uh. I'm
getting mixed up there. I had to borrow money one time to come
on a leave—to come from the South. But we got married here in,
630 uh, August the 15. I got leave, I came home and we got married
by the Rabbi and all that whole business. And then we lived in
Columbus awhile together. That's where she became pregnant and
635 my daughter was eventually born, but by that time I was already
back overseas and after I got back from overseas, well, we began
640 fussing and fighting again and we had a difference of opinion.
My mother-in-law and I couldn't get along. In fact I got thrown
out of the house. She told me to get the "H" out of here and I
did get out.

jo Now, your wife was living with her parents then?

645 db So, anyway I came back and my son was born thirteen years after
my daughter, yeah. But he is my pride and joy in fact--(tape runs
out)

646 End Side One.

001 Begin Side Two.

[jo Had asked what db did to learn the fates of his family members]

002 db . . .and in all that time on a leave I had to give his home
address because I was gonna go to Holland and you were not
allowed to go into the British zone--you did not have a free
zone--and my home town was in it, so I just plainly lied. I was
gonna go to Holland and had no intentions of going to Holland.
When I got to my home town I looked up my childhood friend. I
had a friend there who was a Social Democrat just like myself and
005 his military service--he was transferred. First chance he had he
surrendered to the British. He was a British prisoner for
awhile. And first thing I looked up and I was happy to find out
the war didn't eat him up.

jo Now, he was a Gentile?

db And he visited my parents the last man--in fact I think he loaned
them the money and even a suitcase. How, he endangered himself
by visiting them, so, naturally, we're still friends. Fine, that
010 was one time. Then I made inquiries--there was a Jewish community
there. Couldn't find out very much except they were carried to
the East. I sent some of my informants East, but I couldn't find
out much. See I was a member of CIC [Counter Intelligence Corp].
I could write tickets and food. I made them all available in
order to be able to bribe my way through. Cigarettes, you name
it. Even silk stockings for the women, just to get 'em to talk.
015 I've had Germans working for me that--I was driving an Opel or a
Mercedes and got stopped on the way--sitting next to me reach for
his kennkarte and I reach for my kennkarte. That German
policeman never knew he was dealing with an American. And even
the German, he didn't know that he was working for an American.
And that was part of my work. I was in civies all the time,
except I was armed which the German policemen didn't know. I had
020 to sets of identities: the American as an officer and also the
German. So that was one thing, now, how I found out--you coming
back to this--I couldn't find out too much there, however, I went
and made contact with a German writer who wrote the book "Dachau
025 Started in Wuppertal" and I wrote to him to him for a copy and I
also wanted to find out where he got all the information. The
last time I was in Germany I made it my business--he was on
vacation--I made it my business to wait 'til he come back and get
together with him and I had a copy of a list of all the people
being deported. They went to Thereseinstadt, I believe. That's
where they were carried. I went that far and the next time we

030 were planning to go to Israel this past May, but my wife was
sick, that's when I intended to go down there and see what else I
can find out. In the book he mentioned my sister and her
children, that's why I went back to him. And there are dates.
035 And I also investigated I was in Kaisersesh. I know where my
uncle who moved to Cologne got taken away from Cologne. I know.
I investigated that as much as I could and that's how I found
out. And we added up the ones who were carried away, about 40.
My sister married after I left Germany, had two sons, and she
married a Gentile. However, when it became time for them to
report to be deported or "resettled in the East," as it was said,
040 he volunteered to join his family. He went along and, naturally,
perished, too.

jo So they were in Dachau?

db No, they went to Thereseinstadt. No, I had the list, the copies.
My name was on there also. I made photostatic copies. I got
that far. So that's how I know. And I investigated my
grandparents home, so now my grandparents--when my grandfather
died and my grandmother came to this country and lived one
045 week--now, I made the statement then, when I heard they were going
to bring her over here, that she's unable, I think, I mean
somebody else could have taken her place. She died within a
week. She's buried in Appleton, Wisconsin because I have an aunt
and uncle that live--she's on the outs with me now. She got mad
at me because I am lazy when it comes to writing. So at any
rate, I checked that out, I mean, they were carried off. I had
050 them in Kaisersash, Münstermaifeld, Cologne, Bonn,
Müchen-Gladbach. I checked them all out. Now, I had a lot of
cousins. Now, I have some of them in this country. . .

