

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

NORBERT ZEELANDER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Jill Porter

Date: February 21, 1986

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Holocaust Oral History Archive

Gratz College

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NZ - Norbert Zeelander [interviewee]

JP - Jill Porter [interviewer]

Date: February 21, 1986

Tape one, side one:

JP: So, when and where were you born?

NZ: I was born in Antwerp, Belgium on February 24, 1938.

JP: And what were the circumstances of your family life at that point?

NZ: Well I was born into a comfortable, middle class family living nicely. The family had been in Belgium for about 40 years. Basically, the family had lived in Holland for hundreds of years before that and had moved over to Belgium in the early part of the 20th century and right on into the 1920s because the diamond industry which is what they had been involved in moved from Amsterdam to Antwerp.

JP: You were a first-born, second born?

NZ: I was the first-born.

JP: And your, your father was a diamond...?

NZ: Actually, he wasn't in the diamond business. My mother's family was in the diamond business. My father had studied, had learned to be a diamond cleaver but he was in the import-export business. He had his own business which was doing very nicely in Belgium and in Holland and in Germany.

JP: Do you know much about the community that you lived in terms of the Jewish-- were your parents religious, actively involved in the Jewish community?

NZ: I know a lot about it because I've gone back after the war too. And, of course, we always talked about it a lot at home. My parents were basically not religious, neither were my grandparents. People were not bar mitzvahed. Yet they felt very Jewish. And even when we lived afterwards here in the United States, my parents didn't belong to a synagogue. When it was Rosh Hashanah we would be off and there would be special dinners, the Passover, the matza balls and everything like that. Made differently than we make them here. Very different consistency but it was all-- so the Jewishness was there. But...

JP: You say you lived comfortably, single home? I mean, what do you remember living there?

NZ: No, I don't. What I remember I remember from pictures and what I was told [unclear]. All during those war years, that's all I remember being told as I was growing up, what it had been like in Belgium and having to leave because of the Germans.

JP: So you have no recollection of Belgium at all?

NZ: Not generally, no.

JP: When did your family leave? What were the circumstances that you know of?

NZ: It was May 10, 1940, so I was just two years old. What occurred was, that morning, as it was described to me so that's how I recall, parachutes were seen in the sky and people were coming onto the streets and police were driving through the streets as there was some bombing, isolated bombing. This was going on, telling people to get back in their houses and not stand there looking at the parachutes and the bombs. My father quickly packed up my mother and myself and took whatever he could put in a small car, went and tried to pick up other relatives, convince them to go. The only people who would agree were my grandparents, his parents. And so, basically, it was my grandparents, my parents and myself in a car, started driving south towards France and...

JP: So you were almost two years old at this time?

NZ: A little over two.

JP: A little over two. Do you have any recollection of that ride?

NZ: It's funny, the recollections that I have was, really start when we ended up in the south of France, which until you had taken one of these histories from my father, I had thought perhaps had taken two or three days to get there. Because that's about as long as it takes to drive from, let's say, Antwerp to the south of France and discovered that it took about nine months to get there. And I really don't have recollections of that, like sleeping in barns and things like that. I just remember always being well cared for. And...

JP: You don't actually remember the ride at all?

NZ: No.

JP: And anything that you know about that, your parents told you?

NZ: I'm convinced, I think, that's what my recollections are, what I know from my folks.

JP: I see, and why did it take nine months?

NZ: Well, they had to avoid the Nazis, and France was also invaded at the same time as Belgium was, so they found farms where there were friendly people and lived there. They traveled, as it turns out with another family, who I don't know. They split at some point. Much later a couple of years later, in the south of France, they were able to get out and so my parents were upset about that, that they didn't tell them so I don't think they have spoken since. These are all things I have learned after this history took place. Anyway that ride was, that trip was one of going from farm to farm, slowly through France where they were able to barter either services or a little bit of money in exchange for food and lived and their plan was to stay on at one of these places and survive there and then as the Germans would be coming to these farms and they would see them or hear that they were there, they would have to move on. So they were always basically a little ahead of the Germans, avoiding being caught.

JP: But you have no recollection of actually, you say, you remember being well taken care of. What do you mean by that? You don't remember any trauma? You remember a nice feeling when you remember about that?

NZ: I remember nice feelings.

JP: Related to what kinds of thoughts?

NZ: Basically, essentially being there with my-- always being there with my mother and my grandparents. My father would be gone, at times. Those kinds of things I sort of remember. When my memory starts to come, it's when we were in the south of France and we were living on a large farm and by-- there were animals there, big dogs and horses and whatever, cows. And I remember playing with ducks and things like that and just being on this farm and living in this one room. I remember sheets hanging separating my parents from my grandparents, kind of thing. I remember my mother getting pregnant, or being pregnant and being very upset about it, that she was.

JP: You all lived in one big room?

NZ: We lived in the equivalent of a room about this size.

JP: And it was your grandparents, your parents and you?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

JP: And there was a sheet. Where did you eat? Did you eat in there?

NZ: In that same room.

JP: You ate there and you slept there?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Was there the tension that comes with that kind of proximity?

NZ: I am sure because years later my mother always despised my grandmother. So that was clear and I could never understand that. It didn't take too long to figure out how I would feel if you lived in that same thing. Because my mother was fairly young. My mother was 20 when I was born, so figure she was 23, 24 in those years.

JP: Do you recall, though, a sense of tension, or, you know, what kind of mood do you remember from that time?

NZ: I remember a sense of tension yes because I know I was taken to hospitals. Pains in my stomach and things like that, all kinds of x-rays and treatments so I had a nervous stomach through all those years.

JP: This started happening when you were in this one room?

NZ: Yes. While we there they even managed to get me back up to Paris which was occupied and got to me doctors there and in other cities.

JP: Do you remember, you had stomach aches all the time?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Is that what it was?

NZ: And you know when I mentioned to you before that there was this feeling after this other oral history, that's the kind of this that happened to me. So I got these

pains and I couldn't figure out where they were coming from so I ended up only about two years putting that together.

JP: So on one hand, you remember pleasant things?

NZ: Yes.

JP: But you also at the same time were having stomach pains and...

NZ: Yes.

JP: Do you remember feeling any, thinking about things that caused you this?

NZ: Well, what I started to realize more recently is that what I felt during all that time, was a real, the only way to describe it is a real loneliness. And missing having other kids to play with and hearing about them. Like during this period, when we were down there, evidently, a family, my father's brother committed suicide and killed his family and there were two boys who were roughly my age who I had always played with. And...

JP: Who told you this, your mother?

NZ: Well, they were all very upset about that. I mean that I, I have a recollection of that, that they were very upset and that's where this feeling of missing people to play with came from. And if you think about it during that whole period it was just basically me and my parents and my grandparents.

JP: Did you have a sense of abnormality as a child?

NZ: No, but what I did learn, I learned to like living that way. Being by myself. I feel very comfortable that way and at the same time, I feel lonely so my whole life has really been organized along those kinds of lines. When I, I always had this dream of living away from everyone and like on a mountain by myself. Living here is in a sense is sort of like that. If you looked at the phones, every phone has a plug so I can come home and pull all the plugs and no calls. But I hadn't focused on that feeling of loneliness only until recent years. Realizing that that's how I had essentially thought and what I had done was always played by myself. I developed systems which carried on into my early teens where I could play games that took months, like number games and all kinds of things.

JP: That you would make up?

NZ: That I would make up. Like games, they were sports games, like my own baseball game with dice and things like that. As I grew older they became more sophisticated. But all by myself.

JP: And this, you think this capacity was based on how you adapted to that kind of a life?

NZ: I think so. I really do. Because I had to be quiet.

JP: Why did you have to be quiet?

NZ: Because...

JP: You were being hidden?

NZ: There were different times we were hidden and there were times that no one could know we were there and so I learned not to speak. And to be very quiet for long, long periods of times.

JP: Were you told what was happening?

NZ: I was always told that the dirty Germans had caused all this pain to us. And we had lived very nicely, matter of fact, until I visited Belgium after World War II myself like first in the early 60s, I have always thought that my mother had lived in the equivalent of some huge mansion and it was wonderful and many servants and then when I saw the house it was a nice comfortable middle class, let's say like an Elkins Park kind of house but I was disappointed when I saw the house and I said, "hmmm." My mother-- so there was a lot of fantasizing, I'm sure, by my mother. When they gave me some of the goals that I ended up achieving I'm sure, came out of those years because my goal in life was to recoup what my family had lost.

JP: Did you know that?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Was that a conscious decision?

NZ: That was a conscious decision.

JP: At what point did you know that?

NZ: Almost as far back as I can remember. I was, it was sort of up to me to get back what had been taken.

JP: Did you see that as a pressure or as just a desire?

NZ: As a desire. It was something-- I wasn't interested in building castles, you know, or building huge mausoleums for myself, but just having the comforts that had been there before the war, I wanted to regain. And once I did, I was satisfied. Then I was confused because I didn't know what to do with my time. The only thing I knew how to do was working, you know so I had to-- these last few years but those...

JP: When your mother said "dirty Germans did this to us," did you sense at all that your life was in danger, that you were running? Did you have a sense of running or did you just think you were just moving?

NZ: No, I think I was very well kept aware of those kinds of things by my parents. They were always candid with me.

JP: What did they tell you exactly? Did they relate it to your being Jewish? Did you understand that at that point?

NZ: Yes, because I knew there were even conversations about should we, when we get to other places, if we get away, should we stay Jewish? Because there were conversations with other families who seriously, these conversations would go on for long periods of time. Was it worthwhile continuing being Jewish or should they, for their kids' sake, change and not let the kids know they were Jewish and try to get to places like Australia, South Africa, Canada, those kinds of places? And go live far away from any Jewish community? I remember, my parents were always feeling that no, we are Jewish,

and this is the way it has always been for Jews and it's alright, that's what makes us different.

JP: Do you remember having other than the stomach pains, nightmares about being chased or any kind of terror? Do you remember feeling that consciously other than...?

NZ: Only a little bit when I was a little bit older I used to have that. We ended up getting out of the south of France and through Portugal and Spain and ended up in the West Indies and I used to have these dreams where I was always running. I didn't know why I was running or where I was running to, and I continued to have that to this day. I go through periods where it's nice to get up in the morning because at least I won't be tired. And discussing my sister's [unclear]. My sister was born there in France and she has a similar kind of a thing and so you wake up early and you are all out of breath, but you don't really remember anything. What it was that you might be, but you remember running, running, running. All the time. So it's a relief to wake up. I like to take a deep breath and relax and then I can have a nice day. And so, that comes and goes periodically.

