

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

D.S. ANONYMOUS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher

Date: February 22, 1982

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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DS - Anonymous [interviewee]

JF - Josey G. Fisher [interviewer]

Date: February 22, 1982

Tape one, side one:

JF: Can you tell me a little bit about your background, where and when you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

DS: I was born in Berlin, 1928, Berlin, Germany, and my parents--my family was--had lived in the Berlin area for many, many years. In fact, I can trace the family, I can document the family back to the 18th century--as you've seen the pictures, and we have some documents that date even back to the middle of the 18th century.

JF: In the Berlin area?

DS: In the Berlin area, yes. In and around Berlin, perhaps what today might be considered an outer suburb, was at that time an independent little town. The family lived partially in Berlin, partially out of town; the family was large during the 19th century and--we had people--just to give you an idea--we were involved in the development of the city of Berlin, of the area. There were councilmen, there were people in banking, in the manufacturing and industry in Berlin. My grandfather's sister was married to a man who formed a real estate company before World War I, who was responsible for much of West Berlin before it was destroyed during World War II. In other words, he developed the country. What my father told me would take him to Nollendorf Square about in the middle of West Berlin and looking west, there was nothing but wheat fields, this is in the 1890's, and he would say, "Son, as far as you can see, that land that I own." He was a smart man, and a street was named after him. This just gives you a background of perhaps the social fabric that the family was involved in, and that came--Let's say during the War of 1870 my grandfather fought in the Prussian army and...

JF: Did you know your grandfather?

DS: No. he died, I think he died before World War I, and I also didn't know my grandmother on my father's side. She died sometime around 1917 or 1918. My father was born in 1883, I believe. Came World War I my father served in the German army.

JF: What kind of experience did he have?

DS: He--I still have his war record. He first served on the Russian front at Tannenberg, he was decorated with the Austro-Hungarian service medal and then, after the Russian front, he served on the western front, the Somme and the Marne. He was at the tank battle at Cambrai, he was decorated with the Iron Cross, 2nd class. He received a gas poisoning and spent some time in the hospital, and fought until 1918, until the armistice.

JF: Did he ever tell you anything about his treatment while in the army as a Jew? Did that make any difference?

DS: Well no, apparently not. Not in those days. He was, well--equivalent of a--when he came out he was equivalent of a sergeant, 1st class--something like that. He started as a private and came out a sergeant 1st class--not that I can recall he ever mentioned that. Times didn't turn different from what I hear until the 30's. You know--1933--to my knowledge. You always had antisemitism, from what I understand, but you didn't have it in the upper middleclass. You see, there was no--not until the 1930's was there anything, to my knowledge, affected his business or his enterprise.

JF: What kind of business was your father in?

DS: He was in banking. He started out at the Corn Exchange--before World War I you didn't have a stock market. He started as a broker at the Corn Exchange and then went into the banking business with someone else. A private bank.

JF: A private bank?

DS: Yes, a private bank and he also had some kind of manufacturing. Anyway, much of this disappeared by 1934--he had to--the pharmaceutical business went, and then came the inflation, and I think banking stopped.

JF: Was his banking business involved with both Christians and Jews?

DS: Oh. yes. *Natürlich* [of course]. The Jews in Berlin, were, again to my knowledge, in major cities, like Berlin--Berlin was very cosmopolitan. Ever since the emancipation of the Jews in Germany, under Freiherr von Stein¹ I don't remember my history dates as well, in 1810 or 1820, something like that, or perhaps earlier Jews were very much accepted to a great extent, accepted as equals, active in commerce and industry and in all social activities. In fact, you had the great school of art in the 20's in Berlin, the theatre, artists, some of whom I've met personally after World War II, and I studied--and it was quite a--Berliners have always been cosmopolitan and liberal in that sense.

JF: So from what your parents told you, they themselves did not experience the antisemitism that, maybe, some of the other classes did at that time?

DS: Possibly no, they did not experience it.

JF: What was their religious affiliation and experience during the 20's?

DS: Now, that I really--I don't know, I know that we were liberal, in a way. Liberal--well, I belong to a reformed synagogue, okay?

JF: Now, you're talking about? Then?

DS: Then, as a child?

JF: The reformed synagogue as opposed to the liberal?

DS: Yes, well you had either orthodox or reformed, okay. To my--a few years back a friend of mine invited me to come to a reform service. To my astonishment, I discovered that what we considered reform is conservative here. What is reform here is absolutely amazing to me.

JF: So, your family was a member of a liberal congregation or reform congregation?

¹Reforms of 1806/07 followed by edict of 1812 granting equal rights and privileges to Jews.

DS: Yes, reform congregation.

JF: Were they involved with any kinds of Jewish organizations or groups? [unclear].

DS: Well, no, I don't believe so. I don't believe my father had any affiliations that I can recall. No. nothing that I can recall, anything definite. No major affiliation.

JF: Tell me about the area where your family lived when you were young?

DS: When I was young we lived, we always lived in West Berlin. My father was born in West Berlin. A little east of where I was born, because West Berlin then spread. And it was a section of apartment houses, mixed use, stores at the corner, apartment houses were 5 stories, typical Berlin middle-class neighborhood. Five-story buildings. Large apartments. You know, mixed, and small apartments in the back, the rich people lived in the front and the poorer people lived in the back. And some apartment houses had forecourts and the less money you had, the further back you lived, so you could tell by how far somebody lived back from the street, to judge his income. It was a class society, don't forget. The [unclear] took his cap off and said, "Good morning, Maam." That was the kind of society it was. That's what I grew up in.

JF: This was a mixed religious area?

DS: Oh, yes. No. no, there was no Jewish section that I ever knew of. It was mixed--it was very interesting. We had we had five-story story apartment houses on both sides of the street. We owned the apartment house, we lived on the third floor, and right across from us lived a retired general from Kaiser's army, and I remember New Year's Eve, it was a custom to go out on the balcony and toast with champagne to everybody and he would be on his side, and this was still in 1935 and he refused to fly a Nazi flag. He had the old imperial flag on his balcony and he would toast across the street. That was the kind of neighborhood we had. A friend of mine, a non-Jewish friend of mine, with whom I was very close--I had mixed friends, I had Jewish friends and non-Jewish friends in those days--was related to the Bishop of Canterbury in England. It was an old German family, in fact, I found out after the war that his older brother, whom I only knew briefly, who spent time in England, had taken part on the attempt on the 20th of July to assassinate Hitler. [unclear] So, that's the kind of neighborhood it was. It was a good neighborhood, you had all different kinds of people.