jo Now most of them that are in this country, did they come before
you came?

db Yeah, yeah. No, there were some who came after. Right after
055 this, for example papers for an aunt of mine and the family came
over here. I got a cousin in New York, now, one of the uncles of
mine, they came to New York to the other one who signed the whole
family. There were several families who came the same time or a
little later when it was still permissible. Afterwards, you
060 couldn't come out anymore. See, I left legally. I got a
passport, I got permission, and I got certificate that I didn't
owe any taxes, you know and all this stuff.

jo You left when you could still do that.

db Yes. I came with the total sum of \$40.00 and so I was allowed to
leave. So I was legal there. So, we lost that many people that
the war carried away, and sooner or later I got some restitution
that paid for the house we own. It wasn't very much.

T1S2P21

065 jo Now, how did you find out that you could get restitution?

db Well, somehow or another my aunt in Pittsburg—I mean the one who came a little later—they had started procedure and they wrote to me and I just joined the game.

jo And how was it all—Did that go through the UN?

db No, that went through a lawyer in Mayen, which is not too far from
there. And it dragged on and on and a lot of trouble. In fact,
070 when I came to Germany, you know, on my first time, I knew who had
participated in shooting me. I went to the police to see them and
started proceeding against them. The guy died before they finally
had him in the court. He claimed it was his brother, he had two
brothers, but I know which one he was and he died before the court
075 proceedings got done. Oh, yes. I pressed charges. So, no, they
had started proceedings over there and I just followed. I joined
them. And I had my parents declared dead, an un- natural death,
had them declared dead the fifth of May, 1945. That was when
Germany surrendered. So, I'm the sole heir. I got compensated.
Some of the money is in this house, too, so anyway, later on they
080 kept sending me papers applying for compensation, I mean, Social
Security. Well, for a while I didn't bother. Too much paper
works. Well, at the last minute I found out about it and I wrote
them a letter and I had the papers approved, see, so I could
claim-I think I had 16 years I think on my family. I think I was
085 four months left, of it would have been finished and after I
applied for a couple of years or so then they finally agreed to
pay me and I got back pay of about \$11,000 to start with. See I
could prove-I mean, the way they had it set up, I think you had to
prove four years under employment and they would give you ten
years. And I could easily prove, for I had the recommendation of
my oldest boss and so that wasn't bad. And then, uh, they paid me
and I get Social Security from Germany, too. And then I came
090 back, they should contribute to my health insurance this year then
I got another small increase and they have an annual cost of
living increase also, but the problem is this last one they
increased in, I mean, they lowered the contribution to the health
insurance, so it's a matter of about \$10.00 more a month. See
095 that process was on a commission basis. I think there was five
percent of the annual pension input for five years, so what the
heck, I might as well have that money, too. I still have some
left, so I'm not too bad off I mean and I got pay from my employer
which isn't too much, but it all counts. Right now I got an
estimate I'm going to have central air for the whole house and
100 this one is just about \$2,000.00.

jo That'll be nice to have.

db That's the next thing. Well I have three estimates. I always go
with three and the last one I like best. Not that it is cheaper,
no, but I like the compressor and the kind of equipment he's going
to use. He's using the biggest compressor and I'd rather have the
biggest one, even if it costs a little more that way.

105 jo Now, let me, let's see. I'm just going to try to get a time
table. you came back to the United States after serving in the
Air Force...

