

Transcription of Legacy Series Interview for Kennesaw State University Archives

By Adina Langer

Interviewer: Adina Langer

Interviewee: David Jacobi

Transcriber: Adina Langer

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AJL: Good morning. Today is March 31, 2017. My name is Adina Langer, and I'm the curator of the Museum of History and Holocaust Education, and I'm here for the Legacy Series oral history project. Could you please start by stating your full name?

DJ: My full name is David Ira Henry Jacobi.

AJL: And when and where were you born?

DJ: I was born in downtown Atlanta at Georgia Baptist Hospital in early 1962.

AJL: OK. And can you describe your neighborhood from when you were growing up?

DJ: Yeah. I grew up in Decatur in kind of a small area near North Decatur, and not too far from Toco Hills shopping center, if I remember correctly.

AJL: And what was it like? Were the houses close together? Were people friendly with each other?

DJ: As a child I don't know if I remember too much about my interactions with my neighbors, other than the kids that lived on either side of me. The houses were pretty small. They would be what we'd call starter homes today. And I went to a private kindergarten and a private elementary school near Emory called Arlyn Worth¹ for the first four years of my life. And then in the early '70s we moved to another area of Decatur, and I went to Sagamore Elementary School in Dekalb County.

AJL: And did you go all the way up through high school in Dekalb County?

DJ: Yes, I did. I'm a product of Dekalb County. I went to Lakeside High School.

AJL: OK. Your family, were they religiously observant?

DJ: I would say they were conservative. We went to synagogue every Saturday and some Friday evenings. I went to a Hebrew elementary school that was part of the synagogue starting around middle school age. I went to Hebrew high school here in Atlanta.

AJL: Did you have a bar mitzvah?

DJ: I did.

¹ "Coda : Emory Magazine," accessed May 30, 2017, http://www.emory.edu/EMORY_MAGAZINE/issues/2013/summer/of_note/coda-emory-village.htm l. (Confirmed spelling and location of Arlyn Worth school.)

AJL: And were you an only child?

DJ: I still am. Yeah. (Laughter)

AJL: And where did you attend services?

DJ: We started at Shearith Israel² and then moved to Or VeShalom³ synagogue.

AJL: What did it mean to you as a child? What was your relationship with Judaism? (2:24)

DJ: I don't think I really formed any strong opinions until I was about ten or eleven. Up until that time it was just something I had to do because my parents told me. I did find a strong connection to it, I'd say, in my early teens. But I'd say by the time I was in my late teens/ early twenties, it didn't seem to be as important in my life.

AJL: Do you remember any holiday experiences, or anything like that?

DJ: I remember lighting the candles at Chanukah every year. I remember the Passover dishes every year as well. My mother was a very good cook, but she used the British style of cooking, so there were some limitations there. The British are not known for their best recipes. I do remember having Passover once with my grandparents. One time with my dad's parents. And the story I remember – they had a German shepherd, and it was hard to keep him away from the food. That's kind of a memory I hadn't thought about in a while.

AJL: Sure, that's fun. So can you tell me your parents' names? (3:40)

DJ: My father was Helmut Joseph Jacobi, and my mother was Betty Elizabeth Decker.

AJL: And what was their relationship like with each other?

DJ: By the time I was a teenager, it was the typical, you know, there were arguments, but it was good-natured. I think they were very much in love, at least through my early/late teens. My father was heavily involved with Boy Scouts, and that put a little bit of a strain on the relationship, because he was gone a lot. Wednesday nights were meetings. Weekends were campouts. Summers were camping trips and Boy Scout camp, so there was a little bit of resentment there. But they were very close.

AJL: What about with you? What was your relationship like with your parents?

DJ: As an only child, I got a lot of attention, probably more than I wanted. In my teen years, I was a little bit rebellious. But for the most part, it was typical childhood/ teenage years. They were very supportive. I was able to go to Georgia Tech, and I was allowed to live at home during the process, so that was kind of good.