JF: What are some of your earliest memories of the 30's? You were a young child when Hitler came to power.

DS: Yes, I remember. I have some early--The corner bar was used as an election, as a polling places I do recall the SA standing in front of it, that is my earliest recollection, one on each side. The election was some encouragement to vote for Adolph Hitler, and they guarded the polling place. That was the earliest recollection.

JF: Were they intimidating?

DS: Yes, intimidating--in full uniform, with a leather belt, brown shirt and a swastika...

JF: Do you recall your parents talking about the election, or what was happening?

DS: Not at that time. No. I still have the image and I think that seems strange.

JF: You mentioned before that your father's, one of your father's businesses went by 1934. Now, how did that happen, do you have any recollection?

DS: It was a pharmaceutical company. Well, several things went in 1934. I think it was 1934. Jews were forbidden to have mortgages. We had two properties, two large properties in Berlin--it's quite interesting because just a couple of months ago the court in Berlin notified me now after 35 years they wanted information on this one property that was confiscated in 1942 and, apparently, now, after 35 years, they are going to make restoration. The interesting thing though is that the Nazi who confiscated it, who was instrumental in confiscating it, who has been dead since the war--the Russians got him and he never came back and his wife died since--but the son of this couple is contesting the property claim, so that will still have to be decided in court.

JF: Had you appealed for this property to be...?

DS: Yes, but this goes back 20 years ago--my parents put the request for the restoration of the property. This was a property in Alexander Square that consisted of a hotel and restaurant. We owned the building. It goes back to my grandparent's owning the building. It's like at the time before World War II--that area was compared to Wall Street in New York--you know, high commercial street, a busy commercial area and it--the interesting thing is that it got hit during the revolution in Berlin. It was apparent after World War II, when I still saw the property--everything around there was bomb-damaged--it was one of the only properties that stood in Alexander Square--you could see a large hole where it was hit in 1918 by an artillery shell during the revolution in Berlin. And it became apparent that after all of the other buildings were down, I'd known about it. Yes, that stayed there and it was briefly restored to my father and then the city split between the Russian sector and the western sector in 1946 or '47--I am not sure--and then the Russians took over the property because, now, my father was not anymore a victim of fascism, he was now a western capitalist, since he lived on the west side of Berlin, and they operated the building for some time. What happened to it I don't know if it is still stands there, or it has now become part of the Alexander, big Square, or the highway goes through it, or what, I'm not sure.

JF: It's in West Berlin?

DS: No. This property that I told you about is in East Berlin. Alexander Square is in East Berlin. That was the commercial hub of the city prior after the splitting of Berlin.

JF: But now...?

DS: The property that we lost in 1934 was the apartment house that we lived in, on which my father had a mortgage. Since a mortgage could not be renewed, it was canceled. The property was auctioned off, but it was auctioned off conveniently to certain Nazi sympathizers and already party member, so he got the property and we got an amount

of money below the true value of the property. How much I don't know. We still have records--the interesting part is we never were arrested to before that because that fellow sold the property to another company between 1934 and 1945 and that company sold it to another company. It went through 3 or 4 hands after World War II and when the question of restitution came up the Germans simply said that a law had to be passed because there was just nothing on the books so they could retribute because it had gone through too many other hands. All these people knew from the books that it was originally Jewish property.

JF: So you may yet receive restitution for the hotel?

DS: Yes, that was a more direct confiscation. It happened in 1942 when the fellow who had rented the bar took over the hotel--he operated both and then he decided that it was time for him--he was a party member, up to then, very decent but by 1942 he decided that he would want the property and was tired of paying rent so they confiscated it.

JF: What happened in 1934 in the apartment house? You had to move?

DS: No, we lived there and continued to pay rent until, let's see, I think it was 1939. We lived there still after the Crystal Night and...

JF: When you say that you had to pay rent, were you paying what you normally would have paid for your mortgage, or was there a change in that kind of situation? Did your parents ever tell you?

DS: No, they never told me but I would assume that they then paid rent to the new owner. The apartment was maintained.

JF: And your belongings and everything remained intact?

DS: At that time, yes. Until 1939, end of '39, I'm not certain about the exact date.

JF: Were there any other changes that occurred in '34 or '35 when the Nuremberg Laws came in?

DS: Yes...

JF: That you can recall?

DS: Yes...

JF: And, how they affected you?

DS: Well, suddenly, kids started calling you "Jew." We spent very much time inside, with selected friends in '34 and '35 when it really started. And--you--well, we played with other Jewish friends. Preferably, we were not seen on the street. Okay? Got beaten up.

JF: Did your parents also lose Christian friends that they had had, that you were aware of?

DS: No. not--Well, that's a good question. I don't really know. I don't really know. We were in a special situation. That is the interesting part. My mother was Protestant. Okay? So we were a mixed marriage. My father was Jewish and I was Jewish. So, the interesting part is we lost not only friends, but we lost family on my mother's side,

with the exception of one aunt, who suddenly didn't know us anymore. Okay? Until after World War II when they suddenly appeared on the scene again.

JF: They just stopped speaking to you?

DS: Yes.

JF: Do you remember your mother talking about that?

DS: Yes. Except one aunt that lived with us. Now these people lived outside of Berlin--my mother's from Braunschweig. Yes, they stopped contact. Until 1936, 1937, we used to visit once a year. We used to stay a week or so. Then they stopped writing.

JF: Did it surprise your mother when this happened?

DS: Yes. I think it grieved her to no end when her own family would--this was after her mother died. Her mother was 80 when she died. They didn't want contact. They were afraid for themselves. I think that's what it was, because fear had set in by that time. Neighbor looked at neighbor and--but the machine kept going--started looking over their shoulder--It was in back of you. I remember that. As odd as it may seem, now my parents weren't very scientific, but if they had friends over during those years and if they sat talking in the living room like we are, they would take a big pillow and put it over the telephone.

JF: You remember that?

DS: Yes, very much so. Always a big pillow over the telephone, because apparently somebody had told them that the Nazis already were able to listen in over the telephone, even though it was hung up. Of course, it is impossible, but people didn't know.

JF: There was so much fear.

