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Hans Max Krieger and Jeff Krieger oral history interview by Tori Chambers Lockler, December 10, 2009

Hans Max Krieger (Interviewee)

Tori Chambers Lockler (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's note: During the course of this interview, Mr. Krieger is often distracted by off camera murmurings from son Jeff Krieger and wife Della Krieger. As neither of the latter was wearing a microphone, their comments are inaudible and are thus not transcribed. Mr. Krieger's responses can be heard clearly and have been transcribed.]

Tori Chambers Lockler: Today is December 10, 2009. We are here with survivor Hans Max Krieger. My name is Tori Chambers Lockler. We are in Dunedin, Florida in Pinellas County in the United States. The language of the interview will be English, and our videographer is Jane Duncan. Could you please tell us your full name?

Hans Krieger: Hans Max Krieger.

TL: And can you spell your last name for us?

HK: Yes. K-r-i-e-g-e-r.

TL: Okay, thank you very much. And can we start with some information about your childhood, before the war began? Can you tell us where you were born?

HK: Yes. I was born in a town called Karlsruhe in Germany, the southern part of Germany, close to the Rhine [River].

TL: And can you spell the name of the town?

HK: Sure. K-a-r-l-s-r-u-h-e.

TL: Thank you.

HK: And the state, if you want to know the state, is Baden. B-a-d-e-n.

TL: Thank you. And can you tell us your father's name?

HK: Yes, my father's name was Sigmund. S-i-g-m-u-n-d.

TL: And your mother's name?

HK: Erna. E-r-n-a.

TL: Thank you. Do you remember her maiden name?

HK: Yes. Hochstetter. H-o-c-h-s-t-e-double-t-e-r.

TL: Thank you. And can you tell us what you remember from your very young childhood, before you were six years old? Do you remember anything about the town you lived in?

HK: Oh, yes. It was a very, very small town. And I was pretty active as a kid, you know, so I knew almost everything that was going on.

TL: And can you tell me how religious was your family?

HK: How religious? We are at the temple of (inaudible).

TL: Okay, so can you tell us—

HK: We had—

TL: Is it Orthodox, or—?

HK: No, no.

TL: Okay. And can you tell me, if you remember from your very young childhood, the presence of anti-Semitism in your town?

HK: Not at that—no, when I started going to school. Not at the beginning, but later on. But it wasn't that bad, you know.

TL: Okay. What year were you born?

HK: Twenty-two [1922].

TL: Will you tell us your whole birthdate?

HK: August 30, 1922.

TL: Okay, thank you. Can you tell us what your father did? What was his occupation?

HK: He was a cattle dealer.

TL: Okay. And your mother?

HK: My mother, well—she didn't work, but when she did work, she was a seamstress.

TL: Okay. Born in 1922, what is your earliest memory of the changing atmosphere that comes with the war?

HK: With the war? Well, during the school years, there was always problems. You could feel that something was going to happen, but it was very hard to say when or where, you know.

TL: Okay. What can you tell us about the town that you lived in? What can you tell us about being a child there?

HK: Well, like I said, my father passed away when I was six years old, so we more or less—my grandfather helped us out a lot, and I guess I had a normal life. (inaudible) a little bit in school. I wanted to become a veterinarian, so at the fifth grade I applied for it and I was accepted, which was unheard of. But three months later they told me to leave, so I had to go back to my public school for two years, and then they opened a Jewish school the place where I finished up my school year, my eight years.

TL: So, your father passed away when you were six.

HK: Yes.

TL: And then your grandfather helped take care of you?

HK: Yeah.

TL: And what was your grandfather's name?

HK: Karl.

TL: Karl? Okay. And did he live with you? Did he stay, or just—

HK: Not at the beginning, later on. My grandmother became very sick, so we then moved in together.

TL: Okay, and what was her name?

HK: Bertha.

TL: Would you spell that?

HK: B-e-r-t-h-a.

