

Interview with RENA and ERWIN GUGGENHEIM  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
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SUE SIEGEL: Today is April 2nd; my name is Sue Siegel.

I have with me, your names please:

RENA GUGGENHEIM: Oh, Rena Guggenheim, oh, I see.

ERWIN GUGGENHEIM: Erwin Guggenheim.

SUE SIEGEL: We're very happy to have you here today to tell us about your experience.

ERWIN GUGGENHEIM: We'll be glad to relate our story as well as we can.

INTERVIEW WITH RENA GUGGENHEIM

Q: WELL, SINCE YOU WERE BORN IN TWO DIFFERENT PARTS OF GERMANY, RENA, WHY DON'T YOU BEGIN WHERE YOU WERE BORN AND WHEN AND YOUR CHILDHOOD.

A: As far as I remember, I was born in a little town called Pirmasens pretty near the Rheinpfalz; and it was September 8, 1923, and I was brought up there till I was about three or four years old. Then my parents, my father was in the leather business, skin, sole leather factory like everybody else in Pirmasens. He got a promotion, and we moved up north in a little place called Neumuenster in Schleswig-Holstein, near, between Hamburg and Kiel. I went to school there till I was about, till the Hitler-time came.

My father had a chance to get out in about--when it was, Honey?

ERWIN: In the late thirties.

A: But he just didn't want to believe that there was anything like a lot of Jewish people. And, instead of getting out, he was warned--he could have taken his money to England--he decided to open a leather factory himself in a little place called Nortorf, a leather factory, a tannery; and that is where we really lost our money. But we still managed to get out in time; not with money, but with our lives. We went to England then.

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS THAT RENA?

ERWIN: July 1939.

A: On, yeah, that is right.

Q: JUST BEFORE THE WAR?

A: Yeah, so our lives were there, but not our money. We just got out with very little. But before that we moved from the Neumuenster to Hamburg, the last few months, about nine months. And I think one of the lucky parts were that we lived in, moved into a big apartment house; and our name, my maiden name is Schohl, S-c-h-o-h-l, and it is not a Jewish name. In fact, it is a very unusual name, German name. And they went into our house and grabbed everybody, all the men.

ERWIN: During the Kristallnacht.

A: Yeah, but they did not get my father. Because they just didn't know and we weren't registered, and they didn't seem to mind it. And I think that was our luck. But after

that my parents just both decided it didn't make any difference, we had to get out.

Then I went to high school in England, to private high school, and learned to speak English there. After that you have to join either the--it was during the war, you had to join either the armed forces or you could become a nurse. So I chose to be--go into nursing training in Manchester, pediatrics. I was there for four years at least, to get my degree.

ERWIN: You got it in 1945.

A: Yeah, and well, Erwin comes then and is really in between.

ERWIN: You have lots more.

A: I graduated then as a sick children's nurse; I went on as a staff nurse. But in between Erwin and I got married because the war was over; so we got married in '49, in July of '49.

ERWIN: Just a minute, it was 1945 that we got married.

A: Yeah, right.

ERWIN: After that we have a joint story. Whatever other questions you have of Rena, she had various relatives who died in concentration camps. I don't know whether this is relevant. But you want to bring this--

Q: IT IS VERY RELEVANT. WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PARENTS, FOR INSTANCE WERE YOUR PARENTS--

A: No, they were safe. My dad died in England.

Q: THEY LIVED WITH YOU?

A: Yes, but they lived with us. It is very primitive where we lived, naturally, to what we were used to. It didn't bother me as much because I was a child, but I know my mother suffered. My dad died in April '45. I am sure would he have lived here, he could have been helped. He died of a heart attack, very early, very young. And my mother and I-- I have a brother, but something--he always was ahead of us; he always was over here earlier.

Q: YOUR BROTHER?

A: Yeah, yeah, so my memory what he did at that time--

Q: IS HE OLDER THAN YOU?

A: Two years older. So he came to England first, then he came to the United States first, so my recollection is poor.

ERWIN: Rena has American relatives who helped the brother to come out and get into the shoe business, leather business, in Massachusetts; Endicott Johnson is quite a well-known shoe firm. He worked there, and eventually he went to the United States Army. And his gimmick was "when you are in the army, you don't like to be called upon to do too many extra duties." So he decided to change his name to a very common name in the latter part of the alphabet; so when they named people for duty, they never got to him. So he changed his name to Watson, cause I think he was, he enjoyed Sherlock Holmes stories, and hence, Mr. Watson.

Q: RENA, I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU TO TRY AND REMEMBER A FEW DETAILS WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN BECAUSE

THAT WAS QUITE FAR AWAY FROM WHERE YOU WERE BORN, AND I THINK THE PEOPLE HAD A DIFFERENT KIND OF PERSONALITY IN THAT PART OF GERMANY THAN THEY HAD IN BAVARIA; DO YOU REMEMBER WHETHER THEY WERE FRIENDLY TO YOUR FAMILY?

A: Yeah, it was pretty good towards the end, at least I never had the feeling, even in school, but I know I had to have religiosschule you know--I know I did have religion I did not--I stayed, but I didn't feel it as much as other people did or I was too young to even really get upset about it. And I do know every other week--or every week was it--there was a religioslehrer from Hamburg, he used to come to teach us religion. We were bored because we wanted to play, you know Saturday, instead of doing this.

Q: SO YOU DIDN'T UNDERSTAND--

A: So, I didn't really know that my life was pretty good up till--

Q: GOOD.

A: --nearly, you know, in England.

Q: '38?

A: Yeah, right, right. And then I met Erwin; and I really, really didn't have to suffer.

ERWIN: And Hamburg where she spent the last seven, eight months always was very cosmopolitan town. And while, obviously, we had Nazis and anti-Semitism, it certainly was not as pronounced as in the southern part of Germany. That's why she really did not experience too much.

A: And you were five years older and really hit you much harder and your parents and everything. So that's why we were just lucky my relatives weren't in the Rheinpfalz; they went to the concentration camp. And both my grandparents, who lived in Berlin, my mother's parents, he was a doctor, and they both died in Theresienstadt. But what I understand is that they died of natural deaths, but I don't believe it. But they--from other survivors, we were told that they did. So, my story is really very low key.

ERWIN: You might want to mention that in your parents' home was the then finance minister of Germany, Abt.

A: Yeah, yeah, pretty good people. My mother would be here she could really tell you something. But she is still alive, but she is 95 years old. She would be able to--

Q: WHERE IS SHE LIVING?

A: She lives in an apartment alone on 25th--26th and Irving. Yeah, she has a fantastic memory; physically she is not too well.

Q: WE SHOULD HAVE ASKED HER TO COME HERE.

A: Yeah, but I don't think I could even get her up here. You would have to come to her because it is too much. But her story is interesting.

ERWIN: Well, she mentioned that this guy worked with Hjalmar Schacht, I don't know whether you remember him either, he used to be one of the top boys in the financial part of the Nazi Government. And this Mr. Abt dealt with the Jews and with the Nazis; and he was sort of a smooth

operator, or according to what mother tells us. He made all kinds of promises to Rena's parents, but I don't know what the outcome ever was.

Q: HOW WERE YOU ECONOMICALLY OFF IN ENGLAND?

A: In England it was a big difference compared to--we were very comfortable in Germany, very comfortable.

Q: DID YOUR PARENTS TAKE UP A NEW CAREER?

A: No, my dad, yeah, instead of being the director, he got just a very primitive job in a leather tannery, sorting out--leather sorter. I think it really affected him badly.

