

8-9-2008

Bernard Schutz oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, August 9, 2008

Bernard Schutz (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Schutz, Bernard (Interviewee) and Hirsh, Michael (Interviewer), "Bernard Schutz oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, August 9, 2008" (2008). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 131.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/131

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

This interview was conducted for *The Liberators: America's Witnesses to the Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010) and is ©2010 Michael Hirsh All Rights Reserved. Transcripts, excerpts, or any component of this interview may be used without the author's express written permission only for educational or research purposes. No portion of the interview audio or text may be broadcast, cablecast, webcast, or distributed without the author's express written permission. Published excerpts of an individual interview transcript are limited to 500 words unless express written permission is granted by the author. Required credit line: *The Liberators: America's Witnesses to the Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010) and Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project, University of South Florida Libraries, ©2010 Michael Hirsh.

Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: C65-00123
Interviewee: Bernard Schutz (BS)
Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)
Interview date: August 9, 2008
Interview location: Interviewee's home, Skokie, Illinois
Transcribed by: Kathy Kirkland
Transcription date: January 5, 2009
Audit Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Audit Edit date: June 1, 2010
Final Edit by: Dorian L. Thomas
Final Edit date: June 8, 2010

[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: Why don't we start? Give me your full name and spell it, please.

Bernard Schutz: Okay. My name is Bernard Schutz, B-e-r-n-a-r-d S-c-h-u-t-z.

MH: And the address is?

BS: ...

MH: And your phone number?

BS: ...

MH: And your birth date?

BS: 5-16-17 [May 16, 1917].

MH: Which makes you?

BS: Ninety-one.

MH: Okay. Where were you before the Army?

BS: Living on the West Side of Chicago.

MH: Doing what?

BS: Doing work in music. I was a violinist and did professional playing then with the WPA Orchestra, the Illinois Symphony under Izler Solomon: that was the height of my career. And I continued with that career in the Army, as well.

MH: So, how'd you end up in the Army?

BS: I had a choice. I only have one ear; one ear was closed at birth. The doctor advised me that it doesn't portend so well near explosions with that situation. We had a long talk for about an hour, and he looked at me and he said—this is when I was called up. He said, "Well, Bernard, what's it gonna be?" I said, "Major, we've been talking for an hour about the Jewish question." He says, "You're in the Army, 1-A limited service." I said, "What does that mean?" and he says, "Well, you won't go overseas because of your situation." So, I wound up in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany. Typical Army.

MH: (laughs) Were you near explosions?

BS: I got four battle stars and never fired a gun, but we were in it. We were a service company, so we were right there, right off the lines all the time. We were in four situations where the battle was all around us. But—

MH: You go in the Army, and where do they send you initially?

BS: Well, first they send you to basic training for thirty days, [to] Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, then they ship you out from basic. I was a company clerk. I was the only guy who could type at the time in that group, so I was company clerk and soon moved up, and then I became a sergeant in the Army. And then, after the basic training, we were "fooling

the enemy,” ’cause we moved all over the country. Why, I’ll never know. Typical Army, you know. And finally, we got our orders, and we were shipped overseas to North Africa.

MH: Were you shipped as a unit or as a replacement?

BS: As a unit.

MH: What unit were you in?

BS: 20th Special Service Unit.

MH: Attached to a division?

BS: Attached to the 5th Army. There was a unit of 109 men and five officers, and what we did is broke up into service groups. We were infantry-trained, in case there was a breakthrough. We were part of that unit. We carried our rifles, and we carried our fiddles. And it was great, a great experience.

MH: So, you were fiddling across North Africa?

BS: All the way. All the way.

MH: What was the band?

BS: At one time, we even had Tony Bennett as a singer. We had a band, and we had a nucleus, and we would travel around. We would work with a local unit that day and pick up whatever talent was available there, combine it with our nucleus, and that night was a show.

MH: I can’t remember the guy’s first name right now, but he’s in New York and his last name is Sunshine.

BS: Oh.

MH: Do you know him?

BS: No.

MH: I think it might be Morris Sunshine. But he was in a band, too, and Tony Bennett was their vocalist.¹

BS: Yeah. Well, he was with us for maybe a month or two and got moved up pretty—he knew the right people—in a hurry. But the point is, we had some very talented people, and there's a whole raft of people who are unknowns who are marvelous talents. They never made it to the top, for whatever reason, and those are the people. We had a lot of talented people, and some hillbillies along with it. You know, typical Army.