TL: Okay, thank you. Okay, so, you—in fifth grade, you were accepted into the—

HK: Gymnasium, they called it. Yeah.

TL: Okay, and then you were told to leave. Is that the only recollection of anti-Semitism within that school, or do you remember other examples of it?

HK: No, not really.

TL: Okay. Do you have any siblings? Any brothers or sisters?

HK: Oh, oh! I had a brother.

TL: You had a brother. Would you tell us his name?

HK: Otto.

TL: Otto, okay. And when was he born?

HK: He was three years—he was born in twenty-five [1925].

TL: So he was three years younger than you.

HK: Yeah.

TL: Okay, okay. Can you tell us a little about what happened next? You went to the Jewish school because you were told to leave school, and can you tell us from there what happened?

HK: Well, I finished school, and then there was absolutely nothing you could do. There was a Jewish man that had a little factory of something, hell, but there was absolutely nothing you could do. And then my grandfather got me in this farm school.

TL: So, when you say there was nothing you could do if you were Jewish?

HK: Yeah.

TL: No occupations, no—

HK: That didn't make any difference. Just was no future, period.

TL: Okay. So, your grandfather got you into the farm school. Can you tell us about that?

HK: Well, my grandfather had a very good friend, and his son was in the farm school, and somehow they got me—it was very difficult to get into, and went around accepting you out. You know, it was very difficult.

TL: And did you enjoy the school?

HK: Yeah. It was very strict. You know what, it was like—stricter than the army. What I found out later, you know. You had to get up at a certain time, do this at a certain time. Everything was done by the numbers.

TL: Can you tell us from there what happened next in your life, after the farm school?

HK: After the—well, I was at the farm school when Kristallnacht came along. Everybody that was seventeen and up went to concentration camps. And we were told, “Go home.”

TL: Can you tell us first, what was your experience of Kristallnacht?

HK: You know, the school was like an old castle. It had a hundred windows, you know what I mean? And it was just shocking, because there wasn't a window left in the place. The whole thing just happened so fast that you didn't have time to think about it. You know?

TL: What was the name of this school?

HK: [Jüdisches Auswandererlehrgut] Gross-Breesen.

TL: Gross-Breesen?

HK: Yeah.

TL: What else can you tell us about the school before Kristallnacht? What was your experience—

HK: Well, it was a very tough school, but it was not so bad for me because I was familiar with the animals, you know. We had—there were boys and girls in school. They were twelve and fifteen years older than I was. They went to very good schools, they made it into law school, but they didn't know how to milk a cow, you know.

TL: Did you have friends there? You were sixteen at that time.

HK: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

TL: So, it was a Jewish school.

HK: Yes.

TL: So, what do you remember, then, from Kristallnacht? Do you remember—you said that you remember all of the windows—there was nothing left standing in terms of all of the windows were broken. But do you remember the event? Do you remember soldiers

coming? Do you remember people breaking windows? Or do you just have the memory of the windows?

HK: Those were just regular Nazis—the Nazi uniforms. See, we were—in that school, we weren't—we didn't—we weren't allowed to associate with the neighbors. We were strictly by ourselves, you know?

TL: And who told you that? The school?

HK: Yeah.

TL: And was that because—

HK: They wanted to keep it that way. I think they saw it would be better, and I think it was better.

TL: Okay, so after Kristallnacht, they told—the Nazis told everyone from seventeen and up—

HK: No, the director from the school—when he found out that everybody from seventeen and up had to go to a concentration camp, we had to go home. There was—he gave the orders for that.

TL: So, because you were under seventeen, they sent you home.

HK: Yeah.

TL: And what did you—what was your experience of going home?

HK: Well, it was kind of weird, because everything happened so fast and you had to come home. I really don't know how to explain it, but just unbelievable.

TL: And who was there when you went home?

HK: My mother and my grandfather.

TL: Okay, and where was your brother at this time?

HK: Well, he was finishing up school.

TL: But he didn't go to school with you?