AJL: That's nice. Did your parents talk about how they met each other? (5:00)

DJ: I found that out more towards later in life. They never really talked about it when I was a kid that much. I had to kind of pull that out of them, but I found out they met here in the U.S. in 1954, when my mother came on holiday to visit from London.

AJL: OK.

² "About," *Shearith Israel*, accessed May 30, 2017, <https://shearithisrael.com/about/>.

³ "About | Congregation Or VeShalom," accessed May 30, 2017, <https://orveshalom.org/content/about>.

DJ: And they were introduced by mutual friends at a concert at Atlanta Symphony Hall, and that's how they first met.

AJL: Oh. And before I get a little bit more into your mother and her family, what were your parents' occupations? (5:42)

DJ: My father worked in his dad's secondhand store in downtown Atlanta, not far from where Atlanta – Fulton Public Stadium⁴ used to be until last year, and then he ended up working for a women's garment manufacturer in downtown Atlanta for many years. That company is no longer in existence. My mother was a secretary, and then eventually director for the Golden Age Employment Service, which was a public entity that helped people approaching retirement years find employment. And then she worked at The Temple for a few years.

AJL: OK. The Temple on Peachtree?

DJ: Yes.

AJL: Did most of your mother's friends also work, or was she different in that she worked outside the home?

DJ: I think about half and half. I'd say about half of her peers were stay-at-home moms, and the other half were also, were working. At that time that was kind of unusual, in the 70s and 80s.

AJL: And you mentioned your mother's maiden name was Decker.

DJ: Correct.

AJL: Where, and around when was she born? (7:07)

DJ: She was born in 1927 in London, in Stoke Newington,⁵ and, you know, it was between the two wars, and times were tough. And they lived in a multilevel series of flats in Stoke Newington. In fact, the same apartment that she lived in, my grandparents lived in until about 1975.

AJL: And how did your mother's family come to be in England?

DJ: As far as I can tell from the genealogy records, the family came from Holland in the mid-1850s and settled in the central London area in the Jewish district. My grandfather was a cigar maker and also worked with stained glass, so he was an artisan. He did spend time in the Merchant Marines during World War I, but the family name, Decker, is most likely Dutch, and it was, I believe, originally Dukker, d-u-k-k-e-r, until they spelled it the English way.

AJL: And they came through Holland, to England. Originally they were from Spain?

DJ: That's the family lore. I don't have any direct evidence, but from what my grandmother shared from her knowledge, it's believed that they were originally from Spain and settled in Amsterdam after the expulsion in the late – excuse me—in the early 1490s.

AJL: So your mother would have been a teenager, then, during the Blitz.

⁴ "Photos: 19 Memories of Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium," *Ajc*, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.ajc.com/sports/photos-memories-atlanta-fulton-county-stadium/mbjtH2Nd206EXxmvkFRVjl/>.

⁵ "Stoke Newington," *Wikipedia*, May 25, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Stoke_Newington&oldid=782246070.

DJ: That's correct. (8:55)

AJL: Did she talk about that at all? Did she talk much about her childhood?

DJ: She did mention that they were relocated from London. She and her two brothers were all separated and moved into the countryside, and stayed with various families who were all assigned to keep children away from London during the Blitz.

AJL: And when was she then reunited with her family?

DJ: Probably about 1944. Towards, you know, the latter part of the war.

AJL: Did she talk at all about her emotions or kind of her feelings during that time?

DJ: No, the only real stories were the rationing, and the fact that you couldn't get fresh fruit, and that food was hard to come by.

AJL: And did your mother and her family know much about what was happening to Jews in other parts of Europe?

DJ: If she did, she never said. I don't think the general population in England were as aware of what was going on perhaps as the population here in the U.S. They were more concerned, I think, with their own—being on the receiving end of the hostilities.

AJL: And so you mentioned that, when your mother and your father met, she was on holiday, so she was not yet an immigrant to the United States.

DJ: Correct.

AJL: When did she decide to immigrate?

