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Leonard Lubin oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, May 21, 2008

Leonard Lubin (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

Michael Hirsh: Okay. First of all, let me just get your name and your spelling, and your address and phone number.

Leonard Lubin: My name is Leonard, L-e-o-n-a-r-d, Lubin, L-u-b-i-n. I live at ... St. Petersburg, Florida.... My telephone number is....

MH: And your date of birth, sir?

LL: July 7, 1925. So, on this occasion I was what, nineteen or twenty.

MH: Where were you growing up? Where did you go into the Army from?

LL: I went—Miami. Miami, Florida.

MH: And when you went into the Army, you were drafted, or volunteered?

LL: No, I enlisted.

MH: And they put you in what?

LL: At first they put me in the infantry, and I did a basic training in the infantry. And then, later, they were making up this new unit; it had been one of the mule pack artillery units, Camp Hale, Colorado. And we were told that after one of the two existing mule pack—the mules packed the artillery in segments, pieces, for mountain fighting, small artillery pieces; 75mm. They lost an entire battalion; I think is what they called it, in somewhere in the Orient—Burma or somewhere—and they decided that mule pack units

weren't called for anymore and they were dismantling the unit. They dispersed the population of that unit—all of this is by hearsay, what's told to me. They dispersed the population of that unit among various other units elsewhere.

We were told—I don't know if this is true—the reason for it was that these were all very big men, because of the fact that they had no motors, no engines, that they were transporting this stuff by mule and on their own backs, lifting [it] up very tall mountains, which is what it was for: mountain fighting. These had to be big men. They had to load the barrel of a 75mm Hauser onto the back of a mule, counterbalance and weight on the other side, then separately the ammunition, water, everything they used. So, these men, we were told, were a minimum of 5'10" tall, 180 pounds. Many, if not most of them, were larger than that. So, they didn't put them all in one unit, they dispersed them among many units. If this all proves to be incorrect, I tell you again: this is what I heard, was told to me. I can't validate it.

In any event, that unit was made up, stuff was shifted around. Things in Europe were coming close to the end, the final push in Europe and so forth. Some units were battered badly. The first unit I had been put into was the 100th Infantry Division, I believe. I'm jumping ahead to tell you that when I got to Europe, we relieved the remnants of the 100th. The 71st, relieved the remnants of the 100th, which had been badly shot up. Again, this is only what was told to me.

So, then, I was transferred out of the 100th unit before it went overseas, and wound up in the 71st Infantry, the 609th Field Artillery Battalion, and this was 105mm artillery. So, I retrained again in basic—whole or in part I don't recall—in the artillery, and was assigned to one of the artillery there. Am I making this too long for you?

MH: No, no! The longer the better, frankly.

LL: The units are made up of, going by memory, four of what they call "batteries." A battalion is made up—609th Field Artillery Battalion was made up of four batteries. There are three firing batteries that fire the guns, and then the fourth battery is the headquarters battery; that is the one that deals with information, messaging and forward observation. And each firing battery has attached to it, in the headquarters battery, a unit headed by a captain, who is what's called "forward observer," who goes ahead, attaches up to the front infantry because the guns are blind: they can't see.

So, the forward observers call back the artillery information to the guns, to direct the fire and get it on target and so forth, which is done preferably by wire, telephone. And the headquarters unit has—these units have wiremen, who go out and stretch the wire and connect it and repair it, et cetera, or, when you can't use wire, radio. Deadly, because the Germans were experts at triangulation: they would triangulate on the radio signals and direct mortar fire directly on the unit, the forward observers. So, we tried to avoid using radio where we could. Wire had to be stretched on the ground because we were moving so fast.

MH: That's a lot of wire.

LL: Yes, and of course it's constantly torn up by tanks and vehicles moving over it, so much of the job is in the middle of the night—this was freezing cold winter—running out to repair wire. And it's a lot of wire, because there's a lot of wire on the ground, a lot of it German. And you hook into German wire, as they hook into ours, I guess, et cetera. In any event, that was the function.

The forward observer, one for each of the three firing batteries, as I recall—again, I could be mistaken in details—but that unit is headed by a captain, who then has a sergeant under him, and then two more people: radio operator, wireman, a driver, as I recall, four in a Jeep. They traveled in Jeep when they could. When they couldn't, they were on foot. So, that was the unit to which I was attached. The headquarters attached as one of the forward observer teams under a captain named Schmidt. I don't recall his first name. S-c-h-m-i-d-t.

MH: What was your rank at the time?

LL: I was just a buck private. There was talk about offering me a field commission, second lieutenant and all that, and I didn't want that at all.

MH: Had you been to college before the service?

LL: Just a few months, while waiting to be called; I enlisted. The shuffling of units and men and all that was taking place at that time, we later came to understand, because by the time we got there, it was the first part of 1945. The war only ended in May, so it was just a couple of months, a few months, from the time landing in Europe until the war ended; and that represented the final push once we crossed the Rhine [River] and were in Germany proper and started racing across Germany and the Russians coming from the other side. And we were trying to beat the Russians there; they were trying to beat us. All that's political.

Incidentally, pretty much all of what I'm telling you about Wels and all that is on the Internet, the 71st Infantry Division; you'll see a full discourse there, even beyond what I give you. You can just type in 71st Infantry Division; that will get you there.

In any event, on the day in question, which was some time in the last days of April 1945, shortly before—days before the war ended. I forget—you have various dates: May 5, May 8. But in any event, this must have been in the last few days of April. We were going from west to east, moving along. We had been racing across the German countryside; this was in Austria. We went through the town of Leinbach, L-e-i-n-b-a-c-h, a small town just before you get to Wels, along the highway. I didn't know it then, but off to the sides of the road at Leinbach were dead bodies of the concentration camp people. I didn't know it at the time. It was off the road; I didn't see them then.

In any event, I went on. And for some reason, as we came into Wels, I was on foot. I can't

tell you why I was, whatever the reason I was on foot.

MH: What did Wels look like?

LL: What I saw of it—they say a soldier only sees the three square feet around him. What I saw of Wels was entering Wels: a broad street, boulevard. It would be the equivalent of at least four lanes, two each way—American lanes—and maybe even a parking lane besides that on the side of the street. It was more like a boulevard than just a street. Both sides of it were buildings, two-story and/or three-story, that looked like they must have been apartments: solid brick structure buildings, permanent buildings, in front of which—I was impressed that all along the boulevard, every few yards was a dug-out hole with a small tree—looked like saplings, young trees—planted along there. And as I walked along, there were occasionally automobiles parked alongside the road. It was getting on late in the day, and I was alone down that street. You want me to continue in that vein?

MH: Yes, please. Go ahead.

LL: I heard sounds before I saw them, and the sounds that I heard were “*Ungarischen Juden*”—“Hungarian Jews,” in German. *Ungarischen Juden*. H-u-n-g-a-r-i-s-c-h-e [sic], I guess, Juden, J-u-d-e-n. I had a smattering of street German, not all that much but enough to know what it was. I ducked behind a car, and sure enough, I was able to identify three men coming toward me in obvious prison clothing, that kind of striped clothing. They pointed behind them and said there was a *Konzentrationslager*, a concentration camp, down the street. That’s about the most I could get out of them; they were very excited. I motioned them to continue going in the direction they were, and told them that there were American soldiers behind me who would help them, et cetera.

MH: You were able to communicate how?

LL: In German only.

MH: In German. What did these people look like, besides the uniform?

LL: What you want to know is how—obviously the fact that they were ambulatory, walking, they were not the skeleton kind of prisoners that the photography of the era shows us, the living dead. So, that tells us they were more recent arrivals at the camp, who had just gotten out to the camp more recently, so that they were not yet debilitated in the way as many were.

And I’ll answer that by telling you what later proved to be, that Wels was a work labor camp. It was not the extermination camp of the type that used gas ovens, gas rooms to gas them, showers to gas them and ovens to burn the bodies. This was of the labor kind, and it amounted to and operated as an extermination camp, in that the people were killed by starvation and labor. What happened was people in the back door and out the front. In the back door, or the front door, comes new prisoners, who are normal people, recently captured to be put in and they were put to work. Out the back door, if that’s the way to

put it, is the dead people when they died from work. And they're put in there and they're sent out every day to labor, hard labor, whatever work the Germans had them doing, on starvation diets. And, of course, then they quickly debilitated and died.

MH: At that point, had you been aware of concentration or slave labor camps?

LL: No, never, never. Knew nothing about it. We only knew what we were told. The only information we had was *Stars and Stripes*; that was the only newspaper, when you got a hold of it. Otherwise it was more rumor than anything else. We really weren't on top of the news all that well. We knew that the Germans had been persecuting minorities, especially Jews. We'd heard some rumors about killings, but had no concept whatever of this. The military had taught us nothing, told us nothing, had no training or expectations. I had no idea what I was going to walk into. We were told absolutely nothing. So, much of this sounds crazy.

For example, you had asked me earlier how long I spent there, and I told you they wouldn't let us stay. When I say "they," I mean our officers. We had to go, and they're telling us that there are units behind us who take care of these people. Well, if that were true, how come we soldiers weren't oriented to the proposition we were going to be encountering the concentration camps? That seems at odds with each other (inaudible). You would have thought if they knew as much to have units prepared to take care of these people—

MH: They would have told you to expect it.

LL: We would have known to expect it. So, I didn't believe. I came to where I didn't believe anything I was told. But no, nothing: no information.

MH: So what did you think when you see these three men—they were men, right?

LL: Well, yes, they told me—yes. They told me that there was a concentration camp down the road. So, that's exactly what I—

MH: But a concentration camp is a strange terminology, if you haven't been told about it.

LL: Well, we'd heard the word before. Even our civilian population heard of the words "concentration camp," but "concentration camp" can mean a jail facility where you hold people, as we held the Japanese in the United States in World War II, Japanese Americans. We called them concentration camps. That didn't mean that they're killing fields. You understand, we're dealing in a different era.

MH: Yes.

LL: Not just a different century; we're living in a different era. Definitions are different. The English language has become different, and words have taken on different meaning. "Gay" used to have a different meaning from what it has today, the word "gay." And the

word “concentration camp” had a different meaning before this time that it has now.

In any event, let’s see where I was. Oh, you were asking about the condition of the men and did I understand what they were. I knew that they were prisoners, and I couldn’t have developed the concept that they must have been recent at that moment, that they must have been recent prisoners because of the fact that they looked in better shape, as I later saw others who were debilitated, because I hadn’t seen any of the others yet so I didn’t know that. All I knew was that they were from the concentration camp.

You asked me about language. Language in Europe, as is always true in these situations, the language of the conqueror is the lingua franca, the universal language used by Poles, Romanians, Italians, Russians, Hungarians. The only language that they have in common is that that’s dictated to them by the conqueror. In our case, what became the lingua franca, which could link us with Poles and Italians and whatever, was German. So we all spoke in a pidgin German with sign language, that game you play with sign language.

In any event—so, no, I formed no opinions other than what I just told you. All I knew was they were in a jail; I’ll use that term. They used the term *Konzentrationslager*, concentration camp. So, I knew the term; that’s all I knew. I didn’t know what it was. So, by this time I developed a great deal of caution. But here they were free and all, so I wanted to hurry to move along.

MH: But you’re alone at this point.