HK: No.

TL: Okay.

HK: But later on, after I left, he was accepted—he got into that school, and then he died in a concentration camp.

TL: So, you went home to your mother and your grandfather, and how long were you there?

HK: Not very long, because if I remember correctly—wait a minute now. I think we got a job on the farm, am I correct? We got a job on the—my friend and I we got a job on the farm in Virginia, and—what?

TL: Okay.

HK: No, he's shaking his head. (referring to his son, Jeff Krieger, who is off camera)

TL: No, no. Maybe—let's step back, because I think we've moved forward, so let's step back for just a minute. When you went home, and you came home to your mother and your grandfather, you were there for a few days?

HK: Yes.

TL: And then—okay. So, from there, why did you leave home?

HK: Well, I wanted to go back to the school.

TL: Okay.

HK: What?

TL: You were part of the Kindertransport?

HK: Yeah. But that was—that came afterwards.

TL: Okay. Okay, so tell us how we lead up to that.

HK: Well, we went to work on this farm in Virginia and we—finally, after three months or something, we get a day off. So, we went to New York, bragging about our job and how much we were making, and they said, “You’re crazy. You go back and tell them that you forget about the job, and you come to New York and we’ll see what we can do.”

TL: Okay.

HK: We went to New York and I had a couple jobs, very short while—in a factory, and then I became a private chauffeur for a doctor who was in charge of one of the big hospitals in New York, a German Jewish doctor. I was with him, just about a year before I got called into the army. I told him that if he can get somebody, I don’t mind leaving because I can get a job and he can bring somebody else in. But it just happened that way, and that’s where I ended up—in the gas station.

TL: Okay. Well, do me a favor: Tell me about your mother. What can you tell me about her?

HK: Well, my mother, she was a hardworking lady, and she had her hands full because her mother was sick, you know? I had grandparents from my father’s side, but they were no help. Once my father passed away, that was the end of it.

TL: Okay. So, if we can—if I can try to take you back for just a minute, after you left Gross-Breesen and went back home—you were part of the Kindertransport, right?

HK: Yes.

TL: What year was that? Do you remember?

HK: Nineteen—well, that was after the doctor and the gas station.

TL: Okay. Okay.

HK: Excuse me one second; can you shut it off a minute?

TL: Well, we always—we leave the tape running, but that's okay because we're gonna—it's okay, we're gonna work through the story so we'll—just stay with me and we'll work through the story, okay? Okay. It's okay, don't worry.

HK: Okay.

TL: You're doing a wonderful job. You're doing a wonderful job. Okay?

HK: Okay.

TL: Okay, all right. So, why don't we do this? Talk to me about the army, and then we'll go from there, okay?

HK: The army?

TL: Yes. You worked for the doctor, and then you joined the army.

HK: Yeah, I went in the army.

TL: Okay. Talk to me about that.

HK: Well, I was looking forward to going to the army. I had no idea what it would be like. I went for my basic training, and after the basic training I was assigned to a regiment right away. My regiment was the 5th Infantry Regiment, and I think either the fifth or the sixth oldest unit in the country.¹ I ended up—don't ask me why, but I ended up in the wire company. I worked as a wireman. It didn't take long, only about six weeks, when I was made sergeant, but I blew that because they caught me gambling with a private and they took my stripes away.

TL: Oh.

HK: You know, we went and—(mumbling) can you help me here? We went to several camps, you know: Fort Benning, Georgia; Fort Dix, New Jersey, and so on. And then, finally, we got ready to go overseas.

TL: And where were you supposed to go when you went overseas?

HK: Where was I—we didn't know where we were going.

TL: Okay.

HK: But we ended up in France.

TL: Where did—is that where you wanted to go?

HK: I wanted to go to Europe.

TL: Okay.