ERWIN: Yes.

A: And we lived in a small place.

Q: AND YOUR MOM?

A: My mom never worked.

Q: DIDN'T WORK?

A: She hasn't worked, and she never did work; but she didn't have maids around in England like we did in Europe.

ERWIN: Well, I think there is a fascinating story, was her mom, which I think you would enjoy hearing.

A: Oh--

ERWIN: You go ahead.

A: You know better.

ERWIN: Rena had a bachelor uncle.

A: After my dad died.

ERWIN: Well, it was still a bachelor uncle. He had a very high position in the Bavarian Government as a Supreme Court Justice. He always enjoyed the company of Rena's

mother. So when Rena's father died and we brought mother over from England, he did what you're supposed to do according to the Jewish religion, marry the widow of your brother. But it happened that he always had a secret love for mother. So, that was a wonderful marriage.

A: A short one.

ERWIN: Very short, unfortunately. He died when, before he was 70 years old. So they lived for about seven or eight years.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED?

ERWIN: But the wonderful part for mother was that Rena's uncle, or stepfather, if you wish, was very friendly with the later Bavarian Minister of Justice, and he promoted her uncle twice retroactively and arranged also that mother would get a German pension.

A: Certainly more than just the normal.

ERWIN: So that the outcome, as we were telling you before, is that mother never had to work; she was very fortunate.

A: And what she gets now, she lives on, every month. It's a tremendous amount; I am very grateful as long as she's alive that she's getting it. So that is a nice story.

Q: YOU SAY THAT YOUR STEPFATHER WAS ASSOCIATED WITH SOME GERMAN OFFICIAL IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF GERMANY?

ERWIN: No, he was, they were buddies when they studied in--where was it when they studied--in Wuerzburg, when they went to the university. And after the war the Bavarian



Government made him the Minister of Justice in Bavaria. And they were in correspondence. And while her stepfather was a judge or district attorney, then retroactively he was promoted twice to be Supreme Court Justice.

A: Also, my mother wasn't married to him at that time. She was only married in New York to him for the last few years, so he managed that she gets the widow's pension.

Q: BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE TO GO BACK TO GERMANY?

ERWIN: No.

A: No.

Q: THAT WAS JUST DONE AS A FORMALITY?

A: No. Right, yeah.

ERWIN: Well, because he would have probably been a Supreme Court Justice if he would have remained in Germany.

Q: I SEE.

A: So that was great.

INTERVIEW WITH ERWIN GUGGENHEIM

Q: WELL, ERWIN, DO YOU WANT TO TELL US ABOUT YOUR MEMORIES OF YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD AND YOUR FAMILY?

A: Well, I was born November 28, 1918, so I am an elderly gentleman right now. And my father was in the export business. He was prokurist which means, "while the boss was away, he is in charge of the operation." And in 1932 when the export business was not doing so well, my dad decided to go into business on his own. He opened his own little export business, mainly to Mexico; and also opened up a wholesale

cosmetic place, a very small operation that had about three or four employees. But it was a comfortable way of making a living.

In the old days in Germany if you wanted to get into the export business, it was customary that you got your apprenticeship, not at your parents' place, but at a competitor's place, and learn the business. So the idea was for me to eventually take over my father's business. But as you know, things happened a little differently. So after I got my obersekunderreifer, I could not go on to make the .438 At that time Jews were not able to do it. Besides, I was not the type of fellow who wanted to do all kinds of academic things; I wanted to play around a little more. I started as an apprentice for two-and-a-half years, and the last half year they made me a regular employee.

Q: WHAT YEARS WERE THAT?

A: That was in 19--I finished in 1936.

Q: THE NAZIS WERE ALREADY IN POWER?

A: Right. And I was always a nut on sports, but obviously I could not join the gentile sports club. Fortunately, there was a Jewish club sponsored by the Juedischenfrontsoldaten called tschild. You might be familiar with it, and that was just the right kind of activity for me. I played soccer and did track. But at that time in 1936 already during the Olympics in Berlin, Jews were not permitted to go to sporting events or go to any theaters or movies. And while my dad had his business and figured

this Hitler would not last forever, I being so much younger, figured I wanted to get out. And I tried to apply in 1936 to leave, wherever I could go to. But unfortunately, I had no relatives anyplace. So now comes the story that Rena likes me to--.

RENA: So also you might--excuse me for interrupting, that's where I met Erwin in eh, the--

A: Oh, yeah, in the sports club tschild.

RENA: Yeah.

A: Which was a little later on, which was in 1938.

RENA: Yeah.

A: And since there were not too many young ladies available in my own age group, I had to turn to much younger and prettier ladies. That's when I met Rena. But you're getting a little ahead of the story.

RENA: But, no, that is where we originally had met before--

A: Correct. But I was just trying to tell her how I got out, and I started in 1936. So what I did is, I went to the American Consul and got a hold of phone books and looked for people with the name of Guggenheim. So, I did find several, as a matter of fact, I wrote 30 letters.

RENA: Was that only in the United States or was it all over?

A: Yes, yeah, and as I mentioned to you before, I was not too interested in doing all kinds of thorough work or being academic, so what I did is, I made, I used carbon copy.

When I wrote those 30 letters, I actually wrote 10 original letters and 20 others. And out of those 30 letters, I did receive three replies.

Q: REALLY?

A: And the first one was from a gentleman, who, now my memory is a little hazy now, who said: "I would like to help you; unfortunately, I don't have the means to do it. And I wish I could help, but I can't."

The second was from the very wealthy Guggenheims, the carpet Guggenheims. The secretary wrote and said, "Yes, we will be glad to furnish you with an affidavit." Which he did.

And the third one, and this is now the story, that, is "the" story, came from a lady in Indianapolis. My letter originally went to her father's home in Chicago, but this man had been dead for seven or eight years and I don't know how it happened whether our U.S. Post Office was more efficient at that time or not, that letter was forwarded to her in Indianapolis. And she happened to be the head of the Jewish community in Indianapolis, and she figured, yeah, the sisterhood, and she figured this would be an opportunity to help somebody. So they asked me whether I wanted an affidavit, and of course, that was the idea. There was no relationship at all, but she swore that she was a first cousin; she was from Stuttgart.

So, as I said, that was in 1936. But the German quota numbers to the U.S. were so solidly booked that my

number never came up. And an affidavit, as you might know, is only good for six months. So, I had to request from these people to renew the affidavit six months later. The carpet Guggenheims came back and they said, "Unfortunately, we can not renew the affidavit because we made out affidavits for over 49 or 59 people," and that was the end of that story. But the people in Indianapolis were glad to renew it. As a matter of fact, they were so nice they sent me a couple of cartons of Chesterfield cigarettes, even though I never smoked; and when they arrived I was supposed to pay duty on them. I told the custom's official, "You smoke, you keep the cigarettes." So to make the story short, this went on and on. And my quota number never came up. Until 1939 when I really got antsy, and I found out through an accident--I hope I am not boring you with this story?

Q: ON THE CONTRARY.

A: That I could get out of Germany through a different way because my mother was born in France; and the U.S. gave you the option whether you wanted to be, wanted to come under the French quota or the German quota. My father was German. And, obviously, the French quota was not nearly booked as solidly as the German quotas. So then I made a quick decision.

Q: YOUR MOTHER HAD NEVER CHANGED HER CITIZENSHIP FROM-

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A: No, no, she was German; but the Americans don't go by what your citizenship is, they go by where you were born.