- db Three years maximum, it was, for an officer, Air Force, so I came back in 1947.
- jo '47. And then did you--were you a civilian at that point?
- db No. I stayed in until '49.
- jo And what did you do in this country? What was your--oh, you were telling me you were...
- db As a serviceman?
- 110 jo You were observing the German scientists.
- db No, here I was in charge of running the Three-O-First 'C' Detachment. I was Acting Detachment Commander.
- jo And what did they do?
- 115 db They investigate subversive activity within the limitation of the country, that's the limitation on that. I supervised the German scientist, control, uh, construction projects by aerial surveillance, so they wouldn't get into sensitive areas and so on. You had to prove this, that was our job and also make the write the reports about all kinds of things, you know, in the service
- 120 you've got all kinds of reports; equipment report, personnel report, that was all my assignment. I was the Acting Commander. I used to approve rations, quarters for our men. As the Acting Commander I assigned them by order of the Major who was in charge. In fact, the Major wasn't visible very often. I was the Commanding officer.
- jo And then after that?
- 125 db Then after my wife didn't want to join me, I could have gotten quarters as an officer,--I applied for release from the service. See, you don't get discharged, you have to apply for a release. And I left the service in '49.
- jo Now, what part of the country were you serving in at that time?
- db I was a Governor's Island, New York.
- jo New York. And she didn't want to...
- db No, she didn't want to join me, for she didn't want to leave her sick father.
- 130 jo Oh, I see, so she was in Columbus?
- db She was in Dayton. Right here.

jo She was in Dayton.

db Oh, she left me in Columbus, again, to go back home and I went on step by step. I went in Columbus and then when they called-came, they needed interpreters-I went to Windsheim/Aish. I was transferred to Germany and I went overseas and then I went, after
135 my fighting days were over-I mean I had battle scars. I could prove I was in a fighting zone. And after the fighting was over I applied for military government and counter-intelligence, and counter intelligence got me first and I went to European intelligence school in OberAmmergau, an nice area, four weeks-it was make or break. Either you made the course or you got kicked out of counter-intelligence. So I didn't get kicked out. And later on
140 I was working as satisfactorily to my superiors that they asked me to apply for a commission. Now, I didn't know the difference between a second lieutenant and warrant officer and I applied for warrant officer and I had to go to a in Frankfurt and be interviewed by my superiors and believe me I nearly got blinded by
145 all the brass. Generals and Full Colonels and all. And that quiz was such a way that eventually I came to the point I didn't care whether I made it or not, just get me outta here. I didn't care. But apparently I satisfied their questions and February the 15, uh, February the first, 1947, I became a Staff Sargeant because the ratings is open and closed, open and closed, I went in
150 all the time and the 15 of February I was called to Frankfurt to accept or reject the appointment as a Warrant Officer and we went in, we had to wear uniform, and we went in, two of us, we were Staff Sargeants and had to raise our hand and take the oath of an officer before they signed the second page of our discharge. They didn't take a chance on it. They wouldn't sign both sides
155 because, if they didn't have us take the oath of office, we would have been civilians. So we were sworn in as officers they pinned the insignia on us and we came outside and here come a coupla gr's and they salute they salute and we looked at each other and we thought "who the heck"-we forgot we had them things on our shoulder. We snapped to it and returned the salute and we had to go to the officer's mess and PX, because that was off limits
160 before. We had to see what it was like. We were not allowed in there otherwise. And from there on the way back we were stationed in Ausbach, then, I believe, on the way back to the railway station we picked our insignias off our shoulders-counter-intelligence doesn't wear insignias. I was at times in charge
165 over Full Colonels-it didn't matter where I was even in charge. The same thing happened to me in Columbus. I had generals were even taking orders from me, for I was an instructor bombsight so we picked them insignias off and then I worked as a counter-intelligence investigative officer. In fact I was in charge of a
170 branch office in Windsheim for a while. I had a the key to the city hall-this long. You couldn't carry it in your pocket, you know, those old fashioned keys and people there used to-they just shot somebody-a political prisoner-"terminal discharge". They had