DS: That is just an indication of the fear that already existed at that time. I remember the big pillow...

JF: You were being educated during part of the 30's?

DS: Yes.

JF: What kind of school were you going to?

DS: Well, I went to a public elementary school at first. There were in 1934 and 1935 some teachers already antisemitic and had signs in the classroom. There was a particular teacher that I am thinking of--and he found out that I was Jewish, and the kids always said, "Hey, he's a Jew." He had a sign saying, "He's a Jew," you know. He came over and explained to me that that sign didn't pertain to me. I do recall that. It said something about *Judenrasse* some kind of anti-Jewish slogan.

JF: And he said that you were exempt from this?

DS: Yes, I was exempt from this.

JF: Did you receive a lot of harassment from the other kids in the classroom by that time?

DS: Well, it was more--less harassment, as I recall, and more separation. They went their way and I went my way. There was no intercourse so to speak. And you stayed with your Jewish friends. I had a little friend who lived across the street; we went to school together. You covered your back. You watched out for flying stones or some missile.

JF: You started school in what year?

DS: I was 5 years old, so it would have been about '33.

JF: And how long were you permitted to stay in the public school system?

DS: I finished--you start with eighth grade over there--seven, six, five--four years. That was in '37. At that time you made a choice. And it was just at that time. If you wanted to follow an academic schooling, you chose a high school; or, if you were going to--this was the European educational system--if you wanted to go into a vocational area then you continued your elementary span and then went to a vocational or middle school of sorts. I decided to go on to high school but this was just the time when Jews were not permitted to enter normal high school, so I went to a Jewish high school that was the Holbein School named after a philosopher, Holbein, and it was a Jewish high school and at the time there were two Jewish high schools in the city.

JF: This was what year?

DS: I think it was '37. Yes, in '37 because at Crystal Night I still went there, in '38. In '39 or '38--I know it was after Crystal Night, the two schools were combined, so there was only one school and then that one school--they took both school buildings and they put us in makeshift quarters in the synagogue in West Berlin...

JF: Before that time you had a regular school building of some kind?

DS: Yes, a regular school building. Yes. There were two regular high schools, two Jewish high schools, and they were regular school buildings.

Tape one, side two:

JF: You were telling me about the high school that you went to.

DS: Yes, I think the education was good for one reason as I recall and that was that somehow we had to prove that we were just as good if not better than everybody else. There was an intensive training. And then you couldn't do anything else anyway by that time.

JF: Now, you were telling me before that you felt that you had to stay off the streets. Were there activities at the school that kept the students occupied after school hours? Were there programs that were developed so that there were alternative places for you to go?

DS: Yes, there were some. They also had rooms where they could play ping-pong, as I recall and there was some attempt made to have some kind of Jewish life at the time.

JF: Were you allowed in any of the public playgrounds or parks, as you recall?

DS: No. I think that in--let's see, I believe that after Crystal Night they became off limits. It was after 1938.

JF: Until that time you did use them?

DS: Yes, yes, we did use them.

JF: And could you do so freely or were you bothered by other children?

DS: If you were in an area where they didn't know, unless they recognized that you were Jewish...

JF: Then they wouldn't bother you?

DS: Then they would.

JF: Then they would, otherwise they would not bother you.

DS: Otherwise they wouldn't. You have to also realize that Berlin was a very comfortable city just like Washington in some ways. The streets don't run like in New York and Philadelphia for miles in one direction, without interruptions. Usually the city plan is that the streets would run from a square to a square. A landscaped square is at either end of the street, so to speak, and in between streets, maybe a boulevard. So you didn't have that kind of activity that we have here about playgrounds. Maybe they had that in the suburbs or smaller towns but in Berlin we played in the squares. And some squares had facilities for the kids, others didn't. There never seemed to be a need for organized play, as I remember, for cosmopolitan, for big city kids.

JF: How did that time feel to you as a child? Were you afraid of what might happen? Did you think that things would get worse than they were at that time?

DS: I would say not until--no, I don't think I comprehended that as much until 1938. That's when it came home. After the Crystal Night. I mentioned before that I had a friend who lived across the street. His father had a bookstore--not a book store, an office supplies store, paper folders, and things like that, at the corner. I think it was it started in

1936 or 1937 [unclear] when they had to put their names, you know, the name-calling started then. I have to say yes, even earlier, I began to realize that things were bad, because my father's cousin, who was a Superior Court judge at the criminal court in Berlin--he and his two sons went to the concentration camp in 1935, ostensibly put there by two criminals he convicted before 1933, who came out and then became Nazis and took revenge.

JF: Did they stay in the camps or were they released?

DS: They were released a year later.

JF: And you talked to them?

DS: Yes, oh yes. I talked to them. In fact, I talked to them after the war. That's a story in itself. He came back in [unclear] and the sons came back in '36. They left Germany in '37 or '38 for England with the idea of bringing my aunt and his mother over to England and her mother--no, his mother--I am sorry, my aunt to England. He was there with his sons already. Since he was a lawyer by profession--and on the continent you practiced Roman law, not English law, you know, he couldn't work in his profession and he worked in a factory and became the department head in some factory at the time. In 1939, by 1939, his wife had sent all of their belongings to Rotterdam for transport over to England, the war broke out, Rotterdam got bombed, they lost everything, which wasn't too tragic in a way, but the tragic part was that his mother and his wife never got out of Germany. They were placed in a concentration camp and never returned. His sons both joined the British army and were in--one of them was in intelligence, and came into, you know, ahead of British troops. They went into the Ruhr area in 1945 and they were ahead of the troops to collect papers, information and things like that for the British. After 1945--as the German Government was formed he was offered the high post in the West German government which he declined. He said that he wouldn't want to go back without his family. He wasn't about to go back. He stayed in England and retired there. His sons both went to Oxford. One teaches at--it's the university with the name of that famous English outlaw who stole from the rich and...

JF: Robin Hood?

DS: No, not Robin Hood, the town where he was.

JF: Nottingham.

DS: Nottingham University. And he also taught at Princeton, as a guest lecturer, by the way...

JF: When...

DS: So that was '35.

JF: When this man came out of the camp, I assume he described the conditions...

DS: Well, for the first time I saw a man with his head shaved. I remember that. I don't think he talked to me about it.

JF: He did talk to your family. Did your father at that time talk about leaving?