MH: What'd you play?

BS: What'd I play?

MH: Yeah. What kind of music?

BS: What I did was unusual. I was the master of ceremonies. I was the joke teller, you know, the Jewish Chicago boy: that was always the designation. And I would stand there with the fiddle and do my intros or the acts.

MH: This is Jack Benny.

BS: Right, exactly.

MH: Ben Kubelsky, a Waukegan Jewish boy.

BS: Exactly. And I never needed a guy to show. Somebody would always holler, "Hey, Sarge, you gonna play that fiddle?" Then, at the end of the show, I would pay it off with a straight semi-classical number. It worked like a charm.

¹ Morris Sunshine was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00134.

MH: What's your best joke from back then?

BS: Well, one of the quickies is that this sailor was on leave in Hawaii, and he's walking with a beautiful Hawaiian young lady, and she turns to him and she says, "Soldier, how would you like a lei?" He says, "Well, dear, I was gonna lead up to it more subtly, but okay." Well, she runs off into the forest, and a few minutes later comes back with a beautiful garland of flowers. She places it around his neck, and she gives him a peck on the cheek. He says, "What is this?" She says, "This is a Hawaiian lei." And he says to her, "Honey, if this is a Hawaiian lei, God bless America." (laughs) That was one of the openers.

MH: Okay. You got one more?

BS: Not offhand.

MH: Okay. If you think of one—

BS: They got a lot rougher.

MH: Okay. If you think of one while we're talking, tell it.

BS: Okay.

MH: So, how do you—when were you in combat?

BS: Well, we were in combat zones. Like I say, if there was a breakthrough, we became part of that unit. And when we traveled on—we started in North Africa, then we were shipped to Italy. We kept following the combat troops, thirty days later all the time. And then from Italy, we were shipped to France, and then from France to Germany. And in Germany is where I had my experience with the Holocaust.

MH: What did you know about the Holocaust before that point?

BS: Good question. Very damn little. We knew that things were bad. The only hint that I had was a real clue. In France, I was in charge of a transport deal from one town to another, and on the road was a young, handsome couple with a small child. They looked familiar, like landsmen, and they signaled us, so I ordered [us to] stop. I found out they were in hiding and they just came out of hiding. Their name was Ripstein. That was it. Well, we gave them whatever food and things we had with us, and he gave me a photo of their family, which I have, in Yiddish, thanking me, you know. We took them to the next town that they were headed to for relatives. And that began to—talking with them, [I] began to understand why they were in hiding for a couple of years.

MH: What year was this?

BS: This was 1941, I guess.

MH: Forty-one [1941], that early?

BS: Yeah, I think so. Forty-one [1941] or forty-two [1942], I'm not sure.

MH: When did you go in the Army?

BS: Forty-two [1942].

MH: Forty-two [1942].

BS: Oh, yeah, you're right. I'm wrong on the date. It was forty-one [1941], I was in the Army in forty-two [1942], so it was probably around forty-three [1943], beginning of forty-four [1944]. That's a big timeframe, right. And that was my first exposure.

MH: Tell me what they told you.

BS: They said that they knew their family and friends were picked up and never seen again. The word got out that they were not going to labor camps; they were going to death camps. So, if they could—whoever could, hid, you know? And evidently, they were in pretty good shape, and they made it successfully underground.

MH: How old was the child?

BS: I would say the child at that time was about nine, ten years old.

MH: A boy or a girl?

BS: A girl.

MH: A girl. Yeah.

BS: It was a fleeting experience for about a half-hour. We took them to their destination, they thanked us, and then I began to say, “Things are not quite as easy.” Everything was very camouflaged. You didn’t see much, you didn’t hear much, and you’re busy in the Army. There was no choice.

MH: Did you know about it when you were still in Chicago? I mean, Kristallnacht?

BS: We didn’t know about the death camps. We knew there was problems; we knew there was anti-Semitism. There were incidents, but we never knew the full story at all. And in Germany, the Landsberg camp was not far from where we were situated, and the word got out under—I don’t know who brought the message—that there was a liberation of a camp called Landsberg.

MH: This is now—this is forty-five [1945].

BS: Right.

MH: Between meeting that family and getting to Landsberg, anything else?