LL: I was alone at this time, yup. I continued down to the camp, and then I came to—the best I can describe it—you’ve seen it in the cities before, in places. We have one in Hollywood, Florida; if you’re down here, you know? These big circles, traffic circles, around some either essential statue or building or something, and streets enter into it as spokes in a wheel [roundabout]. Washington D.C. has those kinds of streets. You know the kind of street I’m describing?

MH: Yes, absolutely. Dupont Circle, been there. Yes.

LL: I’m sorry?

MH: Dupont Circle in Washington. Yes.

LL: Okay. A circle, and the streets feed into the circle. When you’re on that street, before the circle, you don’t know you’re on the spokes of a circle. It isn’t till you get there that you realize that.

So, as I got to there, ahead of me I saw a structure, which I’ll tell you about in a second. But I also saw, out of the corner of my eyes—in addition to that structure, I saw that other soldiers, American soldiers, were entering into the circle just as I was, from adjacent streets. You follow what I’m saying?

MH: Absolutely.

LL: So, it was being entered by numbers of us on different streets, approximately the same time. These others from the other streets got there about the same time I did, and we entered in together. What I saw ahead was what looked like a wall, a wall that looked like—let's see, a typical living room here in Florida is, I don't know, 11 to 14 feet high, 14, 15, 16 feet high. I don't know; I'm not so good at that, but something like that. Something you couldn't jump over too easily, a wall. And a big gate, two big swinging doors with door hardware on them that you could see.

And as I got there, I saw that the doors were ajar and people were pouring out through the gates, out onto the street into the circle. And in terms of seeing what they looked like, people of all descriptions—not all, but most descriptions—and many who could walk; ambulatory. It wasn't until I got in I saw that there were many more who couldn't walk, but these were those that could walk, in various degrees of debilitation. Some in far better shape, like those three I first encountered a block or two or three up the street, who were the most recent arrivals and therefore the healthiest. And then some who were less well, and less well, and less well, diminishing in stages and degrees: some extremely feeble, but probably close to falling down and not being able to walk. In any event, that's the first thing I encountered: the people coming out.

MH: What are you thinking at this point?

LL: I have to tell you, and I'm embarrassed to say it, I was stunned. I can't tell you I was thinking of anything. It's like when an automobile accident—when you're in the middle of an automobile accident or something, if you've ever been. I was stunned. I couldn't formulate much in the way of thought. I wasn't as much thinking as I was reacting.

MH: Right. Are you carrying a weapon?

LL: Oh, yes, of course.

MH: M1 [carbine] or something smaller?

LL: A carbine. No, no.

MH: A carbine, okay.

LL: We all carried carbines. Officers carried pistols, .45s, automatics. The men carried .30 caliber carbines, with a clip—fifteen rounds in a clip—in them, another round on your belt: thirty rounds.

So, the door swung open and people were pouring out, and at the same time American soldiers were coming in. We soldiers shouted at each other. What to do? "Grab them!" somebody said. "Stop them—grab them!"

While all of this was happening, more American soldiers were pouring in, and they started chasing down the people, trying to stop them, to grab them. The people who were escaping, we concluded later—they were running from us like crazy in a panic, those who could. And we concluded that they saw our uniforms, that they may have seen our uniforms and may have not been able to distinguish us from Germans or something. I don't know, but they were panicked. That or freedom, I couldn't tell. All I knew is they ran like hell.

Here comes the big moment, for me.

MH: Okay. (laughs)

LL: Something very personal to me, the big moment for me, which to me sums up the whole war, the whole Holocaust, and which is the content of my nightmares. Not dead bodies; I'd seen a lot of dead bodies, though I wasn't in combat all that long: a few months, mostly chasing like crazy up the highway. But I'd seen plenty of dead bodies, theirs and ours. So, it wasn't that.

This was something different. Here was this guy, and he had found a food can, a tin can, the larger kind that tomatoes sometimes come in, whole tomatoes. I don't know how many inches in diameter, four inches or whatever it is. It had been opened with one of these old-fashioned push and lift can openers; you don't even see them anymore today. You punch a hole in it and then you lift it all the way around. It creates a horribly jagged edge all the way around.

MH: Just like the P-38 [can opener].

LL: I guess. And typically what people would do, because you didn't want to handle the jagged edge, you didn't take it all the way to the end. You would get it close to the end of the circle of the can and then push the lid back. You know, push the lid back so it's standing up, and you would empty the contents and then push the lid down and then throw the can away so you didn't handle it and cut yourself, because it would make brutal cuts very easily.

This man had found one of these empty cans and was trying to get the contents out of it. He had it with both of his hands jammed up against his face, trying to get his tongue into it to lick the contents, and lick the top lid and the sides of the top lid, the sides of the can. The blood was pouring down his face, and he was acting totally insane. And that vision is what's in my mind. If I were an artist and could paint a picture, I would; I can't. Didn't have a camera.

So, in my nightmares, that's what I see. And to me, that's what the Holocaust was. It wasn't the death; it was torment of the kind that can reduce a human being to sub-animal status, to be willing to lacerate himself and cut himself to get that slight bit of nourishment. In any event—

MH: Was that man one of the people you described as being more debilitated?

LL: Yes. More debilitated than the first ones I had seen up the road, not as debilitated as such as to be unable to stand up and walk, but pretty far gone.

MH: At this point, you're still outside the gates.

LL: I'm still outside the gates. People were running out, and apparently there had been some rain, or from some other source some water, because there were miserable puddles of water at the street edge, the corner of the curb. Not large puddles; they must have been old, because they were filthy, dirty puddles, and small. I saw some of the people falling down on their face to lick up water from the street. And others ran to the closest trees and were trying to rip bark off the trees and eating the bark. It was pretty subhuman, all of it.

And amid all of this was screaming and crying and carrying on, and American soldiers looking confused, as we all were, not knowing what the hell to do. Some of them were chasing people down and grabbing them and trying to lead them back and shove them back into the camp. Didn't know what the hell to do.

MH: What kind of a day is it, weather-wise?

LL: Not bad. I wasn't in an overcoat or anything; I think I was in an Eisenhower jacket. April, late April; it was near the end of the day. I don't have a recollection. It wasn't snowing or anything. It wouldn't be in April, usually. I didn't recognize any special feature of the day. I can't tell you it was snowing or it was hot or anything: an ordinary day.

Now, here I'll be disappointing you, because you'll going to want to know, did I go way inside.

MH: Believe me, you're anything but disappointing me.

LL: Well, other interviewers—

MH: You're quite eloquent in describing the things you've seen.

LL: Other interviewers are disappointed as I come to this part. They want me to have gone into the camp and describe in infinite detail, up close, people in the bunks, and I can't do that, because I didn't do that. That didn't happen.

MH: That's okay.

LL: So, anyway, this was the mayhem that was taking place outside. That went on for quite some time before anybody really entered into the camp. All of the effort and energy was direct—concentrated and directed toward attempting to grab these people. I don't know why.

MH: Is that what you did as well?

LL: Well, yes. (laughs) Didn't know what else to do. I tell you, a soldier doesn't know what the hell to do, and doesn't know what the hell's going on. He knows what's around him like three feet. And whatever somebody seems to be telling him that sounds like it should be correct is what you do: crazy things, all kinds of dumb things. So, yeah, that's what I was doing.

MH: Were the people resisting you?

LL: My particular people?

MH: Yes.

LL: Yes, but not really hard. Not to the point where they were trying to hit me with their fists or beat on me or anything like that, but pulling against me. They were fairly tractable, if you exerted anything beyond bare minimum force; by that, I mean grabbing them by the elbow and pulling them. They went along. I think they'd gotten used to that.

MH: This is a gross sort of question, but were—did they smell bad? Were they covered in crud?

LL: Oh, my God. Oh, my God, you can't believe it. You cannot characterize the odor, there's just no way. And all the records I've read, or all the interviews I've heard of the concentration camps, have that as a central theme: that there's no way—pictures will never show you what it smelled like. It was horrifying. Yes.

MH: And the people smelled, and were covered in crud.

LL: Yes.

MH: So—

LL: Well, wait a minute. Covered in crud—yes and no. There was some crud, but I don't want to paint a picture, a mental image of them just totally immersed in filth, no.

MH: But you were in physical contact with these people.

LL: Oh, yes, up close.

MH: Were you concerned?

LL: What do you mean?

MH: For your health?

LL: No, never entered my head. Just never thought about it. Didn't think about much of anything, really. You go on some kind of autopilot. You may have read this description before, the same as an automobile wreck. You ask somebody whose car has just collided, what is he thinking? I don't know whether you can answer that question. I think you go on autopilot. At least, I think I did. I believe I was in shock. I don't know if it's a medical description, medical definition of shock.

MH: Emotional shock.

LL: Yeah, yeah. So, yes, I did the same thing, grabbing people. We didn't go inside for some time. Oh, God, I don't know: ten minutes, twenty minutes, an hour, half-hour, hour. I don't know. It was dealing with the people in the streets. I guess in some kind of way we figured, well, if they're not on the streets and they're inside, okay, they're already in. Our energy was being directed to getting everybody inside where we could deal with them.

MH: The camp—just so I understand, the camp was in the center of this traffic circle you're talking about.

LL: Yeah!

MH: Okay.

LL: Yeah. It was strange. The other strange thing about it is here we are in the middle of a town. I hadn't ever seen that before. Usually concentration camps are out in the country.

MH: So, the people could say, "We never knew it was there."

LL: Yeah, or whatever. That's why I don't know what it really was, you know? We'll use the word "camp." Was it a camp? Was it a jail? I don't know. Maybe it was just a holding pen, I can't tell you. I don't know.

Anyways, our efforts were confined to trying to round them up. I guess our thinking was—exactly what we were thinking—I guess our thinking was, "We've got to get them inside where we can deal with them." By this time, officers were on the scene. My captain, the other guys' captain, and the guys' lieutenants, they were taking charge, directing and giving orders. And the orders, as I recall, were "Get these people! Get them! Stop them! Stop them! Get them inside." And, "There are units behind us who are going to deal with them. Take care of them. Just get them inside so we can handle them." That was what we were doing.

So, that's what most of us were doing. We were cowboys rounding up stray cattle; that's what it was. I can't give you numbers, but there were significant numbers of them when those gates swung open. What we later learned, in interviewing and talking to them, was that the guards had just left. They were just ahead of us. They knew we were coming and

they split. They went out the back door lickety-split. They didn't want to be there. One minute they were there, and suddenly the guards were gone. And the people see the guards are gone, and those who were the healthier among them headed for the door. That's all pretty expected, pretty logical. When we got there, there were no Germans there; they were gone.

In any event, so we rounded the people up; it took quite some time to do it. The officers were directing us to do it and trying to stop them from drinking the water out of the street, trying to stop them from ripping bark off the trees to eat it, and trying to stop them; as I did my guy who was with the tin can. I tried to knock the can out of his hand to stop him from doing that, and not let the can be there so somebody else can pick it up and do the same thing. It was pretty frantic. It was all frantic. It was less thought than it was automated, autopilot, frantic stampeding around. And the direction seemed to be in the imperative, seemed to be, "Stop these people; don't let them kill themselves with bad food or water or bark off the trees. Get them into the camp and there'll be somebody behind us." So that took some time to do.