So there was an opportunity. The only hitch on the deal was that if I wanted to leave, my mother had to go also because I was a minor child at that time. And my mother did not want to leave dad alone, so we decided to go to the consul anyhow and make, get visas for both of us or just for me. And I asked the stupid question, I asked, "Could I travel on my own, my mother doesn't want to go?" They said, "Oh, no, you must travel with your mother." As a matter of fact on my papers they printed "minor child must travel with mother," and my mother had no intention of going.

Q: THAT WAS IN 1938?

A: 1939.

Q: AND YOU WERE 21?

A: I was 20 at that time, I was still 20. So I finally got my papers together. And I was sort of a brazen little guy, I folded that piece of paper over and used a hot iron and pressed it down so that it didn't--so nobody would look at this. But before I could leave I had to go to the Gestapo because I was in the draft age; and at that time they still had Jewish boys in the reserve quota. So I went over there, and it took about three or four hours before I got clearance from them. They called their quote "Ausschliessungsschein" end of quote, and said when you cross the German border you must present them. But while I was over there my parents had fits because I never came back. Anyhow, after four hours I got it. So we were supposed to--I was supposed to sail on a Dutch ship out of Antwerp at the

end of September. I knew that the ship was not going to Antwerp, but I knew that the German officials did not know that at the border. So I actually crossed the border September 30, 1939, and Poland was already defeated. We had a lot of army soldiers on the same train going towards Aachen. That was our point of crossing the border.

Q: WAR BROKE OUT IT SEPTEMBER?

A: September 1st. So I used to play the accordion quite well, and I had a big 120 bass accordion which I took along. And while I was at the border the German officials asked me, "Well, you're probably just taking the accordion along to sell it in the United States." And I said, "No, this is my means of possibly making a living." So, the guy said, "Well, let me hear you play it." So I played there at the border and this was a fairly decent official. Then a couple of others came around, and they wanted me to play more and more. Anyhow, they let me take the thing along.

Q: WITHOUT PAYING ANY TAX?

A: No, duties, enter. I mean, most of the time they kept it.

Q: CONFISCATED IT?

A: Confiscated it.

Q: EXCUSE ME, WHERE DID YOU CROSS THE BORDER?

A: At Aachen.

Q: AT AACHEN?

A: Yeah. So, I would say that probably was the happiest event in my life, when I went over there. But the

ship was not there. As a matter, of fact we were stranded in Antwerp for five weeks. And the steamship company Holland-American Line paid for our hotel. I had the greatest time of my life. As a matter of fact, I was very friendly with a close friend of Rena's, and we had a ball. I played the accordion, and she went along collected from the hotel guests; and we enjoyed ourselves. Go ahead.

Q: WHO DID YOU LIVE WITH, YOU SAID "WE"?

A: The lady that was on the same ship.

RENA: It happened to be just coincidence.

A: Yeah, well, this is quite a story. Her name--she worked for Corrette of California, you might have known her, her name now is Ilsa Wesley. Her name used to be Illa, Donna Barrett.

Q: I KNEW HER.

RENA: And her sister Lela Madeline. You know her, I am sure.

A: So, we were on the same ship going over. But if I may interject another little story which is quite something. My grandmother, who went to the United States before us, had quite a bit of jewelry left in Germany; and my parents had no intention to give it to the Nazis. You know during the Kristallnacht you were supposed to turn over everything you had. But now we were trying to figure out how we can get her jewelry, and the little jewelry that my parents had, how could we get that out. Now I happened to be friendly with the Peruvian Consul who was stationed in Hamburg. He lived



in our neighborhood, and I used to play with the son. And this boy fell into the canal where we were playing; and I was a big hero and pulled him out of the water, which was really nothing. But everybody blew this deal up to a big extent. So this consul, I figured, maybe can do something for me. And so I approached him whether he could get the jewelry out for us through the diplomatic pouch. He said, "Yes, I can get it to Holland." But I was not going to go to Holland, I was going to go to Belgium. So, we happened to have an acquaintance in Holland, to whom the jewelry was sent. But, he was a German refugee also. He could not cross the border from Holland to Belgium. He had to give the jewelry to a middleman who could take it over. So, I am giving you the punch line in a minute.

This jewelry traveled all over and finally wound up in my hands while I was in Belgium. And I put it in a safe there with an acquaintance I had. Everything was signed, you know, so that nobody could open the package, so we thought. So, when we finally got to New York and I saw my grandmother there at the pier, the customs official asked me, "Do you have anything, any duty to declare?" I said, "I have nothing," and I must have had such a guilty face. The guy opened up my suitcase, and sure enough, he found the jewelry, which really belonged to the family. He said, "This is no man's jewelry; this is all women's things. A couple of watches you can keep them, the others we have to leave here." I said, "For whom am I going to leave?" "Well, don't you

have a mother over in Germany?" I said, "Yes, but I don't know when mother will come." "Well, it has to remain there until she comes." In the meantime my grandmother who was at the pier that was her jewelry, said, "May I have a look at the various things?" She discovered that one ring, the most valuable ring, was missing. Now the question was: "Who took the ring?" And we never found out the answer. But to come to a happy conclusion of the jewelry caper, my mother had to come over two months later because otherwise her visa would have expired, and she got the jewelry. But this was just an aside that I wanted to explain.

RENA: Yeah, I am sure your grandmother thought that you took that ring.

A: I don't know who she thought took it. But this was a heartbreaking decision for my parents to let mother go on her own, and dad remain behind. But they figured, well, mother was still fifteen years younger than dad, so she did come. I'll revert back to this in a minute.

When I arrived in New York I called these people in Indianapolis. "I'm here now, and I'll be able to manage; I am young enough, I can do all kinds of things." They said, "Huh-uh, now you're here, now we want to see what you look like." They sent me a Greyhound bus ticket, and I went to Indianapolis. They treated me like their own child; they were unbelievable people. They had two sons, one is close to my age, and the other is a little younger. And I stayed there with them for about two or three months, until I made

enough money, which is about \$50 a month at that time, that I could go on my own.

And then I was drafted into the U.S. Army in February 1941. I was one of those fortunate fellows who had a very early draft number. You might remember Roosevelt had the fish bowl there where you pulled out the numbers. So, I was drafted as an enemy alien, which is most unusual at that time. So, I am reverting back now to my parents.

My mother was in New York; she stayed with my grandmother. She was really working in a household just to make ends meet or to support herself. While I was in the army, my dad was still in Germany. As a matter of fact, he was still in Germany up until February '41.

Q: EXCUSE ME, AND STILL NOBODY KNEW THAT HE WAS JEWISH?

A: Oh, yes, they did, but in Hamburg they did not send people to the camps at that time.

RENA: You forgot even to mention when all this happened that you were hiding.

A: Oh, yeah, yeah, I missed a whole bunch.

Q: ALL RIGHT, WE CAN GO BACK.

A: Yeah, but let me talk about dad first. As I mentioned to you, he was in the export business and had connections with various consuls. One of them was a Panamanian Consul. And by "smearing him", meaning paying him some money, even at that time the Panamanians did not object to accepting bribes, he issued a visa to my dad at least to

get out. So my dad left via Koenigsberg, and then he took the Siberia Express, Express in quotation marks. And when he wound up near Vladivostok, it was a matter of whether he was going to Shanghai or to Japan. So for some reason he went to Kobe, Japan. And then when he presented his so-called visa to the authorities, they knew that this was a phony visa. So he could not leave Japan.