BS: No. No, we were very busy, very busy, doing our work and all. And we lived on trucks. We were American gypsies, you know, so we were constantly on the move. There was no place to really get the roots of any situation.

But when we heard about the camp being liberated, I had—I was lucky. I got a Jeep and a couple guys, and we went to the camp. At the camp was the whole picture. There they were. Those who were able—they were all human skeletons. They all had those striped pajama things on. The medics were there, and we were not allowed past the gate, because there were a lot of cautions about diseases and things.

MH: Typhus.

BS: Also not to feed them, because that would be—instead of a help, that could be—

MH: It was killing people.

BS: Right. So, what we did see, we were right at the gate. There was a large opening in the ground for a couple of hundred bodies, men and boys, all lying there dead, with an earth machine there, ready, and the Germans didn't have time. So, there we saw this scene ourselves, and of course, that scene changed my life. Then I realized what was happening. Men and boys, hundreds of them, all lying there dead, and the others walking around in a daze. Most of them really didn't know yet, comprehend what was happening. It was a horrible, horrible day and scene.

MH: What was the weather like? What was the day like?

BS: The weather? I don't remember it being severe. There was no snow or terribly cold. You know, at this point in time, it's almost like a bad dream. It's almost like—what is the word in art? Surreal. Then it sunk in, and I realized—and I talked with some of the officers in charge—that this was one of the death camps, too. And Landsberg was not the big camp, but it was just as bad.

MH: Did you talk to any of the inmates?

BS: We just said, "Hello, hi," and I tried in my Yiddish to say a few things, but they were not ready to communicate. They were in an absolute daze, you know? And they were emaciated, just nothing. I had one incident where that night, I happened to be on guard duty. In the early morning, there was a cry in German, "*Helfen mir, helfen mir.*" A bunch of the inmates in the striped pajama thing had caught one of the guards, and they were trying to kill him. And I just held my gun up, and the captain came out and heard the commotion. He said, "What's going on here?" and I told him, and he says, "They know

what they're doing. Leave them alone." They strung the guy up on a tree and killed him. They were wild.

MH: This is at night or daylight?

BS: This is early morning.

MH: So it's daylight.

BS: Right. Daylight.

MH: What do you mean, "They were wild"?

BS: They were wild. They were just—they had caught somebody that they recognized. He still had the corduroy-type boots on, whatever you call them, and they were—it was revenge, you know. It was revenge time. Like I say, they strung him up on a tree and that was the end of it. The captain said, "Leave them alone. They know very well what they're doing."

MH: How did these emaciated people manage that?

BS: Dozens of them, that's how. Just by number, just by number. I said the same thing, "Where'd they get this—?" I guess you get a certain strength when you emotionally go beyond your capacity, you know. That changed my life forever, because then I realized what was really happening, and then multiply that by all the other stories. And then, coincidentally, when I came back to the States, I and two other bachelors went to Temple Sholom in Chicago, and Betty was the first Jewish Dutch girl survivor. Like I say, either she went back to Holland or, if I married her, as a GI, she could stay legally. And that's what happened.

MH: Were you still a GI?

BS: No.

MH: No? Let me go back to Europe.

BS: All right.

MH: Can you describe that family, the three people? What did they look like? What were they wearing?

BS: Oh, yeah, sure. They were a handsome family. He was, I would say, around thirtyish. She was kind of a blondish, good-looking lady, and a very, very handsome little girl.

MH: How were they dressed?

BS: They were dressed fairly well that I can remember, nothing sensational either way. They were not in rags, not in tattered clothes, and they were not in evening gowns. They were just normal, very normal.

MH: Walking down the road.

BS: Right. And looking for a lift, you know.

MH: Did they appear desperate?

BS: No, they were very calm. They explained to me in Yiddish that they were underground and they were saved that way, and they want to get to the next town to make contact with somebody they know there.

MH: Were they carrying a suitcase?

BS: Yeah, he was carrying a little case of some kind. The rest is just kind of a hazy memory. But I know it happened, because then he gave me the photo, and on the back he wrote in Yiddish, "Thank you for helping us."

MH: And you still have the photo.

BS: Yes. Yes.

MH: This is now sixty-three, almost sixty-four years later. You're seeing all this stuff like it's a movie playing in your head.

BS: Right.

MH: It never goes away.