DS: Yes, oh yes. Well, shortly thereafter, yes. He began to think about it. He wanted to emigrate to the United States. You know, there was a time my cousin wanted to go to South America--he couldn't get into--I'm not sure if it was Argentina or Brazil, but one of the countries, if you had machinery, you were supposed to--that was part of your requirement for entering a country and I remember his apartment in Berlin was filled with all kinds of grinders, you know machines that he had spent his money on. He never got out. Yes, there was talk. My father did get a number from the American consulate which was about this long, but it never came to anything.

JF: In what year did he apply?

DS: It must have been after '38.

JF: After '38.

DS: Yes, '37 or '38, somewhere around that time.

JF: Do you think your parents were aware of how bad things were getting?

DS: Yes, oh yes.

JF: How early do you think they felt that?

DS: Well, I think before '35 they said that--you know, I used to blame the older generation--I've always blamed them for that. You see, they were Germans, don't forget. They weren't Jews. Judaism was a religion, just like here. You're an American, you're not a Jew. Okay? I mean they always had been Germans, and their father had been German. Didn't he serve in World War I, didn't he fight for the Fatherland? Didn't his grandfather fight for the Fatherland? So who's this corporal, trying to tell--it will go away, that was the attitude, it will go away, but by '35 we began to wonder what would happen. We began to worry--in '36 and '37 and in '38 came the Crystal Night and my father's friend, who had lost an arm and a leg in World War I, had that store and was brutally beaten, pulled out on the street and was beaten, and there was a shattering of glass. I will never forget that. I crawled under the couch during that day.

JF: You were home?

DS: Yes. We lived on the third floor, but you heard the glass shattering, you heard the screaming, the hollering, the banging on doors...

JF: Did they bang on your door?

DS: No, I think they didn't want to climb that high. Three floors up. It was safe. It was mostly the first floor and the stores. Like my friend's father's store--you know, by that time the names Israel and Sarah were being applied to Jews and he had to paint it in big letters, this high on the store window, his name and it was Israel [unclear] and you knew it was a Jewish store, because the idea being that people shouldn't buy there. Yes, that was Crystal Night.

JF: So, was your family also home at that time?

DS: Yes.

JF: Was any damage done to your father's property outside the apartment house?

DS: By that time we had the property in East Berlin in Alexander Square--No, because, you see, we owned the building, which no one was aware of on the street, and but the hotel and restaurant was owned by--what happened to be a Nazi member. This was the incongruity of it. He didn't have to have a name. The building was just a building. It wasn't apparent so there was no damage to the building.

JF: What else about that time do you remember?

DS: Well, I remember the Nazi marches through the street and I remember General Bromberg, was it, who courted the girl around the corner. [unclear] Bromberg?² Blumberg I forget, Hitler cashed him in because he was too little--cashed in [cashiered] him in--What else do I remember?

JF: You said that you were still in school up until Crystal Night. [*Kristallnacht*].

DS: And after that.

JF: And after that as well.

DS: Yes the Jewish school was, well--deportation started, I believe, in 1940, the first things came--we had at that time--the school must have had about 300 Jewish children...

JF: In 19--?

DS: In 1940, when deportations started.

JF: This is when the schools had been combined?

DS: Yes, they were combined I think in '39. In 1940 the first deportation started. It was very slow, people had lots of time. They could pack all of their belongings, and all this make-believe, and they shipped them out with big crates. There were all kinds of--at that time, it wasn't looked at as too serious. Not then. And, then, kids would disappear from school. First we would know that they had to leave--it was like moving somewhere, like they moved to Warsaw. In fact I got post cards from school friends of mine in Warsaw. Of course, they couldn't say much, that they were fine blah, blah, blah...

JF: Did you have any idea where the people were being taken?

DS: Yes. Warsaw, we knew that they were going to Warsaw. It wasn't camps--then that didn't--if any German tells you he didn't know anything about the camps they're full of--excuse the expression...

JF: They weren't taken to camps until later than that?

DS: Well, they were taken to ghettos. You know, Warsaw was a ghetto where they were concentrated that way. Put it that way. I'm not sure, but I know that--what happened 1940: the war was going on against England, in 1939 they had marched into Poland and the war was on against--and England joined it, England and France joined it, and I do recall my father saying--that was '39, he said "Now they've lost the war." Then with France getting in on it, see because they had gone into Austria into Sudetenland and then they had gone into Poland, and then England and France had declared war, and my father said, "That's it..."

²General Werner Von Blomberg, whom Hitler forced to resign in 1938.

JF: And he thought it might be over soon, at that point?

DS: He--No, he didn't think it would be over soon--no, the realization, the hope started after Stalingrad. We knew that was the turning point, everybody knew that was the turning point! That's when the hope started. That's when I put maps up and the little flags and I started measuring distances. Because, you know, suddenly your lifeline depended on little flags and the distance between them. That was--you had to hold on until that time. So kids disappeared in 1940. Rather rapidly they were being picked up. And then, I think, the schools were closed in 1941. Either the end of '40 or the beginning of '41, I am not sure. I think it was the end of '40 they just closed the schools down where they remained.

JF: Was it difficult for you at that time to get supplies or...?

DS: Yes, ration cards had started in--I believe it was '39, and Jews were not permitted to have meat or milk, eggs, less bread, less vegetables, no fish, no sugar--you just didn't get rations from that. So we really lived on my mother's rations. She got full rations. Thanks to her, it helped it.

JF: Do you think there were any other ways it helped your family because your mother was not Jewish?

DS: Well, it helped later on in several ways. Number one, we were caught in the Rosenstrasse Aktion. I don't know if you are familiar with that.

JF: Can you describe it to me?

DS: I think that was in 1941.³ My father was taken on the street and they came home for me, and we ended up at the Rosenstrasse. You know, there was a whole group of people--they separated those that had Aryan wives, Aryan husbands--one way and the others--a big piece of cardboard around their necks--they were shipped out that way and we sat on the fourth floor of the building--and it was also the first bombing of Berlin at the same time--we were up on the fourth floor with the whole thing going on. I do recall that. It scared me, you know. Scared like anything. All kinds of people just sitting on the floor, like a big empty--no furniture at all, people just laid on top of each other up there. And then the demonstration. I think it was the only demonstration against Hitler during that era. The women and the men of those people inside were demonstrating outside, screaming that "We want our husbands back." You know Berliners, once they get to riot, they get to riot and the police trying to hold them back, and nobody knew what happened. Due to connections, many of these people in Berlin were related in some fashion to important people. I think that's what saved us. We were released after a week.