JP: Do you know, does anything trigger it, do you know?

NZ: Uh-uh [negative].

JP: Have you been able to identify the times that the dreams come?

NZ: Not really because they probably come and this -- when I focus on trying to figure out where that came from, it came when I was most relaxed. When I should have been on a vacation, couldn't stay on vacation because I just got so itchy. When things are going well, if you were to see how I worked, it's-- I have to be doing three, four, five, many things at the same time and I used to find the way to relax, was that I would shift into something else. By that I mean, like you heard this call, it came before. Now I'm working with a company helping them divest and sell off a division and so if I get to know that business very well, which is a business I knew nothing about, well, that's relaxing and was relaxing for me for a long time. To be working on, or have a business of my own and have two or three things like this going on and I guess you would go on into the night. When I would have that many things going on, then I can sleep well at night. When I don't have much going on, then...

JP: So when your mind is preoccupied...?

NZ: Yes.

JP: When you are essentially putting anything that's not active behind you?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

JP: But when you are relaxed, and did you see it at any point as suppressing something else?

NZ: No, I never really realized it. All that I know was that I had this and I knew this, way back. Let's say, I realized when I was about 11, 12 years old-- when I first came to the United States, I was 10. When I was first brought to school, I used to

get in a lot of fights. I was very aggressive. I had a lot of problems dealing with kids. Well in fact, I never, if you think back, I never had to deal with...

JP: No socializing with them.

NZ: But I would be, I would get in lots of fights and a lot of that came about when after World War II we were back in Belgium and there was a lot of antisemitism there. And so I would be chased around, get into fights and when I came here, if somebody was aggressive with me, I had been taught and I had learned how to fight. So if you said something that wasn't nice to me, I would just go out and go. And I did some pretty stupid things. I mean I would go after you with, let's say a roller skate. And I would try to hit you. I would have to be restrained so I wouldn't really hurt you badly. And so, in my own mind I was really at some point in there really very fearful even to the point when I started driving, if somebody did something, I would go after them. Stupid stuff. So that right up to the point when I was about a freshman in college. I was about 18 then. It was only at around that point that, let's say, I said I had to harness this and I might as well, if I don't I might kill somebody and do something stupid. My temper would get the better of me and I would allow it to. And it was all really related to, at least to my way of thinking, to being angry. I never understood what I was angry about. So the way I handled it was basically to work. I did try to make as much money as I could. That's essentially how I functioned. Because I didn't do well in school, say college for example, if I didn't have jobs.

JP: Where did you go to college?

NZ: So, going back to the time I was about 14, I always had little odd jobs. While I was going to school. Not even so much for helping to support our family or anything like that but just so...

JP: Occupy yourself.

NZ: Occupy myself and have my...

JP: Direct those energies.

NZ: And I learned how to harness that. When I was in college I had the equivalent of a full time job running things. At some point in there I was making more money, I realized, than my father was making and I just kept right on going, right on through college and right on through law school, but always working full time and...

JP: All throughout school you were working?

NZ: So I was going to day school to make it go faster rather than to night school but really had the equivalent of 40, 50, 60-hour jobs. All the way through there and with that, I won my battle with people and I just harnessed it and in that sense learned to [unclear]. The funny thing that happens now and still happens is that people basically say I'm one of these calm, relaxed...

JP: And you seem so, you really do.

NZ: And I've used that from a negotiating point of view, a selling point of view, but basically deep inside everything is rumbling away.

JP: So that do you still feel that you have it under control or do you think it's gone?

NZ: It isn't gone because what I have had to learn to do-- I didn't want to just keep working at that kind of pace so at first I thought, well, it would be nice to stay home and I'll read and do some things.

JP: This is after you had become extremely successful?

NZ: Yes. But I found I couldn't do it. So that's how I got hooked up and a little involved with Ellen¹ and the stuff down at Gratz and some other things. I am still really trying to figure my way into that kind of a world. How to-- all right, so you know, everything needn't be aimed at only purely working for the sake of bettering yourself, now share it and do some things with it that are useful. But the thing I don't like is working in organizations. I have always worked pretty much by myself. Even if I had a business and basically delegated everything, I was off to the side, really watching it and running things but really not so much dealing with all the people.

JP: So essentially then, the formative years of your life, determined-- and you were in this, in the middle of the height of this during the formative years and it totally affected your entire life? Everything that you are, do you think?

NZ: I think so. I don't think negatively.

JP: No, I am not saying that.

NZ: It's interesting. That's how I personally benefitted from it. See, during those early years, like when we were living in France, just to describe that, every so often and quite regularly, I checked it with my folks. I have this recollection of these men coming through at night, who were nice men. That's all I could remember and that my parents would be sitting there playing cards or doing things with these people. Well, it turned out that they were part of a sort of underground system for people who were flyers in the RAF, you know the British Air Force, to make it back to from behind the lines. So their place where they were on this farm was a place that people knew they could go to and was marked for that. So that was another thing. So that probably was the excitement my folks had. They didn't do much work. My father basically worked on this farm, that I remember. I remember working on cars and engines and things like that.

JP: You and him working?

NZ: He was, and I would be there with him watching sometimes doing stuff like that and at night and what. I don't know, I can't believe it is every night, it had to be every so often somebody would come through but in my mind that's what I recall.

JP: So the mood, as you recall, when you were living on that farm, was that oppressed-- what was the sense of your daily life? Was it unhappy, happy you know? Was there a sense of dealing with it or what do you remember?

¹Ellen Rofman, a member of the Holocaust Oral History Archive staff.

NZ: I remember just basically people, I would say, were dealing with it, were just working on a farm, like picking up eggs from chickens and milking cows and having time to walk and do things and there was a lot of talking about what was going on. They definitely knew what was going on back in places like Belgium. I don't know if they knew about the concentration camps but they knew that things weren't good for people back there. I told you earlier about the suicide of my uncle and they knew about things like that. So the news-- they were communicating with each other. Mail was coming through.

JP: Were you being, were you nurtured, do you remember being loved and cared for? Do you remember being in the way?

NZ: No, I don't think I was ever made to feel that I was in the way. I really believed that I remember that I was getting, whether it was from my grandparents or from my parents, they would get me special things, like eggs for Norbert, milk for Norbert, meat for Norbert and they may not have had it but they gave it to me. That I really remember things like that. I remember having-- always thinking I was very fortunate because of this. Because of this, I was with my parents all the time.

JP: I was just going to ask you that.

NZ: And to this day I will call them two, three times a week and speak to them. When I go down I don't have the patience to stay with them that long [unclear], but I mean I like to -- I look forward to seeing them, still need the strokes from my mother you might say, you know. Call up and need to have them say, "You are all right," that kind of stuff. That is all the result of this.

JP: But do you remember being lonely?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

JP: For other children?

NZ: And keeping that to myself. And never really having realized that as much, how big a thing that was.

JP: Did you keep it to yourself because you sensed that you were-- that the family was trying to survive, that you couldn't be selfish and express it?

NZ: I think I was sort of brought up that-- I think my parents were like that, too. If things aren't right for you, you keep it to yourself, because the other people really can't do much about it anyway and so a lot of those kinds of feelings, while you talk a lot, you keep your inner feelings to yourself.

JP: There was no privacy, presumably, in this place and you lived there for nine months. Do you remember any difficulties with that in terms of being, seeing intimacies or having to be so closely involved with other people?

NZ: I think my mother complained, as I recall, my mother complained about that all the time. She didn't like that aspect of things. But for myself, I became somebody who lived within my own head. That's the way I feel.

JP: That's where you got, the way you got by?

NZ: Yes, and I do to this day. And talk about seeing intimacies, yes. I mean to the point where what I had grown beyond that or lived differently. Let's see, we ended up in Curacao in the West Indies, but I was so very curious that, by that time, let's say, 1943, 1944, I was five or six years old. It grew to the point where I would go trying to either catch my parents, seeing them having sex if I could, or I mean it was just...

JP: Did you see them having sex there when they were in the...?

NZ: I must have heard. That's what I remember.

JP: Did you have an alcove where you slept yourself? Near what were you?

NZ: It was all in the same area.

JP: You were not roped off, or curtained back or anything?

NZ: Possibly. I don't really remember. But you hear things, you know. The lights can be out. There is still sound so that's-- I'm sure and that curiosity. I really realized things I did even at-- as an example, when my mother would have friends over, after when we lived in Curacao, I would be the kind of a little boy who would crawl along the floor with my little cart. I would crawl under the table and get my pleasures from looking up skirts and things like that, that's how I lived and that sounds strange but that's what kept me happy, you know. What can I say? And that's the...

JP: And you trace that back to the kind of stimulation...?

NZ: I think so.

JP: Unnatural kind of stimulation that you got because of the circumstances that you were living in.

NZ: Possibly, I don't really necessarily call it unnatural, well curious.

JP: Yes.

NZ: I was very sneaky about it. Nobody realized that this little boy...

JP: You were an innocent little boy.

NZ: Yes and he had his own little fantasies and that's where it was. I mean that's...

JP: Let me ask you, knowing your parents, you are describing some of this. You are describing yourself as someone very introspective, someone who lives within himself a great deal. Can you tell whether or not, basing this on what your parents are like, do you think that you would have been that way anyway? Or do you think this was-- are you very different from your parents? Do you think this is because of your experience, or do you think it's because of your character? Can you say?

NZ: It's hard to say. But in many ways I don't think I am that different from my parents. But, I have to think that perhaps the goals that I had, I really...

Tape one, side two:

NZ: Because we spent hours and hours together, I mean, right on through to the end of World War II where she-- I would probably be the one first to whom she spoke to -- even looking at it now, more than to my father about how she felt about the things she missed, and what her life had been like as a girl, and her parents and brothers and sisters and the people she missed. I was the person who heard all about that. So to me that was a very real part of my life. I could almost imagine-- there were times I pictured actually being there. Being with these people and doing the kinds of things, like where they go to in the summer and imagined being there with them.

JP: Why do you think your mother spoke to you more than your father?