DJ: About three years later, in 1957, she came to stay and seek employment here, and then they were married in '59.

AJL: And did she ever become a citizen?

DJ: She did not, and she was very proud of that fact. She had to renew her green card every few years, and she was very proud of the fact that she was not to blame for any of the presidential elections.

AJL: So let's move on to talking a little bit about your father's family. So where and when was your father born. (10:48)

DJ: My father was born in December of 1924 in Berlin.

AJL: And did he tell you much about his childhood before the war?

DJ: He did a little bit. They were fairly well-off economically. He was one of two children. He was the older of the two. His sister, Ruth, was born a couple years later. My grandfather was a leather maker-- at least that was his trade. And he had served in the Kaiser's army during World War I and was actually injured during the war. He carried his papers with him all the time. He was very proud to be a German. (11:27) That was kind of his thought. They were very well-integrated into the German society.

AJL: And before we get into the details of what happened to your father during World War II and the post-war period, can we talk a little bit more about your grandfather's family? Where – what was his life like before he came to Berlin? (11:52)

DJ: That I don't know that much about. I know he was born in a small town in what was then Prussia called Schonlanke⁶. It's now Trzcianka⁷ in Poland. I don't know that much about what his family life was about. I know that he had an older brother named Kurt, a number of brothers and sisters, all of whom did not survive the war—They left Schonlanke probably in the late '20s or early '30s and relocated to Berlin.

AJL: And you mentioned, so he served in World War I.

DJ: Right.

AJL: Do you know much about where he served or what he did?

DJ: No, I don't. He was in infantry. I think that was about all I could glean. I do have his military pass papers, but I have not really read them to see what campaigns he served in.

AJL: Why did he decide to come to Berlin after the war? (12:59)

DJ: That I don't know. I suspect it was because his parents moved, and they were probably seeking better economic opportunities. That would be my guess.

AJL: And what would they have known about Berlin? What was Berlin like?

DJ: It was the capital of the empire at the time, and it was the place to be, but I really don't know their motivations or why they chose to go there. (13:28)

AJL: And do you know if they were kind of excited about the Weimar Republic, or this move into democracy?

DJ: I honestly don't know.

AJL: So, how did your—Before we move on, I want to know whose thing is making that noise.

DJ: Probably me.

AJL: Do you think you might be able to mute that?

DJ: I got it.

AJL: That would be great.

DJ: Sorry about that.

AJL: That's OK. So, before we move into the rise of Hitler, how did your grandfather meet your grandmother?

DJ: The story I have from that, I actually got from a cousin who was Kurt's son, Gerhart Jacobi, who now lives in Israel. He told me that they met by accident. Kurt and Alexander, my grandfather, were walking out of their store at lunchtime, and they saw a woman trapped between two electric cars, or electric streetcars, down the road from where they were working, and she was screaming for help. And Alexander raced across and was able to get her from between the cars, and that's how they met. (14:46)

⁶ "From Der Netzekreis by Paul Muller," accessed May 30, 2017, <http://remus.shidler.hawaii.edu/genes/Netze/Schoenlanke/Schonlanke.htm>.

⁷ "Trzcianka," *Wikipedia*, February 9, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Trzcianka&oldid=764598650>.

AJL: And did they have a long courtship?

DJ: I don't know, because I don't know exactly when this was. They married in 1921, so I don't know how much time passed from the time they actually met to the time they actually got married.

AJL: Do you know what their relationship was like with each other?

DJ: I can only have images of from what I remember from them as a child. It was kind of—My grandfather was a very quiet man, kind of passive. He always kind of had that glint in his eyes like he had a joke he wanted to tell but never got permission to do it, and my grandmother who was maybe five-foot-two, five-foot-three, she dominated the room. So she was a very forceful personality. He was a very quiet man. But I don't know their relationship. I know there was—When my grandmother spoke, she usually spoke very loudly, and he would just kind of nod and say, "OK." (15:50)

AJL: Sounds almost exactly like my paternal grandparents. So, how did life change for your father and his family during the rise of Hitler and the Nazi regime?