JF: You mean the people who were protesting were related in some way?

DS: Yes, for instance, I had a friend, his mother was related to Udet [phonetic], General Udet. He was a World War I hero, and a general, a German general, a German Air Force general, a very important man at the time. Hitler had him killed in '43, I think,

³On February 27, 1943, when non-Jewish wives protested against the deportation of their Jewish husbands at the Rosenstrasse Camp. The men were released after a week.

but then he was a very important man. So there was a lot of, you know, there were connections. People had connections, it was a big city.

JF: How did it feel being in that area, an enclosed area in the fourth floor of that building and hearing the yelling and the screaming and the protest?

DS: Scared, real scared. Just plain, plain scared.

JF: Did you think it would do any good?

DS: I didn't think. I didn't know what to think. I didn't know what was happening to me at that time.

JF: Did you think your mother was out there?

DS: Yes. Yes. She was out there, too.

JF: You knew she was there?

DS: Everybody ran--everybody piled against the windows. In 1941, I was 12 years old so I couldn't see over everybody, everybody was looking for everybody. My mother was outside.

JF: And they kept you there for a week?

DS: They kept us there for a week.

JF: With what kind of conditions until it was resolved?

DS: We were taken down to the yard and walked in a circle for maybe half an hour. And went upstairs again and sat around. And some food was issued. Soup. Minimal. And I remember the fellow--in fact, I still have that piece of paper, ostensibly yellow, the release sheet, the yellow star, *der Jude*, the Jew, released. I remember that he addressed us before we were released, and he cut a very dashing figure in his black SS uniform, and he was icily polite saying, "Gentlemen, I'm sorry I can't send you to the concentration camp." I will never forget that. "I can't send you to the concentration camp." We were released with the requirement to report to the local police station for what reason, I don't know--the local police didn't know...

JF: You were to report then to the local police?

DS: You know, on the way out, after that. And then we were notified to--let me put it this way--before Rosenstrasse, something else happened. After the schools were shut down and by the way, out of the 300 kids--and you get to know each other--it was very cramped--you get to know most kids--only 3 people left. One is now in Israel, he went to Israel after the war, one is in this country, and myself. Only 3 out of 300 that I know of came out of it. One came back from the camps, the fellow in Israel, the fellow here--I ran into him right after the war in 1945. He had lived underground for two and a half years and then they caught his mother and she was sent to Theresienstadt and she spent something like 6 months in a cellar until the Russians came and liberated the camp.

JF: This is out of your class in the school?

DS: Yes, my boyfriends. There were friends that I went to school with. He now lives in Washington, DC--Yes.

JF: What happened to you after the Rosenstrasse incident?

DS: Let's see. Before the war, after the schools were closed, I worked in the--as a helper so that I would have something to do. In the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden* in Deutschland, which was the central organization of the Jews in Germany. And I was an office helper. It gave me something to do. And until the day they picked the people up, when the SS came and the Gestapo came, that was before the Rosenstrasse--I believe, yes, it was before the Rosenstrasse--and the trucks were down there and they lined everybody up, and they pushed me forward. Somebody who knew me said, "His mother's Protestant," and they said, "Okay, you can leave." I went past the guards, I went home, half in shock, because they had already loaded [?] the people down into the trucks, you know, furniture vans, closed the doors and off they went. That was the last I saw of them.

JF: Furniture vans?

DS: Yes, big furniture vans.

JF: And that was about when?

DS: 1940.

JF: 1940.

DS: Yes, I must have worked there maybe nine or ten months, after the schools closed. I wanted...

JF: And you have no idea what happened?

DS: To them?

JF: Yes.

DS: Well, they didn't come back.

JF: They didn't come back.

DS: I never saw anyone again who was there. We have the list up to '45, a long list of names, there was an aid--an office had opened, the people could find out if their friends had come back. Nobody came back. Then the Rosenstrasse and then my cousin-- Oh, then came, wait a minute, Rosenstrasse was after the schools were closed in '39, before starts--we had to move out of our apartment, we had a large apartment, like a New York apartment, and they gave us one week to move into one room. Okay? We moved into one room and another apartment, a smaller apartment, shared it with two other families.

JF: In your building?

DS: No, no, a little further west, in the Pragerstrasse and we shared that with two other couples.

JF: Your parents and yourself?

DS: Yes, we had one room, one couple had another room, and a kind of a large dining room. It had--originally it had a large dining room, a large living room, a bedroom and a smaller room, and then a little room next to the kitchen, and then the kitchen. So, one couple had the small room, we had one of the larger rooms because we were three, they were two, and then there was another couple that originally had the apartment and they maintained their bedroom and we shared the dining room as a common eating place, and, of course, we shared the kitchen.

JF: This was 1940.

DS: Yes, 1940. In one week, get rid of everything. You know, how much--a room not bigger than this one.

JF: So at that point you had to liquidate a lot of your possessions?

DS: Yes, well, liquidate, and then store with friends some of the things.

JF: The friends that you stored these things with were non-Jews?

DS: Yes.

JF: And they were willing...?

DS: Yes, my aunt, predominantly my aunt, my mother's sister, in Berlin, who lived in Berlin.

JF: And the photographs and the paintings that you showed me of your home, of your family, were stored with this aunt?

DS: Well, some of the papers my father kept on him. Mostly the bigger things were stored with her.

JF: What happened after that?

DS: That's funny. Then life in one room started. It was remarkable, you had a bed, and you had to put a curtain across. You had your own room within a room. What happened after that? Yes that was after Crystal Night...

JF: After Crystal Night this happened?

DS: Yes, it happened after that. After the Crystal Night. And then, as I said, the schools closed, I worked at the central Jewish organization until the Gestapo cleared out the officers. They just grabbed everybody and put them on vans. By that time they weren't polite anymore. There was no week packing and they just grabbed you. If they got you on the street, they just grabbed you, and I think there was a time that you had to wear the Jewish star. It started at that time.

JF: Now, the...

Tape two, side one:

JF: You were just saying that the central office that closed, where these people were taken off in furniture vans, of the Reichsvertretung⁴, and the end of the operations...