NZ: Well my father's the kind of a guy who would basically say, "Let's just look ahead and don't look back." And he didn't really want to hear stuff like that and he's like that to this day. To this day he hasn't been able to talk to me about his brother and what that was like. He really misses him and things like that about him. He really just won't talk about it. He's told me, you know, that there are long letters that some day I will get to read but he wants me-- I can only read them after he is dead. He didn't want me to read them now you know. So I don't know whether that describes my father. He is a warm person but you can't talk about your real feelings.

JP: But you could with your mother?

NZ: Yes, very much so. So in terms-- she spoke that way about those kinds of things with me. And years later, when she would be dissatisfied about things, problems let's say with my father-- wasn't earning enough I would hear that kind of thing. So that always then said, "And you then have to do it." Or, "It hasn't been done before." Now would I have been a different person had we not gone through these experiences? Personally, I don't really think so. It just helped hone certain experiences and certain-- not experiences, but, you know, talents that I otherwise might not have had. They are really very well honed so that in that sense you might say, well, you wouldn't have had that.

JP: I think it's hard really to separate out who you are and what you would have been-- how would you know that? So you stayed on that farm for about nine months?

NZ: No, we stayed there.

JP: I'm sorry. It took you nine months to get there, yes?

NZ: No, I think we were probably there for about a year and a half.

JP: You were there that long?

NZ: I think we left towards the end of 1942. November, 1942.

JP: Was the goal, the expressed goal at that point, when we get home. Where were you headed? Do you have a sense of what was next?

NZ: I really believed that we knew we were never going to go back, that we couldn't go back. It was just a question of getting to places and learning where to go, where you would be away from Nazis and Nazis were Germans.

JP: Were you taught to mis-- to not trust people? Were you taught, very specifically, were you told, given very-- or were you never left out of your family's sight?

NZ: Well it is interesting to bring that up. I was really taught, this I lived with and remember clearly, that it could very easily occur that I could be separated from my folks. That I had one responsibility in addition to myself. I would have to take care of my sister. So that there I was. I had this newborn baby.

JP: Was she born on the farm?

NZ: She was born there. She was born November, '41. And as I said, we stayed there I think the end of '42, the beginning of '43, when we got out of there and that's roughly around the time when the south of France, when Vichy [unclear] and the Nazis came into there. Again, they stayed until they learned they had to move on and then we ended up going through Spain and to Portugal.

JP: Getting back. So you were told that you might be separated?

NZ: In that period, yes. It was-- there was even a time.

JP: Were you warned how to behave?

NZ: I don't remember, just that I had to take care of my sister.

JP: There was even a time you, started to say?

NZ: There was a time when we were, in a sense when we were lined up by-- I don't recall whether it was military or police or whatever-- and we were standing, my parents, my grandparents weren't there, my parents and myself and my sister and they had to show identification, things like that. They had to realize they were Jews and that they could be in real trouble and we never went back to the apartment, to the room and just kept right on going. I don't-- the story that I have later on, when I asked my father about it, was that the guy actually had a gun and that I didn't really truly myself recall and they essentially-- so I had to be prepared at that point in time. Since we didn't go back he had papers with him and went to a train or went to somebody that got us to the train and that's when we started traveling to get to Spain.

JP: So, this is your parents, you and your sister and your grandparents weren't with you?

NZ: Not at the initial point. They met us as we were going so word got to them that they had to join us and did.

JP: I want to get you to-- leaving behind, this idea that you would have to take care of your sister.

NZ: Now, it is in that period that I had to be taught that my father could be caught, my mother could be caught and they might-- I should get away on my own. If I ever saw them in trouble, I should just walk away. I was old enough and big enough.

JP: You were four?

NZ: Yes.

JP: That must have been an awful big burden for a four year old?

NZ: But to survive. Through that we learned.

JP: Do you remember thinking about that and worrying about it?

NZ: That's why I really think I was always-- I tried to be very nice to my parents so that would never have to happen. It really is-- I remember, never complained, you know. If you were just sitting there and were my mother, I would be sitting there not very far from you playing with something, staying very close. Close as I could. Later on when I was five years old, I would be reading. I would be reading in the same room as my mother was reading. Always trying to stay very close. I'm sure, because I was afraid then, that she would be separated. I would be alone.

JP: How about the idea of having to take care of your sister? Was that-- do you remember thinking about that?

NZ: I remember then I was being annoyed about it around the time let's say I was say 20 and having a sister that I was always looking after. Whether it was boyfriends giving her a hard time and stuff like that.

JP: So you took it to heart?

NZ: Oh yeah. I mean almost to this day. It's only very recently that I said to my sister, "Hey you are on your own!" It's true.

JP: Really?

NZ: I have another sister and she is much younger and I never felt like that about her. I could fight with her, tell her off, tell her anything. Say don't bother me, but my-- this one who is four years younger.

JP: She is your responsibility.

NZ: I was worried about how her marriage would go and how things were at home and I would be deeply concerned. I would call her husband and established a relationship with him so that I know-- knew that he had his own good times and I wanted to know what was going on, so if there were ever a problem, I would be protecting my sister.

JP: So you never got over that?

NZ: No, only recently, I think.

JP: Were you aware, as you were growing up, and you were still [unclear], were you aware of why you felt that?

NZ: Yeah, yeah.

JP: And yet you still couldn't-- you knew that the circumstances weren't there.

NZ: It was my responsibility, you know. It was almost like you have to-- you were a boy and you have a sister and she's younger and that's your responsibility. As to-- you see, this is something I think that may even go back longer. I gave my sister an

allowance, when I was, when I would be making some money. I would save some for myself and I was taught to give her some allowance. You have to share. That was partially taken care of, giving her some money to spend. So that continued-- and my parents, you know...

JP: They wanted to be sure that...

NZ: Yeah, now strange as it-- now, I checked into that to see well what people in Belgium do, like my mother's brothers and sisters-- did they do the same kind of a thing, you know? Was this from World War II stuff and, yes, they were very nice to each other but they don't feel those kind of things. A real responsibility, that kind of stuff didn't go on before, you know.

JP: Oh God, that's a lot for a four year old!

NZ: It never occurred to me that it was a lot, you know. I never thought of it. I wouldn't realize that, I'd say, in the last three or four years. Because the other thing I should mention that's important I think in here, is that until we had the Holocaust meeting in Philadelphia²-- when was that, last year?

JP: It was-- you mean, last year's?

NZ: Just last year.

JP: The most recent one, yeah.

NZ: Up to that point in time, I didn't really consider myself a survivor because we were really always taught that unless we were-- nothing ever happened to us. We were always -- we were never under any German domination, so we were never victimized in any way. We survived, but differently. We didn't go to a concentration camp or weren't under any of that kind of oppression, so we were fortunate. There were always the words, "We were fortunate. We were fortunate." So my parents wouldn't recognize it. And really, it took until very recent years that I was able to start to make things fit into place and the puzzle started to come together. I saw-- well, gee, somebody would come and visit who was in a concentration camp and you learning that parents had died and the guy was my age and he had taken care of a sister, or a brother and figure out that he had a three years old and a one year old to take care of and, in fact, did that-- and those thoughts then came to me and I said, "Gee, you know, that's how I was taught that could happen to me too and that could have been the case. And that's, perhaps some of those things affected me.

JP: You never thought about that?

NZ: Never thought about it-- really didn't.

JP: And yet I'm sure this experience-- you say your parents were candid with you, it was discussed, it was always open, I mean, what you had been through.

NZ: It was from a very positive, optimistic point of view in that sense, if you look at it that way.

²"The Gathering" - The American Gathering of Holocaust survivors held in Philadelphia in April, 1985.

JP: Your parents never lamented-- your mother did, though?

NZ: My mother lamented that she didn't have her easy times and living in luxury, you know that kind of stuff. She missed the material things. My father has never really been a very materialistic person. It has never been that important to him. To him, just being healthy and having enough to eat was all that ever mattered. I remember being angry with him as a teenager, you know, like, "Why do we live here?" and "We don't have a car," or the car we finally did have and, you know, and other kids could have more.

JP: Here being Queens?

NZ: Yes.

JP: A row house?

NZ: Yes. You know, so to me, that was, it was...

JP: Why did-- and yet that was already important to you, materialism? As a young teenager?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Was this from your mother? I mean, most parents-- I mean, "I live in a rowhouse, I grew up in a rowhouse." I mean, almost everybody grew up in a rowhouse. Why do you think?

NZ: I just thought we should live better than that. I really did.

JP: Do you think that came from your mother?

NZ: It had to. Absolutely. I'm sure it did, it had to. Because remember I said when I went back to Belgium I thought we lived in this magnificent mansion and it wasn't such a big deal, you know. And then I saw the apartment where my parents lived before World War II and it was just a plain ordinary apartment where a young couple would go and live and it wasn't anything special. And yet if you had grown up listening to my mother, you would have thought that we were very wealthy and that every afternoon they were out listening to music and I'm sure my father had to work very hard and would have had to work very hard, you know, to keep things like that. I saw how my uncles on my mother's side, how they lived-- the diamond business is one where it is much more leisurely because it's a business that changes from year to year. You have good years you have bad years, like the stock market is here. And so you do have a lot of free time. And you don't put in an eight-hour day necessarily but it's a lot of mental stuff, even a lot of-- it's hard to describe but so it's a different pace. A whole different life, that's what she missed.

JP: I want to get back to you leaving the farm but...

NZ: Yep.

JP: So, if you didn't consider yourself a survivor, so to speak, how did you become identified with the Holocaust? I mean you know, why did you even take an interest in the meeting last year?

NZ: Well as time went on I realized that I had this hatred for people who were German, and that I came to the conclusion that some of the anger that I had had to be related to things like that. My definition of a survivor had only been people who lived and who had gone to a concentration camp. And so when they had these meetings and they talked about things like this, I guess I always sort of pushed everything away.

JP: What meeting?

NZ: That there was a Holocaust kind of survivor-meetings and things like that. I presumed that people who had been in a concentration camp went there. I also presumed that to myself, I don't have time for stuff like this, I've got to do the things I have to do in order to get...

JP: Make some money?

NZ: Build mountains, build things and just function that way. I would never go out with girls who my parents tried to introduce me to. People tried to fix me up with them, a woman in New York who came from-- there is an awful lot of that where another Dutch Jewish family, you know, people like that and say, "Why don't you meet her?" They were always trying to fix you up and in those circles. I mean it isn't just being Jewish. If you were Jewish and you were Dutch, you tried to stick to your...