In the meantime I was in the army and making a private's salary of \$18 a month, or \$17. And my mother worked in a household, and we had to get my dad out somehow. And he had a handicap that his hand, fingers would not close properly. So the American Consul said at that time, "Well, we cannot take you in." This was one of those deals. So, my mother was quite a forceful person, she went to Washington D.C. and saw our representative in the House. His name was Ludlow. Explained her story to him that her only son served in the U.S. Army, and we have only one relative left. So, this was a very kind man, and he got in touch with the State Department to see what they could do to get my dad over. They said, "Yes, we can get him; however, somebody has to deposit an irrevocable letter of credit to the tune of \$2,000." Who had \$2,000 at this time? So, again, I turned to these nice people in Indianapolis, who didn't have it in their hip pocket either. But they went--and I remember those things, but I don't remember what happened yesterday--they went to the Morris Plan and got a loan for \$2,000. So, now we assured them that dad would repay it immediately when he

comes back, when he comes to this country; but they would not let him do it. You have to pay it over a period of two years. Anyhow, my dad arrived. I got a leave from the army; I was in Fort Custer, Michigan. We had a terrific reunion there.

Q: AMAZING, QUITE A STORY.

A: So to come back to the night of the Kristallnacht. We had a call from some friends they were arresting Jewish males, so we left our home immediately and were hiding with gentiles until the first ones were released.

Q: YOUR MOTHER, TOO?

A: No, just dad and I; and mother went into the apartment house where my grandmother lived. At that time they were searching for us. As a matter of fact, we stayed in the apartment three floors above from where my grandmother was, and we saw, or we heard, the people searching for us. So then Christmas--

Q: WHO WAS HIDING YOU THERE; WERE THEY FRIENDS OR WERE THEY ACQUAINTANCES?

A: They were gentiles, acquaintances. We knew them because they lived in the same apartment building where my grandmother lived in. They were just very kind people, and they took one awful chance.

Q: IT WAS COURAGEOUS OF THEM, THEY COULD HAVE BEEN IN A LOT OF TROUBLE.

A: They certainly could have. But before they came, I already set up something in our apartment. We were on the

first floor, I had a very solid rope that I tied to our window; and I explained to my dad, who was no kid, how to crawl down. And I knew through the backyards where to go. We were not about to be taken in. Most German Jews were sort of like sheep. When the officials tell you something, this is what they do, that is what you have to do. So, dad was ready to climb down there with me, but we never had to do it. So, of course, they closed his business like they did with most of them, and that, when it was too late already. I mean, he didn't get out until early '41.

Q: WHEN HE WENT ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE SOVIET UNION, DID HE HAVE ANY PROBLEMS YOU KNOW REMAINING ON THE TRAINS OR--

A: No, there was a Jewish organization, I think, who worked for the highers, who were in various places in Russia, who fed them, gave them something, and also some money. But I wish I wouldn't have been as lazy as I was, I would have translated my dad's diary. It is an unbelievable story, how he got out, how he managed it, and--

Q: DO YOU STILL HAVE HIS DIARY?

A: I have his, in his own script, and he has worse handwriting than I. I have to translate it, but it is quite a story. And I think he embellished it a little. He used to be a writer. He used to write for the Hamburger Illustrierter, and he made up one heck of a story that is really something.

Q: WELL, MAYBE IT'S TRUE?

A: Part of it is, yes. But he made, he earned a living, while he was in Japan waiting, for the papers by analyzing people's handwriting. He, his hobby was graphology. And the American Consul got very friendly with dad, even though he couldn't help him, and he gave him quite a few names. And, analyzing their handwriting, that's how he made a little money over there.

Q: RESOURCEFUL.

A: So, they didn't like it in the Midwest, my parents, and said, "This is not for me." So, they went to the West Coast without any money and landed in San Francisco.

RENA: First in Los Angeles.

A: First they checked in Los Angeles; they didn't like it, then lived in San Francisco. And dad got a job; he was in his seventies. It was Granite Brothers, as a messenger carrying diamonds on the key train from San Francisco to the Oakland office. And they were really very thrifty and frugal, and with that little money that they made, they earned enough that they could buy a house for cash in San Mateo in 1952. And they loved it there, and they lived there until 1964, when they both died within three weeks of each other. So they had a very happy life, the last 14 or 15 years that they lived over there.

Q: AND WHERE WERE YOU DURING THAT TIME?

A: I was, well, I was in the army. Oh, this is a good story.

Q: BACK TO ENGLAND.

RENA: Yes, with me.

A: Okay. As I was saying, we were stationed in Iceland for 18 months our organization, we led the marines, and I was in a regular army outfit, opposite to nothing but draftees; in other words, people who wanted to be in there. And we had quite a few hillbillies in there who had never seen a Jew. And one of the highlights of the conversation while we were in Iceland was making dumb remarks to each other. And one guy's name was Tally, and the other guy's name was Tilly. And Tally kept saying, maybe a hundred fifty times every hour, "Don't be thilly, Tilly." That's what, he lisped, and this was the type of people I was fortunate to associate with.

RENA: Excuse me, they sent you to Iceland without being a citizen.

A: Oh, yes, I'm coming to that.

RENA: He was still a German citizen.

A: I was an enemy alien at the time. As a matter of fact, the Germans did some reconnaissance flights over Reykjavik, Iceland, and evidently found certain places, they did not bomb them; then I don't know what they did. But the American Army got very antsy; they wanted to know who was telling whom what. So they actually tailed me because I was still an enemy alien. I was a German and didn't matter whether you were Jewish or not.

Q: BUT EXCUSE ME, ERWIN, DID YOU APPLY FOR CITIZENSHIP WHEN YOU GOT HERE?



A: Number one, I could not apply I had my first papers it took five years at that time. And when I got to the army, they don't ask many questions, they needed bodies. They shipped them. So they found out, "Oh, my God, we got an enemy alien here in our group." So there were a couple of Canadians besides me who were aliens, who were not naturalized. So they sent a judge over from the United States and made the Canadians and me U.S. citizens in Reykjavik, Iceland. And that's what my papers show.

Q: RIGHT ON THE SPOT?

A: Right.

Q: THAT'S AMAZING.

A: So, we were there for 18 months, and it was horrible place. And everybody figured we would go back to the states, but no, they decided to send us over to the continent in preparation of the invasion. So, we got to England first, and I knew that distance were not too big and Rena was in Manchester; and that's the first place I went to. And she turned out to be a real beauty, she was as a child already.

RENA: So young.

A: I figured that, if I--

Q: SO BEAUTIFUL.

RENA: --like a horse.

A: --if I get out of this war alive, this is the gal I would like to marry. I didn't tell her that, but I figured I would do it. I saw her on several furloughs; then we were

moved to Ireland in really serious preparation for the invasion. And so then a few days after D-day, fortunately, we landed in Normandy. And I made it known that I spoke German fluently, and I bragged that I was good in French, too. So, I didn't particularly want to be number one cannon fodder, so I got into civil affairs, that's what they called it in France, or military government in Germany. And I was an interpreter with regimental headquarters.

Q: EXCUSE ME, WEREN'T YOU WORRIED, ERWIN, THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN CAPTURED BY THE GERMANS BECAUSE THEY STILL HAD YOU ON RECORD AS--?

A: Correct. This was still on my mind but it--I was such a redhot and I wanted to get over there, and I didn't feel that I wanted to go to the Pacific, maybe I would have had a choice. As a matter of fact, on my dog tag--you know what a dog tag is--I definitely put down "H" for Hebrew; and I really did not care. So there those--there were quite a few experiences but much too long to tell you about.