At some point along the line, in the doing of this, some of them—some of them you could say—many of them—you could say, "No, no, no. Stop! Others are coming with food, with water. *Essen, Wasser*; so go inside." I'd say many of them—most of them perhaps—obeyed you. They did that. They saw authority, they were used to responding to authority, they heard us say that food and water was coming, and we could only deal with them if they were inside.

MH: Were these men and women?

LL: No. No, all I saw was men.

MH: All men.

LL: I didn't see any women, or children. I was asked that question—the first time I was asked that question by an interviewer, I was shocked at my own recognition for the first time. I had never even thought about it, that all I saw was men. I didn't realize that until later. I'm tellin' you, it makes you crazy. It really makes you crazy. I wouldn't blame you if you said, "I can't believe that you couldn't tell me whether you saw women or children," but that's the way it affects your mind, at least mine. I'm a pretty normal person, I think, pretty average.

Anyway, some of them, of course, gave you more resistance. The ones that gave you more resistance, you walked—if that's the word for it—you half-pulled, half-shoved, walked them to get them into the gates. We had to get up close to the gates. So, in the first part of this, what I saw—could see of the inside—was only seen from the street as I pushed a given inmate back through the doors, back through the gates.

At the gates, to keep them from rushing back out again were a number of American soldiers at the gates. There'd be no point in our shoving them in and then having them

coming back out again. So, stationed at the gates—under officers' orders, I guess—of course all of our soldiers were containing them, keeping them from going back out again. So, we didn't have cause at that juncture to be going inside. Our imperative was to go grab these people and keep them inside. That took quite some time. If you told me ten minutes, I'd say, no, longer. A half-hour? Yeah. An hour? Could be. Hour and a half? It took time.

So, I didn't see deep inside the thing on the front end of this experience because of what we were doing: chasing the people down and bringing them in. What occasion I had to see anything inside was when I was dealing with one inmate who wouldn't follow my orders and just go in. I had to lead him there to the front gate to put him in the hands of our soldiers who were guarding the gate, who then would take over and shove them on inside. But I could see the inside as I'd get them there, and what I saw was a whole melee of people.

In any event, that went on for a time. And by this time—and I may be short on the time we were there because an awful lot was done in the time we were there, so maybe it was a couple of hours? I don't know. Anyway, that went on for some time. So, finally we came to the point where I guess we pretty much had the people off the street we could find, who hadn't disappeared out into somewhere else. We had them in there. And as part of getting them in there, I only saw what I can only describe as—I don't know, a front yard, if you will: an area. I could see that there were buildings. I could see that there were beds and such. But we had—there were already men inside.

My job, where I happened to be, was in getting them in there, getting them up to the front door, to the gate, and then at that point turning them over to them and then they would deal with shoving them in. There were others who were all the way inside. So, no one of us went from way on the outside to grabbing inmates, bringing them in through the ante yard and all the way into the beds and into the camp. That wouldn't make sense. No one of us did that. Those of us, like myself, who were on the outside bringing them. Our job was to get them to the gate. Then there were people at the gate; their job was to get 'em on inside. Then there were others who were deep inside. So, when people ask me, interviewers are disappointed when I could not say to them, "Yes, I was right there, saw them in the bunks like you see the pictures of them, and so forth." And the reason for that was that that wasn't my assignment.

MH: Right.

LL: How much of it did I see? How deep did I get in? I never got into where the beds and bunks were, like you see in pictures. I got pretty close to it, but not deep inside where it was dark in there. Where I was, when I got past the front gates to the inside, it was in this yard area—this compound, whatever you choose to call it—and it was crammed with people in all stages of debilitation.

Some—very few—were relatively healthy looking. No, I shouldn't say very few; a number of them were relatively healthy looking, like the first ones I ever saw up the

street at the first encounter. It looked like—if I can quantify it on some kind of scale, it looked like they'd only been there a few days. They were fairly recent consignees, as it were. Others were in worse shape: skinnier, more debilitated more hallowed and hollow-cheek looking. Others were on the verge of falling down, with the bones sticking out of their chests, and others were on the ground.

Anyway, we were there in that courtyard for some time, separating people or doing whatever the hell you do. I can't even remember, exactly: milling around. Some kind of order was getting restored, and the officers were shouting at us, shouting orders at us. We were trying to pick people up, or move them around from one place to another and such. And while I was doing this, suddenly—and this is the point where I say—I told you in the beginning this was going to be short, and boy was I wrong!

Anyway, during this time, some kind of order was restored in that there were officers there and many American soldiers were there by this time, et cetera. But, I was aware that I was hearing whistles, like a policeman's whistle: some louder, some dimmer. I didn't have whistles, so I don't know who could have whistles, but I came to recognize that a whistle meant there was a dead person there, come get him.

Somebody—a squad—so, maybe there was somebody behind us who was doing this who had arrived by this time, I couldn't tell you. Maybe they hadn't lied to us; maybe they had formed units. Why they never told us about it, I don't know. But whoever they were had whistles, so maybe there was such a squad. I don't know. But I'd hear a whistle, I'd look to see where the whistle came from and I'd see there was a dead person there. So they would gather them up.

Anyway, back to my state of mind. My instinct was to stay there and to try to find some way of helping. And, yes, a lot of the guys wanted to feed them our food, our K-rations and C-rations. And then someone else would start yelling at us, "God, no, don't feed them; you'll kill them! This food will kill them. They can't handle this food. Don't give them water, don't give them food. Do nothing. Just keep them from killing themselves. Get them inside, make some kind of sense and order out of this thing." And those were our orders. "Don't feed." Those were orders. "There's an outfit behind us"—they kept telling us that. "There's an outfit behind us that's gonna take care of these people." But my instinct was to stay, although I didn't know what the hell I would do if I stayed. But someone's dying there, and your instinct is to give him water, give him food. A lot of the soldiers were trying to feed them their food, and they stopped them from doing that.

MH: Were you carrying rations?

LL: We all carried rations.

MH: You had what, a pack on your back?

LL: Did I have a pack on my back? I don't recall. I don't know. You know what a K-ration looks like?

MH: Yes.

LL: Like a Cracker Jack box: very small, very little. You can go a few days with very little of this. I can't answer that question. That's one of many questions I can't answer. Anyway—

MH: I know this is a minor detail, but you've got the carbine slung on your shoulder?

LL: Yes, yes, yes. (laughs) Always. You sleep with that sucker. Oh, yeah. You take care of that before you touch your toenails. Yeah, sure. You don't part with that.

Anyway, so my instinct was to stay, and [mind] the officers. The officers—some officer said to me, "You can't stay, you go. That's an order. Form up," or whatever. "Let's go. Have to go. There's a war to fight yet. There's somebody behind us who are specialist; they'll take care of it. You can't do it, you don't have—you're not equipped, you don't know what to do. And don't feed them, don't give any water. Let's get out of here."

As a Jew—and I knew these were Hungarian Jews, which I'll tell you about later. And a Jew—and the person is a human being. My instinct there was to help save; for those dying, pick them up, hold them, recite the Shema, a Jewish prayer. When somebody is dying, you say, "*Shema Yisraeil, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad*: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

MH: I relate.

LL: But, no, they told us we had to go. So, we went. Later one day here, recently, when it became widely known that I was—I hate the word "liberator;" it makes it sound as though there was a—

MH: A battle.

LL: The museum over here [Florida Holocaust Museum] was going to do a feature on the liberators, as they did many other features, so I went to see if my unit was there. And there were pictures of American soldiers all on the wall, and a little snapshot of each—what they looked like then and now—and their little narrative. One after the other said that they hadn't talked about this, et cetera, and I realized I hadn't talked about it, either.

MH: When did you start talking about it?

LL: Well, that's what I'm about to tell you, but let me go on with this narrative.

MH: Sure.

LL: One day, just accidently, I saw in the *St. Petersburg Times* a very small story. It said that in excavating for a development of some kind in Austria, they came across what

looked like it may have been a mass grave, possibly of Nazi prisoners, but they didn't know, and it was just outside a little town called Leinbach. Well, then I heard the word Leinbach and it stuck in my head, and I immediately knew what it was. I understood instantly that this was a mass grave of Hungarian Jews from Wels. I just knew that in my gut. And the article said they didn't know. I later learned that somebody had known that about this time, but I didn't know, and I didn't want there to be a grave unknown, unmarked, unrecognized.

So, I didn't know who to turn to or what, and I started to make phone calls as to what to do. I thought of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. So, I contacted the Holocaust Museum and said I had some material about this. They said, "Send us what you've got," and I said, "Okay." So, I sent them what material I had about it, and identified this as the Hungarian Jews from the Mauthausen sub-camp Wels and so forth. And they sent me back a mysterious letter: they wanted my permission to put the material in their archives. I said, "That's not what I'm interested in. Yes, you have my permission. I'll give you whatever you want in writing, but I'm interested in there being recognition of the gravesite."

Anyway, that's how I got into all of this and that's how it became more widely known. I was contacted, finally, from California by somebody for Steven Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah* project. You're familiar with it?

MH: Yes.

LL: Before they all die, he wanted the narratives of everybody who was involved. He got into it and decided that he couldn't just take the survivors' narratives; he had to have those of the liberators.

If you think about it, "liberators," that hateful word—and I'll tell you why in a minute—"liberators." There can only be a handful of them. If it's a few hundred, it's a lot. Because you come across the camp, that imperative is to get rid of the bodies. You have to bury them, get a bulldozer and bury them; you don't want disease plaguing the countryside. So, they're not going to sit there for the world to see and every American soldier to go there; they're there a day or two and then they're gone. So, it can only be people like myself, who happened on the scene by luck. Most of these camps are off the road.

There'd be very few liberators: some Americans and British—they were in Belgium at Bergen-Belsen—and Russians on the other side. There are just a handful of us. It all sounds so exalted and, you know, so glamorous, but we didn't do anything to liberate anybody. It's a bunch of bull. Just a soldier, putting one foot in front of another like I was told to do, happened to be walking down that road like I was told to do, and walked into this thing. No Germans there to fight. So, I didn't do anything heroic to be a liberator. I hate the term "liberator;" it's a false thing. This fellow who wrote the book—the newscaster—who wrote the book *The Greatest Generation*—

MH: Tom Brokaw.

LL: Yeah. Exalting these people and the greatest generation who were great? That's a lot of foolishness. Most were draftees. And even if we weren't, we were just ordinary people like the people today, nothing special. We didn't do anything to liberate anybody, nothing. I take no credit for liberating anybody. I don't even like the word attached to me. People hear you're a liberator, their eyes glass over and they speak in hushed—

MH: Will you accept “eyewitness”?

LL: What's that?

MH: Will you accept “eyewitness”?

LL: Oh, yeah, sure. Sure.

MH: Okay.

LL: I didn't liberate anybody. I just happened to be there. The guy next to me happened to be there. Anyway, that's off the subject. So, that's how I got into it.

MH: What year was that?

LL: Oh, the article in the paper?

MH: Yeah.

LL: I'm lousy on time. Time compresses when you get old, I tell you. I'm eighty-two. Within the past couple of years; maybe it's two years. I got the—

MH: So, you went from 1945 to 2006 having never discussed this.

LL: Well, maybe 2005, somewhere along in there: four [2004], five [2005], six [2006]. Yeah, never discussed it with anybody. I'll answer you about that; what it's all about. You come back here. “Oh, great! Happy to have you home! Tell us, what was it like?” So, you tell 'em. “Concentration camp?” Yeah. “Well, what was it like?” Well, all these dead people. “Well, tell me about it.” Well, what do you want me to tell you? They were dead people: stacked up, dead. And then, if you look like you're getting emotional or anything, then the response would be, “Hey! Forget it! It's over now, you're back home. Whoopee! Let's have a picnic, let's have a party. Let's buy a car, get some clothes, get some beer.”