DS: That was the end of the central organization of Jews in Germany.⁵

JF: And you, at that point, were not occupied in anyway? There was not a job?

DS: No. no. I just went home and I think that the Rosenstrasse Action happened soon after. It must have been the same year. And after the Rosenstrasse Action, both my father and I were assigned to a labor gang.

JF: Where was that?

DS: That was in Berlin.

JF: In Berlin?

DS: In Berlin, and I was by that time let's see, it was '41, no, it was '42 [Actually, 1943]. I was bar mitzvah.

JF: You were bar mitzvah?

DS: Oh yes. I was bar mitzvah. I must have been 13 when I became bar mitzvah.

JF: This was in 1941?

DS: '41, so we didn't have to move until '41 and the schools closed at the same time and '42, I think, was when the *Reichsvereinigung* closed.

JF: That was 1942?

DS: 1942. You see, it gets a little hazy for me. It was spring of 1942, I am sure [Actually, 1943].

JF: Let me back up a minute to your bar mitzvah. What condition was the synagogue operation, at that point? How was your training?

DS: Well, I was good friends with the rabbi's son. So his father trained me.

JF: Privately?

DS: Yes, it was outside the synagogue. The big synagogues had been burned, the major synagogues. This was where the school was or had been operating, in the same building.

JF: This was another synagogue where the school...?

DS: There was a synagogue. You know, the last place that the school operated until the Nazis closed it down.

JF: It had been a synagogue?

DS: Yes, it had been a synagogue but it was in the back of the building, so it had escaped damage because--it wasn't apparent from the street--that was probably the only reason that it did escape damage. It was a small synagogue--that's in the Joachim Stelerstrasse. That's where I was bar mitzvah.

⁴*Reichvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*. The *Reichvertretung der Deutschen Juden* was transformed to the *Reichvereinigung* in July 1939 and came under Gestapo control.

⁵This happened in the spring of 1943.

JF: Can you recall what that was like, given the atmosphere of the times.

DS: I was scared, I think I was just as scared of going up there and saying [unclear]--reading the part from the Torah as I was of everything else.

JF: What kind of feelings did you have being bar mitzvah at a time when Jews were being seen in such a way?

DS: I don't know--I was mad I think. I was scared and I was mad and I used to blame the older generation all through that period, until even after the war. I used to tell my father, "It's your fault. You let it happen."

JF: What do you mean, "You let it happen."

DS: His generation, not he personally. I said that you should have fought. In fact, we did fight. Not he, I did.

JF: You mean fight back within Germany as opposed to leaving.

DS: Yes, well, you fight back in Germany or leave. One or the other. Don't take it. And I joined the resistance group in Berlin in 1943. A group of fellows that I worked with, one of the school friends that was still around, also from a mixed marriage.

JF: Can you tell me about that?

DS: Yeah, we met privately. We--One of them had contacts with some other group, and never disclosed who he was in contact with. Especially in the last years of the war, especially during the battle of Berlin, we--I think, did our share to fight back, as you might say. We cut telephone wires and interrupted communications, cut tires on army cars that were parked on side streets.

JF: This was during that two-year period?

DS: Yes.

JF: About how many people were in the group?

DS: Six fellows.

JF: Men, young men.

DS: Yes, anywhere from 15, 14 to 18, I guess. That age. Most of them from mixed marriages.

JP: Were any of you ever caught?

DS: No.

JF: What was the feeling like among you? What was the spirit?

DS: The spirit was excellent in a sense that we had very few weapons, I think out of the six we had two revolvers and I think about 20 rounds of ammunition, something like that. The idea was, that they are not going to get us. That was the attitude. Now maybe we weren't very effective, but in a way, we--I was in this gang working in the reclamation of steel helmets and repair and restoration of mess kits and other equipment for the German army. And--I was 15 and worked 60 hours a week, on those rations that I told you about and no pay. And the acid came in very handy because there were several things that you could do. You filled the mess kit with acid, and the acid used was so strong if you left a piece of aluminum in there overnight the next morning it wouldn't be there anymore, it

would be completely dissolved. And the German foreman would get milk. We didn't get anything, working with those fumes, so we would fill a mess kit full of acid and put it in a sack of finished goods, and it was shipped out to the German army and you can imagine how much was left when it got there. Some of the, maybe, juvenile things that we thought up.

JF: Was that sort of thing ever traced to you?

DS: No, they could not trace it to us. It was never traced to us.

JF: You had that kind of job primarily during that time?

DS: Yes.

JF: And what about your father.

DS: My father worked in a carpentry repairing, bomb damage, things like that.

JF: And your mother. Did she have to work also?

DS: No.

JF: During those years was she still able to receive regular rations or whatever the...?

DS: She would receive regular rations.

JF: Whatever the population received?

DS: Yes. She would go out with a minimum of exposure. Of course you had to wear the yellow star, I remember two things. He [my father] came home twice. Once when he wore the star and he came back and he said two workers accosted him, in a typical German dialect, "Man, what the hell are you wearing? What's that? You got to wear that?" and the other, "Oh, these bastards!" The Berliners were not necessarily Nazis per se. Again Berlin was a very cosmopolitan town. "Those Bastards." [unclear]--That was at first, which made him very happy. I had a similar happening to me. I walked down the street coming home and suddenly a man approached me with a bag in his hand and he said, "Come into the doorway," and before you know it he said, "Take this," and he threw the bag in my hand and took off. I looked and there were two loaves of bread in it, some butter and some food. Okay, it's like the--to me it has always been somehow reminiscent of God asking Lot [Abraham] if you find 10 just men I will not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah so there were some just people around. It has been my experience.

JF: Are there any other vignettes that you can tell me like that? Other help that you received?

DS: There were people helping. You know, always was looking over their shoulders, and there were people like they accosted my father, who came home with a star and they beat him up.

JF: On the street?

DS: Yes, beat him up on the street. Attacked him. "You god-damned Jew," just like that. He came home as white as a sheet.

JF: On the job, in these labor units that you and your father were in, what was the treatment like? Who was in charge of you?

DS: The German [unclear] were.

JF: Civilians?

DS: Nazi members. You worked and you got rations and if you didn't produce then you go to the concentration camp. You--kind of--you lived in the foyer to these camps, so to speak, either you do or you don't. They retaliated it in their own way.

JF: During this time people that you knew were constantly being taken?

DS: Hm, hmm. Yes.