Q: OH, GO AHEAD, WE HAVE LOTS OF TIME.

A: Well, obviously, I got into some action. And particularly near Verdun, which was completely in wonderful shape. But we had a tank division associated with us, and that general figured he could park the tanks right in the middle of town. The Germans came over at night with their Pathfinder aircraft, Pathfinders meaning they had search light; and they just bombed the heck out of this town. And I was in a hotel, but stayed in the basement. And when they

started bombing, that's when I really experienced something that the British took for granted year after year. And I was scared. And the British, we called them Limies at the time, they were completely relaxed while we were down there. So in the morning when I was going to get my equipment out of my hotel room, there was nothing left, it was just the basement.

So I was associated with a French captain who worked with the underground. We were together quite a bit and I helped him to evacuate some French to go over the Meuse River, near Pont-a-Mousson, that's the name of the town. Anyhow, a year and a half later I found out that he recommended me for the French Croix-de-Guerre, which I did get. That's the only hero thing that I ever experienced. I didn't want to be a dead hero, but this I felt pretty proud of.

So, any event, we were involved in the town of Metz, we were in Patton's 3rd Army, and we went through the town in a hurry. But then our flanks, the left and the right flanks, didn't keep up with us; so Eisenhower decided to pull the 3rd Army back. We had to take that town of Metz over again, and it took us about two-and-a-half months. And all my old buddies who used to be in my rifle company either were killed or captured or wounded. The only ones left were some cooks and supply people left. So, what I'm trying to tell you it was very fortunate that I got out of that outfit.

Then we got involved in the Ardennes deal, because they needed all the bodies they could use. Instead of, we

were supposed to go straight toward Frankfurt. Well, when that one was finished, it was Christmas 1944. It is actually true that Patton gave us a little piece of paper that we were all supposed to pray that the rain and the snow would stop, so that our planes could come over and bomb the hell out of the Germans. Evidently, we must have prayed so well, that it stopped, and that's when they could destroy the German deal. But one interesting part of this campaign was none of the GIs ever carried any gas masks with them because there was no fear that there was a chemical war. So the Germans captured an awful lot of our people, and then decided to wear American uniforms. You never knew who was a German and who was a GI. That's when we got instructions: "Everybody wears gas masks, carries gas masks; if you see anybody without a gas mask: shoot." And that is how we could identify the Germans; it was a helluva situation. Anyhow, after that things went very fast.

Our next objective was Frankfurt. We took the I.G. Farben building, and incidentally, we had instructions not to fire at the GM works, General Motors works, Opel, in Ruesselsheim, because it's American-owned. And then we went through Bavaria very quickly to a little town called Passau, at the Austrian and Czech border; our final objective was going to be the town of Prague, and that was at the beginning of May. Then Eisenhower and Stalin decided that the Russians should take Prague, and that was the end of the war for me. So, I had accumulated enough points to get discharged, but

then I wanted to marry Rena. And this is where the story comes in.

RENA: And Rena wasn't so quite sure she wanted to marry Erwin.

A: There were a lot of hitches connected. You had to prove that you were in correspondence with her for the last six months, which I don't know whether I was because I was in action. And the chaplain had to certify that you were an honorable person, and all these things. Now the chaplain was a German-Jewish refugee; there was no problem. But then I had to get a letter of acquiescence from my future wife. And I wrote her, I need that in order for me to come over and marry her. I never got an answer from her. In the meantime--

Q: (TO RENA) DID YOU GET THE LETTER?

RENA: Of course I did. But you know--

Q: (TO RENA) YOU WEREN'T SURE?

RENA: No.

A: Don't take the punch line away so--

RENA: I needed a little thinking always.

A: I had to make the decision or the army was going to make the decision. I had two choices: either you go home, and I would have been one of the first ones to be discharged; or go with us to the Pacific. Our division was, you know. But I wanted to get her over as a warbride, and nothing happened. So, I decided to take the bull by the horn, and I wrote a beautiful letter to myself that she was very happy to

marry me, and I showed it to the chaplain. I was on my way to Metz to go; I mentioned Metz because that was a place, just as I was boarding the plane my buddy comes with a jeep and was waving something in his hand, and it was her letter. But I must interject, that her letter was not nearly as nice as mine was.

RENA: Naturally, but I thought it was maybe one way to get out. I wasn't too happy in England where I still at the tail end of my nursing degree. I wanted to become an R.N.; it was very important to me. I never used it here, but I needed it just for prestige, I guess. Then I figured this way, my mom wasn't very happy in England, maybe we could all get out. I guess I did all right; I haven't regretted it.

Q: (TO RENA) YOU HAVEN'T?

A: Well, we did get married in July 1945, so it was not--

RENA: I was only 21.

A: It was not so easy.

Q: IN ENGLAND?

RENA: Yeah.

A: She worked as a nurse, and she had to get permission; and I was in between going home. It was just sort of messy. But we spent a beautiful honeymoon in (Londatno), that's in Wales.

RENA: North Wales.

A: North Wales. So then we had to part, which was not the happiest part. I went back home, was discharged in

August 45; and Rena came over as a warbride and arrived in April 1946.

Q: AHA. QUITE A WHILE.

RENA: April first.

A: Yes. And we were fortunate that Rena's uncle and I were close enough to mother to make out affidavits for mother that she could come over just two months after Rena arrived and lived in New York. So this actually very--the whole thing is a very pleasant story. When I got out of the service my dad said, "You were lying on your fanny long enough." He called that lying around. So, I applied for a job and 24 hours later I got a job with S & W Fine Foods and worked for them for forty years until I retired.

Q: REALLY.

A: Yes. And I worked as a consultant with them. But I wanted to mention something when I was on my business trips to the Midwest\*\*\*, I always made my business to get to Indianapolis over the weekend and spend three, four days with these people in Indianapolis.

RENA: And last year we were fortunately--fortunate enough to be invited to Hamburg, for a whole year.

A: Not for a whole year, for a week.

RENA: No, I mean for--

A: For a week. As I mentioned at the beginning of this conversation that I am an elderly gentleman, and when you reach a biblical age, the town of Hamburg will invite you

to be their guest. Maybe you're familiar with it or maybe you're not.

Q: NO, I'M NOT.

A: They invited me and my wife. They paid for the airfare and the hotel stay--oh, there's another terrific story connected with this. We had a reunion here of former Hamburgers, including Alice Caulder, whom you interviewed the other day, Roy Caulder's wife.

RENA: Sunday.

A: Yes, and it was organized by a very good friend of Alice's and mine, and the Chronicle took a picture of this gentleman and me. And there was a correspondent of the Hamburg newspaper who saw that and asked for permission whether they could publish our story in the Hamburg paper, which we granted. So, my picture showed in the Hamburger Abendblatt. And somebody saw that and wondered whether this could be the same Erwin Guggenheim who went to school with him in 1925; it's going back a bit. And he contacted the Hamburg Senate, and the letter was forwarded to me; and sure enough, this was a friend of mine. He was gentile, but we were very close as youngsters.

Q: YOU WERE VERY YOUNG?

A: Yes, and he was from a very fine German family. And he invited us for his 70th birthday party in Hamburg. But I figured I know enough guys who are 70 years old here that I don't have to go to Hamburg for that. But the coincidence was that the Senate invited us for about the same



time; and I asked the Senate whether I could come a few days earlier, so that I could rest up for that party. And it was one heck of a wing ding. And this man had another five or six former classmates of mine, all gentile; we had an unbelievable reunion. And I think we got hoarse talking about all our experiences.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR FEELING AT THE TIME WHEN YOU WENT BACK?