JP: Why did you reject that?

NZ: I just was-- it's part of my privacy. No one ever knew anything about what I did. My parents didn't.

JP: I mean you were interested in girls, why did you not want to, did you not want to deal with...?

NZ: I didn't want to deal with any, any people who were related or had anything to do with the whole European scene and I think it's as much not having wanted to do with anything with the Holocaust as my personal feeling of privacy. See, if I went out with you and you were the daughter of somebody my parents knew, well they would know what was going on.

JP: So you were...

NZ: I loved living in New York because, you see, there was such privacy there. In that mass of people I could go anywhere and nobody would know me and to this day I enjoy working in Manhattan because you never see anybody. I hate Philadelphia in a sense and I don't work in Philadelphia because you walk on Chestnut Street at lunch and you bump into people.

JP: So even now you don't like to bump into people?

NZ: No.

JP: Why?

NZ: I am extremely private, in a sense.

JP: Do you consider yourself antisocial?

NZ: I don't know. I don't think so. I enjoy being with people, but I very much enjoy being by myself too.

JP: You enjoy being with people on your terms?

NZ: Yes, I guess that's it. It's hard to describe.

JP: Do you like anonymity? Do you feel safe being anonymous?

NZ: Totally, yes. Regarding business, people want to write articles and do stuff about some of the things I was involved in. I always avoided that like the plague.

JP: Is it a form of hiding? Are you still hiding?

NZ: Well, one of the reasons I wanted to move away from New York, and it was a conscious decision, was because I felt it wasn't safe for me in New York. There was no way you could escape from New York if there was a bomb attack or things like that, so I always have paths of how to get out. One of the reasons we live here is because I always felt that from here I could get away very easily. Wings Field. To catch airplanes, take a plane.

JP: And you consciously-- a conscious decision?

NZ: Yes, during the Nixon years I traveled up to Canada to figure out where I would live, because I saw the whole thing coming to a disaster in the United States possibly and I was seeing where I could move to next, so, yes.

JP: Does your family know of these things?

NZ: No, Sue does, my wife does, I've shared those things with Sue.

JP: Was she aware of that; she understands?

NZ: She is probably the most responsible for getting me to go to these Holocaust meetings. Which has been very rewarding because a little group that has been established which is sort of child survivors of the holocaust group that started as a result of that, and it's fascinating talking to these people when we get together and discover that you know, many of the same feelings that I have, these people have.

JP: And are these people in the same circumstances as you, or did they live in ghettos, did they live in camps?

NZ: They lived in all kinds of places.

JP: So just child survivors?

NZ: People who survived concentration camps, people who lived exactly the way I lived and who had, in fact, did see their parents get taken away. In places where like I was and ended up surviving.

JP: So it's a curiosity, then, you have essentially been running?

NZ: Yes.

JP: And yet, at this point in your life, you are now going back to connect...

NZ: Sort of.

JP: ...to something that you...

NZ: ...because I've been trying to achieve in my own mind is like talk about the dreaming, why we have this ridiculous feeling of running? There is no need to be. What are you running from, you know? Trying to relax. And in the process, I haven't figured it out yet, you know.

JP: And you think somehow it's related to getting back in touch with all of these things?

NZ: I think so. I think so. Come to the conclusion it isn't necessarily all bad, to have to be, let's say, it's not even so much being physically active, it's mentally active.

JP: Do you have peace of mind? Do you consider yourself--do you have any serenity or are you still the little boy who has stomach pains?

NZ: Lots of time I am still like that. It's hard to get that serenity. I get that serenity when my juices are flowing whether it's doing something I enjoy working at or it's hard to get it reading a good book. Which I like to. I read a lot but I just don't get the serenity out of it that I would like to get.

JP: So you don't feel at peace?

NZ: Not much of the time no. Sometimes.

JP: Is it something that-- is that what you are looking for now?

NZ: In a sense, yes. Because, you know, why should you-- my feeling is why should that motor always have to be running.

JP: I mean, you have achieved so much of what you. [unclear]

NZ: For my purposes, yes. But-- so I sit there saying, "This is ridiculous," but you keep looking for it. One of the things that I have been able to accomplish that way is that to find things, to get involved in, because since I have to make use of the time anyway...

JP: Are you retired now?

NZ: I can't. In a sense I am, but I am involved in a lot of things anyway, as you can see from the phones. So, I don't think there is such a thing as being retired but what I have tried to do is not to have to be in a, let's say, a nine to five routine. So that I can basically-- what I am really trying to establish is with my youngest-- my youngest daughter is 16, she is a junior in high school. By the time another two years go by, she will be in college. What I would really like to do is to be going to travel to different places, that I haven't gotten to yet and be doing more of that and to be able to do that I can't have the kind of routine...

JP: Travel with her you mean?

NZ: No, no, Sue, let's say. So that once she is away in college, that would-- I could break my time up more. Now I spend more time-- we spend more time around here, a lot because generally the kids are around.

JP: Is your daughter your last child at home?

NZ: Yes.

JP: You have three children?

NZ: Yes.

JP: And the older two are at college?

NZ: The older one is at college and the next one is in a boarding school, will be in college next year, and Julie who is a junior.

JP: Okay. Let's get back to being four and being lined up, you were lined up. Now your sister was an infant [unclear] and your mother was holding your sister and you had to leave and you just left. This was not anticipated. It just happened although you know that your father was ready for it at any time because you had the papers.

NZ: Yes.

JP: Tell me from there, what happened next? What did you do?

NZ: We ended up going to a train and taking a train.

JP: Did you leave your things behind?

NZ: I had one thing with me, a teddy bear, which traveled with me a long time. And everything else was left behind.

JP: You remember longing for anything you left behind?

NZ: Yeah, I remember the animals that I played with and really missing them. And basically, you know, that's something that is the way it had to be and I've always been able to do that since. Just leave things behind.

JP: Just walk away?

NZ: Yes. I was even taught that, because remember how my folks left Belgium -- just basically left the house with lights on and made it look like we were still there so nobody would suspect it.

JP: Well, have you done that? Have you done that since?

NZ: I have done that in relationships with people, with business. I can be really very cold and calculating and if you hurt me or turned against me, I-- essentially that's it. And I have separated that from my personal life, my business life, so I really have no relationships as friendships with people who I do business with, so because I can be, I like to be very protective and have close relationships with friends or family but don't want to get into those kinds of relationships with anybody businesswise. I think I learned that from this. So, getting back to getting on a train, we got on the train and that took days, getting to Spain. Exactly what transpired I don't know. What I do know is what my father and mother told me about the train ride.

JP: You don't remember the train ride?

NZ: I remember the train, I remember being on the train, I remember sitting on the train and I remember very clearly always like sitting in little corners and stuff like that but...

JP: Was the train crowded? Were there a lot of other people?

NZ: No, but there were German soldiers on the train and that I remember.

JP: You remember that? Did you feel in danger? Were you afraid to do and say certain things?

NZ: Yes. Yes. And I think I was taught to say nothing, just to be very quiet, just be a quiet little boy, you know. My parents were there and what I was taught was regarding, even that train ride that if they were taken off the train, that my goal was to stay on the train even if I had to hide and that...

JP: Did your parents have papers? How were you traveling with German soldiers?

NZ: They were on the train. They checked people. My parents had papers, whatever they were, they must have been special papers, falsified papers that they had gotten to get on this train. The story I know is that my father have to-- when they got to the border, he had to go to a train master at one of those-- at some stop, say whatever he had to say, a password of some kind, and they were to take care of everything and that happened. So there was a whole system of how people were able to get out and people who were helping who were working, say, within the train system, and I think this was on the, not on the French side but on the Spanish side where that particular train master was in a town right up in the Pyrenees at the border...

JP: How long were you on the train? Do you know?

NZ: That, too, I supposed was just a matter of a day. It turns out to probably be four or five days of getting on and off trains and staying in little towns along the way and then where I thought we had ended up, going to straight to Portugal, we ended up in Madrid and stayed there for a few days then connected on to Lisbon.

JP: So you have a fairly vague recollection of this trip?

NZ: Yes, that I do.

JP: Was there food, was there any [unclear]?

NZ: We traveled first class.

JP: You traveled first class?

NZ: Yes. That was fascinating. We did very well on that train.

JP: Do you know how you traveled first class?

NZ: It was all part of these arrangements.

JP: I see, so there was a system in place.

NZ: Yes.

JP: And you traveled through this. Do you know how connections were made? I mean why you had not taken advantage of that before? I mean why you only left at that point?

NZ: Part of the story that I have is that they wouldn't let-- the people who were organizing us all, who were involved with us getting out, didn't want us to travel with a baby. So that made things-- it controlled my sister's life. Here she is, this very wanted child, right? Couldn't even get out of France because they had a baby.

JP: They thought it would be suspicious to be traveling with a baby?

NZ: Who knows? I don't know what the reason may be but because they had a baby, they couldn't leave the year before and my father was working in different underground activities that they were using him for and that he was involved in, so he wasn't anxious, necessarily to leave as long as things seemed safe. It's only when things got very bad, that the time had come to get out. So there is also-- the reason they were stopped on the street was because they had learned from someone who had come to my

parents' room or was on the way and was going to be stopping there that-- so therefore, that my parents were involved in the underground. That's why they couldn't go back to the room although, subsequently, the way my parents had described it and why whoever they went to said, "Well, here are the papers. You better go."

JP: So they found out that they were coming to get them?

NZ: Yes. And the guy, now, picture the policeman or it would have to be a French, somebody French because if it was German they wouldn't have gotten away...

Tape two, side one:

NZ: ... the message, the clue, to get the hell out of there because if he wanted to kill them or he wanted to take them away, he could have, he could have arrested them. I mean he didn't. And so he told them enough so that they knew they had to get away. So that though this is a bad guy, in a sense he was a good guy. He saved their lives and it may not have appeared that way at that time, to someone like me a little boy he was a bad guy but when you analyze it that's what occurred. So off they went.

JP: So you got to Madrid, so you spent this time on the train and got to Madrid.

NZ: Lots of times we were checked, but once we got through Spain everything was all right and they ended up going from Madrid to Lisbon where they waited for a boat which would take them out of there, the boat we were on, it was a big passenger ship, I remember clearly.

JP: You do.

NZ: And we lived in a very nice cabin.