JF: What was your own idea about what was going to happen to you?

DS: Well, we feared for the worst. In fact, the worst would have come in May of '45. The order had already been given in Berlin that mixed marriages which had been separated in the other towns, except, I understand, for Vienna, Berlin and Hamburg, that we would be separated and then shipped to the camps, and lucky for us, the Russians got in the way of the plans and then the Battle of Berlin started.

JF: Can you describe that for me? Your experience?

DS: Yes, very vividly. By that time I was used to air attacks, okay? Night bombings in 1943, and it is kind of interesting to sit there and hope that your friends will miss you. [laughter] And it's also interesting to note that I had a cousin in the German air-force, and I had a cousin in the British intelligence. You know--this kind of family situation.

JF: Were you in touch with these people?

DS: No.

JF: Was there any way at all?

DS: No, no. Not till after the war.

JF: And let me ask you one other question. Was there any way of finding out exactly what was happening in the concentration camps?

DS: Well, the news came back in 19.. by the end of '43 we knew, by '43 we knew. Sometime around '43 the news came back. It was brought back. And the Germans knew because that cousin that I mentioned in the German Air Force came back from Russia in 1945 and then stopped by. He was in Berlin and actually came and visited us because it was safe again, after the war was over. He told us he was stationed in Latvia and that their airfield was near a gas works and it had been burned out and that the Latvian people brought the people and lined them up and shot them with machine guns. Their commander said, "We are the Air Force and we don't have anything to do with it so don't look." So people knew, I don't care what anybody says. If somebody says that they didn't know, I don't believe it.

JF: This was common knowledge in Berlin by '43.

DS: I would say so. Yes, yes, yes. I'm sure. The soldiers brought it back. We knew about it. My cousin Albert--he and his friend tried to escape. It must have been '42 then. In '42 they tried to escape to Sweden and they got as far as Denmark. His friend got onto the Swedish ship. He was caught with false papers and we heard from him because a

cousin of my father's worked at that collection point, and he said he had seen Albert and he had talked to him and he was going East. That is the last we saw of him. We have the records. All my cousins, all the cousins of mine died in Auschwitz. According to the German records that they died due to a type of pneumonia.

JF: You have the records?

DS: Yes, my father got the official notification. We have the records, yes.

JF: How did you receive them?

DS: After the war.

JF: After the war?

DS: Yes, after the war. I must have them somewhere.

JF: Was there any way of communicating with any of the family that was taken?

DS: We communicated to Warsaw back and forth because we did get postcards from there and we could write back. Up until a time. When, I don't recall. But up to a time. That's the only thing that I recall. And I think to Theresienstadt, too. My father's cousin was taken to Theresienstadt and he died there.

JF: And you could receive some news?

DS: Yes, we did receive a postcard, again, saying nothing but that stopped after awhile, then there was nothing further.

JF: We were talking about the Battle of Berlin.

DS: Well, I was mentioning that when a plane went overhead you could tell the--when the bomb, you know, you were used to that. You figured that if he was overhead he wouldn't hit you. You learn all that as a kid, at that time, but I think it was one bright Sunday morning--oh, it was a Saturday afternoon, there was an announcement made that the anti-aircraft towers in Berlin would have a practice firing, and it was supposed to last for one hour or something like that, and they started to fire all right but they never stopped. In fact somebody came from the center of the city and said that the Russians were shooting into the town and it was the very next Sunday morning when a stray shell came across the apartment house and implanted itself. We were asleep at the time. We had a Jewish cellar and an Aryan cellar.

JF: And that was all that was left?

DS: Yes, and I must say to the credit of the other--Oh, we had some Nazis in the building that wouldn't look at you. But to the credit of the rest of the people that--the day before the Russians took the city we were--the last couple days, we were invited in the Aryan cellar.

JP: The Nazis, too?

DS: Well, no, the Nazis had left by then. They didn't stay in Berlin, they went west.

JP: Were you aware of Hitler's death?

DS: Well, not until afterwards.

JF: Not until after...?

DS: Not until after the war.

JF: There was no knowledge of this.

DS: No, there was no communication with anybody. The radio was off. I mean, whatever was on was just propaganda. The shelling on the last day was continuous from five o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock noon. And then it stopped, and that was it.

JF: And you were in these cellars?

DS: I was in the cellar and I watched the crack getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

JF: How long were you in the cellar from the time of the actual bombing?

DS: I would say from the day the shelling started--it must have been--it was about eight days. You came out--like, there was no water, there were pumps in the city streets. There were pumps there from way back. Horses were still watered. There was no gas, no water, no electricity. Nothing--and dodged artillery fire and run to the pumps for water and ran back again.

JF: And when it was over?

DS: It was 11 o'clock in the morning, and suddenly it was all quiet. Oh, there was still firing in the distance, but suddenly the Russians came and that was it.

JF: What did you do when the Russians came? Where did you go?

DS: Nowhere. I just showed them my star and apparently they knew. A Russian commissar came and wanted to talk to my father. He spoke perfect German and wanted to know about the Nazis in the area, and wanted information, and that was sort of the first contact.

JF: Where did you go to live then?

DS: We stayed in the basement. Well, somebody got killed, and first we buried the dead. One day we got a hit and somebody got killed, while they were making breakfast. Do you believe it? He went upstairs to fry himself an egg. And as a result, he got killed. They, the Russians, treated you very well if they found out that you were Jewish. "*Yevrei? Yevrei?* Come on, here's food."

JF: So you stayed in the cellar for a while?

DS: Yes, I stayed in the cellar. I was almost--some person called me out. There was a German officer before that and he wanted directions, and the person was so nervous she called me to get the directions for the man and he looked at me like, "Why aren't you in the army?" and I was undernourished anyway so I said, "I'm only 11 years old." I wasn't 11 but he believed it. That's the information he got.

JF: That's all he wanted?

DS: Yes, that's all he wanted, because they had young people and old people. You know the Volkssturm, they hanged people...

JF: Was there any religious support during that time?

DS: During the last...?

JF: During the last few years, yes.

DS: No, there was nobody left. You looked out for yourself. There was no meeting, no--except for the young fellows--we planned our things.

JF: You're talking about your resistance group?

DS: Yes.

JF: What do you mean you planned your things?

DS: Well, we would meet to plan moves. Plan what we were going to do.

JF: That was the organization?