DJ: Only from what I can surmise from what other families were going through at the time, because my father really never talked about that. He did say that the families made plans. The family made plans to separate when it became clear that their lives were in danger. They found friends that they could stay with separately. They set up times to meet. And they would never all be together the four of them. They would pass notes back and forth to each other. (16:30) My father worked in the early part of the war for Siemens. Didn't get paid for the work other than just, you know, maybe enough to cover food. But essentially it was almost slave labor. He worked for Siemens, I think he said, for maybe seven or eight months. But then after that it was a struggle. It was just people were willing to help out and give food and things like that.

AJL: So he had worked for Siemens before the proclamation when Jews were asked to wear yellow stars? (17:07)

DJ. Yes. He would have been maybe fifteen or so at that time.

AJL: And do you have any understanding of why your father and his family decided to stay when things became more and more challenging?

DJ: I believe they thought that this would all pass, you know. Because there had been anti-Semitism before. It was kind of underlying in the culture, but no one ever thought that this would really come to pass. And their opportunity to leave was a very narrow window. My grandfather's brother Kurt felt differently, and he tried everything to get out. They were able to leave Germany in 1937 or 1938. They left going east, through Russia, to Shanghai, China. But he was convinced it was not a good place to be and left. My father—my grandfather, Alexander, I think Kurt tried to convince him to leave, and Alexander said, "No, this is my home. I'm a German." And so, when the window of opportunity passed, obviously, it was too late. (18:25)

AJL: So you mentioned that they had experienced anti-Semitism. Did they ever talk about that?

DJ: No. Not directly to me.

AJL: And what about your grandfather's other siblings? My understanding is that he was one of five.

DJ: Right. He had a sister Frieda, a brother Gustav, and another sister Gertrude. In 1942-1943 they were all taken. And nobody really knows their fate. They were taken and never seen again. And also his

mother, Johanna Jacobi, she was living in Berlin at the time. She was in her early eighties, and my understanding from the records is that she was taken to a German hospital where she had a heart attack and died.

AJL: And so your family decided to go into hiding essentially in plain sight, just under the surface. From what I've read, that was sometimes referred to as being a "U-boat." Do you know if they ever talked about it in those terms? (19:43)

DJ: I've heard the phrase. They didn't refer to themselves that way that I can recall, but my father tells stories of how occasionally he would leave the city and go to a farm area. And someone would allow him to work for them in exchange for food. And he would sleep in the barn. And he said that happened to him a couple of times. But he never really told me how the other family members survived.

AJL: And they would send notes to each other sometimes? (20:14)

DJ: They would write notes in advance, and when there was a planned meeting, they would pass those notes on so that the other person would then pass it on to the next person they would meet. It was probably pretty complex. I have no idea how they did it, but they had a plan.

AJL: None of that correspondence survived the war?

DJ: No, it did not.

AJL: Now I know that a couple of the yellow star badges did survive. Now they would have worn those up until the time that they chose to go into hiding?

DJ: Correct. Then obviously they would have not worn them anymore, but my grandfather and my father kept those. In fact, they would carry them in their wallets because it was, you know—if you didn't have it, I guess the thought in their head was that the consequences would be much, much worse, but they didn't wear it openly. (21:05)

AJL: How did your father's family react to the end of the war? (21:10)

DJ: At the end of the war, they were actually still living in what would be considered the Western sector in the U.S. administered part of Berlin. My father's comment to me—The only comment was that I can recall, after the bombing of Berlin, he looked out, and he said, "I was glad. I was glad to see the destruction of this city, because the destruction of Berlin represented the destruction of all the evil that had gone on." That was a comment that he shared with me.

AJL: Wow. And he didn't talk then much about any news, or how news would have filtered to them about what was happening to other members of the family, or to other Jews in Europe?