JP: Was it filled, was it a regular passenger ship?

NZ: Yes, a regular passenger ship filled with refugees.

JP: Was this your first real encounter with other children, were there other children on board?

NZ: There must have been other children on board but I don't remember other kids or being with other kids.

JP: You don't.

NZ: I don't remember any kids. I really remember walking with my father or hand in hand with, and just walking up and down the ship.

JP: So you remember this as a very pleasant experience being on the ship.

NZ: I think everybody was elated.

JP: To be getting away. So the ship was from where to where?

NZ: The ship was going from Lisbon to the West Indies.

JP: Was this the only place you could go? Was it just a question of getting off the continent and going where you could?

NZ: Yes.

JP: And just going where you could. It was not a matter of choice, it was just...

NZ: I don't think it was. I mean you couldn't go to places like-- think, we were in the south of France, how far would we, we were close to Marseilles, the city. But nothing must have been going out of Marseilles, who knows what. They have to get, this was, this all had to have been planned out and the Dutch Red Cross was involved in a lot of this. Underneath it all. They were making these kinds of provisions and how that was done I don't know. Because my parents were Dutch citizens even though they had lived

in Belgium they were still Dutch citizens and so the Dutch government somehow was involved in this.

JP: In this leaving.

NZ: Somehow involved, some of it.

JP: So now it was your parents, you, your sister, and your grandparents?

NZ: And my grandparents.

JP: They were on the boat.

NZ: Yes.

JP: Do you remember feeling relieved and joyous that you had escaped?

NZ: I don't know. I remember being excited because of us going to new places and things and the only thing I know that I didn't like was there were so many people but that's basically all I can recall from it.

JP: Okay.

NZ: From there we ended up in-- I think that took about three weeks. And we ended up in Trinidad. Didn't really get off this boat, had to stay on the boat from there and get off in Jamaica, the island of Jamaica, and were put into a refugee camp up in the mountains there, the Blue Mountains. The place is now being converted into the University of the West Indies Medical School. [unclear]

JP: Have you been back?

NZ: I couldn't, I was there and some people were going to take me but it was before the new government, this is while Manley was the president there, things were just terrible while I was there in Kingston, including the hotels at the time.

JP: Yeah.

NZ: But I was doing business there so I talked to people and that's how I learned what was going on. So we lived there, I think about six months, and the refugees actually set up their own schools for kids. The kids would have classes and things like that.

JP: So you were five now at this point?

NZ: Yes, five, yeah, 1943, the beginning of '44.

JP: Did you live in barracks?

NZ: Barracks.

JP: You lived in barracks. Were you with children or were you with your family?

NZ: I was with my family.

JP: Uh huh. How many families to a barrack?

NZ: Couldn't tell how many, there had to be hundreds of families.

JP: They were given barracks?

NZ: There were many barracks.

JP: Right but I mean how many, how large were the barracks, I mean was it just your family and one other family or was it three families or was it?

NZ: I honestly couldn't tell you. I remember, have you ever been through a military army base? It looked like regular barracks but how it was split up I couldn't tell you.

JP: But once again there was no privacy, once again you were forced to live en masse with other people?

NZ: Yes. I'm sure, we ate like in a dining room with a lot of other people that's how we ate. I remember my parents were very happy because now they didn't have anything to do, there was no work and they basically were living in a nice climate and they were young and everybody there was having a nice time and at that time, that there were other pressures, now people wanted to be drafted. They wanted to go into the Army and go back to fight and I remember there was real tension between people so because some wanted to go and some didn't want to go and some felt they had an obligation to go.

JP: So what army did they want to go back in?

NZ: They wanted to be like a volunteer Dutch army.

JP: So you were with a lot of Dutch?

NZ: It was all Dutch.

JP: It was all Dutch.

NZ: I think there were other people in adjoining areas from different places but they kept the Dutch people together in one set of barracks or multiple barracks and they had classes in Dutch and things like that.

JP: You went to school?

NZ: Went to school, yes. It had to be my kindergarten, first grade, what it was, but that's what it was. I remember the man who was the teacher so I'm sure I went to classes, how much I don't know.

JP: Do you remember having adjustment problems in terms of you had been with your family, just your family all this time and now you were a part of a big society with other kids and schools and...

NZ: The only time I remember having a problem was a little bit after that we ended up in Curacao. Which is a Dutch island that's why we ended up in Curacao. And I remember once I was in school having problems with my mother being called to school because of me getting into trouble. I would be sitting there in class and getting into trouble because I would see submarines or I would see-- the school was right along the water.

JP: Right.

NZ: And so I would sit there looking out and saying, gee, I see this or I see that.

JP: Not paying attention.

NZ: Not paying attention but always coming up with stuff like this, boats coming to attack and things like that and teachers having a hard time with me. I wouldn't behave and I wouldn't pay attention.

JP: So how old were you before you left for Curacao?

NZ: We were there I think about six months. And so we probably got to Curacao before the end of 1943.

JP: Why did you leave, go to Curacao?

NZ: They were dispersing the people to go to places, this is just a temporary place where the British would keep people and...

JP: So it was a British camp?

NZ: I think so. It was a British colony at the time and so people who were over 60 were allowed to go to the United States. Everybody wanted to get to the United States but couldn't. So my grandparents went to the United States.

JP: You split up?

NZ: And my parents went to Curacao in the, a Dutch island.

JP: Did your father want to go back with him? Or was he...

NZ: No, this is an interesting little anecdote for whatever it is worth. There was a doctor who basically checked everyone and he would stand there and say you don't have to stand this tall, a story my father had, your heels had to touch the wall why can't you stand a little straighter in another way so he was short enough that he was rejected. And a lot of people didn't want to do that. But my father was not looking to be a soldier.

JP: Why could only the older people go to the United States?

NZ: The United States was not that nice about letting that many people in, that's basically why. And that's-- so we ended up in Curacao. My father was like a civilian employee working for the military there. And we stayed there till the end of the war which was in 1945.

JP: Did you live in a house, in a barracks?

NZ: We lived in an apartment over some-- I guess people lived underneath us, it was on a very busy little street.

JP: Government, did the government supply that for you, or was that a private?

NZ: I think it was all private and my father got a job and he paid for it and that was basically it. We could have stayed in Curacao after World War II, a lot of people did, but my sister was in very bad shape. She was a redhead and her very fair complexion and she couldn't take the climate, the sun. She weighed less at the age of two than she weighed at the age of one and had all kinds of problems so they had to take...

JP: From the climate?

NZ: From the climate.

JP: Wow. So now you were in school?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

JP: Did you have a sense at that period that your life had returned to normal?

NZ: Ah ...

JP: That something was over?

NZ: Yeah, but always still looking, always looking, this wasn't the final place where they were going to stay.

JP: You knew that?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Did they know that?

NZ: And they knew that and we even had a problem, I'll jump ahead to give you an idea, but the time I went to high school, I had never finished more than two years in one school. I never completed a second year and when we lived in New York my mother was agitating, and I was really very supportive of it, what if we move on and go someplace else and it was only so this feeling of wanting to move became exciting. And also I didn't have to develop real relationships with anybody and I could be a character or I could be quiet and I had different personalities in different places.

JP: You did?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Where did...?

NZ: I was a good student, I was a bad student; I cared, I didn't care.

JP: Did you know you were role playing?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Why were you role playing? Why were you doing that?

NZ: Because it was just fun because I knew I wouldn't be staying there.

JP: Was it your way of defending against having to make relationships that you had to leave?

NZ: Possibly, I felt badly that we left Curacao. Because I did have some friends there so I did enjoy that and once we came to the United States, we came here first and it was pretty clear that we weren't going to be able to stay because we weren't here legally.

JP: You came where first?

NZ: From Curacao.

JP: To?

NZ: New York.

JP: Right.

NZ: Lived in New York about six months and then did have to leave, to go back to Belgium and wait for a quota.

JP: You mean.

NZ: You can't immigrate to the United States unless you have a-- each country gets a certain number of people who are allowed to come in. So we didn't have that and

there was about a two-year wait coming from Holland and Belgium so we tried to come here and the lawyers who helped people immigrate to the United States and it didn't work. So we had to go back to Belgium and we did do that. So for me, once I got into that kind of pattern, I really liked when we went to Belgium I knew that wouldn't be permanent, and then when we came back here again, we lived in a small apartment and we knew people who moved into a nicer neighborhood. So it was always knowing, even when I was in New York, I was changing schools. I had no trouble with school, I mean as far as doing well in class. I didn't have to work very hard. The two years I went to school in Belgium was a tremendous assist because they packed so much in and I was so much further ahead than the schools are here that I coasted right on into high school with the stuff I already learned. You know math wise and language wise.

JP: Why was there no sense that you would stay in Belgium at that time?

NZ: That was clear, my father would never.

JP: He didn't want to be there.

NZ: He didn't want to stay.

JP: He didn't want to stay it was too unhappy for him?

NZ: Yes. Both unhappy and didn't feel safe. That was clear that we were just there temporarily, tremendous pressure from my mother's whole family survived, all the brothers, sisters, parents. All the cousins had been taken away but her parents had managed to survive by getting to Switzerland and they were all there and they were very successful in the diamond business and wanted to offer my father, you know, positions and work and he would have nothing to do with it. He wanted to get away. When we talked he said there was a war after the First World War and there was a war, World War II and there is going to be another war so who needed to stay there. I guess he felt...

JP: Did you have any sense of wanting to stay, somewhere that you knew you were, did you have a sense of being pulled away or did you have a sense of voluntarily going?

NZ: He?

JP: You said you were.

NZ: After awhile it became fun to move. It became a pattern. I would be looking forward to wherever the next place would be. That's you know I, how I essentially looked at it. It's interesting in my own life I haven't moved that much.

JP: You haven't. You've stayed put.

NZ: Yeah. I had to get out of New York, that is something that is clear. I love New York, I mean there is a lot about New York that I like. I mean I don't like Philadelphia. From a social point of view. Excitement point of view.

JP: In terms of what is available, theater and things like that?

NZ: A boring city. People are boring. Restaurants are nice but hard to find exciting things to do here. Where as New York I find terribly exciting. Same with the

West Coast. But I opted to live here, to be away and I guess go up to New York for the day. I go back and forth regularly.

JP: Pleasure or business?

NZ: Both. Both.

JP: Are you still threatened about living in New York?