HK: We ended up in France and then we fought our way through France, across the Rhine, and when we crossed the Rhine it was only about twenty-five stadium widths

¹ The 5th Infantry Regiment is the third-oldest American infantry regiment. During World War II, it was a part of the 71st Infantry Division.

from where I lived. I had—my mother's sister was married to a gentile, and they had a daughter that was three years younger than I was.

TL: It's okay; you're doing a great job. No, no, no. You're doing a wonderful job. Okay, so your mother's sister—

HK: Yeah, so anyway—

TL: So you—

HK: We stayed overnight very, very close to my old hometown, but there was no way of getting there, okay? So, we fought through along the Rhine until we got to Austria, and then we liberated the concentration camp and met the Russians. And then, after the war was over, after a very, very short while, we were transferred to Augsburg, Germany.

TL: Can you tell me about the experience of liberating the camp?

HK: The what?

TL: Liberating the camp.

HK: Oh. I want to tell you something: you can see it in television, you can read about it—no matter, but when you walk in there—by the way, my grandma didn't want me to go in, but I insisted because I thought, "Who knows, maybe I'll meet one of my relatives," you know? But anyway, it was just horrible: people crawling on the floor because they couldn't sit up anymore, and it was awful. And dead people piled up as high as you can pile up. Terrible.

TL: Do you remember what camp it was?

HK: Yeah. Gunskirchen.

TL: Can you spell that?

HK: G-u-n-s-k-i-r-c-h-e-n.

TL: Okay. So, once—how long were you there? How long were you liberating the camp? Were you there for more than a day? How was your experience?

HK: No, no, no, no. No, just maybe half a day or so. Then we went right on.

TL: Okay, and where did you go from there?

HK: Then we met the Russians, stayed a couple more days, and then we got transferred to Augsburg, which was in Bavaria, which was about 200 miles from where I lived, and that was strictly army occupation. And I had a very good Englishman colonel, and I said, “Colonel, we’re so close, so close to home now, and I would really like to know what happened to my aunt and my niece.” He says, “Well, I tell you what, you go and I’ll give you transportation. But if you get caught, I don’t want to know anything about it.” Fair enough.

So I went, and I went to my uncle—where they lived when I left. He came to the door and his head was all bandaged up, and he collapsed in my arms. Told me what happened. Just about the time that we were close to my home, two weeks before, they came one night and they said they were gonna pick up his wife and his daughter up the next morning. So, they decided to commit suicide. My uncle shot his daughter and shot his wife, but his bullet went right through his head, and he was alive. So, first I said, “Maybe I should have stayed away,” you know. But anyway, I was only out of this town about three and a half, four years.

So, the next morning, I’m on the street, and everybody recognized me right away, but I had my uniform on, you know. And I’m talking to somebody, and lo and behold, one of the biggest Nazis in town comes walking along. He always used to say he’s gonna take the Jews and put them on a wheelbarrow and ship them to Palästina—means Israel. Well, I beat the idea out of him, and I told somebody there to just go home, tell his wife to bring a wheelbarrow, and take him home.

By the time I got back to my uncle’s house, the MPs were waiting for me. “Soldier, what are you doing here?” Blah, blah, blah. “We have to take you to headquarters.” Headquarters happened to be my old teacher’s house. And I said to myself, “I’m gonna level with—if you’re any kind of person, you’ll understand, and everything will be all right.” So I go in “What are you doing here?” And I tell them I used to live here, this happened to be my old teacher’s house, and I told them, you know, what happened the

night before. And he said to me, “How long—can you stay here a little bit? How’re you gonna get back?” I said, “I don’t know.” He says, “Well, stay here a little bit and help us clean up a few, and then we’ll give you a ride back.” Guess what happened? They gave me a ride back to Augsburg.

TL: What did he mean, clean up a few?

HK: Pick up a few Nazis.

TL: So, what did he want you to do with them?

HK: No, he just wanted me to point them out—

TL: Point them out?

HK: And he took care of the rest of it.

TL: And then he gave you transportation back to Augsburg?

HK: Back to Augsburg.