DJ: No. I don't know if he was able to be in contact—if my grandfather was able to be in contact with his brother in Shanghai. They never really said. When I spoke with Kurt's sons, I never really got a sense that they stayed in contact. Now, Kurt's family survived. Kurt did not survive the whole process. He died in 1947 in Shanghai of typhoid, but his two sons, Gerhardt and Manfred, and Manfred's wife, and a baby that had been born in Shanghai, all came to the United States, and they lived in the San Francisco Bay area after the war. (22:45)

AJL: So, your father's family then—so they—they war ended, and they reunited with each other.

DJ: Right.

AJL: Do you know how that process happened at all?

DJ: I don't. I don't.

AJL: Did they move back to their former home?

DJ: They were not able to move back into the former home, but they moved into an apartment near where they had lived. I believe the original structure was bombed. And I know that they were able to collect some of their original belongings they had left with non-Jewish friends, but much of their wealth and their holdings was gone.

AJL: What did they do? What did they decide to do? (23:31)

DJ: My grandfather took employment with an American-administered Jewish relief agency and went back into baking. And most of his activity in the springtime was involved with baking matzahs for Passover. That was a major activity for him.

AJL: Had he been a baker before he was a leather merchant?

DJ: He had not, but his grandfather and father were. In fact Isaac Jacobi, his father, was a master baker. But he never was a baker in his pre-war activity.

AJL: Now, their matzah-baking operation, was this big? Did they bake a lot of matzah? Did he employ other people?

DJ: I don't know if he was a director of the process. All I know is that he was a baker. And I don't know if he had employees or if he was just an employee. All I know was that he was a baker.

AJL: So, this would have been 1946, 1947, and at this time, Berlin and all of Germany was occupied and divided. Did—could people pass easily between the different quadrants of the city?

DJ: I think in the western—in the French, British, and American sides you could pass pretty easily, but it was not easy to pass between the Soviet-controlled side and the western-allotted side. There were checkpoints, and you know, I think only officials could go back and forth.

AJL: So what made your grandmother travel into the Russian section in March of 1947? (25:17)

DJ: I don't really know. And I don't know if she was in the Russian section. I think she was actually still in the western side, but as we've talked and the stories, I think that the Russian agents and the Soviet agents were actually in the western side when she was abducted.

AJL: So can you kind of tell that story from the beginning? (25:40)

DJ: From what I recall, my grandmother was going out on a shopping activity, primarily food, I would guess, and she got off of a streetcar, and as she stepped down onto the street, two men wearing black overcoats were suddenly on either side of her. They essentially picked her up by her elbows, and lifted her off the ground and carried her off and put her in a car.

AJL: And how did your grandmother then describe the next six years of her life to you? (26:17)

DJ: She never described them directly to me. I know from when she was interviewed when she was finally released, she described years of—well the first years were interrogations. She was in Moscow held in a cell. She was constantly questioned about what her role was spying for the U.S, which she denied because she wasn't, but they were convinced that she was working with the American intelligence to

identify former German officers from the S.S. and the Gestapo. She denied that, but because she spoke Russian she was suspect. And eventually she was released from imprisonment but moved to work camps—several camps over time along the Black Sea in, I believe, Turkmenistan, eventually ending up in Spassk⁸. And that was the last camp that I can recall that she mentioned she was in. And then in late 1952, I believe it was—In the middle of 1952 she was released. I believe it was June or July. She was suddenly released with any explanation and returned to Berlin.

AJL: Wow, so in the meantime (27:40) your grandfather and your father and his sister, to them she just disappeared.

DJ: Right.

AJL: Do you know what they did when they didn't—when she didn't come home?

DJ: They tried to get help from the American authorities, but the Americans had no knowledge about what was happening either, and if they did, they probably even couldn't say because the relationship between the Americans and the Soviets was not good. They tried everything they could to find out what had happened. They waited probably over a year before they decided, "we have an opportunity to leave Berlin and go to the United States, and my grandfather, I believe, was the one who made the final decision. He said, "We have an opportunity to move on with our lives and find a better place to live." And they did. (28:26) And they ended up coming to the United States with assistance. They had choices of either Atlanta or Birmingham to resettle, and they chose Atlanta.