175 to report to me in the office and it didn't matter to me they were
always handcuffed and they sit on a cushion and it didn't bother
me, because they were bad enough to be automatically locked up so
I didn't feel mercenary. So they were sick, so what? They didn't
bother about other people being sick, but they had to come to me
to extend their stay at home. Always, the arrested people, I had
180 to carry them to the next place they going along the--like a
concentration camp, likely. I had one an Obersturmfuhrer under
arrest and he asked for information whether he could go home to
pack some things. I took him to his home I told him, "Look, you
make any attempt to escape, I'll have to shoot to kill you," but I
helped him, I suggested things for him to take along and so on,
185 for I knew he was gone for at least a year. So. But he hadn't
done a thing. He was the least of the captivity and we had to
arrest him. And I had investigated him and he hadn't done a thing
or hurt anybody, I knew he hadn't. So, I treated him like a human
being. See, don't forget, there were a lot of members from the SS
who were not volunteering. They were pressed into this service.
They were draftees and then switched into the SS. Which I found
190 out afterward. I wanted to hang a lot more, but the Nazis said
that, I knew, before when I went to school, so that's one of the
things. I enjoyed my work. I stayed on as long as I could,
because of wife and I were not on the best of terms. Well, that
happens...

jo When you're away a lot.

195 db We were not even corresponding. My mother-in-law had something to
do with it, because I didn't hesitate to tell her right to her
face to mind her own business. Try to run my life and that was
out.

jo So, when you came back in '49, did you get a job then?

200 db In '49 first off my wife and I had a meeting at the former Gibbons
to see whether we get together or not, because she wrote to me,
what am I going to do about her? I wrote her back, "You waited
this long you wait--I plan to be back in the 'State at such and
such time--you'll wait 'til then." And we had a meeting and then
we made another--we decided to make another attempt, so, fine, uh.
205 What then? Oh, at that time my mother-in-law had died, I think.
Yeah, she had died. And my father-in-law asked me to move in with
them. At any rate, I was an optician and I went first off at
that, so I looked for work and I had set my price. I wasn't going
to work for a certain amount and I wasn't going to settle for
less, I forgot what it was, \$75.00 a week, or something like that.
And I didn't apply for unemployment. I mean, I had that--what was
it--\$20.00 a week for 6 months or whatever it was. That--I didn't
210 even apply for that, or ration cards. I had enough money saved I
could live without it, so eventually I found a job at a Valley
optical place here in town for the price I wanted to work. So my

215 job which was supposed to be waiting--the whole company wasn't there anymore. They had sold it, so that finished that, so I started working and I worked for about one month, for my father-in-law asked me to join him and he was paying the wages I was making then, plus he was going to pay the tax.

jo Was your father-in-law an optician?

220 db He was in the grocery business. Yeah. And so I joined him and he was a nice guy. You couldn't find a nicer guy, I mean may he rest in peace. And after the first year together--I didn't invest a penny--I set out to buy a car. Now, I had enough money to do that and also--I worked with him. After the first year he split the profits with me-- I didn't have any money invested. So--and then he 225 decided to sell out to my youngest brother-in-law and I as equal partners and he had enough money he didn't overcharge us, and then my youngest brother-in-law was called back in the Korean War--he was a captain. he had studied to become a Professor of Sociology. At any rate, we were partners until he was called back and then I made up a contract with him that I was going to pay him six 230 percent interest, which you couldn't get in a bank his investment, took inventory and whatever increase later on that would have been half his, too and then I made money. I put more equipment in and I made money on the grocery store.

- jo What was the name of the store?
- db Knollwood Market. Originally it was Block's Market but since his name was Block and mine was Bender we called it Knollwood Market. I made money. I was saving about \$500 a month regularly, so, uh, 235 not bad. So, anyway when he came back he didn't want to stay. He wanted to get back to school and finish his education, so I thought, "fine I'm not going to be paying him any investment, so I might as well pay off." I took inventory, paid him half of what it was worth with interest and it was my store after twelve 240 years. And then come the I-75, I had to get out the way.
- jo Aw. What year was that?
- db Uh, I forgot. It was in '61 I moved away from there. Then I 245 bought a store called Western Market--an aunt of mine, I mean, my father-in-law's sister owned the building--and I bought that store and it was a bona fide lemon. I was stuck with that thing for 5 years and I lost money on the average about \$1000 a year, it cost me. I finally auctioned it off and I went into insurance. I didn't even know you needed a license to go into insurance. I found out.
- 250 jo So you became an independent insurance salesman?
- db No, I had a business and the first time I flunked the exam for the license by one point. It still makes me mad when I think about it. You needed 75 out of 100 and I got 74. Then I got so darn mad and I really studied. The first time I took it easy. 255 The next time when I took my exam--they don't tell you the score, but I kept score where I had any doubts and I am positive I made about 97. I'm positive of that. So the first year I needed another \$1000 to support myself. I wasn't making enough money, but then I started and now I'm getting maximum Social Security. I was an independent agent in the end, I mean, a general agent.
- 260 jo Did you start with a company then?
- db Yeah.
- jo With which?
- db Inter Ocean, which are now--they used to be independent, but they're now part of Cincinnati Financial Corporation and I was with them, I mean, counting retirement benefits for 30 years, but actually I was with them 16. See then they changed my whole set 265 up. They made everybody a general agent. No more retirement accumulation, nothing. So in three years I didn't have any accumulation. But I worked as a general agent the last few years, prepayed my taxes. If I tell you that I gained \$1500 every month