TL: And what happened from there?

HK: Well, in Augsburg I started—I think I told you this. Before we left for Germany, we were in Fort Dix, and there was a change of command. The gentleman who was in charge found out that they kept the baseball players there, and he said, “The next odd trip that’s going out, get going.” So, we inherited all the baseball players. After the war was over, one of the captains said, “Now let’s find a place where we can play and everything.” To make a long story short, we won the European championship.

TL: Okay, so, before—because I want to hear more about that—before that, can you tell me what you remember from the very end of the war?

HK: Well, all I can say to you is everybody was very happy that it was over, and

everybody wanted to go home right away. You know.

TL: And can you tell me what happened to your mother?

HK: My—no. All I know is that she—my combat—my father had two brothers. The first one passed away in World War I. He passed away when he was at a young age. And the other brother was deaf and dumb, but he became a very big artist. He ended up in the concentration camp with my mother, and they both got killed there.

TL: So you lost your mother, your uncle, your grandfather?

HK: Oh, yeah. My grandfather, yeah.

TL: Did you—was he in a concentration camp?

HK: Yeah.

TL: And then—

HK: And you know what we found later on—that all the Jews' cemeteries were destroyed, but the cemetery where my grandparents and my father was buried—it was still in place when we went to visit.

TL: Okay. And what was the last time—so, the last time you saw your mother was—

HK: When I left for the Kindertransport, yeah.

TL: Can you tell me some about that?

HK: Well, you know, the Kindertransport was a lot of *kinders* [children], and everybody was very upset because they didn't know where they were going and why and what have you. But I—we first went in a big camp. I—don't remember. I think he was called Lord Krishna Camp, if I'm not mistaken. And from there, they tried to put you with families, or in school or on the job. I was—I got a job with a widow on the farm, and I went to

work on the farm and stayed until I had my papers ready to come to the United States.

TL: (whispering) Okay, okay. (to videographer) How are we on time? Okay, great. Okay. (to HK) Now, if you'll tell me more about the baseball team?

HK: Well, I tell you, Jeff showed me long story that somebody—a newspaper man from *Euro Times*. We had a lot of big baseball players, and the stadium we got was a soccer stadium. And I got very friendly with one of the soccer players that used to be on the German team. We became very friendly, and—just between you and I, I didn't have to sleep in the barracks or eat like—it was like home. I mean, they were Germans, but still, I knew a little bit about their background.

TL: So, what—tell me about it. Tell me about your roll in organizing and playing and—

HK: Well, my role was just to get everything done—like in the later day, the wall had to come down, so I had to go and get someone to knock the wall down, and things like that.

TL: And then you said that you won—what was the game that you won?

HK: I forget which team it was, but it was the European championship.

TL: The European championship. Okay, and what do you remember next? What happened after that in your life?

HK: Well, when I got discharged, I signed up for the Nuremberg Trials. And I came home, waiting to go to the trials. That's when I met my wife. After ten days we were engaged, and after three months we were married, and I didn't go back. (laughs)

TL: Um, can you tell us your wife's name?

HK: Della.

TL: And how did you meet?

HK: I think we met in a friend's house. Yeah.

TL: And why didn't you go back for the trials after you met her? Do you remember?

HK: She—her brother said, "There's no way that she can go back to Germany." And that was the end of it.

TL: Do you remember what year that was?

HK: I believe it was 1946. Am I right?

TL: Tell me what happened next, after you got married. You got married after 3 months of knowing each other, and then what?

HK: Then I'm trying to find a job. I didn't have a, you know, I never did anything. So I went and worked in that gas station. They took me—two brothers. It was a pretty good-sized station. And I became like the manager, and (inaudible). You know. And, well, it went on for quite a few years. And then one day, I found out that the station up the street is—they're looking for a manager, so I quit the job and I took the manager's job and I took most of the customers away from my old bosses. And then they came along, they said, "Gee, you do such a wonderful job. We're building a new station down the street. Would you be interested?" I said, "Yeah, why not?" So I took over that station, and in the meantime I had the other one, and I took over one more. And then, here I was with three stations, and my old bosses, they were just—went out of business. And one day, they sent somebody over to me, and they wanted to know if I would be interested in renting their station. And I said, "No way. The only thing I would be interested in is buying the place." And that's what happened. So, then I had four places. (laughs) I got rid of three, and I ended up in that place.