AJL: Do you know how this was arranged?

DJ: I believe it was through HIAS⁹ which was a Jewish relief agency administered through the U.S. And I'm guessing there were probably other families, small numbers of families that were similarly given the same opportunities.

AJL: Did your father or your grandfather ever describe their first impressions of coming to the United States? (29:04)

DJ: No, they did not. I know the name of the boat that they came on. It was the S.S. Bremen¹⁰ (sp) and it left, I think it was, Danzig. That is where they would have departed from, but they came into New York, and through immigration, and (shakes head) I really don't know all the details.

AJL: When did they become American citizens, and what was that process like? (29:30)

DJ: They went through what was then, at least in the state of Georgia, "Americanism" classes to prepare them, along with some other people that had also come from Germany as well, to prepare them for citizenship. Both my grandfather, my father, and also my aunt applied for citizenship. They were very proud of that. I think my father got his citizenship in 1954. So it would have been about seven years (nods head) from the time he arrived.

⁸ "Spassk, Penza Oblast," *Wikipedia*, July 15, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Spassk,_Penza_Oblast&oldid=729942574.

⁹ "HIAS - Welcome the Stranger. Protect the Refugee.," *HIAS*, accessed June 2, 2017, <https://www.hias.org/node>.

¹⁰ "SS Bremen (1928)," *Wikipedia*, May 30, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=SS_Bremen_\(1928\)&oldid=783021493](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=SS_Bremen_(1928)&oldid=783021493). Note: this was the only reference I could find for an S.S. Bremen, but this ship is listed as destroyed by fire in 1942. Editor's note, upon further conversation with David Jacobi, he noted that this information about the ship is incorrect as of June 2017.

AJL: Was it difficult for them to learn English? (30:09)

DJ: For my grandfather it was. He never spoke English well. In fact, towards the end he would speak to me in French, for some reason, which I know very little of. I don't really know French at all. I knew a little bit of German, and he would try to speak to me in German, and he would try French, and that wouldn't work either. My father actually mastered English very well. He had a heavy accent, but he actually spoke English fluently.

AJL: Where did they live? Where did your family live in Atlanta? (30:39)

DJ: Originally it was in Southwest Atlanta, in the area where the Atlanta-Fulton County stadium is, or was. In Southwest Atlanta area. My grandfather had essentially what we would call today a pawn shop, a secondhand shop, or a thrift store. He would do small repairs on things, and he would buy, sell, and trade.

AJL: How did they learn about your grandmother's release from Soviet custody? (31:09)

DJ: They were notified by the same agency that helped them resettle. When word came back to the Americans in Berlin, a communication was sent out to my grandfather, and my father flew up to New York to meet his mother.

AJL: And did he or she ever tell you about what that meeting was like?

DJ: No, I never really got a sense of it. The only thing I could surmise was from pictures I've seen in the newspaper articles. I know that while they were in New York, because I have a picture of it, my father took his mother to the Empire State Building. I have a picture of them standing at the top on the observation balcony. So I imagine they spent a little time in New York, but that's about all I know.

AJL: Why did your grandmother think that she had been released? (32:05)

DJ: Based on the interviews that were covered in the paper at the time, she believed that it was because she wrote numerous letters directly to Josef Stalin. Now, that's her belief. I would tend to doubt that that really had a lot of influence, but Stalin died a couple of months before she was released, so it is possible that some of his policies were no longer in effect with the new regime in place, they no longer wanted to pursue whatever led to her kidnapping, incarceration, and so on. So maybe they felt they just didn't need her there anymore.

AJL: So when and how was your grandmother then reunited with the rest of her family? (32:55) They were in New York, and then what did they do next?