Rena: It was very interesting because most of these friends have some Jewish blood in them. Yes--

A: Yes, yes. Otherwise, we wouldn't have--the one who was 70 is a quarter Jewish, and he went to South Africa after he was in the German Army. I still don't know how he could be in the German Army when--his grandmother was Jewish. But at that time, if he was quarter Jewish they kept him there; but he could never advance in the army.

Q: BUT, HE WASN'T EXPERIENCING ANY DISCRIMINATION EITHER?

A: I really don't know. He was not too happy; so he decided to move to South Africa. He was very successful. He got a doctorate in business, but he had all his relatives in France, still in Hamburg.

RENA: But to come back to our feelings.

A: Yes--

RENA: We, ourselves, feel this is forgotten, you know; we don't have a grudge. We know a lot of young people,

German people, and, we do not feel like other people, who don't want to have anything to do with them.

Q: SO YOU FELT THAT THESE YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULDN'T SUFFER FOR THE SINS OF THEIR PARENTS?

RENA: No.

A: This is correct, definitely.

RENA: Indeed, yeah. This is not everybody's feeling.

A: No, I mean, yeah. When we were at that party there were quite a few people in my age group or older and I was just deep down wondering--

RENA: --in Hamburg

A: Yes, in Hamburg, when we had the 70th birthday, I'm wondering how many might have been in the S.S. or what type of people are they.

Q: DID YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THEY KNEW SOME PEOPLE THAT WEREN'T AS LUCKY AS YOUR FATHER AND YOU? IN OTHER WORDS, WHO WERE ROUNDED UP THE TENTH OF NOVEMBER AND MAYBE SENT TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS?

A: Of course. I knew a lot of my, our friends who were in the Sports Club who never made it home, yes.

Q: RIGHT. MY QUESTION IS: WAS THAT BROUGHT UP AT THE REUNION OR DID YOU TRY TO STAY AWAY FROM TALKING ABOUT IT?

A: I brought it up but I was not going to hammer it home to them. Obviously--

Q: SURE, YOU WERE INVITED.

A: --they would not want to associate with me if they would feel differently. But one fellow said, "Hey, how about

if I really throw a party for you and get all your classmates together." So, we wrote back and said, "That's all very nice of you, but I don't know whether I would feel that comfortable, and maybe that would not be the thing to do." So, we sort of got out of it. But we stayed in a home of one of those friends. They have a beautiful home near the border of East Germany, and he invited four of the other fellows over and that's where we spent the next day. It was just--

RENA: Very sincere.

A: --very nice. And we happened to correspondence with all of them. And they are from real old-time German families. As a matter of fact, one of his grandfathers was a burgermeister\*\*\*, and the other one on his mother's side was. So they were--they certainly were probably Deutsch National, if you know what I mean, but not necessarily--

Q: THERE WAS NO REAL CONVERSATION ABOUT HITLER THEN?

RENA: Oh, yes; oh, yes.

A: Oh, yes; oh, yes, there was. As a matter of fact, this one wife is, this one man's wife is very active in politics. And the reason they are so active, she was the representative, lower echelon, county, that things would not happen the way they happened in the thirties during the Nazis. They wanted to get involved in this deal. Yes, that conversation came up quite often.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS ABOUT THE RUSSIANS?

A: Well, two of them were at the Russian front. They were not too enamored with the Russians at that time. But that is understood, you know, when you're at war.

Q: ANY CONVERSATION ABOUT GORBACHEV AND HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT THE SOVIET UNION TODAY?

A: Well, it was exactly last May and they were thinking fairly highly of Gorbachev; he was the only person who really could do something. But it never entered anyone's mind that Germany would be unified. They showed us the border--

RENA: They took us to the border, and anyway it was real pathetic for them, too.

A: --and you could see there was always two people in those towers in case one of them wanted to defect.

RENA: Indeed he did, yes.

Q: HAVE YOU HAD A CHANCE TO CORRESPOND WITH THEM SINCE?

A: Oh, yes, yes. And we, I expressed my feelings about--that was when the Berlin Wall started crumbling. I didn't think that they would be--that there would be a chance, they could reunify that quickly. And deep down, I don't know whether the West Germans would be too happy to have them in there. Even though officially they say, "Yes, they are our brethren," because how are they going to support all of them. They, when they came over, the East Germans, they wanted to be taken care of in a proper fashion; and, of course, you read this in the newspaper the way I did, they

started paying them a certain amount of money when they came over. They gave them German Westmarks. But at that time officially, they said, "Oh, yeah, we love to have them." But deep down they were not too crazy to have them.

RENA: Now this group that we went to, we met in Germany; that was also very interesting reunion. They all introduced each other, and one lady came from New York. She was, well, I really was the youngest, but there were over seventy. But she mentioned that she was in three or four concentration camps. And I said, "How did you ever get out, and how did you ever have the nerve to come back here?" She said, "Well, it is forgotten." And she wanted to come back and see the hometown. Of course, they take you to cemeteries, and they really go all out.

A: As a matter of fact, there were two brothers and a sister in this group; and one from the United States, one from South America, and one from Holland. And the Hamburg Senate arranged to have them all three come at the same time. As a matter of fact, the city of Hamburg invites always some 40, 50 people once a year from all over the world and six months later from Israel to be their guests.

RENA: Very generous. And we go to operas and I mean they just--

A: And it is--I mean, the speeches that we heard, we don't know how truthful they are. One of them was the son of the director of all the schools of Hamburg. And when Hitler came to power, he wasn't going to go for that nonsense, and

he resigned, that father of this gentleman. Then after 1945, even though he was in his seventies, they dragged him back in, and he ran the show. It was very interesting for us to listen to what was going on.

RENA: How about that meeting that Sunday evening--in the--

A: I don't know.

RENA: --you remember when those people that were not Jewish.

A: Oh, yes. You wanted to know how the German people are. They have a German-Israeli Club, if you wish, and the people, they're not Jewish, they're gentile. They're very--

RENA: Young, young people.

A: --pro-Israel. And they entertained us, and they said if we don't have anything to do over the weekend, they'll be very glad to invite us to their houses and so on.

Q: LIKE A GERMAN-ISRAELI CLUB?

A: Yes.

Q: WHERE THEY SOME TIMES WORK ON A KIBUTZ WHEN THEY GO OVER THERE?

A: I think so.

RENA: Yeah, you're right, you're right. I wouldn't know that.

Q: Go on.

A: But we also went to a synagogue or to what used to be a synagogue, and met some of the Jewish people. There are very few in Hamburg. And most of them are not originally

Germans; they come from Eastern Europe and from Iran, quite a few. There was one man and his wife who were in their eighties and he was an original Hamburger. He approached me because he knew we were from San Francisco; and he asked me whether I knew somebody here, and I did. And, of course, he was very happy to hear that--there was a tailor, his name was Friend, Freund his name was in German. He lived somewhere in the Avenue. But that was actually the only German-Jewish couple that we met there. They have a community of maybe, how many, maybe couple hundred Jews were members of the synagogue there. And that is really sponsored and financed by the Senate of Hamburg. I mean the community has no money to speak of.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY FEELINGS, ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU WERE THERE AND HAVE HAD SOME VERY NICE CONTACTS WITH PEOPLE THAT SEEM TO WANT TO FORGET MORE OR LESS DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH WHAT HAPPENED; DID YOU HAVE ANY FEELING THERE IS ANY LATENT ANTI-SEMITISM?