TL: And did you have children at this time?

HK: Yes, I think, yeah.

TL: Tell us about your children.

HK: Pardon?

TL: Tell us, how many children do you have?

HK: Right there (indicates Jeff). And we had—and we lost one.

TL: So, tell us, is it a son or daughter?

HK: A daught—a son.

TL: A son. And what's your son's name?

HK: Jeff.

TL: Jeff. Okay, thank you. And what year was he born?

HK: He has a birthday this month. (to son) What year was it, Jeff?

Jeff Krieger: Fifty-three [1953].

HK: Fifty-three [1953].

TL: Nineteen fifty-three. All right. And tell us a little bit about what happened after. So now you have one station—

HK: Yeah.

TL: And tell us a little bit about what happened after.

HK: Well, I—we did pretty well, you know. And Jeff wanted to come into the business, and I had some other fellas there, and I thought maybe I was old enough to retire.
(laughs)

TL: And this was—where was this?

HK: New Rochelle, New York.

TL: Okay, so this was in New Rochelle, New York.

HK: Yes.

TL: And how long were you there? That was up until—

HK: Well, forty-si—I'm just counting the time after the, you know—

TL: Right.

HK: Nineteen forty-six, and we moved down here—be here twenty-five years.

TL: Okay.

HK: And there was the time between New Rochelle.

TL: Okay, so how did you go from New Rochelle here?

HK: I had a very good friend, a gentile, and he had a young family and he was in the same business that I was in. And he decided to retire. He rode all over the country by the safest city or whatever, but anyway, up came Dunedin. So, he sold his house, sold the business, and he came to Florida. And we used to come down and visit him. The Ku Klux Klan was still here; there was no temple, no nothing. So, he said to me, "Why don't you move down?" I say, "Shucks, I can't." Well, anyway, three or four years went by, and he called me up one morning. He says, "Hans, you better make up your mind. They don't say, 'The Yanks are coming' anymore; they say, 'The Jews are coming.'" And that's how we came down here.

TL: And tell us—you were talking about the Ku Klux Klan being here before you moved

here. What is your experience with anti-Semitism as an adult, after the war ended?

HK: Nothing here, no.

TL: No. How about in New York?

HK: No.

TL: No. Okay. And do you belong to a temple here? Are you religious?

HK: Yes, I go to temple. Ahavat Shalom.

TL: Okay. And—

HK: I have been very active there.

TL: Tell us about that.

HK: When I first came, there was another fella like me. We used to—and the temple had—they really had nothing, you know. We used to clean the place: the halls, the toilet, everything. And we started a bingo game and we helped in that, and I became very active. I became the manager, and that lasted quite a while. And then we opened up a preschool, and then they came and said, “Either you have to give up the bingo or the preschool. We can’t have both.” So, naturally, as far as the temple was concerned we had to give up the bingo. The rabbi asked me, “You’ve been doing a good job with bingo. How about staying on and become the grandpa or something?” And that’s when they called it the Krieger Early Childhood Center. And I’ve been there ever since. I go up there every morning. My wife complains because I go at seven o’clock, but I go there.

TL: And what do you—

HK: And that’s what keeps me going.

TL: What do you do there?

HK: Just greet the kids in the morning, and used to give them a piece of chocolate and a mother complained, and I—lollipops. They'd complain. And then I give them stickers and they complained, and now I'm down to pretzels.

TL: (laughs) So, what are the children like?