DJ: Well, they came back to Atlanta, and they had a house—I believe it would have been about 1964-1965 timeframe, they bought a house in Decatur near the intersection of Clairmont Road and Briarcliff Road. And that was actually not far from where I lived, so my grandparents were really only about six or seven miles away from me. I remember there were times when, because my father worked downtown, and my mother worked also downtown, at the end of the school day, they told me that I had to walk over to my grandmother's house, which would have been about a mile and a half from where I went to school. And a couple of clear images in my mind—I would come to the intersection of Briarcliff Road where there was a stoplight and a crosswalk, and my grandmother would be standing on the other side with her German shepherd, who was almost as big as her. And she would wave to me (waves). And the light would change, and I would come across, and we would walk back to their house.

AJL: What was the house like? (34:09)

DJ: For me, it was always kind of dark. I don't know why. I don't think that they opened the curtains in the kitchen. I remember playing ball with the dog, Hector. Hector was very smart. He had taught himself to play ball by himself. He would take a tennis ball and drop it, and catch it, and drop it, and catch it. My grandparents doted on this dog. And he would sit with them at the table, on a chair, for meals. So the three of them would be sitting around the table: my grandfather, the dog, and my grandmother. You know, the dog would just be sitting up there on his hindquarters at the table.

AJL: What languages did they speak at home?

DJ: They spoke German. My grandfather, as far as I know, did not speak any Russian, so it had to be German.

AJL: What was it like for your grandmother to settle into life in Atlanta? (35:00)

DJ: I think she made a lot of friends at the synagogue—at Beth Jacob. She did stay in touch with her family in Europe. She had some sisters who actually left Germany before the war. They lived in the Paris area. She did go back to Germany once, and also to France to visit with her family there. But after that she came back and never went back. (35:30)

AJL: So you mentioned that she was a member of Beth Jacob. Was she and your grandfather—were they both religiously observant?

DJ: They were very religiously observant. (35:45) On the – what would have been around their 40th wedding anniversary, there was a very special ceremony where they donated a torah to the synagogue.

AJL: Wow—and you were at that ceremony?

DJ: No, I was not. I was too small. I was, in fact, I'm trying to think when that would have been. I probably would have been about three years old at that time.

AJL: Yeah, it can be challenging to bring a three-year-old to a solemn event.

DJ: Yeah, actually, no, if it was their 40th, I wasn't born yet. It was in 1961, so a year before I was born.

AJL: Did your grandmother ever decide to become a U.S. citizen? (36:29)

DJ: She did not. My grandfather did, but by the time my grandmother came over, she said, "I don't see the point. I'm here. I'm safe. I'm happy. I don't need to be a U.S. citizen." So she remained a German citizen.

AJL: Did she ever work outside the home?

DJ: No. I think at that point she said, "I've done all the work I'm going to do." (Laughter)

AJL: I can imagine.

DJ: Now she actually spoke English reasonably well. I remember having conversations with her in English. So she mastered – I think because she already knew Russian, knew a little bit of French, she spoke German—her ability to master languages was a little better than my grandfather's.

AJL: It sounds like you had kind of a special relationship with her?

DJ: I don't know. I mean, she passed away in 1974. I was twelve years old. But I know for the two to four years previous to that she would always give me cookies, or something sweet, whenever I came over. (37:36) And she would always tell me to "eat more! Eat more!"

AJL: So, can you describe some of the objects that you're loaning to the Museum of History and Holocaust Education?

DJ: Yes. The majority of the materials are the contents of the bag that she brought back from camp—the slave camp that the Soviets kept her at. And it was a canvas bag. The largest object was a heavy padded coat that she obviously wore in the cold winters, and all over clothing that she kept with her. She was allowed to bring that back. There was a small sewing kit that contained spools of material, and a knitting needle, and a stub of a pencil, and there were some woolen undergarments and things—but these were things that – that was all she owned. None of the things that she had with her when she was taken were ever given back to her. I don't know if she had any money or anything, but probably not. But these things were kept in a bag in my parents' house, in the attic, and were never looked at in the fifteen plus years that they had them.