So, here you are and you've got this dichotomy. Here: a great society, cars, happy people, well-fed, happy people. Over there: destroyed society, gone to rubble, the men gone, the women you could have all you wanted for a pack of cigarettes—and cigarettes were free for us, so the women were free—and a destroyed society. It was one of the most advanced cultures in the world. You look through *Who's Who of the 1800s* on through,

until the advent of Hitler every other name of achievement is German. They had Social Security long before we did. It was gone. People's savings were gone. The currency was worthless; nobody would accept it. It was a totally destroyed society, spiritually gone and confused.

Over here, the other end of the dichotomy. Everything was fantastic, terrific, get on with it, good. Forget it, like you could turn the spigot off and you could forget it. So, you didn't. And there was, for Jewish soldiers like myself—not that I was an observant person, nothing like that; ordinary American, assimilated like so many American Jews are. Not just Jews: Catholics, Irishmen, all of us were assimilated as Americans. But nonetheless, I have to say it's true: there was a certain embarrassment.

Over there, you're talking to these people. You asked me what they smelled like. They stunk. They were whining and pleading and crying and begging and assuming postures of begging and adoration, kissing your feet, or trying to. Humiliating, humiliating, the whole thing. And you're thinking to yourself, "There but for the grace of somebody go I. Why them and not I?" But you talk to a German, they're well fed. No matter what you've heard to the contrary, they're well fed. They've got cigarettes to smoke. They may be ersatz cigarettes, but—ersatz, fake cigarettes. They're healthy. They can talk to you on an intellectual level. They can tell a joke.

Over here you've got these whining, filthy people—abhorrent. Your instinct is just to get away from them. Just get away from them. And I think—I can't speak for others but I believe most Jewish soldiers who saw that, who were involved in that way, had to be embarrassed and humiliated and torn. I know I was. I know I was.

MH: Embarrassed for them?

LL: I don't know. I don't know. Embarrassed because you want your people to be strong and healthy and well, and these were not strong and healthy and well and heroic. They were slovenly beggars, pitiful people. You could almost have contempt for them, you know. "Why did you allow the bastards to do this to you? Why didn't you resist? Why didn't you fight? Why didn't you take a bullet?" It's hard to explain.

Anyway, you asked me when I started to talk, something or other. Oh! Yes, I went to the Museum, and I saw that none of them talked, none of them talked, nobody talked. And I was asking myself why I didn't talk. I thought I didn't talk because of this Jewish thing I described, but obviously we weren't all Jews—far from it, the extreme minority. They were American soldiers who didn't talk about it.

And then one radio show they called and interviewed me, as we're doing now on the phone, and another guy, non-Jewish, had called in as well. And, on the radio—I had the radio on while I was on the phone with the interviewer; this was a live program. This guy said he didn't talk about it. He was a non-Jew. That was before I had gone to the Museum and seen this exposition where none of them talked.

People didn't talk. I always thought it was because of the Jewish context that I just described to you, but I guess it was something else as well. Part of it was, really, nobody wanted to hear it. They'd say to you when you got back, "Tell me about it," and, "Oh, dead bodies? Well, that's it." It was unpleasant. Let's get on with it, you know. Hey, have a good time, forget it! It's over, forget it, we won. Hooray!" And something about all that tells you people don't want to hear about it. I have talked to survivors—not liberators, survivors, concentration camp survivors with the numbers on their arms, and they'll tell you the same thing. People didn't want to hear it. Somehow, they didn't articulate it in words, their demeanor, their manner or their expression. It silenced you.

MH: I understand what you're saying. I came back from Vietnam and nobody wanted to hear it. It was years.

LL: There you go. There you go.

MH: So, I understand what you're saying.

LL: Well, I'm glad. You're the first interviewer I've spoken to who does understand what I'm saying. Yes, I've talked to Vietnam people, too. Terrible, terrible, what we did to the soldiers of Vietnam who came back. My God, that's unforgivable, how you were treated.

MH: Except, I need to tell you in the course of doing research for this book, in talking with guys like you who were in combat—you know, through Anzio and through France and the Battle of the Bulge and everything else—the kind of combat you saw makes the kind of combat we saw in Vietnam look like a party.

LL: I don't know about that.

MH: We never faced enemy aircraft, we—except for the Marines who were way up north, we never faced enemy artillery. I mean, I was mortared—

LL: Yeah, but you had other nightmares.

MH: We did, but—

LL: The children who were your little houseboys by day; by night were slitting throats.

MH: But not like what you went through. So, back to you. (laughs)

LL: Thank you for that. But anyway, that was it. It was more than enough lifetime food for thought. And there was physical experience on the ground. My whole big deal as a liberator was—if you grant me a lot, it was four hours or something like that. And the one singular experience—oh, you can't imagine the conflict that goes through your mind. You can't imagine how your corpuscles fight with each other.

For example, so the war ended. When it ended, I was in a gorgeous little mountain village

in the Alps, some point where I was. And we occupied a house, which was an old farmer man and his wife. He went out to the fields by day; she was a housewife. There over the mantle of the fireplace was four Germans—pictures of four Germans: black and white pictures of four German soldiers. They were her sons: every single one of the four killed on the Russian front in the war.

These were the loveliest people you ever saw in your life. I didn't like Germans; I was prepared to kill 'em. They were the loveliest people. Here was a mother; she lost all four of her sons. Had no idea what the hell it was all about. And she somehow chose to believe that I reminded her of her youngest son, so she wanted to feed me and clean my clothes and press my clothes. And these were people—and so here were my corpuscles fighting with each other: hate, love, love, hate, a mother, a parent. It's just too much. It's just too much. So, I had enough conflict for a number of lifetimes, in my mind and my spirit and my emotions.

MH: You used the phrase before; you used the phrase: "the content of my nightmares."

LL: Yes. I just want to say—I'll come back to that. I was speaking to a group—graduating class of a religious school, a Christian religious school, a Bible class or something: twelve, fourteen-year-olds. And one little girl raised her hand. She says, "Mr. Lubin, do you hate Germans? Because I'm German." And I said, "My God, child, no, of course not. They're just people. Of course not."

And so, all of this stuff in your head—as you were saying, the content of my nightmares. Yes, the content of my nightmares. My nightmares are all these things that I'm telling you. And the central theme, the minute I hear the word Holocaust—or anything like it that relates to this in that time—what flashes through my mind is that engraving in my brain of that guy cutting himself to pieces trying to get some nourishment out of that tin can. That, to me, is the Holocaust. But—I don't know what else I can tell you.

MH: You mentioned that you were either a loosely observant Jew or non-observant.

LL: No, not at all. I went to—as a child, I went to Sunday school, religious school. Learned a smattering of Hebrew, which I forgot as soon as it was over with. You didn't know the meaning of the words; you read it phonetically.

MH: Were you bar mitzvahed?

LL: Yes. You're not Jewish, are you?

MH: Yes.

LL: Oh, I didn't know that. Thought I was talking to a gentile.

MH: No, no, no.

LL: Yes, Sunday school, Hebrew school, as you know what that means: very little. And bar mitzvahed, and that was the last of that. Walked away from it, and I early on adopted a—I don't like the word "atheism," because it sounds like a belief all in itself: a belief to have not a belief. So, I don't like that word, and I don't like "agnostic," because that's nothing; it's not here nor there. But I'm certainly not a believer in God. I guess the closest thing to it is atheism, that's it. So, I'm culturally a Jew, certainly not religiously. No, never went to temple, never went to synagogue unless somebody was getting married or it was a funeral.

MH: Was that just the way it was, or was that a reaction to what you saw?

LL: No, no, it's the way it was. It's the way I was. I didn't come back to anything like Judaism until the end of the war, when I came home from the war. Then it was Zionism, and it was my mental picture of those people in Europe, and it was a question—the British were not allowing them into Palestine. They sent the ship [SS] *Exodus* back, and it was a matter of saving these people and creating Israel, now Palestine. I wonder how smart that was, as opposed to having relegated them to the Western societies; maybe we wouldn't be living with this Middle East nightmare now, I don't know.

But, in any event, that was the extent to which I returned back to Judaism, if you will. So I had relationship with it, a connection with it, in terms of making speeches to groups, Zionist groups, and public works, toward that end and all that. But certainly there was never any religious connection whatever, you know? I don't accept any notion of God.

MH: Is that—that has nothing to do with having seen what you saw in Europe?

LL: No. No.

MH: Okay.

LL: No offense here; if I offend you, I apologize.

MH: No, you're not offending me.

LL: When I say to you that I regard the concept of a God as the way usually thought of as—what's a good word? I don't know—bizarre, a fairy tale? Makes no sense to me. Why should I accept it on faith? So many things were accepted on faith that are ridiculous and puerile. So, why? Because somebody else saw a vision and it's his faith and he told—nothing authoritative was ever shown to me that gives me any commitment to the idea. People are smarter than I am who came up with this notion, and why should I accept them?

MH: But you've never raised the question, you know, "The proof that there's no God, I saw at Wels."

LL: No. No. I've heard it all around me, of course, but I had already formulated that

notion so I didn't need Wels to tell me that. But in discussion, I could make that point. I could say that. It wasn't what formulated my concept, but I could say that to you, yes. The crazy answers that they give you—God has His own (inaudible). Yeah, I can go into that, pursue that. But no, I never accepted that in the first place. But if I needed any kind of proof, (laughs) that's what it was. Surely the Holocaust could serve that function.

And I want to say this to you: I'd be thrilled and delighted to meet you if it can be worked out on Tuesday, if you're going to be here anyway.

MH: I have to come up there and I really would like to come over, if nothing else to meet you and to take your picture.

LL: Well, you're nice. I don't want you to come to my apartment. I just sold my house, the beautiful house I had on the water. I sold that and I'm in a junky—not junky, it's okay. It's an apartment, condo apartment. It's just a horrible nightmare, so I don't want it to be there. So, we'll have to try to meet somewhere else. I apologize.

MH: Where do you live in relation to Bay Pines [VA Medical Center]?

LL: A distance. In driving time, you can do it in fifteen minutes.

MH: Would you like to meet for lunch?

LL: Yeah, we can do that. Let me get my calendar. Hold on, I've got to walk to another place. But I must tell you that we'll have to stay in phone contact as we approach the time for the meeting. It's very possible I would have to cancel; there's something going on in the family that commands my time. What day are we looking at?

MH: Tuesday.

LL: The 27th?

MH: The 27th. I have an 8:30 appointment there and an 11:30—an 11:00 appointment, so I should be done there at noon.

LL: Okay. You'll be where, at Bay Pines?

MH: At Bay Pines VA.

LL: Let me make some notes. Forgive me; let's start over from the beginning, and give me your name.

MH: Michael Hirsh, H-i-r-s-h.

LL: H-i-r-s-h, okay.

MH: Let me give you a cell phone number.

LL: Good. Hang on. Okay?

MH: ...

LL: ...

MH: ...

LL: ...

MH: ...

LL: ...

MH: Do you have a cell phone?