DS: Yes.

JF: There was no other kind.

DS: No, not to my knowledge. There were other groups, I am sure, I mean there were communist groups, I know that.

JF: And you said that you think one of your members was in contact with another group.

DS: Yes. One fellow got the information.

JF: Got information as to where people would be?

DS: Yes, and what they wanted. What they wanted us to do,

JF: So you were taking your cues from another group?

DS: Yes.

JF: Did you know what the other group was?

DS: No, I had no knowledge.

JF: So the groups were working in connection though through a secret...

DS: Yes. There must have--Yes.

JF: Line?

DS: Yes. Yes.

JF: So that there was some kind of organization?

DS: There was some kind of organization, limited, I don't think very effective, to be honest. I, I don't think that what we did made a hound's tooth of difference but at least there was a...

JF: It sounds like it made a difference to you.

DS: It made a great difference to me. I am a great believer in "Never again." No next time around, no.

JF: How did your parents feel, or did they know about your participation in the resistance group?

DS: They knew about it.

JF: And how did they feel about it?

DS: They tried to talk me out of it.

JF: Because of the danger?

DS: Yes, naturally

JF: Is this something that came up later after the war in your conversations with them?

DS: I am sure it did. I'm sure it was--I'm sure--I don't know. I think that is why I left Germany at the end of '48 or beginning of '49...

JF: How did you live during the time, the liberation till...?

DS: I lived fairly well. You mean from '45 on?

JF: Yes.

DS: Well, central services were restored in the city. You know, CARE packages began to come.

JF: And where did you live then?

DS: The same area where we had lived in the one room except we moved one floor below where the Nazi had lived there and vacated his apartment and moved on to the West so we took over that apartment.

JF: How did you get the apartment? Who made arrangements like that?

DS: The landlord. Whoever owned it at the time.

JF: And then you were able to find some kind of work at that point to pay for the apartment, or was there backing from outside agencies?

DS: I don't--that's a good question. I have no idea. I don't know how that was handled. I don't know if they even collected rent. Right after '45. Nobody collected rent for six months. We just moved down. It was empty, it stood empty, and finder's keepers. We just assumed control over something that nobody else cared about.

JF: You said this during this time a lot of the papers that you referred to, your father had with him.

DS: Yes.

JF: During the eight days in the cellar and that entire period, he had these papers on his person?

DS: Yes, yes, he always carried them in his briefcase.

JF: And the rest of the things were with your aunt?

DS: That's right, yes.

JF: Were you able to find any kind of work after a bit?

DS: After the liberation?

JF: After the liberation?

DS: Well, I decided that I wanted to study. Okay? So the requirement to study architecture--I started in--let's put it this way. The requirements were that you had to work nine months to a year on a building, a special arrangement that was union sanctioned as well as--for fellows who wanted to study architecture and you worked with a carpenter and a bricklayer of a large construction company.

JF: Was this a school?

DS: No, that wasn't a school, that was just a requirement and you kept--you already had applied--I didn't do anything in '45. I started in the end of '45 and I had begun taking that job to prepare myself and at the same time I completed my high school.

JF: What kind of school?

DS: In a German school.

JF: A regular German school.

DS: Sure--That was fine. As I said, even before the liberation you could move into the Aryan shelter...

JF: And the school had the same kind of atmosphere?

DS: Well, I had never been to that school. The school had all kinds of people. The high school--it was history thrown together--everything started from zero. There were returning soldiers who went to the school, there were other DP's who wanted an education, there was a whole mixed...

JF: What was the interchange between the people?

DS: Amazingly, everybody was looking to the future. None of--let's say, on the surface but--I frankly left Germany in 1948 because I couldn't look anybody in the face, because in my mind was a question: Where were you? In fact, a person I worked with, a German fellow also an architect--known him for years--I don't think that I had ever got over the feeling, Where were you during that time? Apparently that doesn't go away. If somebody is German, automatically my mind clicks back. I don't ask them. I ask myself, I wonder what he did during that time. There is always that suspicion in my mind. I don't think I will lose that.

JF: Did your parents want to leave?

DS: No. My father said, "Well I'm too old to go anywhere." My mother came here after we had settled here. She came to join us. My father passed away in 1959 and my mother came over in 1961.

JF: So they did not come with you?

DS: No, I left by myself.

JF: You left by yourself?

DS: Yes.

JF: Did you have difficulty leaving at that point?

DS: No, the HIAS--through the HIAS I came. [unclear].

JF: What word did you have from your parents about how things were for them in Germany after you left?

DS: Quite well. Everything seemed--They visited--My mother's relatives suddenly discovered they had relatives in Berlin again.

JF: The Christian relatives had returned?

DS: Yes, yes. Then suddenly my parents were invited to come and visit, and life went back to normalcy.

JF: Do you know whether they ever discussed with the family...?

Tape two, side two:

JF: You were talking about the fact that your family was reunited with the Christian part of your mother's family after the war.

DS: Yes.

JF: But you yourself did not go to see them.

DS: No, no.

JF: But there was also the contact with the aunt who had helped the family?

DS: Yes.

JF: The one aunt.

DS: Yes, she lived in Berlin and that contact was never lost.

JF: And she stayed and your parents stayed?

DS: Yes, in fact she visited us here as well a little later. No, that contact was never lost, and there were people in the building who were anti-Nazi. As I said we had experiences that gave you hope.

JF: And you said, if it had not been for your aunt and your mother that you feel your chances would have been very different?

DS: Oh, no question about it. We would have--as I said, all my relatives on my father's side never came back. Okay. The people I showed you. And others I didn't show you--other cousins never came back.

JF: And your mother came to this country after your father's death?

DS: Yes, we asked her to join us here and she lived here until '63--she passed away in '63, '64.

JF: Is there anything else you'd like to add to your story?

DS: No, not really. I mean, we've gone over many things in a short period. The lesson I drew from that is that I wouldn't take anything like that laying down and I almost threw someone out of the subway in 1945 after the war who made antisemitic remarks. You know, it's just like a red flag. I jumped at the guy and said, "Get out of the train or I'll throw you out."

JF: You felt the freedom to do it at that point?

DS: Yes, and all the good Germans stood around silently and didn't say a word, just as they stood around when the Nazis beat up the Jews. So, to me--I wouldn't take it lying down.

JF: Thank you very much.

DS: Okay. Sure.