NZ: Mmm hmm. Yes.

JP: Because of the lack of escape or because of the density?

NZ: No, not the density, the lack of escape. The fact that it is just the tunnels and the bridges. And yet I would really like to live in Manhattan very much.

JP: And there is no way, have you ever tried to come to terms with it?

NZ: Yeah, I live here and I go to New York regularly and I'll stay over.

JP: But you would be happier living there. But you would never?

NZ: No I don't, I can't be happy living there because of the fact that I wouldn't feel that I could escape if I lived there permanently.

JP: What I'm saying is that...

NZ: You say, coming to grips, coming to terms with it.

JP: Yeah. You have never tried to overcome that? In other words, it is irrational, you know it's irrational?

NZ: I guess so. Yes.

JP: And you have never tried to say "This is irrational, I don't have to escape." Would you feel that there may come a time when...

NZ: I don't think it's irrational, see I disagree with you, I think we number one being Jewish, I always have to know where else I can live. I believe that when it happens in our time or somewhere, the Jews will have a problem in the United States. This is just another nice temporary place to live.

JP: You believe that.

NZ: I really do. I don't believe in living in Israel.

JP: Why?

NZ: Because I don't want to be among that many Jews, living in one place. When they finally want to get rid of all the Jews it is so easy. They are all in Israel so I don't mind living the way I do. I also believe aside from that being Jewish there are possibilities of nuclear wars and things like that, those things will come again so why wouldn't they aim for the cities? I remember being upset here at one point when I discovered that out of Valley Forge and King of Prussia the whole control center for all of the power companies for the eastern seaboard is here. I said, "Oh shit, that I picked living here. That's stupid, that's a logical target for some missiles," you know, well I said I pushed that to the back, think that way like you said before, you can't live anywhere, might as well go live in a little island someplace. So...

JP: Do you have a place of escape in your mind, is there somewhere that you are going to go? Do you have a route and a location?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

JP: You do.

NZ: Right now it would probably be Toronto.

JP: Why would you feel safer in Toronto?

NZ: Because I somehow feel Canada is an emptier country and I don't think it would be antisemitism there. The closest place to go to would be Toronto and the easiest. Montreal I would like too, originally, I like it as a city. But learned that there was, you know there are a lot of problems there a few years back, so I switched to Toronto. Actually went up to Montreal and checked it out.

JP: You did.

NZ: I haven't done that as far as Toronto is concerned.

JP: No.

NZ: It's just that...

JP: When did you go to Montreal to check it out?

NZ: During the Nixon, during that terrible period. I really thought at that time we were going to be in deep, deep trouble. As a country. Not necessarily for Jews, but this would be a place that because of the constitution the president is also the commander in chief, he could really take over. You could have a really military oriented government and we were this close to that.

JP: So you don't think your feelings are irrational?

NZ: I don't.

JP: Do you have friends that you discuss this with?

NZ: Mmm hmm. [affirmative]

JP: Do they, what do they think? Do they agree with you? Do they say this is good old Norbert, you know?

NZ: If that's how they answer fine, suit yourself. Basically they felt that way about my father, that he was nuts when he was leaving Belgium so that's how I justify it. You know, they all said he was crazy. I don't think he was.

JP: Does Sue agree with you or is that, does she humor you?

NZ: I think she agrees with me.

JP: Does she have any background in Holocaust background, she is not a survivor?

NZ: No, she was born in Brooklyn.

JP: She's a survivor. [sic, she is not a survivor] I've lost my train of thought.

NZ: Sorry.

JP: That's okay give me a minute here. Talking about the moving. So you left Curacao?

NZ: Mmm hmm. [affirmative]

JP: And basically because your sister-- tried to get into the United States illegally.

NZ: Yes. Couldn't stay.

JP: Did you have family here?

NZ: Yeah my grandfather and grandmother.

JP: Your grandparents lived in New York?

NZ: Mmm hmm. [affirmative]

JP: Why New York?

NZ: My father, there was a cousin who had lived in New York from the 1930s or so, so he was like their sponsor and so that's why and he in the diamond business and my grandfather was a diamond cutter so the only diamond business in the United States was in New York. During World War II that was a very, very good business, so my grandfather made very good money in those couple of years.

JP: How old was your grandfather?

NZ: He had to have been about 60 at the time. Because it was a funny story that he, that he got picked up for not having registered with the draft. He had no idea that he had to register, you know. He didn't have a draft card or something like that and he wasn't 60 yet or he was 60, something like that and so. Well, let's see he was born in 18--. I can't remember.

JP: That's okay.

NZ: It doesn't matter.

JP: So you came to New York.

NZ: They tried to stay. There were lawyers who handled that kind of immigration. They even saw one and paid him, the way to go-- to stay was to go up to Canada and come right back and my father was stopped and couldn't stay so we left.

JP: When you came here you lived with your grandparents?

NZ: We lived, no, my grandparents lived in Brooklyn and my parents lived in a small like two bedroom, not two bedroom, two room place in 72nd Street in Manhattan. I remember the name, the Hotel Hargrave. My father got a well-paying job cleaving diamonds and we rented an apartment up in above Harlem, Washington Heights, right by the Cloisters.

JP: In a Jewish refugee area?

NZ: It wasn't particularly Jewish no. It was very difficult after World War II to get apartments in New York. People were, just like it is today. Subletting, so they sublet an apartment from somebody, and it was very Chinese oriental furniture. Oriental carpets and I don't know what the man had done.

JP: It was a furnished apartment?

NZ: Yes, a furnished apartment and that's where they lived, that's where we lived. I remember playing up in the Cloisters and before that playing in Central Park, I was learning how to ride a bike you know, and roller skate.

JP: Did you like the United States? At that point?

NZ: I guess so. I don't know.

JP: There was no...?

NZ: You realize I didn't know English, went to school.

JP: You didn't know English?

NZ: I went to school and don't really remember very much about the school. So I don't know what I did or what they did with me. Went back to Belgium. Went to school there, it was terrible in Belgium so I had to be anxious to get back to the United States.

JP: What was terrible?

NZ: Because there was a lot of antisemitism. The kids were essentially picking on me, kind of a thing. I was like a kid who had never been exposed to anything like that so I would be riding my bike down the street or on or in the park and somebody would stop me, would say stop and then I would get beaten up or wouldn't know what the hell was going on.

JP: So even though your whole life up to that point had been determined by antisemitism, you had never felt it directly until then?

NZ: That's right. Personally, directly.

JP: Did you relate that to you know why your life had been?

NZ: No I don't. I really don't. I didn't. All I learned was that I learned how to fight and I spent the next two years mainly in fights in school. I had a hard time with teachers in school.

JP: For the same reason?

NZ: Evidently, I was always in trouble in school because the kids would complain about me and the teachers weren't supporting me and I realized that there were two Jewish kids in the class and I was-- it was a private school too. I don't know why my parents, I guess there weren't any Jewish people who had kids around, that's why I was there. I remember meeting a fellow who I was in class with about ten years ago, he came to visit the United States and came by my house and...

JP: The Jewish kid?

NZ: The Jewish kid and talking about how he wouldn't have known how he could have survived, you know, if I hadn't been there because all we did was fight and had to put up with the teachers. And...

JP: Did your parents explain this to you? I mean did you discuss it at home? What did they say?

NZ: Yeah. My father taught me how to fight.

JP: That was his response, just fight back?

NZ: Fight back.

JP: Until we can get out of here.

NZ: Until we can get out.

JP: Did you learn to hate Gentiles?

NZ: Not really, no. Even though you've got to picture where I lived in New York, it wasn't until I started working that I could accept Gentiles having any intelligence. To me, even after college, the high school I went to in New York was 98% Jewish and colleges.

JP: Where did you go to college?

NZ: I went to Queens College, it was one of the city colleges so that was 90% Jewish and the kids who weren't Jewish I didn't really deal with. Even through law school.

JP: But how did you determine without having dealt with them that they were dumb?

NZ: I had to have gotten that from home. Of course, that's how I came to that. And then afterwards when I worked I dealt mainly with people who weren't Jewish. All my work.

JP: How about your friends?

NZ: Both.

JP: Both?

NZ: Both, I had both. But my closest friends were only Jewish, but basically people from going back to New York days, back to school days, some of them were good friends of Sue's who I then became friends with their husbands and probably aren't that many real close friends that I have.

JP: Yeah. None?

NZ: Basically.

JP: Do you have a best friend, a best male friend, a couple that?

NZ: A couple but one I haven't seen in six years, one I see twice a year, at best.

JP: Do you not feel the need for this or you know why do you feel this is?

NZ: I feel the need for it but I just haven't been able to-- just don't have those kind of relationships.

JP: So essentially you are only close with your family?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Are you close with your children?

NZ: I think so, yes.

JP: Do you talk and I mean you stay in frequent contact?

NZ: Mmm hmm, yep.

JP: But that.

NZ: Actually, that's one of the things I have tried to accomplish after I decided to work less, is spend more time with my kids.

JP: Is it difficult for you to be close to people?

NZ: I think so. I think so.

JP: Including your family?

NZ: It took me a long time to really open up more to let's say someone like Sue, my wife. And over the years I have. Probably the only person who I have been open with and never with my parents.

JP: No. And your sisters?

NZ: I mean I feel good towards them, but they don't know very much about me. One of the things I guess I should say in here is that all the years through school and probably around my freshman from my freshman year in high school my parents really never saw my report cards. Except if I wanted to show it to them. And they never really pressed me for it. This was fantastic.

JP: Why?

NZ: I don't know. They went to parents' day and visited and always got such a good boy kind of thing but college they never saw my grades. They never had the foggiest idea what I was earning.

JP: So you became secretive even to them?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

JP: Were you aware of it?

NZ: Yes.

JP: And it was intentional?

NZ: Intentional.

JP: Why?

NZ: I was afraid maybe my father was going to take money from me, initial feelings that I had to share. But basically over the years, I, it was just, I was just totally secretive.

JP: Even from your parents?

NZ: Even from my parents. They couldn't figure out what I was doing. They had seen I went to law school that I could practice law so they would say tell us exactly what you do, and I wouldn't really tell them.

JP: Did you ever question yourself? Did you ever doubt yourself as to why you, or were you comfortable with it? Did you ever wonder why you were that way?

NZ: I wondered about it at times but I was comfortable with it. That was never a question.