A: Well, I really did not; we did not experience anything in this trip.

RENA: No, no.

A: However, we were in Germany and in Austria before, and we did experience it in Austria, definitely. There is a different climate. That's the way we felt: maybe we were prejudiced because we saw some TV shows on German TV when they interviewed some Austrian people, what they thought of the Hitler regime, and they said, "We don't remember

anything; we don't think that really occurred." So maybe we were influenced and that was at the time also when Waldheim was made president. But somehow the Austrians--sort of had a little different feeling, and we decided, hey, one day is more than enough; we weren't going to stay any longer.

RENA: As he said, in Austria--very uncomfortable.

Q: WHAT ABOUT SOUTHERN GERMANY, LIKE MUNICH?

A: Well that, Rena has cousin--

RENA: Young cousin, daughter of a cousin.

A: --young cousin, whose father was half Jewish. She is a concert pianist in Munich; and, well, we didn't feel any particular anti-Semitism. But we were there at the same time when the head man of the Republikaner party, you might have heard of it, that's the far right party, made a speech. We did not know that somebody was making a speech. All we knew was that, suddenly there was an awful lot of police all over the place; all roads were blocked. The reason for that is, there were so many people who hated this guy's guts and they didn't--this Republikaner, I can't remember his name. He is quite well known. So that there would be no bloodbath there. So--I mean, while you do have some right-wing elements in Germany and there is no question in my mind, it is very minute. I mean we have the skinheads here, too.

Q: THEY GOT ELEVEN PERCENT OF THE SEATS IN THE GOVERNMENT?



A: In the government, which is considerable, yes. I did lose some relatives over there who were unfortunate, did not get out, and so did Rena, cousins and uncles.

RENA: Yeah, yeah. Well, like Erwin mentioned to you before, but I don't really think that this little anecdote is worth it, to put in there, when we went on the previous trip to Pirmasens, to my hometown.

Q: YES, WHY DON'T YOU TELL US ABOUT IT.

RENA: It was his crazy idea, so I think--

Q: GO AHEAD, ERWIN, TELL US ABOUT IT.

RENA: Well, what happened at the beginning is that my parents lived in Pirmasens and they had gold. They didn't want to give this gold to the Nazis, and they buried it in window sill, deep in there.

A: Oh, now, wait a minute. That was after World War I, the Germans were already hungry at that time.

RENA: Oh, I see.

A: And they hid it in a--what do you call, a window shade. But then, when it came to the Hitler regime, as I mentioned to you before, you were supposed to turn over jewelry and gold during the Kristallnacht--when was that, November 10, 1938,--they did not do that. They decided to go to the cemetery at night and bury the gold next to the grave of Rena's parents.

RENA: Rather than giving it to the Nazis.

A: So, then they were scared to prepare a detailed map of where the gold was buried, so was a flimsy little sketch

that went to grandfather, it's her uncle, and Rena's mother had that little sketch. I had a heck of a time figuring out what it was all about.

RENA: And he insisted on checking it out.

A: But I figured we were going to Germany so I bought one of those--

RENA: It was so much fun really.

A: --metal detector deals and shipped it over. Oh, the funny thing is, we arrived in Frankfurt and had all our luggage; the metal detector wasn't there. I said, "Oh, oh, they figured there was something not quite kosher." Anyhow, we did find it later on. So, in the meantime, I wanted to arrange with the head of the cemetery that he show us where the grave is and introduced myself. So, I went to the German Consul--but I--Consul here--I explained to him what my mission was, but I did not want to let the cat get out of the bag. All I wanted the Consul to write to him, that there is a gentleman coming who wanted to look at the graves and so on; that he should extend all the necessary courtesies. So, we did, and I introduced--we introduced ourselves. It was a very nice man, and then I sprung the deal on him, what we wanted to do. And, of course, he was sort of enthused. We went to the grave site, and, he, looking at the sketch, he had an idea where it would be. And we wanted to be sure that there were no new graves in that area, and certainly there were not. It was well kept, we had a hunch where it was, so we used that detector and went over it. And, oh, we heard

that beep, and I mean we got so excited. We figured, "Hey this is it." So then we called this head man of the cemetery. He brought a couple of spades and we started digging. So then we found a resistance, and what it was--

Q: --A METAL COFFIN?

RENA: No, not quite.

A: It was an old pan, brick pan laced with iron, and that's what attracted it. But we didn't give up, and we went for another hour and then we found something that now we said, "This is definitely it because this has got to be the place." This guy started digging and what he dug up was an old shrapnel. The French evidently shelled the area. And then we gave up. Maybe somebody else found it before.

RENA: Or it might have been scattered.

A: Anyhow, that was the story.

RENA: Yeah, and it went into the paper there in Pirmasens. Burgermeister and everything.

A: Oh, yes, the big headline, "Daughter looking for gold", or something like that.

RENA: We didn't find it, but it was fun doing it. So that's about our story.

A: Unless you have some other questions pertaining to what our feelings are now. We have various friends who would not go back to Germany, come heck or high water, they would not.

RENA: Yeah, yeah, well, of course, I got just a couple of thousand dollars for interruption of education, but Erwin is--

A: Well, I worked and I was able to work out a deal that I get German social security. I made an additional payment, maybe 12, 15 years ago, and it certainly is nothing to sneeze about. If you were a--they call it "verfolgter" if you were persecuted, I think they gave you an additional nine or eleven years, as if you would have worked an additional nine or eleven years. And then you had a choice of making an additional payment, if you wanted to, to increase your social security, which we did. And so, while I was not brainy enough to go to a university and had to go to work, it was a blessing in disguise at that time.

RENA: Also, we found out that my mother can get any money, they call it--what do they call it kindergeld.

A: Kindergeld. If you are--

RENA: I don't know whether you are aware of that or not because we found out from German people.

Q: NO.

A: You have to be a certain age group, and if you had children that were born over there, the German Government pays very small amount for each child. So, what I understand now and you might mention it to some of the other people you interview, anybody born prior to 1920, any woman, can apply and get some money. The ones who were born 1920, that's the youngest group, they will qualify to get money as of October

1990. I do not know whether the child has to be born in Germany or where it has to be born, but it is something worthwhile mentioning to people.

RENA: So much for each child.

Q: WELL, I THINK THAT ONE OF THE QUESTIONS I HAVE, I GUESS, IS HOW DO YOU SEE GERMANY FUNCTIONING IN THE FUTURE AS PART OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY? WHERE DO YOU SEE THEIR LEADERSHIP COMING FROM, AND I AM NOT THINKING NOW ABOUT MR. KOHL BECAUSE HE'S NOT A VERY YOUNG MAN?

A: No.

Q: I THINK THAT IS SOMETHING THAT WE ALL ARE WONDERING.

A: I feel that I think discussing this with various friends of mine that they certainly--in Germany--that they certainly would like to stay with a NATO or some kind of a similar organization, East and West Germany combined. And I don't know whether the Russians would have much choice, but they should. And I think they would want to remain this way. And, possibly the Russians might keep some troops in East Germany, and Americans might remain in West Germany. I think that's the way the future will be. I certainly would not want to see them independent; this is something that I would not be too crazy about. In other words, if they would be completely neutral. And I think while the Russians are mouthing it officially, that they don't want anything or--they secretly would like them to remain in the NATO organization or in the European community. Certainly they

will be very powerful. It's pretty obvious the West Germans were by far the strongest of the Europeans, and the East Germans were the strongest in the Eastern Bloc.