270 then I tell you something. I mean, I was estimated under \$22,500 and I went over it and my wife was working as a teacher. Now her money was estimated too, but there were times when we still had to pay more even with a 38% profit we made, so...

jo Where did she teach?

db Well, she teaches at the public school system, City of Dayton.

jo Elementary level?

275 db Yeah. For a couple of years she taught at Roth in high school and then she gradually worked from seventh grade down to the second and third as she got older, so she's got 21 years. At any rate, my son started schooling. Now, my son used to go to Camp Ramah and we used to go up there on visitor's day every year, that was
280 routine. I love it. It's in Wisconsin. I love it. And then he started--he selected Washington University in Saint Louis and was accepted there. He also he was a little bit on the lazy side--he was on probation for a little while. He majored in History and
285 Political Science. What are you going to do with it? Work for the gov't. Anyway he got to meet a nice little young lady in Rockford, Ill., or somewheres, place with his friends. I mean some of his camp friends are there and she went to University of
290 Iowa in--where is it? Iowa City, I think, and so eventually I got him a car. Usually he was running back and forth, eventually he asked permission whether he could transfer there. I put a few stipulations on it. If you are behaving and your grades not
295 dropped, alright, I let you transfer. He transferred and he graduated a little bit later than she did, almost the same year. I mean he had to take a summer course in between to make up for the grades he lost and soon. At any rate, he graduated there and
300 he started--and she graduated with honors. She took accounting got 3 stars on her gown. She's got that gown at home, I've seen it, yeah, nice lady. So, he started working. Chicago was his magnet. Started working for the Gap and I wasn't very happy when he did that. You know Gap, uh, clothing?

jo Oh, the clothing store, the jeans...

db Yeah, oh that stuff's crazy. Well, he found out soon enough and
305 then he got a job with CNA, a large insurance firm, as a claim adjuster and he worked for them several years until IWE was after him he they wanted an insurance broker, and he's a broker with
310 Merril-Lynch now. And his wife started out with, oh, a well known auditing firm--oh, what the heck. I can't think about it.

jo H&R Block?

db No, no, no. A bigger one than H.R. Block. I mean, all the big
315 companies. In the town, in right downtown in Chicago. And them--

they used to get the cream of the crop. They'd take 20 or 30 graduates at one time and eventually she got laid off, I mean they reduced the staff, so she started working for some insurance company and she still works for another one now, but I couldn't even tell you the name, but there she is in a managerial position already and I don't know what the girl makes, but she makes as much as my son, maybe more. I don't know. She's a...

jo They have kids?

db No, not yet. She's a licensed auditor, a certified accountant in Iowa and Illinois. No, they don't have any children. She is a couple of months older or so than my son. I heard her say when she was still a girlfriend she wants to work til she's 30 before she thinks about a family, but I think she ought to do it because my son's going to be 27 and she's 27 now. They've bought their first home and she's a lovely little girl. She's shorter than I am. I have my son's--I don't carry any pictures except my son. There is his high school graduation picture and this is his wedding picture and now let me take it out...

jo His name is Howard, isn't it?

db Yeah.

jo I went to school with him!

db You know Howard?