JP: What were you afraid of being questioned?

NZ: Oh, I was always afraid of failing, being insecure about not succeeding so the less people knew about me [unclear].

JP: So you didn't want to be vulnerable?

NZ: At least that is how I--yes the vulnerability question. At least that's how I interpreted it. For myself. I also felt safe that way. Safe from what?

JP: Yes. I mean were you trying to be invisible?

NZ: To a great extent, yes.

Tape two, side two:

JP: Okay go ahead. You were living around here?

NZ: In a split level. And when we found this. I also wanted to live, away from there. The big decision was coming in here, was that now I wouldn't have, possibly wouldn't as much anonymity moving in here.

JP: Living in here?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Because it was so?

NZ: Because people might notice me. But on balance I have gotten tired of traveling with kids down to the shore and I needed a place work-wise to escape to. It got to be ridiculous three little kids in a station wagon and every weekend racing off, I used to go to Long Beach Island, the only place I could feel happy walking on the beach and I said this is ridiculous and I can't function like this, bikes on roofs, packing in kids like that every weekend. The decision was to come and find a place like this where I could drive in and I would be away from the world. But I also recognize that once I did that that people might notice that I might have more that I might have shown. So one of the things I used to do when I would be around here, I was, I loved my army fatigues, and those were the days that people had long hair, my hair was down to my shoulders practically and I would be floating around in my fatigues and people would come up to you and they would ask for who the owner was or they would need something and I'd say he wasn't around. I would keep shoveling or raking leaves or do something like that. I would never put my name up over there. And then I got past that. And I started using the place from a business point of view, bring people there. That was a decision to break away from, I realized I would have less anonymity coming into here.

JP: But this is very secluded.

NZ: Yes. But all my friends would know too.

JP: That you had a lot?

NZ: Yes.

JP: And it was important that they not know that.

NZ: Even that.

JP: Even though you were driven to succeed you didn't want to have evidence of your success?

NZ: That's right.

JP: Because it would be taken from you or because someone would know about you?

NZ: Yes, would know about me more. More that knowing about me, and, but I got beyond that. I did. It didn't bother me as much, because it became difficult having the kind of relationships you have with friends and you know, not telling them about trips I took.

JP: You wouldn't tell them?

NZ: That's right. Or where I had been or what I would do or-- then they would notice some art of something that I have around and gee, well, that's so and so. Okay.

JP: So you came to New York after two years in Belgium when you were constantly fighting and dealing with antisemitism?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Then you came to New York?

NZ: Yes, lived in Brooklyn near my grandparents for a short while.

JP: You came here illegally; at this point you had another sister?

NZ: No, I still had the first one.

JP: So how old were you when you came?

NZ: I was 10, it was 1948. It was in February of 1948, we came here. We lived in Brooklyn, Bay Ridge. Lived there probably six months to a year and my mother-- and it wasn't a Jewish neighborhood. My mother now wanted us to live a-- it was basically my mother who wanted us to live in a Jewish neighborhood, go to school with Jewish kids, very conscious decision. And so Queens was picked to move to.

JP: Did she say why, was it for safety or was it just for comfort?

NZ: Perhaps to meet other Jewish kids and know Jewish people and to check the schools out, found a school in Queens that was a good school and that's why we went there. That's how we moved to an apartment and ended up going to school there, then they bought a little house a bit later. Very comfortable. Nice house as far as I was concerned and I lived there until I got married.

JP: Never moved out?

NZ: Never moved out.

JP: Now where was this little house?

NZ: This was in Kew Garden Hills in Queens.

JP: Was this a row house?

NZ: This was a row house. In a neighborhood where there was one other family on the street that wasn't Jewish. For miles everyone was Jewish.

JP: When you, were you raised religious, I mean did you not go to Hebrew school?

NZ: Did not go, well I only went to Hebrew school for a little while because my parents did want me to be bar mitzvahed. I think that was as much of a decision so that I would be as much like all the other kids rather than the idea of being bar mitzvahed.

JP: So the whole experience didn't change their essentially secular Judaism?

NZ: Not in the least. Didn't change them at all. And if there was anything they questioned, is there a God? As I question. Probably through their influence.

JP: You do now or you did?

NZ: I was probably brought up with it from them, especially from my mother and still I don't disagree with them. To this day. I disagree with Sue.

JP: She is religious?

NZ: More so than I am but I, my feeling was if there is a God how could there be one and let a Holocaust and things like that occur. So, I...

JP: Was there that kind of searching in your house, was there a residual from all those years that you'd been through or was there a sense of we are living for today, we are going to try to live a normal life? Was it put behind you or was it something that was part of your lives at that point?

NZ: It was put behind us and you want to look ahead yet there is always the references. If I was going to school and I was going to go to a concert, my mother would mention, oh gee, my first cousin who I would spend Easter vacation with became the second violinist in the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam and while, imagine you could have known all those people. So it was always being referred back to. But more from a loneliness. When I felt about myself, I felt lonely, and probably to this day still have those feelings and yet there is the antisocial aspect of it. I'm sure my mother always felt real lonely.

JP: Lonely or a sense of loss.

NZ: A sense of loss but also lonely because these were the people she had grown up with, so when I feel close to people I feel good when I am with my kids, my sisters, my wife's sister and her husband. Those people I feel close to, a couple of friends, who literally become like relatives. Who will get together but that's what we were brought up with. That's what you felt and...

JP: You mean this constant reference to what was gone.

NZ: And if we had a Passover dinner and it was just us, I would be sitting there feeling very lonely and missing the fact that I knew my friends were having Passover dinners with 15 or 20 people and they had all their cousins, and I would sit and look around and I have no cousins. I have no family so that feeling was always there.

JP: The only cousins you had was your father's brother who killed himself and his family.

NZ: Those are on my father's side. My mother's side, my mother was the oldest so her brothers and sisters were much younger, or younger and first had kids the next one was 12, 13 years younger than I am but I never knew them because they were in Europe. But I did then after, like once I was old enough to travel on my own and had my own money I started going to Belgium to meet these people.

JP: You did? When was that?

NZ: So I could get close to them. In the early '60s and by now I probably go over at least once a year, sometimes twice to get together with these people.

JP: So you went back and re-established a family?

NZ: I really have.

JP: Yes.

NZ: Constant correspondence back and forth, calling. Go to them?

JP: Does your mother go also?

NZ: Less so, it is more of a financial thing with her, that she doesn't.

JP: Is she in contact with her family back there?

NZ: Yes. Very much, so that goes on. Their stories aren't nice. I mean the one, the oldest cousin I have committed suicide.

JP: On your mother's side?

NZ: On my mother's side, so we had, many of them are all screwed up-- you think people are screwed up in the United States-- and I attribute a lot of that to what their parents went through and then the results that they turned into with dope addiction. Nice middle class Jewish families in Belgium think it's bad here, bad there, there is heroin. Really bad. Some people really are bad off. So it turns out that my relationship with my uncles who are a little older than I am, not all that old, but with their kids haven't been able to develop much of a relationship because there isn't much of a person in most of them. So it's sad, so I went back to look for that and well you know. But I speak to friends there who say oh, you know, I have a cousin that is a dope addict, I have a cousin that is this. So with this, that came as a shock to me.

JP: So how many, you have two uncles there now, the ones that you're close with?

NZ: Two uncles there. Yeah.

JP: Okay so you settled in New York. Did you have the sense that this was it. That the long, you know... ?

NZ: Well my mother and I agitated to move. I remember having battles at home with my father and I was probably 14, 15 or 16 at the time when I would say, "Why do we have to stay in New York?" You look around and all these stupid people are coming from all over and they stay in New York. I mean there were some opportunities my father could have had; in one case it was in Minneapolis and I remember, but it was as much the desire to move from, for the adventure of moving as any, it was more a fantasy there was nothing logical. My father is a very conservative guy so he knew what he had in New York so why go to...

JP: But you and your mother.

NZ: But my mother and I.

JP: Let's go.

NZ: Let's go, aren't you bored? Won't it be exciting to go live someplace else and that.

JP: So you actually went to one high school straight through?

NZ: Yes.

JP: So as at what age then did you finally settle?

NZ: Probably from around the time I was 13 or 14. Around 13.

JP: You had said earlier that...

NZ: I moved into that house when I was 14.

JP: This is the row house in Queens, and you went to Queens High School?

NZ: Forest Hills High.

JP: Forest Hills High and you went, you were bar mitzvahed?

NZ: Yep.

JP: And that was it?

NZ: Yes.

JP: You knew that it was a ritual that, you had to real attachment to God?

NZ: No, I played stickball on Yom Kippur.

JP: [Laughter].

NZ: I got a lot of the kids' mothers angry with me because I drew them into these games. We played football, whatever, basketball.

JP: And it was at this point that you began to withdraw from your parents in high school?

NZ: In, yes. Only in the way that it was easy enough to have confrontations with my parents and not to be accountable. I hated questioning. Always hated questioning. I hate authorities. Whether it's, I mean I have always had a problem with that so to.

JP: I mean it's not obvious, I mean German authority, is that where it comes from do you think?

NZ: I don't know, really, I really don't. But I mean I always avoided it. One of the reasons I went to, let's say through law school, was to make sure that if I avoided things, I would be able to do it legally so jail I didn't want to go to. I didn't mind taking risks.

JP: Such as?

NZ: Business risk, any kind of risk. Physical risk no, but business risk yes.

JP: You went to law school to what end?

NZ: To teach myself. How whether it is in taxes whether it is in anything how I can be on the right side of the law, but how I can basically know as much as I need to know and not be dependent upon somebody as a lawyer, I mean I will use lawyers and I know how to deal with lawyers because I am a lawyer.

JP: You want to be a totally self-contained survivor then?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

JP: You don't want to need anybody?

NZ: That's right, for business purposes I felt law was the most important thing to have.

JP: Well what did you want to be when you went to law school? Did you have any specific goal?

NZ: No. My goal was I was going to make as much money as I could. I had no idea what that was. I had learned from a great teacher I had in high school that you always have to set goals. He actually gave me a system to setting goals so that went it was a matter of making, I always had a-- when it came to school, I always wanted to be better than I had done before and I transferred and that became less important to me, how well I did in school, I decided that's just a lot of bull. You just have to pass and get through school. Who cares about grades? Money became the more important thing. I transferred to making money. So from earliest at those times I would set goals as to how much money I make now so that I have to make more the next week.