BS: Never goes away. Oh, no, oh, no. One nice thing is—sometimes you question yourself, because of the time distance. I'd mentioned this at the Holocaust Foundation when we were talking to a group there, and a guy jumps up and says, "That's exactly the way it was. I was there, too." And I felt so good, because it substantiated. Sometimes, you begin to question yourself because of the timeframe. Did it really happen that way? You know. And he jumped up and says, "That's right, that's exactly the way it happened," when I explained all the men and boys dead, lying in an open pit. And it did happen, no question about it. And, as I say, after that, everything just changed. You realize that it's the real thing.

MH: How does an experience like that change your life?

BS: Well, from a happy-go-lucky guy who was a bachelor without very many commitments, to suddenly realizing that your people from all the ages that you knew had persecution, and this was the worst of all. This was. When we heard multiple stories afterwards, when we heard "millions," you can do nothing else but think about it and change your whole attitude on being happy-go-lucky, free, you know, to a lot of responsibility. As a result of that, I got busy with the Jewish War Veterans. I got busy with Magen David Adom. My sister-in-law in Holland is very active; she's one of the big *machers* in Europe in the David Adom. And my wife, of course, has been very, very much into Judaism. Unfortunately, it [the Holocaust] left a scar on her. She's nervous now. She had nightmares all the time about—

MH: Where was she during the war?

BS: She had a wonderful, lucky experience, but it traumatized her forever. She was in the ghetto in Amsterdam. Luckily, her father was a fisherman and had gentile friends, and one of them came over there and said to her at the camp, "We're gonna get you out of here." She said, "Well, how?" He says, "Take off the star."

MH: She was already in the ghetto?

BS: Yeah, in the ghetto, right. She was in the ghetto. He said, “We’re gonna take off the star. You’re light, fair, blonde. Don’t look at anything. Just walk with me, and we’ll walk out of here.” He had a truck near the entrance. They walked out, believe it or not. She got into the truck. In the meantime, the church was the underground, and they arranged for her for a false passport with a false name with a corresponding age. And they took her, and—the man had volunteered to take a little girl. He was quite surprised when Betty walked in as an eighteen year old adult. And Betty took over the house. The woman was a very, very sick, mentally unstable lady. The man was a gem, never took a dime. You know, most of them, for whatever reason, took whatever they could. This man never took a dime. And we became very, very close. She used to call him “Pa.”

MH: Had she left her parents?

BS: This is interesting. Her parents, her mother and father, survived in a closet for two years, in an actual clothes closet.

MH: In Amsterdam.

BS: In Amsterdam. One brother survived in a false attic in a building with no heat during the winter, and the older brother was volunteered. The Germans came in and said, “We want young men of this age to do labor work,” and he said, “Well, I’m not worried about work. They’re gonna pay us. I can use the money,” and they never saw him again. And they found out later—I think he was killed at Sobibor.

MH: Your wife’s name back then was?

BS: Elisabeth.

MH: Elisabeth what?

BS: Elisabeth Knoop, K-n-double o-p, real Dutch.

MH: With the umlauts?

BS: No.

MH: No umlauts.

BS: That's German.

MH: That's German, okay. K-n-o-o-p.

BS: Right. Her father was a tough, tough guy, raised on the streets, no schooling, brilliant: a brilliant businessman. He's the one who realized this could've been a business, when he saw things happening with dealers who came from the States to buy in Holland. Suddenly, those dealers around the New York-Boston area, who came once a year, are coming about once a month and buying containers of art. He said to me, "Something's happening there. I want you to look into it." And I, of course, objected. I said, "You can't do business with artists. It can't be a legitimate business. You're dealing with a lot of temperamental guys." He says, "It's a business." And the next thing we knew, a container pulled up to our apartment in Budlong Woods, and we were in business. That's the kind of guy he was.

MH: And you live in a place that's surrounded with art, filled with art.

BS: Always, always. We've never had a freestanding home, and we've always lived with our business. Betty was a tremendous asset. She had this wonderful Dutch-American accent, and was a charmer. Between the two of us, I did pretty well as a salesman.

MH: You have children?

BS: Huh?

MH: Children?

BS: We have two: we have a boy and a girl. But we're having a very, very tough time now with Betty, physically and emotionally, and we got some help with us now, coming

over part-time; she just called. And there's a lady who's the head of a clinic of, uh—acupuncture, that's the word I'm looking for. She's coming to examine Betty and see if she can help her with that, and that's where we are now.