RENA: I think that is the opinion of the German people, too, from what we found out.

A: Yes, from what we found out.

Q: YOU MEAN THE GERMAN PEOPLE DO NOT WANT THE AMERICANS TO LEAVE ALTOGETHER?

A: No.

RENA: Not at the moment.

A: No, I mean, at that time there was no inkling of what was going on. But they were perfect--they feel quite comfortable with the Americans around. Hey, this is just one lady's and one man's opinion.

RENA: Oh, we talk about this many times.

Q: WE WANT YOUR OPINION.

RENA: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: OF COURSE THE GERMANS WERE ABLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR ECONOMIC MIRACLES BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO SPEND THAT MUCH MONEY ON DEFENSE. SO IT'S MAYBE TO THEIR ADVANTAGE.

A: On defense--however, I wanted to bring up one other thing that I mention every time we have this conversation. When Poland sort of got a little more free, three or four months ago, Mr. Kohl came over to Poland and told them, "Well, we're going to be buddies", and he brought one-billion-mark letter of credit along with it, for the Poles.

And they had a--he made a speech in what was formerly called Breslau--Mr. Kohl. And boy, there I saw the signs that I remember during the Sudetenland Anschluss where some of the few Germans who were still left there would want to reunite, and I figured, "Oh, boy, I hope we don't go through this again." However, there are not too many Germans living in Silesia, because they were kicked out by the Poles; but they're still a German minority who speaks German and they want the same rah-rah deal that you and we are all familiar with. They want to be reunited, of course, I can see that; and the Poles are worried about this because, as you know, the Poles got a big part of East Germany, while the Russians took a big part of East Poland. So--

Q: WELL, THE CZECHOSLOVAKS ALSO HAD THE SUDETEN GERMANS?

A: Yes.

Q: THAT'S ANOTHER ISSUE.

A: Yes. But I think Mr. Kohl never came out with the statement that he was going to honor the present Oder-Neisse line, because he wanted to be sure that the right wing of the Germans would re-elect him next October, until he was forced to come out with a statement saying: "Yes, we honor the border." What's going to happen there, I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if a monetary solution will come within the next few months. That maybe two Ostmark will be worth one Westmark, or something like that.

Q: THEY ALREADY MENTIONED THAT IN THE PAPER.

A: Yes, I read this. But I think that's the first thing going to happen, because they're worried, the East Germans, what's going to happen to our pensions, social security, and so on. I think this will be the first step.

Q: SO YOUR FEELING WAS THAT THIS NATIONALISM OR THIS SORT OF EUPHORIC KIND OF GERMAN NATIONALISM THAT WAS ON THE TELEVISION, AND, YOU KNOW, TALKED ABOUT IN THE NEWSPAPERS, IS NOT ALL THAT SINCERE WHEN IT COMES TO THE WEST GERMANS AND THE EAST GERMANS?

A: Yes, well, that was all I can tell you what our feeling was when we were there last May that they said, "Oh, yes, we want our brethren to be reunited." But deep down they figure, "Hey, who is going to support all this financially?" And there is quite a bit of provincialism, and it's still there in Germany. Like, for instance, the Prussians never had too much use for the Bavarians, and the same applies between the West Germans and the East Germans. There is no change.

RENA: They are happy to visit. They come out to visit, but they like them to go back, according to the letters we got from our German friends.

A: Yeah, there are about 14, 15 correspondents that I have and that keeps me sort of busy.

RENA: It's interesting, too, to hear their opinion because they are very intelligent people, they're not just peasants. Well, that's about it.

A: So--



Q: WELL, YOU HAVE A VERY FASCINATING SURVIVAL STORY TO TELL BECAUSE SOMEHOW YOU WERE ABLE TO ESCAPE ANY, ANY MAJOR--

RENA: We were certainly--

A: Yeah, correct. We were very fortunate, both of us all the way--I was in the service for four-and-a-half years and never got a scratch.

RENA: I really think because we were young and the age has a lot to do with it, you know, you forget or it doesn't-- I remember going in the shelters, and going down every night but they--

A: --in England.

RENA: Yeah, but then it comes to routine. I remember incendiary bombs in the hospital but you lose that fear its-- you just go on.

A: And, as I said in the beginning, I was fortunate to live in Hamburg, which was a very cosmopolitan town, always was. The Naziism was not nearly as severe, as for instance, in the Rhineland or in Bavaria, because I know they started sending them to camps much earlier than in Hamburg.

Q: YOU ALSO HAD A VERY GOOD ATTITUDE, I CAN HEAR THAT FROM YOUR STORY. I THINK YOU HAD A VERY GOOD, HEALTHY, SURVIVAL ATTITUDE.

A: Yes, well--

RENA: It's part of your parents' upbringing, too.

A: I think so because we sort of--my dad was a very independent-minded person. I mean--

RENA: Stubborn--

A: Stubborn. He did not--

RENA: --to tell you the truth.

A: He did not like to take orders and maybe some of it came on to his son.

RENA: Yeah.

A: Because--

RENA: He hasn't changed much yet either.

Q: THAT'S GOOD, THAT'S WHAT KEEPS YOU YOUNG.

A: Yes, I think and--are we about through?

Q: WELL, IT'S UP TO YOU, IF YOU HAVE ANY MORE TO SAY.

A: I don't think. I think I talk too much as it was.

Q: NOT AT ALL. WE'RE VERY APPRECIATIVE OF EVERYTHING THAT YOU'RE SHARING.

A: Yeah, I wish I had a little more details of my dad's escape; that was a real hairy situation.

RENA: It was.

Q: IT'S AMAZING THAT HE WAS ABLE TO LIVE THROUGH THOSE WAR YEARS THERE WITHOUT EVEN--

RENA: And he was always sick, that was another thing. He survived.

A: Yes, he did. He lived to be 89 years old, so that's a pretty good age. He encountered some problems on account of his last name; while I was very fortunate on account of my last name did I get out of Germany. And I never planned to change my name. But when he was over there and just trying to board that last plane, they heard about the Guggenheim family sponsoring a lot of things to fight

against the Nazis, so they were trying to hold his passport back. The story gets so hairy, I don't know what is truth and what is fiction. How he grabbed his passport and ran to the plane, and the plane took off with him.

Q: YOU SAY THAT IT WAS YOUR NAME THAT HELPED YOU TO GET OUT OF GERMANY?

A: On account of my last name Guggenheim that I looked up in the telephone book and wrote to the people.

Q: OH, YOU MEAN THAT PART OF YOUR EXPERIENCE.

A: Yes.

Q: WELL, IT ALSO TOOK A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF INITIATIVE THAT NOT EVERYBODY HAD, TO WRITE 30 LETTERS AND GOT A 10 PERCENT RETURN.

RENA: Amazing, too.

A: Yeah. This is funny.

Q: EXCELLENT.

A: So, but then you really found out of how wonderful these people were. And I want to emphasize once more that the Germans sort of had a superiority complex towards the East Europeans. But when I came to this country, I found out how terrific a lot of East Europeans were to us refugees. And that's why we should not forget how they treated us. And when we now have these Russians coming over, we should treat them just as kindly.

Q: ABSOLUTELY, I HAD THE SAME EXPERIENCE--

A: Yes.

Q: --AS YOU DID; THEY WERE VERY WARM AND CARING.

A: Correct.

Q: SO THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

RENA: Well, thank you for asking us.

A: I am glad we could do something, hopefully.

RENA: If it could just help anybody...it'll be a great  
help.

Q: GREAT.