LL: Yes, I'm going to give that to you right now. I have to walk to someplace else. I never have memorized it. But when I'm not in the house, it's always on me, with me. So, that's what we should do, is connect that way. I have no idea at the moment that I speak where I'll be on Tuesday close to that time....

MH: Okay.

LL: So, why don't we leave it this way: I'll lay it into my calendar for that time, Tuesday the 27th at noon.

MH: At noon. I'll call you as soon as I finish.

LL: I'm sorry?

MH: I'll call you as soon as I finish.

LL: You'll call me, and wherever I am, either—and if I have to say I can't meet you, I apologize in advance, 'cause I would love to.

MH: It's okay.

LL: But if I can't, and I'm going to try to make myself available, I'll await your call, and then we'll agree to meet.

MH: Can I ask you, what career path did you follow when you came home from the war?

LL: Law. I went back to school, met a woman, had a pocketful of money—it's a total other story why I had a lot of money, and it's not important. Had a pocket full of money,

and I met a woman—she was going to college out there, University of Miami. It was over summer, and when the summer ended, she was going back to school, so I went back with her. (laughs) That relationship ran its course, but by the time it had, I was involved in school and accidentally got into law school—by pure accident, which is also another story.

I graduated, became a lawyer, and practiced law all this time, up until virtually now. I've chosen as a cut-off end date to resign from the bar and close my practice June 30. I'm in the process—selling my house was part of the process, and I'm in the process of doing what it takes to close the practice out and dealing with hundreds of files and all that one must do. It takes weeks, and weeks, and weeks, which is why I choose not to meet with you in my apartment, because it's just a horrible mess here: all part of the process of selling my house, moving, shutting my practice down, et cetera, et cetera.

MH: What kind of law did you practice?

LL: It has been a varied career. I've always been, except for just a very short interval—extremely short—I've always been a sole practitioner. So, it's been a varied career. And the law has changed, as has everything else; we're dealing in a new era. You know Ben Hecht, the author—

MH: Yes.

LL: —who wrote the Pulitzer Prize winning *The Front Page* with Charles MacArthur? Ben Hecht wrote a book called *A Child of the Century*. And his thesis was, here he is, born on the cusp of the century, the close-out of the last century, into 1900, and here the world was changed and turned over and in parallel with his lifespan, so he's a child of this remarkable century. It's written as though this is almost the end of everything; we've come as far as we can go, as the song says. I think of us, people of our generation, as children of the era, because it's not a century anymore, it's an era. It's a totally different, incomprehensible world, this change. Related to the atomic age, whatever you want to call it. I think we're children of the era.

So, back to my practice; what I practice. It's a different era today, and you couldn't do that I did. I thought, "Well, they trained me, they educated me. I'm a lawyer, I hang up a shingle, and I can do anything." (laughs) I didn't know that I couldn't. I thought I could, which I did. If a criminal case came to me, I handled a criminal case. Probate, a death came to me, I did that. Somebody wanted an estate plan, I did that. So, every day was a new learning experience. Over time, I did develop expertise in one area or another. I did appellate law for other lawyers—I'm very proud of that—for a time. I did trial work, tried many a case.

In these latter years, as I became older and not as agile, I quit trying cases, litigating, and little by little oriented my practice to estate planning and administration and probate. In other words, arrange people's affairs during their lifetimes to give them the advantage in the court process of probate and tax advantages and what have you. And then at death,

[I] handled the administration of their estates; the probate part of it. Because that's essentially a sitting-down practice, and it's not one of those where your life is a series of appointments, waiting for judges, waiting for juries in halls with spittoons. In those days, there were still spittoons out in the halls. (laughs) You know what a spittoon is?

MH: I certainly do.

LL: (laughs) So, I've done thing or another. I've done appellate work, and I think I had a certain amount of expertise in each at one time or another. I have no regrets, but today I would never embark on such a thing. It's a new era. Nobody can do that. It's insane. Anybody who can claim to be a lawyer, a whole practitioner who handles everything, is nuts.

MH: Did you happen to follow the [Terri] Schiavo case?

LL: Yes. Well, followed it in a lay sense.

MH: I wrote Michael Schiavo's book.¹

LL: Did you, now?

MH: Yes.

LL: Wow, I'm impressed.

MH: So, I spent a lot of time with several six-foot-high stacks of legal documents. (laughs)

LL: (laughs) Amazing. How old are you?

MH: Sixty-five. Did you marry?

LL: Yes. I married Lona, L-o-n-a. She died—we were married in 1951; she died just short of fifty years, two weeks short of fifty years. She died in, oh, 2000 and what, four [2004] or something like that.

MH: You have children?

LL: Two grown children, a son and a daughter, and one grandchild—my son has a child—a granddaughter who's twenty. Just a few kids.

MH: Do they live near you?

LL: Yes, we've been very fortunate; we're pretty close to them. I hear many people complain that their children are so far away.

1 *Terri: The Truth*, written by Michael Schiavo and Michael Hirsh and published in 2006.

MH: My children are in New Jersey.

LL: And you live where?

MH: I live in Punta Gorda [Florida].

LL: Ah. Well, New Jersey—at least if they're all in one place it's not all that bad.

MH: No. We just spent two weeks up there. We just had another grandson.

LL: And your occupation is?

MH: I write books. I spent most of my career in television, working in public television and doing documentaries and network specials.

LL: Amazing.

MH: This will be my fifth book.

LL: Amazing. And you're calling this book what?

MH: Um, you're going to hate it. You're going to hate the main title; the subtitle you'll like. The main title at the moment is *The Last Liberators*. The subtitle is *America's Final Witnesses to the Holocaust*.

LL: Okay. Okay.

MH: But I certainly will duly note how you feel about the word "liberator."

LL: (laughs) How I feel is not important.

MH: It is. I mean, the experience is very personal to you.

LL: Well, anyways, back to—I developed back trouble, and part of why I had to change my law practice was that—some other reasons, too, but one of them was I can't stand on my feet very long. Obviously, you can't try lawsuits when you're not on your feet, among other things. So, as a result, I'm impaired, so I don't get much exercise, or any to speak of. So, I developed belly fat and what have you. That oriented me to a sit-down law practice, which in turn oriented me to more belly fat and less fitness, and the one thing fed off the other. Somehow, I got to eighty-two. I don't know how that happened.

MH: You keep going.

LL: Oh, I don't know. (laughs)

MH: Do you have any pictures of you from World War II?

LL: Yeah, I think I do.

MH: If you could dig one out that I could borrow, I'd appreciate it.

LL: Will I get it back?

MH: Yes, absolutely. I'll scan it, or the publisher'll scan it, and it'll come back to you.

LL: Let me make a note. Pictures.

MH: And when we meet, I'd like to take a couple of pictures of you.

LL: Okay. I'm not much to look at—

MH: That's okay.

LL: —but I'd be happy to do it. As the song says, "Not much to look at." Anyway, yeah, I look forward to meeting you.

MH: Okay.

LL: You sound like a delightful man.

MH: I will call you on Tuesday.

LL: How many children do you have?

MH: A boy and a girl.

LL: What do they do?

MH: My son is the oldest, and he has twin three and a half-year-old boys.

LL: Oh, my.

MH: And my daughter is three years younger. My son's about to be thirty-eight, and my daughter is thirty-five. She has a little girl who's four years old, and just had a little boy.

LL: How nice!

MH: Actually, not so little. He weighed nine and a half pounds.

LL: (laughs) Well, Mike, I look forward to meeting you, and I'm going to move heaven and earth to be available when you call on the 27th. I pray that I will.

MH: Okay, terrific.

LL: Take care.

MH: Thank you very much, sir.

LL: Bye.

MH: Bye-bye.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

[Transcriber's note: This portion of the interview takes place in a crowded restaurant. There is a considerable amount of background noise and frequent interruptions.]

MH: We're talking with Leonard Lubin. So, why do you think that the Jewish soldiers were embarrassed by it?

LL: Because of my own response, and from my perception of the facial expressions and the body language of those I spoke to; what little speaking we did of it. That's the impression I had. It was my own impression, as well.

MH: You believe you felt differently than the gentile soldiers?

LL: Yes, I do. Yeah. I think that the gentile soldiers felt that they were seeing something awful. It was terrible. They were very compassionate, no question about it. They were. Tried to help in every possible way. But it was an event, an experience in life—a life experience—a terrible one, but a life experience. I got from them the same kind of, or similar, reaction I'd gotten from people I'd spoken to who had been in the stockyards and watched the slaughter of animals. It was an abhorrent event, but it was different, I think, for Jewish soldiers.

MH: But by the time liberation happened, most of the people remaining alive in the camps were not Jews. I mean, at Dachau there were 33,000 or 34,000 people still alive, and only 2,000 of them were Jews.

LL: In Wels, they were all Hungarian Jews.

MH: In Wels, they were all Hungarian Jews.

LL: The Hungarian Jews were the very last liberated, as I think you know.

MH: Yeah.

LL: The very last. They were the last taken in and the last liberated, largely through the

efforts, I think, of—what's his name? The gentile Swedish—

MH: [Raoul] Wallenberg?

LL: Wallenberg was one of them, and some others who acted for them. They were the very last. These were all Hungarian Jews. It was the very end, the very tail. Yeah, that's what they were. It was a visceral experience. You could speak to a German: he was nourished, looked well. If you were in such a mode, you could talk with him about poetry or music or languages. You couldn't talk to these people. These people were starving to death. They were whining, begging, repulsive. It's human nature to be repelled by such things. I saw similar body language or expressions on others. It's not repugnant, but repelling you, a thing you turn away from.

MH: Do you feel guilty because you have that reaction?

LL: No, no. I understand it's normal. I don't feel any sense of guilt. I saw it as a normal thing. But I had the sense that there's nothing you could be proud of. There was something, a little voice inside that said, "How did you allow this to happen to you? Why didn't you resist this? Why didn't you take a bullet, as they did in the Warsaw ghetto? Why didn't you resist? How did you allow yourself to be taken this way, and demeaned in this way?" This was the little voice speaking to me. I was angry about that. I felt a sense of anger as to why they didn't fight.

MH: Ten years, twenty years, fifty years later, do you still hear that little voice saying that?

LL: No. No, my attitude has changed about many things, including Germans. I resisted any notion that Germans are inherently bad, although one wonders why every twenty years they find it necessary to go start a world war. (laughs)

MH: Let me talk about Germans for a second. When I started working on this project, I mean, I had read Holocaust accounts and history, but not as much as I've read now. Two things strike me, one of which is the Germans not only had to kill people, but they deliberately had to humiliate them along the way.

LL: Something like Abu Ghraib [prison], isn't it? Something like our people at Abu Ghraib: humiliate them first.

MH: But at Abu Ghraib—they were trying to get information at Abu Ghraib.

LL: Well, not all of them. The woman [Private Lynndie England] who had one on a dog leash, et cetera, she was just having a good time.

MH: We'll let that go for a moment.

LL: (laughs) Can I give you a broader answer to this, what I went through?

MH: Let me take the second part. The second part was: the order came down that no prisoners are to be taken alive, which is why they marched them from Auschwitz to another camp; which is why, as they were leaving Ohrdruf, they emptied their guns. I mean, they shot boom-boom-boom-boom-boom. They couldn't say, "The war is over, all this crap happened." They had to kill as they were leaving.