AJL: When did you first encounter these objects?

DJ: Shortly after my parents' passing, when it was up to me to dispose of the house and its contents. I brought that over to my house, and I opened up the bag, and that was my discovery of what this was. I knew the bag existed. I had seen it. But I'd never really opened it, or never really looked inside it. (39:27) And so it was kind of like a snapshot. This was a moment that was the end of my grandmother's period in captivity, and it was put aside and never really thought about again.

AJL: Had she ever talked about them to you? (39:45)

DJ: No, she did not. (Cuts to video of DJ holding objects.) So, this is an aluminum cup that my grandmother had in the bag with her that she brought back. I assume it was given to her by the camp administrators, and probably everybody in the camp had something similar. But she brought this back. It has a small stamp on it that probably was made by the manufacturer. And, you know, this was hers. And she felt it was something she wanted to keep. The other item that was really of interest was a small bag. It looks like it was hand-stitched together, and it contains spools of thread, and a small toothbrush, and that's pretty much it. Just thread that she would have used to repair clothing or maybe even create her own clothing. But this was probably the only personal belongings that she had that she was allowed to keep.

AJL: I've heard a lot of stories about toothbrushes. (40:59) And how important they seemed to be to people when their liberty is taken from them. It's sort of a connection to life before.

DJ: I'm just surmising this, but it's a symbol of civilization, because when you don't have a lot of freedom, like you said, you don't have any personal control over your life, but something like personal hygiene was recognized as something very important to them. So, if you have to keep a toothbrush, like that, (shows toothbrush again) it probably meant a lot. (41:33)

Videographer: Could you get the cup again?

DJ: Sure. (Holds up cup)

Videographer: Because now I'm not on your lap. Do you want to talk about the cup again?

DJ: Yeah, this is the aluminum cup that she brought back, and it was given to her by her captors. And it was in the slave bag—what I call the slave camp bag—and one of the items that she felt that she had to bring back, and it was probably the only metal item that she owned.

AJL: That's great. Do you want to talk just a little bit about the star? (42:00)

DJ: (Holds up star badge) Yeah, so all the Jews under the German rule at the time had to wear the yellow star with the word *Jude* on it. This was my grandfather's. And it was something that he kept with his papers until the time of his death, and I assume my father had it as well. I have my father's also. They look very similar.

Videographer: OK, I'm going to get a close-up of that. OK.

AJL: Great. Thank you so much. I'll let you get back to the positioning from before. I have one final summary question. Let me know when you're ready. (43:47) So, what do you think are the most important impressions and lessons that you take away from your family's World War II, and Holocaust, and immigration experiences?

DJ: I think, just my initial impressions are just fate, luck, perseverance—all of these things that were beyond the control of the individuals, and the forces that were in motion at the time all kind of came together, almost by coincidence, that allowed a couple of individuals to survive, and find a better life, and meet up with another person who had gone through war in a different way, and come to the United States to make a life. You think about the circumstances and the chance of something like that happening. Obviously it did, but the chances are kind of slim that those circumstances would have led to what they did. That's really the thoughts that I have about that. Given all the suffering that went on, and the terrible things that were going on, there was a good outcome in this case. You know, just fate and luck played a huge part in that.

AJL: What can students learn (45:16) from your family's experience?

DJ: I think the most important item, and I'm not the first to say this, is that this story, or this history shouldn't be forgotten, because otherwise we're doomed to repeat it. It's a time that most people don't think about anymore. We're pressed to try to even remember what happened last year, but I think it's important that the story of people's lives that went through these events should be captured and documented and remembered. Because they had their own stories, and unfortunately, I don't know so much about what went on there. Just little snippets from newspaper articles, other people's research, and a few artifacts, and that's really all I have.

AJL: Is there anything that I didn't ask you about, or anything else that you would like to talk about?

DJ: No, I can't think of any ideas. I think we've covered pretty much what I know about. (46:29) My family history.

AJL: Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate you coming to do this.

DJ: My pleasure.