JP: Specifically?

NZ: Yes.

JP: That is specific money.

NZ: And I added it up and I started investing in the market and I kept records of how I was doing and to this day I do. I keep that up almost on a daily basis.

JP: Do you really?

NZ: Yes, it's absurd but I do.

JP: So you are measuring your progress every day?

NZ: Yes always have. And...

JP: Does it ever become more of a burden than?

NZ: No, because I have it so down pat, yes it becomes a burden at times because I would say how foolish, you know it is ludicrous. Who cares? You know?

JP: Beyond a certain point?

NZ: Yes. It doesn't matter. And so the thing I have been going through these last few years it to be trying to transfer some of that.

JP: Transfer some of the energy?

NZ: Yes. To things that have maybe some more meaning, you know develop myself some more, you know.

JP: But you found this to be -- so you graduated law school?

NZ: Yes.

JP: And you went into business?

NZ: First I went to work for the Univac, for Sperry. And I worked in that area?

JP: As a lawyer?

NZ: Basically, to negotiate in contracts so it was as a lawyer but not necessarily, I really wanted to learn, I really felt that working was going to hone my talents. The thing I wanted to do was to learn how to deal with large companies and negotiate with them at high levels and...

JP: You mean work for them negotiating deals for them?

NZ: Deals. So that I would hone those kinds of talents.

JP: Why were you drawn to that do you have any idea?

NZ: I felt that learning how to negotiate with something that was very important for whatever I was going to be doing. I would always be doing that. Somehow negotiating was sort of like the bottom, sort of the bottom line of things, at least to me. Also wanted to get into new industries and places that weren't the best run because I was afraid of going to work for an IBM or a DuPont or a General Motors, I would be slotted into a little pigeonhole and have a hard time moving on so I analyzed very carefully.

JP: This was all very deliberately?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Arrived at.

NZ: Yes what are the most screwed up companies in the most exciting new industries. And I specifically went after them to get jobs.

JP: To do what? To straighten them out?

NZ: No, to get any job that I could, whatever level I could get into I would get into it because I figured I could work my way through it into the areas where I could learn the most. So I didn't get a job at Univac as a lawyer, I got a job in a marketing area in the home office, doing market research, within two months I was negotiating their contracts. Nobody was doing that. And I found that area and so, and it was doable, I think, it's still doable till today. The other place I had an offer from is Avon. It took me six months to get an offer from a place that I thought would make sense. And, that was a long time. Meanwhile Sue was pregnant, people were questioning whether I was ever going to have a job. I was working, I was running newsstands but...

JP: Is that what you were doing?

NZ: Yes.

JP: But you were waiting for the opportunity you knew?

NZ: I was, Sue's family was besides themselves, they could never figure me out.

JP: Where did you meet Sue?

NZ: At college.

JP: Had you dated a lot? Had you had relationships with a lot of women or girls?

NZ: I did. I really hadn't gone out that much in high school, but by then I was in my senior year so all through from the time I started college I was really going out a lot. With both girls let's say a place like school, but also many from further away, as far as, again. So I was going out from Brooklyn, I was going out with girls in places like West Chester.

JP: [unclear]

NZ: She was not real, real close but she was in school. I had no problems with that. I either, the real relationships I had were with girls who didn't go to Queens. Girls I went out with on dates, sometimes, I would go out for a while. The better relationships were with girls who were further away. Even when I was going with...

JP: Did you want a family? Did you want?

NZ: I really did. I was driven to have boys so that the name Zeelander could continue and that there would be more Jews in the world. That was definitely there in my mind. Drove Sue crazy. Because when I met her, I was really probably more after her than she probably, than she wanted. She was a freshman.

JP: Why Sue? Do you know?

NZ: There was just something there that clicked. She was the first real person who I was able to feel good with. When you say at peace, are you ever at peace? With Sue I am. It's the first person, the only person, I felt that way with. It was probably irrational, because I loved jazz all the way through college, I would spend many nights just in Manhattan listening to music. My parents didn't know what. I mean I lived at home, I had lots of battles about how I acted and lived but they didn't know whether I was working or listening to music or studying.

JP: How come you stayed at home, any reason?

NZ: Plainly selfish, to save money.

JP: Were you hoarding?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Are you a hoarder now?

NZ: Yes.

JP: You are.

NZ: To some extent I guess. I can't throw anything away.

JP: Can you share? Do you find it easier to share now than you did?

NZ: I never had a problem sharing with Sue or with the kids. A little bit with my parents and my sisters. I'm very hard with anybody else. You know. No real problem sharing with my kids or Sue.

JP: So you wanted a family, you wanted to get married. So you have been extremely goal oriented. You know what you want and then you wanted a family and you wanted to be rich?

NZ: Yes.

JP: Did you ever question whether you could do that or, was there no question in your mind that you would do that?

NZ: The only fear I had was that I would possibly do it illegally or steal to do it. But I knew I was going to do it.

JP: And you considered stealing to do it.

NZ: I was approached and I walked away from opportunities. So that I didn't want that. The only thing that kept me straight was the fear of going to jail. Not that, not what other people would think of me so much. That didn't bother me.

JP: You were that desperate to be wealthy?

NZ: Yeah, I think so.

JP: Was it just to make up for what you...

NZ: Just so that, the key being I never wanted to be dependent upon anybody else. It's almost like the "fuck you money," idea. But it's [as] much to rebuild what had been probably as anything else.

JP: What point in your life? How long were you married before you had your first child?

NZ: Helga was born, let's see, practically right after we were married.

JP: So you had a family right away?

NZ: Yeah, within the first year and a half.

JP: And at what point -- so you went into business and you began this whole process-- what point did you feel that you had attained what you set out to attain?

NZ: It was a very conscious thing, but I totaling my assets and looking at what they were generating as far as income was concerned, knowing what I needed to live on and...

JP: When was that?

NZ: Four years ago.

JP: Did you have a sense of having arrived well?

NZ: Yes. Actually it had gotten there once before and lost it all and hated myself for awhile.

JP: You did?

NZ: Yeah.

JP: In a business?

NZ: In a business. It happened too fast. I was 30 and I had gotten there extremely fast. [unclear] 30 and within a year I had done it and then screwed everything up by, I guess just making business mistakes, and had to start all over again. The second time it took a lot longer and a lot of hard work. Basically I knew what I needed and just worked at it.

JP: Did you spend money as well or were you just-- was it easy, did you want to spend it? Did you enjoy it or did, was it just this goal, this symbolic?

NZ: It is as much the goal but I do spend. Not as much as I could be spending. I don't have the need to spend.

JP: You do travel though.

NZ: Yeah.

JP: You have beautiful artwork.

NZ: Yes, I like to go to restaurants, live nicely and do things, take trips. I like to see places. I like good music. Good music is probably the way I am at peace, relaxed.

JP: You are someone who knows himself extremely well.

NZ: Yes.

JP: Well you certainly sound like you know who you are and you know pretty much why you are and you have come to terms with that?

NZ: Yes.

JP: How did that happen?

NZ: I...

JP: Did you just decide at some point you were in therapy?

NZ: No, I first went into therapy after I had stopped working. And I said "Why can't I be at peace?" That's, it was just ridiculous. It took me six months to decide that I ought to go.

JP: You mean you were retired, I mean at that point?

NZ: In a sense yes. I really wasn't doing very much.

JP: Because you had already arrived and you didn't have to?

NZ: Mmm hmm [affirmative]. So I got myself thoroughly confused and I couldn't enjoy reading during the week, I could only read on the weekend. I mean it didn't matter if it was Monday or Saturday, Saturday I could read but Monday morning I couldn't read. Couldn't tell anybody that I had stopped.

JP: Why did you stop?

NZ: Because I really never found that working was anything that important other than to make money. Once I had what I needed, I wanted to see, couldn't I do some other things.

JP: So then how did you come to such self-perception? To such insight basically?

NZ: I don't know. I really don't know. I mean you say, that sounds nice what you are saying but I never looked at myself that way. Never such self-perception, you know. I don't know. But basically what I then tried to do after I found a little but more about myself with this therapy and came to the conclusion well I don't have to spend, I was trying to go at things at a slower pace and so I maintained an office. But now I didn't have to go at the pace I was so I was going crazy. So I started to learn, "Well I could go in from 9:00 to 11:00 right now is enough." My pattern is: I get up in the morning, I get the New York Times and Wall Street Journal and Philadelphia Inquirer. I have breakfast slowly, I read everything. I get some information on the stock market and by 11:00 I show up at an office. I have a couple of offices that I can go to. Still the same anonymity, people don't know what I do. I work with some people who know me quite well from areas I have talents in. And who I work very closely with but very loosely and no real...

JP: Commitment?

NZ: Commitment and I'll work on individual projects with them or on my own.

JP: What kinds or projects?

NZ: Buying and selling businesses. Helping them reorganize their business because they really don't see things out into the future and they sort of respect me for being able to do that.

JP: What is that skill that you have that you think makes you so successful? A vision?

NZ: A vision, yes, I am able to see where things can go. And in turning that into then how to make money with it and being very organized in a way that I can use. It's almost like a chess player, seeing many steps ahead where things can go and having that and then going after it in a very low key way. And that being very deceptive. To use my adversary, he can never figure out I have it all figured out. And going at it that way.

JP: And you got into the Holocaust, how?

NZ: Basically more through Sue. We were going to, we went down on a Sunday because there was a celebration for the, at the memorial there. And I've always felt very close to that but I never publicly wanted to go. The reason I didn't publicly go to places because I was afraid to be among that many Jews in one place. I've even felt that way being in synagogue and sometimes I've felt very uncomfortable. Thinking that somebody can throw a stone through the window or blow the place up so--but I went and I must have been ready for it, got carried into it. They walked from the thing there down to Independence Plaza. I walked along and walked along and said, "Gee this feels very nice. You know, these people I have something in common with." And hadn't even decided to go to, then they had a three day thing, I guess a three day seminar or whatever it is called. I went down to it, I sort of apologetically signed up and said, "Well I don't know that I belong there, here I am."

JP: But now you see yourself as a survivor?

NZ: Yes and in looking at things to do, and rather than just sitting there being a survivor, I figure I see what Nora Levin is doing and I'm shocked. About 600 of these histories, 30 of them transcribed. And here we want to have things for historians and people to work with.