LL: Do you know, do you understand that there were those among the Einsatzgruppen who couldn't do it, couldn't shoot them, who broke down or who resisted and had to be removed from that task, who couldn't do the job, who were disgusted by it or sickened by it? Because, why? Because they were human beings, and because we human beings behave as human beings, that's why.

Let me get to the broader issue about Germans and whether they're different. I came back thinking they were different. My corpuscles were at war with each other, because of my experience with the German couple, whom I mentioned to you, who had the farm. Here these were compassionate, lovely people, who could not feel sad; the mother who had lost her children, who had been drafted. And I found them to be human. I found them to be human beings.

(to server) Thank you.

So, my corpuscles were at war with each other. Part of me was trained to kill, ready to kill without hesitation. And here I found them to be wonderful, warm human beings, for whom I felt compassion.

(talking about recorder) Is it getting it?

MH: Yeah. That's what I was making sure of.

LL: I came back home, and in the course of time the French had their North Africa experience and were accused of atrocities to the people, torture, very much like the Nazis; and then the Dutch in their Indonesia colony, exactly the same thing. I began to take note of the proposition that people are people, and that what the Nazis did or what the Germans did could happen elsewhere as well. The French did it, the Dutch did it. Latterly, Abu Ghraib tells me the same thing, and other similar experiences.

So, my attitude has mellowed over time. It doesn't mean that I embrace them. I'm still hesitant about them, the Germans. I still view them from a distance. They have to prove something to me. I have to be satisfied about them first, but I don't derivatively detest each and every one of them because he happens to be of German stock. That attitude has changed because of life experiences that I've described to you.

But, in any event, what brought on that question was the attitude about Jews. Yes, I think there was, if not guilt, some other feeling; in my case, the anger I described to you. I would like to think—I don't know. We can never know what we will do. There was a

young Mexican American boy who jumped out of a trench and ran under the guns of a Tiger tank, climbed up on top of the tank, and threw a grenade into the hole, the peephole, and destroyed the crew in there. He was cited for heroism. They asked him later, "What were you thinking?" He said, "I don't know. I just did it."

Which illustrates what I'm saying: you don't know what you're going to do and how you're going to act. But I like to think, I choose to think, that I would not have allowed myself to be taken in the way these people did, and humiliated the way they did. I like to think, I choose to think, that I would resist. I don't know that I would, but I like to think so. So, there was that anger, that original anger, that pitiable attitude and experience, that whining, groveling attitude that was despicable to me. I don't think that my experience was unique to me.

Server: Uh-oh, runaway olive.

MH: It's okay, we'll manage.

Server: (laughs)

LL: Thank you.

Server: You're welcome. This is marinara sauce we serve for the eggplant fries, and that is a mint aioli that is served with the burger.

MH: Thank you.

LL: Do you sell limeade?

Server: Limeade? No.

LL: How about—would you bring me one of those iced teas?

Server: An iced tea?

LL: Yes, please.

Server: Sure. Anything else I can bring for you?

LL: No, that's all.

MH: We're good, thank you.

LL: I don't think—I'm pretty sure that my attitude to experiences is not unique. Others may deny it, they may not have thought it through, or they may have chosen not to think about it. I don't know. But I believe that there's merit in what I'm talking about. *Bon appétit.*

MH: Thank you. Same to you.

LL: You know the joke about Goldberg, of course. Goldberg?

MH: No.

LL: Goldberg's taking this exotic cruise. He gets to his table where he's assigned, and there's another man sitting there, who gets up when he comes in and says, "*Bon appétit.*" So—I'm terrible at telling jokes. I'll think of it later. (laughs) I forget how to work the punch line.

MH: Wait a minute. I don't get the punch line?

LL: He says, "*Bon appétit.*" So, Goldberg says, "Goldberg," and they sit down to eat. The next meal, the same thing.

MH: (laughs)

LL: Finally, Goldberg decides that he's going to be as debonair and as worldly as the other man is, so he beats him to the table for the next meal. When the Frenchman comes to the meal, Goldberg stands up and says, "*Bon appétit,*" and the Frenchman says, "Goldberg." (laughs) So, anyway, Goldberg to you. *Bon appétit.* I hope that's good.

MH: It is.

LL: You want to turn that off, or let it run?

MH: (talking about recorder) Let it run. You wrote this in response to something?

LL: My son had been talking to somebody about something, and so he got on the Internet to look up something about a camp. I forget the name of the camp.

Server: There you go.

MH: Wels?

LL: Wels was the sub-camp of—

MH: Buchenwald?

LL: No, no.

MH: No, Mauthausen.

LL: Mauthausen. Well, he looked it up on the Internet. He knew something about the

Holocaust, of course, but he hadn't looked at that part of it in depth. He did, and he became overwhelmed with what he saw, and disturbed by it. So, he wrote to me: he wrote that to me, in which he said—his central point was, "I don't see, Dad, how could you live in the world? How could you believe in the decency and nobility of man? How did you make it work? How did you get by in the world?" It was in response, in answer to that, that I wrote this, in which I started out by saying, "Well, first, before I answer you, let me tell you about liberators." I did, and then I answered his question at the end, in which I tell him how I acted or how I felt I could live in the world. So, it was in response to his question.

MH: Why do you seem almost embarrassed to be referred to as a liberator?

LL: For the reasons that I've told you.

MH: You don't think you did anything?

LL: A number of reasons. It's an artifice. It has no validity. We're creating artificial heroes. I dislike to see them relish in it and come to believe that they're heroes, who are doing only what they were doing. We didn't do anything to liberate. We didn't fight anybody. We didn't do a damn thing. We just happened to be there, that's all. I feel that it's wrong for them, and I've seen them, other so-called liberators like myself, wallow in this and start believing themselves to be heroes, thinking of themselves as heroes who did something, and I don't think they did. The heroes, for examples, were those in the Polish Warsaw Ghetto who fought. Those were heroes.

MH: How much combat did you see before you got to Wels?

LL: Very little, very little. It was the tail end of the war, and we were racing across Europe. The whole thing was a couple of months. Got there shortly after the first of the year 1945, and the war ended in May, and it was a chase. We got there, my unit relieved the 100th, which I had been in before, and from there on we crossed the Rhine River and then it was a race, chasing them; the Russians were chasing them the other way. We were meeting in the middle, and they were running from the Russians towards us. There were just hordes of people coming toward us, and the Germans were running this way and that way and didn't know which way to run. So, they ran mostly toward us. Most of what we were doing was telling prisoners where to go, or to go back. There were thousands, hundreds of them on the roads.

MH: When you say it was a chase, you were running across the Europe, you're in what, deuce-and-a-half trucks?

LL: All kinds. We had troops on foot, and to keep up pace, we ferried them back and forth. The column of troops was going this way, and what can they do, twenty miles in a day? Maybe fifteen, twenty miles a day.

Server: Gentlemen, how are we doing? How do you like the hamburger?

MH: It's very good, thank you.

LL: So, trucks would go ahead—or go back—load up some of them, take them forward and drop them off and go back. Instead of moving fifteen or twenty miles in that day, you could move forty miles. So, all kinds of situations. We were chasing across the countryside trying to beat the Russians to the area. If you see some of the collateral material, we were trying to get the German scientists and their materials, wanted to get to the sites before the Russians did. If we intruded three feet into the Russian zone, when they got there they made us go back out of what they called their territory. There was some combat resistance, usually in the form of snipers in the churches in the small towns. As you approached the town, they would utilize the church, as the highest point in town, as their sharpshooter's sight. And some combat, but not extensive, not elaborate. It was mostly just a chase. I tell you, we weren't heroes.

MH: Okay.

LL: I think it should be debunked. They should not be allowed to think of themselves as heroes, when they didn't do anything heroic. I didn't.

MH: There were—I've interviewed guys who were in the war much earlier: North Africa, Anzio. In one case, a man who lives near me did all that and ended up at Dachau. When I listen to him and listen to other people about the combat experiences they have, and compare them to the combat experiences I know we had in Vietnam, what the World War II guys generally went through, at least at that stage in the war, makes Vietnam look like a party.

LL: My personal feeling is those who had it the very worst were those in the Pacific, the South Pacific. I think they had it worst of all: jungle fighting, on the beaches. There was no civilization around them. You know, we had the option, the potential, to sleep warm at night by taking over a village, doubling the Germans up, putting guards around them, and taking their houses, and sleeping warm. Fireplaces and warmth, food, the potential to get food out in the countryside; there was bacon, eggs, we had chickens, potable water: some civilization. The guys in the Pacific didn't have any of that. You were in the sand. You were in a stinking hole. You were rotting with insects driving you crazy. I think they had the worst of it.

In any case, mine was easy. It was that winter. I say it was easy: relatively easy. It was very cold; we were in the Alps. It was a very cold winter, January, February, and on to March.

MH: They say it was one of the worst winters on record.

LL: It was a very bad winter. We were very, very high in the Alps, very high. There were some nights when we couldn't get into quarters, when we had sleep outside and had to dig into the snow to sleep. But I can't call it a hardship that measures in any way like

those fellows went through.

MH: Have you ever gotten into this debate with other vets from World War II who feel differently?

LL: Who did—?

MH: Who feel differently.

LL: No. No, but I've talked to Vietnam people whose experiences are different from yours, and who describe a very horrendous experience.

MH: The people in Vietnam who I believe had it worst were the Marines up north near the DMZ [Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone], where they had the North Vietnamese army lobbying artillery at them day in and day out.

LL: No, relatively, our experience was a lot easier. It was combat, saw a lot of dead bodies and a lot of misery, lot of rubble. Munich was—last night on the public channel WUSF—no, no, on the Travel Channel—this fellow Steve Reeves [Rick Steves], who does Europe, did Munich and the foothills. I tuned in for just a little bit of it, because I had time in Munich. It's a glistening, gorgeous, beautiful city, but what I saw was rubble. You couldn't go five feet that it wasn't rubble. So, I just wanted to see what it looked like today.

But—I lost my point; couldn't have been worth very much. (laughs)

MH: The night—

LL: I—I'm sorry.

MH: No, go ahead.

LL: I was going to say, I suffered more mentally and emotionally than I did physically. It was a tremendous shock. We weren't—it's inexcusable that we were not prepared in any way to encounter the concentration camps, in no way. Nothing. It wasn't discussed, wasn't mentioned. We had no clue. That's why when we were told, when I got there and wanted to stay and help, though I didn't know what I could do, we were told, "No, no, no. There are outfits behind us equipped to do this," and I'm saying to myself, "If they knew we were going to encounter us to the point that they created outfits capable of it, why weren't we told?" Something didn't make any sense to me.

And the example of the German couple that I talked to you about. All of this, and running into a camp full of Jews—these were all Jews in Wels—all of this did a number on my head. There's no question about it. I didn't have any breakdown, but there's no question about it. It was extremely disturbing. And as I said in this note to my son, to come home is a terrible shock. You come home to this society, let's buy cars, whoopee, everything is

great. It's a disconnect. I was just over here, and it was one thing, and now I'm over here and it's something else. It doesn't make any sense. And then Germans; and who are German? And what are Germans? And how could this happen—all of it. Pretty big shock.

MH: But you didn't talk about it for decades, you told me.

LL: From high school, a couple of months of college just to pass the time till I'm called, so essentially from high school—I was a kid—into this: a disconnect, tremendous disconnect and emotional upheaval.

Let's see, what else can I tell you that might be of help?