MH: Were you a religious person before you went in the service?

BS: Very Jewish, but not practicing religion. I'm not a great fan of rituals. I still think that's all manmade.

MH: Do you believe in God?

BS: I have a big question, after the camp.

MH: That's my question. Did you believe in God before the camp?

BS: Yes. Yes, and would always refer to "God help me," you know. I still have a feeling that there is something, but I have no knowledge of what it is. And after what I saw—

(phone rings) Excuse me.

Pause in recording

BS: My number-one daughter, who watches out for us. She cooks for us, she shops. Very lucky: we've got two great kids.

MH: So, to go back: before the camp, you did believe in God.

BS: Yes.

MH: Were you ever in a combat situation? I mean—

BS: Actual fighting?

MH: Yeah.

BS: No.

MH: No artillery coming in on you, that sort of thing?

BS: Yes, there was. Oh, yeah, we had artillery coming. Matter of fact, I was in a local hospital, and they hit it with artillery when one—it was in a U-shaped hospital, and one wing was bombed.

MH: Did you pray then?

BS: I was knocked out of bed. Oh, yeah, of course.

MH: You were in the hospital?

BS: Yeah.

MH: Why?

BS: I had stomach problems. I was really run down.

MH: Oh, okay. So, do you pray then?

BS: Oh, yeah. Oh, definitely. I still have the feeling, but because of what happened—in a discussion, for example, with a very Orthodox man, I said, “How could this be?” and he said, “No, I have faith,” and all that. I said, “Well, how could it be?” He said, “One of the reasons is that we didn’t follow all the laws of the Book.” I said, “What about a million and a half children? How can you reconcile children?” Can’t be more innocent than that. And there’s no answer. There’s no answer. “He knows best.”

You know, I envy people who have blind faith. I think that’s wonderful. No matter what you say or what happens, they believe. I question. I want to believe, but it’s very difficult. It’s very difficult. I was dead once for a short time. I have a heart problem. Nothing

happened. And I lead a very honorable, good life. Never cheated, never went the wrong route, and nothing happened.

MH: Have you run into people personally who say the Holocaust didn't happen?

BS: Well, the one who wrote the book in Northwestern University.

MH: [Arthur R.] Butz?

BS: Yeah. I fought with the university personally to try to get him fired, and of course, they said, "He has tenure." And I said to them, the president or whoever I talked to at the time—I really went after it very hard. I guess a lot of people did. And I said, "You mean to tell me if Adolf Hitler was here, if he had tenure, you wouldn't do anything?" No answer. But oh, yeah, I campaigned very hard to try to get him fired, and I couldn't. I think he's still there. "Mr. Butts," we called him. (laughs)

MH: Yes. You're very unusual in that, because of who you married, you live with the Holocaust for sixty—it's your sixty-second anniversary?

BS: That's right.

MH: Sixty-two years.

BS: That's right.

MH: I can't imagine having to cope with somebody who says, "That didn't happen."

BS: Well, I realize that there's such a thing as bitter anti-Semitism, for whatever reasons, you know. Who knows? That's a psychiatrist problem. But for whatever reason, there are and always will be anti-Semitism to such a point where they feel they have the advantage of time. We're dying off, and they can perpetuate the lie that it never really happened. All we want is money from it, and that was it. And, incidentally, getting money from that is not easy. Now, after sixty-some years, we may get a pittance from the German government, you know.

MH: Reparations.

BS: Reparations, right. We're involved in that now, but so far, not a dime. They want to take a lot of time. I wrote them a letter and asked—we got a letter of approval. Nothing happened for months, so I wrote them a letter. I never got a response.

Anti-Semitism is understood, and we fight it wherever we can. We belong to a lot of organizations who are in the fight, you know, including at one time that of Rabbi Marvin Hier in California, and people here. And we're as active as we can. Now, physically, she can't do anything. And I'm on the board of the Holocaust Foundation here in Skokie; we're just about building it. We'll be ready this spring, I hope. They've already accomplished over \$30-some million, and Mr. [J.B.] Pritzker is our chairman, so everybody feels, well, he'll pick up the slack.

MH: Out of his pocket change.

BS: Exactly, and petty cash. So, that's where we are. What are you doing? What do you do?