335 jo Yes, I recognized him. I was in 5th grade with him at Jefferson.

db At Jefferson and later on to that school--it now belongs to the Girl Scouts, uh, Shoup Mill. He was bussed out there.

jo No, I never...

db That's Howard. And this is--let me see if I can get it out of there. That's his wife. And there, now, you can see it better.

jo Oh, yeah. I always knew he'd be successful, he was such a nice boy.

340 db He's my pride and joy, what are you talking about?

jo I remember him very fondly. He was--Well you know that school was pretty bad and he was a nice boy.

db Well, but I tell you something, you know. I was kind of a mother hen there and you know he ended up at Col White and I threatened Mr. Thomas, I think it was--wait a minute. What was that principles name? Not Thomas.

345

jo I went there, too

db The guy who brought in all his mess. Thomas was one of them.

jo Lacey was, uh.

db I don't know, but I threatened him on the phone if necessary I'd
come over there with a pistol in my hand and I managed to get him
out of there and get him over to Fairview. And then I used to
350 take him to Fairview and pick him up, too. I used to make it my
business to be there at the right time. And Howard, when he was
born I was home and I helped raise him and--Is that thing still
running? I hope not--Oh, for heavens sake you don't want that on
there.

jo mhm, sure.

355 db So, I gave him all the bath til he was able to take his own. In
fact that little stinker, I never had diapered a baby in my life
and after he was about a week old or so momma had to go someplace
and here he messed up his pants and I wasn't going to leave them.
360 The pants didn't bother me as a grownup that doesn't bother you,
He had #2 in there, but I wouldn't leave him lay in that mess. I
cleaned him like I seen momma do him and I oiled him and I pow-
dered him and then I got the great big tent, I mean that's what
the diaper looked like on that little bitty bottom, I did the best
365 I can, but he must have been comfortable, he fell asleep. So
momma came home, I told her, "Look, I diapered him the best I
could", you know, I had to fold the thing, and she repinned it.
But I always made darn sure of one thing. I had a principle--if
somebody is stuck it'll be me, not the baby. And I got stuck a
few times, you know, with the pins, but I won't stick him. But
I took care of the baby and I got the milk back, too, that's
370 such a lovely thing, when your baby gets a bottle and all of a
sudden this mess is all over you and the only thing you can do is
make them comfortable and then you go to the bathroom and undress.
That's all you can do. And we did everything together. Howard
was a member of the Civil Air Patrol and daddy used to take time
375 out to take him out there and time out to pick him up and daddy
would see that he got the full uniform, but Howard is such a
gentle person, when he went up in rank and he had to start giving
orders that went against his training and he quit. Oh, he would
380 have gone way up there. He was getting them one by one. He was
lining up to become commander, but he could not give orders so he
quit.

jo I seem to remember now that I was also in an English class in our
freshman year in high school with him, and I think he read the
part of Romeo and I read the part of Juliet in a play, once. I
385 remember him quite well, he was very nice.

db What is your maiden name?

jo Rollins, Julie Rollins.

db He didn't say anything. No, I tell you we did everything together. Now, my wife never could go on--maybe on a merry-go-round, maybe, but she got dizzy very easy. There wasn't
390 an instrument of entertainment that Howard and his daddy wouldn't go on. I mean, if the darn thing put you in a cage and turn you upside down, it didn't matter to me, because I always was that way. The only thing I would not go on is a roller coaster because
395 when I was approximately 12 years old or something like that I nearly sailed out of one of them once. They had an exhibition right alongside the Rhine in Dusseldorf and I felt being lifted out and I held on for dear life I would have ended up in the River Rhine. And I wouldn't go on one of those things anymore. That was the only exception, but anything else which threw you around
400 or--daddy went with him. And Howard was interested in the Indian ruins and there were some on the other end of Ohio, I can't even think of the name of the place. We spent a whole Sunday going clear across Ohio driving over there. When we got there we were disappointed it was hardly anything worthwhile, but we went there. Anything Howard wanted to do, if it was possible, daddy and he did
405 it. And the week before he got bar mitzvah I had another week--he had another week to spend--vacation or so on. Or I had a week of vacation. Howard and I went to Canada. And, listen, daddy never fools around. We left at 8:30 in the morning, at 5:00 in the
410 evening I called momma from the other side of Buffalo, I mean, on the Canadian side. We had already a motel. Momma didn't believe me, I mean, I told her, if you don't believe I'll give you the number--call back. We--I don't waste any time. At that time 70 was the speed limit, but I went as much as 95.