MH: Were there points in your life when this, you know, came rushing back to you?

LL: No. If you mean flashbacks and whatever the word is for emotional breakdowns and all of that, no.

MH: Not necessarily emotional breakdowns, but times when something in the news would come up—

LL: Yes. Something in the news or something would remind me, yes, and tears would come to my eyes, and I would choke up and I couldn't talk. For the longest time, I couldn't discuss it at all. The first time I was ever interviewed was for radio, not with pictures, and was being tape recorded as you are now. I had not ever spoken of this, and I was shocked when I reached the point where I encountered the man trying to get nourishment out of the tin can, that I described to you. I was shocked to find myself breaking down in tears. I had no idea that that was in me.

Of course, as time went on and I told the story many more times—this interview with you now must be at least the fifth or sixth in one form or another: some for radio; one was filmed, of course, the Steven Spielberg *Survivors of the Shoah* project. Like anything else, you get used to things, and as you talk about it, it becomes easier to do. If I were being interviewed now and it was the first time, you would find me to be a very different person you'd be looking at. No, we didn't talk. Again, as I mentioned, that was the other shock.

When I went to the exhibit at our museum, our Holocaust museum, they had the pictures all around the wall: a big picture of the soldier as he looks today, up in the corner a little snapshot of how he looked then, and then his narrative. One after one, after one, we didn't talk about it, we didn't talk about it. I tuned in for just a moment, switching channels to last night's Memorial Day thing out of Washington. They had the actor Charles Durning doing his—the same thing. We didn't talk about it, he didn't talk about it. I could understand why Jews didn't talk about it, perhaps, but I couldn't understand why others didn't. Why didn't they talk about it? I had a hard time understanding that in myself and in others. The answer that I've gotten—only latterly, not in those earlier days,

only recently—was nobody wanted to talk about it. You couldn't get next to anybody in talking about it. You could see it on their face. "Forget about it. I don't want to hear about it."

For a time, I had an associate in my law office who was the child of a survivor. Never was in the camps; he was in the Polish woods as a partisan. His father had all this World War II experience, some of it very brutal, and my associate in my office—when I asked him about this, his father had never discussed it with him. Isn't that the damndest thing? His own father never discussed it with him. I said, "Didn't that concern you? Weren't you concerned?" He said yes. I couldn't understand why his father never discussed it. Again, until very recently—

MH: Sometimes, in order to discuss it, you need to be asked.

LL: Even when asked.

MH: Really?

LL: Oh, they asked.

MH: And his father wouldn't talk?

LL: He and his brothers asked, and the father would dismiss it, wouldn't talk. So, you suspect things. Is it guilt? Was he a kapo, a collaborator? Was he alive because he collaborated? That's another brutal thing to confront; that's another issue. Can you imagine?

So, there's something in the human makeup at work here: too many people who didn't talk about it. You have to ask yourself why. Some may be because they were kapos: they cooperated. Some may be because it's overemotional for them to do so. I don't know. But when I asked my associate about it, he said, "No, he didn't talk about it." I said, "Does it bother you?" He said, "Yes, it did." I said, "Did you ask him?" "Yes, he dismissed it. Wouldn't talk about it." Perhaps in the telling of it it's too disturbing to the one telling it, I don't know.

MH: Do you recall the Nuremberg Trials? Do you remember what you were thinking about when those trials were taking place?

LL: I'm not sure I know the meaning of your question.

MH: Well, I'll tell you where I'm going with it. One of the things—again, in researching this—I've discovered, is that there were people—there were Nazis convicted of war crimes who were hung. There were others who were given long prison sentences. Around 1950 or so, most of those sentences were commuted.

LL: I know. You've seen *Trial at Nuremberg* [*Judgment at Nuremberg*] movie?

MH: Yeah.

LL: Spencer Tracy, Marlene Dietrich. It ends with that recitation: that by such-and-such a date, all of them were free. You have a point there?

MH: I don't understand it.

LL: About [Wernher] von Braun? We bring him here, we fête him, and we wine and dine him, and we make him a citizen and we give him everything. This man used slave labor, who died. As at my camp, they came in the back door, front door, and they were worked to death and died, and they went out the back door. It was a constant revolving door. Von Braun used those people. We took him in.

The larger issue, supposedly: the larger issue, the more important issue. Why didn't we bomb the tracks, railroad tracks, and facilities going into Auschwitz and save lives? The larger issue. The best way to save the Jews is to end the war as quickly as we can, that was the notion. Tonight, one of the movies playing on the television will be *Ship of Danger* or something like that. It's about the *St. Louis* turning back, with the ship.² So, why, why, why? All these things are why? Because, it's the kind of world we live in, a political world.

When the war was over over there and there was much to do, we used the Germans because they were effective. If you wanted to get something done, the way to do it was to have their German overseer in charge of the project, or the German sergeant. That's how you got things done. We worked with them, with the Germans. Many became friendly with the Germans—unseemly to me; unseemly disgusting, to me. But that's the human condition. That's the way it works.

MH: I was asked recently how I felt about somebody who had been one of the guards, I guess, at one of the concentration camps, who was deported from the U.S. at the age of eighty-three.

LL: Yeah, we have right here in St. Pete a lot of them. There's a substantial Lithuanian community here. Remember the Lithuanians? Yes.

MH: How do you feel about letting them off, or deporting them? What would you do with them?

LL: I suppose it was the extent of their involvement and what it is that they did. If you dig too deeply, you find you're not left with too much of a German population: as this

2 The MS *St. Louis*, a German ocean liner; in 1939 it sailed from Germany to Cuba with 937 Jewish refugees, who were refused entry to Cuba and then to the United States. The captain, Gustav Schröder, refused to return to Germany until the passengers were given entry to some other country: ultimately, they were dispersed between the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. Lubin is probably referring to the 1976 movie *Voyage of the Damned*, based on the 1974 book of the same title by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts.

young man [Daniel Goldhagen] writes in his now-book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. How can you kill six million people, involving the entire railroad system, involving all of those people and all of those mechanics and all those resources, without people knowing about it? How do you keep such a thing secret? It's not possible to do so. People had to know about it. They had to be involved.

Yet, if you look at the pictures that were taken when the Third Army, of which I was a part, liberated a camp, Patton insisted on getting the German civilians in from the town and making them go through. If you look at their faces, you can see they're truly in shock. They didn't know about this. They knew the camp was there, they may have even known that people were getting killed, but they didn't know about the ABCs of the brutality they were seeing there.

MH: I just watched—I found some on the Web, and then I found a place to buy a DVD that showed the footage that George Stevens, the Hollywood director, did at a number of camps, including Ohrdruf, the first camp we liberated, and Hadamar, the hospital. And at Ohrdruf, you see the German civilians being brought in on a truck and being compelled to walk past. The first thing they walk past was a display—I keep surprising myself, 'cause I find things that I never knew. On the display, they had one of the lampshades that was made out of skin, but then they had painting that were done on dried human skin. And then you see an Army sergeant put two shrunken heads on the table.

LL: Yes.

MH: And—

LL: How? You ask yourself how?

MH: Yeah. And then you see the German citizens—they're all dressed up. The men are wearing coats and ties, and they're carrying shovels 'cause they've been told, "You're gonna have to carry these bodies." But they're still the same people who said, "We didn't know." Just like when I went to Auschwitz: the little village of Oświęcim is literally right outside the gate. They didn't know. Those trains coming back and forth, they didn't know.

LL: Did you know, or were you old enough—maybe you weren't old enough—about our Japanese Americans whom we put in concentration camps?

MH: Yes.

LL: Call them what you want; they were concentration camps. You can say what you want; these were American citizens. They had been removed from their homes—

MH: I would agree with part two; I don't agree with that they're concentration camps.

LL: Call it what you want.

MH: Well, they're not slave labor camps, and they weren't there to die.

LL: Good. (inaudible) Nevertheless, nevertheless, they were uprooted from their homes, American citizens, many of them born here. Uprooted from their homes, their businesses were taken away from them, and they were put in camp. The larger point that I'm making, the point I'm leading to, is I would have been, about that time, sixteen or seventeen, something like that, years of age. I knew that we had put these Japanese Americans in a camp, but it never dawned on me that they could be brutalized, tortured, or killed.

That's the very point. It's conceivable that there are Germans who knew that there were these camps. The government, the society, was telling them that these people are undesirables, whatever it was. They knew, they saw, that people from their village had disappeared, their houses were taken over, and they knew that they were taken over somewhere to the camp, or out to the east. But they might not have known, as I didn't know about the Japanese. If, in the end, it had turned out that the Japanese were routinely tortured and brutalized or killed—

Server: Can I take that for you? You still working on yours, sir?

LL: No, I'm through.

Server: Enjoy it?

LL: Yes.

Server: Can I bring you anything else?

LL: Let me think about it for a couple minutes.

Server: Okay.

LL: Thank you.

Server: You're welcome.

LL: Would I have been guilty if I had known? I didn't know. How could I know? Would the guilt attach to me? So, I accept that there were Germans who didn't know. Very conceivable. I accept that. I don't think that each and every last German in the society knew the extent of what happened.

MH: Do you think in America today there'd be a significant part of the population that would say we should put Muslims in camps?

LL: Do I think that there are Americans who feel that way? Absolutely. I've talked to

Americans who do think they should be expelled. Yes, absolutely. They think of them as enemies, all Muslims. Yes, we do. Absolutely. Do you?

MH: Think they should be put in camps, or do I think that there are people like that?

LL: Uh-huh.

MH: No, I know there are people. I just wondered how large a population it'd be.

LL: I don't know that we can ever measure that.

MH: Yeah.

LL: I don't know that that's possible. But, yes, I've spoken to them. It's the first time I've ever heard that reference that they should be put in camps, not specifically as such, but I've talked to many who think they can't be trusted, think that they're enemies, who think that that religion indoctrinates them in these ideas and these notions, harsh notions. I've tried to think about that myself. I don't know all that much about it, but there's a lot of tough language in there. Poke out their eyes and cut off their hands; judicial systems deal with the people in those ways. I don't know. Language and words can affect us over time, can influence us over time. I don't know.

MH: As an attorney, how did you react to Guantanamo [Guantanamo Bay detention camp], to incarcerating people without charges, to habeas corpus disappearing?

LL: Well, obviously, I don't have to tell you that's terribly disturbing to an attorney. A special orientation to constitutional, civil rights, self-determination, personal liberty, the rule of law? Of course, it's very disturbing, no question about it. The torture issue is something else. There are those who say that torture doesn't work, that people will give you, tell you what you want to hear. But it does work: that's why it's used, because it works. No? You don't think so?

MH: I think the people who really have to use the results—I mean, what they basically say is, "If you torture somebody badly enough, they'll tell you what they think you want to hear. They'll tell you anything to get it to stop."

LL: Well, if what you want to hear is, "Where is the bomb planted? Where did you plant the bomb?" you'll very quickly learn whether you're being told the truth or not. It's not a question of what you want to hear. You'll go look and see if the bomb is there where he told you it was. If you elicit that information in that way and you go there and you find the bomb—

MH: Then it worked.

LL: It worked. It does work.

MH: To go back to my own—

LL: My joke about is, if there's something you don't want the enemy to know, don't tell me, because under torture I'll tell.