HK: Oh, they're wonderful. They need a little attention. Some of those kids, they don't get any attention, you know. A four—a three or four year-old comes through at eight o'clock in the morning and gets picked up at six o'clock at night.

TL: So, how is their—the children's relationship with you?

HK: Very good. I'm Mr. Hans. No problem.

TL: Good. So you go up there once a day, every day, almost every day?

HK: No, I usually—from a little before seven and I'm home by ten, unless there is something special going on.

TL: Tell us about what the children gave you.

HK: What they gave—

TL: The cards and the—

HK: Huh?

TL: The cards and—

HK: Oh, oh, oh! Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, they have—yeah, that was very, very good.

TL: What is it? What did they give you?

HK: A big—what would you call it? A big piece of—like a picture with all their little faces on it. You can go out there and just take a look at it.

TL: And you said that's what keeps you going?

HK: Yeah.

TL: All their faces?

HK: Yeah, yeah.

TL: All right. So, maybe—I'm wondering how you would feel about us moving backwards in your story a little and just seeing if I can ask you just a few other questions. Would that be okay?

HK: Yeah.

TL: Okay.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins.

TL: Okay, I'm Tori Chambers Lockler, and this is tape two with Hans Max Krieger. Mr. Krieger, at the end of the last tape, I said, "If it's okay with you, I'd like to try to take you back some." I know that there was a documentary made about Gross-Breesen, and I was wondering if you could tell us a little about what a day looked like.

HK: A day in Gross-Breesen was all planned. It was—we'd get up in the morning, take a shower, go for breakfast, and after breakfast, we went to work. You were assigned some work: gardening, some for other things, some for the cows—dairy. Then came lunchtime, and then we went to work again. Then in the evening, most of the time we had to learn—like school, you know. So, we got very little time off. It was very, very strict.

TL: So, it was a very strict school, but you—do you have good memories from it?

HK: Oh, yes, yeah. But it all paid off, you know?

TL: And I have a question about after you left Gross-Breesen—this was after Kristallnacht—you went home, you said. They sent you home. Who from there sent you home? Was it the director of the school?

HK: Yes. Whoever—the board of directors might have been in concentration camp. Whoever was in charge then was the one who told us to go home.

TL: Because everybody over seventeen—

HK: They took—they were gone already. They took them right away.

TL: And then, once you went back home, you told us that you saw your mother and your grandfather, and that you were there for a very short time. And then, what happened from there?

HK: They got me on the Kindertransport.

TL: So, if we can maybe talk about that for just a few minutes. What was your experience of the Kindertransport like?

HK: Well, you know, that's another thing. It happened so fast and so quick—maybe I should say it was very confusing, because we didn't know what was gonna happen, where we were going. You know, in the back of my mind I already had come to this country. But there was nothing we could do. Lucky to be alive.

TL: And you were still very young, at sixteen. What was your experience like with the other children on the Kindertransport, all having to leave their families?

HK: We weren't—you know, it's funny. We weren't together that long and that much, you know, and everybody had their own mind going.

TL: And where did the Kindertransport take you?

HK: Uh, I think it was London. Yeah.

TL: Okay. So, did it take you directly to England, or—where did you go when you got off the Kindertransport? You came across—

HK: I think—if I remember correctly, we got on to another train and we went to—what did I say? Yeah.

TL: So, can you tell us a little bit—you mentioned the name of the camp earlier, that it was a children's camp.

HK: Lord Krishna.

TL: Okay, can you tell us about that? How long were you there?

HK: Very short time.

TL: Okay, all right.

HK: Very short time.

TL: And—

HK: And everybody was wanting to know, “Where—when are we going to get out and where are we going?” That's the best way I can explain it. And there wasn't enough time to get together, like maybe start a team or something like that. It couldn't be done.

TL: And from the children's camp, where did you go?

HK: To the dairy farm.

TL: Okay. And that was in England, as well?

HK: (inaudible)

TL: Tell me about that. How long were you there?

HK: A little over a year.

TL: Okay. And what was that like?