MH: I write books. This'll be my sixth book.

BS: Oh, how nice.

MH: I'm a Vietnam vet. I was an army combat correspondent in Vietnam.

BS: Oh, good for you.

MH: I was in television most of my life, and finally started writing my way out. I was embedded with Air Force pararescue guys in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

BS: Oh, boy.

MH: I said to my kids, "Don't worry, I'm not going to do anything stupid," and my son said, "You're Jewish. You're going to Pakistan. Does the name Daniel Pearl ring a bell?"

BS: (laughs)

MH: So, yeah, I went there and wrote a book called *None Braver*. I wrote—you know the Terri Schiavo case that was in the news?

BS: Oh, sure.

MH: I wrote Michael Schiavo's book; that was a *New York Times* bestseller.

BS: Oh, really? Terrific.

MH: And now I'm writing a book about *The Last Liberators: America's Final Witnesses to the Holocaust*. So, I've been interviewing guys like you.

BS: Right.

MH: You remember one more joke?

BS: Uh, yes. A fellow was living in a semi-rural district and was talking to a neighbor one day, and he [the neighbor] says, "How's things going?" He says, "I can't believe it. Here we live in a dairy country, and dairy products are so high priced. I never saw such prices." He [the neighbor] says, "Well, why don't you do what I do?" He said, "What is that?" [The neighbor] said "Buy a cow, and I'll teach you how to function with a cow."

So, he buys a cow, and things are working out fine. Sometime later, they meet again, and he [the neighbor] says, "How you doing?" He says, "Oh, I'm doing fine." He [the neighbor] says, "Would you like to even do better?" He says, "Sure, what?" He [the neighbor] says, "You buy a bull, and you'll be in the business. You'll be able to have calves and even make some money with it and have a nice existence with it." So, he buys a pedigree bull for a lot of money. He puts the bull out to pasture, and nothing happens. Every time the bull approaches the cow, the cow waltzes away.

So, he goes to the vet and he says, "Listen, I've got a problem here. I've got a lot of money invested in a bull, and we're hoping they mate and get calves. But every time the bull approaches the cow, the cow walks away." So, the veterinarian looks in his book and

thinks a while and says, “Wait a minute. Was that cow bought in Wisconsin?” He says, “Well, how in the heck would you know that?” He [the vet] says, “Because my wife is from Wisconsin.”

(both laugh)

MH: Oh, God!

BS: (laughs) We got a million of 'em!

MH: I see. Okay.

BS: I used to even tell a few Yiddish jokes.

MH: Yeah? In Yiddish?

BS: In Yiddish, broken Chicago Yiddish.

MH: Tell one. I'll see if I can understand it, or my mother will explain it to me.

BS: The *lakhedike khaye*, the laughing hyena. Okay? Have you heard this story?

MH: I don't think so.

[[Don't bother marking this for language or trying to figure it out.]]

BS: This is a classic story. Let's see. Yeah, Grandpa says to grandchild, “(Yiddish) to the zoo. (Yiddish) to the zoo.” So they walk into the zoo, and there's a guy standing there with a bullhorn, and he says, “Ladies and gentlemen, in a few minutes, there'll be a very interesting talk on the strange animal, the laughing hyena.” The old man don't hear too well, like me, and he says, “(Yiddish).” So, they stand there. Sure enough, they bring out a cage and they take off the cover, and this animal got this silly grin all the time.

He says, “Ladies and gentlemen, there are three very interesting things about this strange-looking animal, always looking like he’s laughing. The first thing is, he eats but once a month.” The old man says, “(Yiddish).” He [the zookeeper] says, “The second interesting thing about it, it excretes once a year.” He [the grandfather] says, “(Yiddish),” you know. Then he [the zookeeper] says, “The third and the most interesting thing about this animal is that it has intercourse but once a year.” He [the grandfather] says, “(Yiddish).”

So, the old man starts to *daven*. He says, “(Yiddish).” (both laugh) That’s a Jewish classic.²

MH: Say goodnight, Gracie.

End of interview

² The joke is about a child who takes a Jewish grandparent to the zoo, where they listen to a lecture about the laughing hyena. The grandparent does not understand much English, so the child repeats everything in Yiddish. The grandparent approves of the fact that the hyena seldom eats or excretes, but when told that it only mates once a year, asks, “What is there to laugh about?”