MH: To go back to my Vietnam experience, there was a story—whether true or apocryphal, and I'm sure it was both—of capturing two VC [Viet Cong], taking them up in a helicopter to 1500 feet, throwing one of them out to get the other one to tell you what the plans are to attack the division in the next twenty-four hours. And it's with no little embarrassment—

(talking about the check) Let me get this, please.

LL: No, please; you're making a hero out of me, so let me pick it up.

MH: Thank you.

LL: Incidentally—

MH: It's with no little embarrassment that I say I didn't find anything wrong with that, having been one of the troops on the ground.

LL: Well, it's interesting you say that. As a boy in my teens, I read a true story along those lines, along that same theme. They wanted some information, they had a handful of black prisoners in a jail, and they said, "Until we get the answers, we're going to hang you one at a time." They took the one out, kicking and screaming, and tied his hands and legs and hung him right there, in front of them for all to see, came back in. "Next!"

Server: You gentlemen having anything else?

LL: And they got the information.

Server: All right.

LL: They got the information that they wanted, whatever it was. So, yes, torture works. A medical patient in horrible pain and angst, you tell him that it'll cost him \$10 for pain medication that'll relieve his pain immediately, he'll pay it. "Would you pay \$100?" Yes. "Would you pay \$1000?" He'll pay anything.

(phone rings)

LL: (regarding phone call) There's a prescription that may be ready to pick up.

Sorry, we got interrupted.

MH: You were talking about the medical patient, how much he'll pay for the pain.

LL: He'll pay \$1000, he'll pay \$100,000. While he's lying there in pain, he'll say, "Everything! Take everything I've got! It doesn't matter!" So, yes, torture works; perhaps not always, perhaps not perfectly, but it certainly works. I can't stand the notion of torture. I can't stand the notion that—the alienation of the rule of law, not only as an attorney, as a person, as a human being, the moral standpoint, especially augmented by my posture as an attorney, educated in this. At the same time, I wonder about myself. What would I do? Would I invoke the torture? If I have the guy—

Server: Gentlemen, thank you.

LL: Thank you, ma'am.

—and the bomb is planted, it's going to go off, and it's going to kill an awful lot of innocent people, children and all the rest, and I have really good reason to believe that this guy has the information, what to do? Am I gonna sit there holier than thou and say, "Absolutely not. I foreswear it. I'm not going to use it. I'm not going to do it." And if, then, the bomb goes off and I didn't do it, am I going to suffer the rest of my life the anguish of knowing that I might have saved all those people? I don't know.

MH: But the extension of that is Guantanamo, where we've got x number of—

LL: You're preaching to the choir. (laughs) I understand, I understand. That's the whole reason for it, its expression. It only takes a minuscule amount of pork to *treyf* [make un-kosher] a whole barrel of stew.

MH: (laughs) I've never heard it put like that. Yes.

LL: You follow the meaning?

MH: Yes.

LL: Same thing here. It's the slippery slope. That little bit of pork there to allow for a Guantanamo, special circumstances. That little pork *treyfs* the whole damn stew, and pushes you on the slippery slope. That's the reason; that's why we have such very strong rules.

You stop a guy in a car, as the police do, and you search the car and there's all kinds of incriminating stuff: paraphernalia and God knows what. If the attorney for the defense is able to show that the stop was improper, if the police did not have an adequate reason—never mind compelling reason, an adequate reason to stop the car, you ask for the suppression of the evidence. In other words, all of that evidence gets thrown out. The prosecution is charged with the task of trying to process the case without the evidence, and the man walks out the courtroom free. The layman says, "What the hell kind of law is that?"

MH: You let him off on a technicality.

LL: You let him off on a technicality, et cetera, et cetera. Go try to explain to them, “We lawyers have the task—” Bad enough to be a Jew; to be a Jewish lawyer, let me tell you!

MH: My brother-in-law is a criminal defense attorney in Chicago.

LL: Bad enough to be a Jew; to be a Jewish lawyer is something else. Go try to explain to the average layman what that’s all about—“You let somebody off on a technicality? What, are you crazy? You catch him with all this stuff on him?”—to try to them that it can be you next time, that the cops can be wrong.

MH: Tell me a little bit about talking to schoolkids about the Holocaust, about your experiences.

LL: Well, when you say “tell you a little bit” about the experience—

MH: Or a lot.

LL: (laughs) Don’t know what to tell. You try to tell them. My notion—

MH: What was it like the first time you talked to the kids?

LL: Very difficult, very emotional. Very emotional. What is okay to tell them, what’s not okay to tell them? What are you trying to get across to them? What’s the point? Do you just want to make them feel bad, or do you have an issue? What are you trying to get across? What’s your objective? So, I don’t know what you mean when you say, “What do you feel?” You hope you’re connecting with them, hope that they’re understanding.

MH: Well, I mean, you wouldn’t have gone unless you felt there was a point to be made, there was a reason to do it.

LL: Yes. To be ever alert; to protect your liberties and your freedoms, to understand that; to inject some humanism into the system; to recognize, as they should recognize, that there are such things as bad laws, and that your duty is to try to change things, try to change bad laws. These are the purposes. That’s my objective. I didn’t go seek it. You get a telephone call and they ask you would you speak to the group, and you’re either going to say no or yes. If you’re going to say yes, then you have to ask yourself what you’re all about, what are you trying to do.

MH: What did you decide was proper to tell them, and what did you decide they don’t need to hear?

LL: I felt it wasn’t necessary to burden them with great detail about the brutality, the physical brutality, to describe to them the physical—in depth, the physical condition of the people. I didn’t feel that was necessary; I could make the point without that. Didn’t

want to terrify them, send them home in tears.

And as I said—I think I told you on the telephone—a lovely little girl raises her hand. “Do you hate Germans? Because I’m a German.” My heart went out to the poor child. She’s hearing this stuff. Is she a bad seed? Is it endemic? Has she no choice in the matter? Is it beyond her? That’s a terrible thing to visit on a child. Is it my fault? We hear that in divorces, the children suffer, often wondering whether they caused the divorce. Could they have behaved in some other way so that the divorce might not have happened? Same thing here. You have to recognize that you’re dealing with tender years. I have friends who are survivors of the camps themselves, who display the tattoo and all the rest, who do go into excruciating detail, who guess it’s necessary to make the point.

MH: Did you ever ask them why they do it? Ever had a discussion with them about it?

LL: Yes, I did.

MH: Where did that go?

LL: Well, one I have in mind became angry with me for even raising doubts about it. So, that’s where that went. And, back to that earlier discussion about what the Germans knew or didn’t know, to what extent—is each and every last citizen there complicit in the thing in one way or another, by acts or by omissions? I don’t know. I have to believe that there were decent people among them. We’re all human.

I had one survivor of a camp who described this scene to me: He’s there digging in a ditch, and he’s up to his ankles in slop and mud. There’s a German Nazi captain there, who happened to be walking by. It was wintertime, freezing cold. The guy had just the prison uniform on, no warm clothes, and he’s there in freezing water and ice. The German captain is there, and walks by and sees him, and there’s no one much else around him. He sees the captain looking around this way, and he reaches into his pocket like this and, as he walks away, lets an orange drop out of his pocket onto the ground to him, right next to him there.

What does that mean? What the hell does that mean? You got to think about a thing like this. What was he doing? What was it all about? So, what do you say about such a man? You paint everybody with the same brush? I don’t know. We had our—what was the name of—our own American troops in Vietnam, go destroy a village and kill every man, woman, and child—

MH: My Lai [Massacre]?

LL: My Lai. These are Americans. They had not been indoctrinated into the Nazi hatred. They were indoctrinated by something else: by experience, by their time there, by anguish.

MH: But when it came out, the country was repulsed by it.

LL: Yes.

MH: That's a major difference.

LL: But can you take that to mean that Americans are good and are different from Germans, who are bad across the board, and paint them all the same? You can't do that. It's nuts. You can't do that.

MH: I don't know, except that—

LL: Please, don't misunderstand. I'm no apologist for the Germans.

MH: No, no, I understand that. But it's just the monstrosity of—

LL: Of course. That's why we're here.

MH: Yeah.

LL: We wouldn't be here. You wouldn't be writing this book, except that it's monstrous. That's why you're writing this book. Incidentally, when it comes out, I'd like to buy one from you. I don't want it as a gift. I wish to buy one. Really.

MH: No, I've already made an arrangement with the publisher that everybody I interview will get one.

LL: My daughter will chase you down with the cadres to your grave if you lose these [photos]. This is all we have.

MH: (laughs) Okay.

LL: There's one in Garmisch [Garmisch-Partenkirchen]; the war had just ended. That was in Garmisch, when we dressed in rehabilitation. That's one that's self-explanatory; I'm told I look like a Nazi there.

MH: I don't think so.

LL: These are all separated by papers to keep them from—this is just as I got back after the war, in a nightclub, just days after I was back.

MH: Let me not take that one. I'd like to take these two, and I will not lose them.

LL: All right. Thank you.

MH: I will get them back to you.

LL: And you do have my address. If you wish, there's an envelope for them.

MH: Oh, great. Thank you.

LL: What were we on?

MH: Your daughter is in town here?

LL: Yes. (laughs) Oh, I thought that's the pen for a moment. So, I suppose there will be questions that will never be answered. I understand—these responses I give you that roll off the lips easily and all—I didn't come to these notions in two minutes. These developed over years.

(phone rings loudly) Hello?

Pause in recording

MH: You were saying the responses developed over years.

LL: Yeah. It took a long time, and all of the things developed with time. I suspect that if you were interviewing me within weeks or months after I had returned home after the war, the responses I would give you to these same questions might be very different. I came to these ideas over time.

At the time I left there to come home, Germans were evil, fundamentally, and it was endemic in them. They were worthy only of being killed, and I would have had no hesitation to do it. It took the French experience, the Dutch experience and all this, and now confirmed latterly by our own experience to bring change in my thinking about these things. I had to think back on the couple, and I had to think back on the German captain with the orange, and all of these. It took time. It took time to come to these conclusions. And I'm sure there's still questions for which nobody has answers. I don't know. Are you familiar with the [Stanley] Milgram experiments?

MH: Yes.

LL: Well, what the hell did—

Server: All set, gentlemen? Thank you very much.

LL: Are we holding you up from the rest of your life?

Server: From the rest of my life?

LL: Yes.

Server: The busser's going to vacuum in here soon.

MH: Okay, we'll—we're done.

LL: We'll be out of here in a few minutes.

MH: In fact, it just came up in a conversation I had last night.

LL: Yeah. Where do you go with that? And there were other spinoffs from it. There were the blue-eyed/brown-eyed children in school. You know about that?

MH: Yeah.

LL: And there were the jailers and the inmates [the Stanford prison experiment]: the same thing, the responses of people, human beings. So, you look back at the Germans and the German experience. How could they behave this way? Well, then you look at the Milgram experience and you say, "Here are common people who behaved in a bizarre kind of way." It took very little to influence them to behave in that kind of way. And, yet, there were some who didn't, who didn't comply. (laughs) Again, where do you go with that? It unnerved Milgram, I understand. He didn't finish the experiments.³ Well!

MH: I thank you.

LL: I thank you.

End of interview

³ Lubin is confusing the Milgram experiment in 1961 with the Stanford prison experiment ten years later. Philip Zimbardo, the lead researcher in the latter project, ended the experiment eight days early after an outside observer questioned its morality; the original Milgram experiment, however, ran its course and was repeated on several occasions.