415 jo So Howard, of course, was bar mitzah. I guess I'm curious--how is your religion different? After you came to the United States, did you find that you were more religious as a Jew?

db None whatsoever.

jo Are you a member of a temple.

db No, I am not a member. I became a member and then they started
420 raising my dues without asking me, automatically. And I finally got disgusted. You don't spend my money for me, you don't know what I have. And I quit. I'm not a member. My wife is.

jo Where is she a member?

db At the BAU.

jo Where is...

db Right here on the corner.

jo Oh, at Beth Abraham.

db Oh, yeah. No, I have nothing to do with religion and I sweat
425 blood, literally, when Howard got bar mitzvah because my
father-in-law was very religious. In fact he was—he had a
function there. I don't know, I'll have to look at the diploma
430 sitting in there to find out the name of it, I don't know. He was
high up there. I sweat blood because I didn't want to mess up his
bar mitzvah. Because that Howard was his pride and joy, he used
to thrill him. But fortunately they had a little plastic number
435 there, so I could read it and I know how to intone it and yet I
was a little—and my father-in-law told me I did fine. See, they
don't just read, dead reading. I can and I know that sing-song,
you know. I did it only for my father-in-law and my son. I
wouldn't spoil a thing for my son.

jo Is Howard religious?

db Howard was raised that way, however, he is not like I am. I mean
440 I'm almost an atheist, let's put it that way. In fact I intended
to join the atheists when I was young and my mother hooped and
hollered so much I figured alright I don't have to join them. I'm
445 still going to think that way. So, I didn't join. But that's—I
grew up that way. And I refuse to be an old hypocrite. And
that's what I feel like if I pretend. So, I don't know. Now,
Howard was raised religious, he—in fact he can translate and so
450 on. He speaks some Hebrew. I mean, he was in Israel and he took
the East European tour and he took the tour to Israel. Oh yes.
One year he went East European class to Moscow and back down to
Israel and we had arranged—we were going to Europe. He called us
455 from Israel while I was in my home town and we talked and talked
\$75.00 worth in one conversation. We were glad to hear from him.
So he was raised religious. He be—I think he belongs to a
synagogue or schul in Chicago, already, because his wife was
raised religious they both—and they got the mazzuzzahs already in
460 the house, already, and had the Rabbi say his things. Which
doesn't mean anything to me, I mean they're here, too. Now, my
wife was raised religious in fact she is so religious she says her
prayers before she eats and all this stuff and she sits and holds
465 her head. I turn away because to me—I don't make fun of her, but
it looks comical to me! In fact, I made her one problem from
this. She usually lights the candles Friday evening without my
participation. There comes a place or time and, uh, the first and
470 second time—well I'm kind of used to it now, I'll sit there
quietly. I won't participate, but before they get start with
that, I have something to eat because I'm not going to wait that
long for them to get finally to it. The longer I sit the hungrier
475 I get and the more aggravated I get. And then my daughter, she—I
told her already, "You should become a Rabbi." I mean she

embarrasses--the Haggadah alone isn't enough she comes with two, three, four different books to add to it, yet, stories and all, "Rabbi such and such did such and such and so on." Oh! And I'm
480 always waiting to get done with it so we eat. But that's the way it is, I mean, I'm not going to be hypocrite. In fact, I think the last time I was in a synagogue--Howard's bar mitzvah and the Howard's auftrauf and that was it. Oh maybe somebody was buried or
485 dead. I mean her father attended the services, but otherwise I have not been back.

jo Do you consider yourself a Zionist?

db No, definitely not. Now I--let's put it this way, my son claims--somebody tried to persuade me that I am a Zionist. Let's put it
490 this way, I'm not against Israel. I support Israel. But I'm not a Zionist. I don't believe that all the Jews should go to Israel. In fact, in the '30's or so I had the chance to go to Israel. I
495 mean, Hise was soliciting, uh, looking for young people to go. I started along and then I thought later uh--uh, I didn't feel like it and I changed my mind because I didn't believe I would feel happy among Jews only. I mean, I guess it's my way of living. My friends were always Gentiles.

500 jo That's interesting.

db And even now I got more Gen--Oh, I got some Jewish friends. I mean, maybe it's a sign of benevolence. I mean, I help people
505 sometimes, I don't remember, like, Mr.--what's his name again. Mr. Pinkas when he was sick and still had his store I would go over there. I was already retired. I cut meat for him under his direction because I used to cut meat in my store, but Gentile way, not the Jewish way, so I had to cut under his direction. Theirs is cut different.

510 jo You had to learn how to cut it kosher?

db Yes so, fine, I helped him 'til--and he offered that place to me. I told him no. I mean, I could have walked in and taken over. I
515 told him no. I don't want it and that's it. You see, the thing is, I used to be redheaded. I wanted to say something else, but, uh, I want to keep it clean, so--I've been in the service and I know, every cuss word, I hardly use any. I was just using an expression which sometimes is denoted with three letters and so,
520 the last letter is a B. I mean, I used to be redheaded. So, I knew darn well sooner or later I would have spoken my piece. Some of these Jewish women can be a bonafide pain in the neck. I've seen them in butcher shops and so on. But I wouldn't be able to take it. I'd speak my piece and lose a customer, maybe more than
525 one. So I'm not interested. So I used to have a temper. The same way there's--my wife befriended a Mrs. Cantor, I don't know whether you know her or not. She lost her husband just about a year ago. Well, she hasn't got anybody and so on. Well when we
530

go to Cincinnati. My wife—the first attempt my wife made to keep
a kosher house, the kids were crying, "kosher, kosher" I told her,
I said, "If you start a kosher house I'm going to walk out on
535 you." I meant it, because I wasn't going to be the criminal in
the eyes of my children, because I eat anything I feel like, pork,
beef, veal, anything. Except poultry I won't touch. I had to
540 much of it when I was a young child. My mother even raised them
in the house. I will not eat 'em. So, about the second time that
she asked, I said, "Well if it makes you happy go ahead, I think
it's a bonafide nuisance." But I won't do a thing here to spoil
them, I mean, I won't mix them up or so on. I'll keep the dairy
food and meat food separate and the dishes and so on—What are you
going to do, reload?

545 jo Oh, we're gonna—no, we're fine.

db Fine, and now we go to Cincinnati to buy meat and I mean I found
550 out the chuck meat, or hamburger, the best one comes from New York
frozen. Better than Cincinnati or Chicago. Chicago is better than
Cincinnati or Columbus, so were using that and also she is using
the frozen chicken. So we go to Cincinnati and buy them at
555 Bilker's because they're much cheaper than here. For \$1.39 or
something a pound you get whole friers or something and he had
\$1.99 or something like that and I buy about ten at a time anyhow,
so it pays me. So she got a friend or her sister over there.
560 I'll take her along or bring her some. Or she has to go
someplace, let her call me, I'll give transportation. I'll take
her and I take her to the store. I do that once in a while, but
that's about all the Jewish friends. I mean, a lot more know me
than I know. Because I was married to a grocery store. And you
565 don't have time to socialize. But religion Howard, I mean they
don't keep a kosher house. Not that I know, they use pork. Now,
570 I don't know when they eat out, like myself, too, order anything
you feel like it. I mean I mix the cheese and the meat, yes. But
otherwise they do a certain amount observe, I mean, they go home
for the holidays one way or the other, I mean, either her home or
575 our—his home. We were disappointed—thought they'd make it for
Seder this time. They went the other way. So, well. They're
more religious than I am, I am the outcast when it comes to
580 religion, Religion—I still believe the saying of the Second
International. "Religion is an opium or a crutch for the people."
585 I still believe it. And as long as you believe that you can't be
religious.

586 End Side Two

Donald Bender
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