HK: It was okay. I mean, once I got used to my routine and my work and that was it.

TL: What about people you knew there? Friends you may have had there?

HK: I got to know some people, but it was very difficult, you know.

TL: Difficult because?

HK: There was—there were all the language barriers and all.

TL: Okay, okay. So, they brought people in from all over, from different places, to this farm?

HK: Well, most—a lot of places from Europe, yeah.

TL: So, you were there for about a year. Now, during—

HK: On the farm.

TL: The farm, mm-hm. And during that time—I'd like to know a little more about what

was happening with your brother, because during that time, your brother wasn't with you. So, where was your brother during that time?

HK: I really don't know.

TL: You don't know? Was he in school somewhere?

HK: As far as—to the best of my knowledge, he was in Gross-Breesen, in school.

TL: Okay. So, after you had been transported from Gross-Breesen, sometime shortly thereafter, within a year to a few years, your brother was taken there to go to school.

HK: Yeah.

TL: And then from—

HK: From there to the concentration camp.

TL: So they rounded—

HK: Yeah. There were very few after that—Kristallnacht—very few that started got out alive.

TL: Okay. Okay, thank you. And from the farm in England, you told us earlier that you then came to the United States?

HK: (murmurs in agreement).

TL: How did you come to the United States? What did you have to have to get here?

HK: I had—no, no. I had my papers. I just had to wait till my number came up, you know.

TL: Okay, all right.

HK: And then when I got to the United States, I didn't have enough money for bus fare to go to Virginia.

TL: And what was in Virginia? Why were you going to Virginia?

HK: Hyde Farmland.

TL: Okay, tell me about that.

HK: Well, Hyde Farmland was a rundown farm that was bought for forty of us—thirty boys and ten girls—by Mr. [William B.] Thalhimer.² And we went there and we were all trying to get out from there and do something, and so it took almost a year before we got out.

TL: So the—you came—that's what you came to the United States for, was to go to Virginia for this farm.

HK: Yeah, that's how I got out.

TL: Okay, and the person that started this farm, Mr. Thalhimer? The children, or the—sixteen, seventeen, eighteen year olds is, I'm guessing, the age that he brought over?

HK: Well, I was one of the youngest, yeah.

TL: Okay, and was everyone from the same area in England?

HK: No, we were all from Gross-Breesen.

TL: Okay. So, he—can you tell me how he contacted or how you found out about this farm?

² William B. Thalhimer and his cousin Morton purchased the Hyde Farmland in Burkeville, Virginia.

HK: I really don't know how that went, but he owned a very, very big department store [Thalhimer's] in Richmond [Virginia].

TL: So, he had a farm that you worked on for, you said, a little over a year?

HK: Yeah.

TL: Okay. Now, you told us earlier that you then joined the military—the army in the United States.

HK: Yes, I tried, but they wouldn't—you had to wait your turn.

TL: Okay. Why did they—why did you have to do that? Why did they stop you from joining?

HK: Because I wasn't a citizen.

TL: Okay, because you weren't a citizen of the United States?

HK: And I think—if I'm not mistaken, I also was a little too young.

TL: Okay, so you were right on the edge of the age—

HK: On the—yeah.

TL: And then, because you were not a citizen of the United States—so you attempted to join and they—did they turn you down? Or did they just tell you you had to wait?

HK: No, they just said, "We can't accept you. You have to wait." You know.

TL: Okay. And what happens next? How did you get into the army then?

HK: Pardon?

TL: How did you get into the army, then, if they had said that?

HK: Well, I—you know, I had to wait until I got drafted. When I got drafted, I got in.

TL: So—okay, so they had turned you down but then they drafted you.

HK: Yeah.

TL: Okay. All right. And you told us then, as we carry forward in this story, about your basic training in the United States, and then you were sent to Europe, right?

HK: To what?

TL: In the military—

HK: Yeah—

TL: You did your basic training here in the United States—

HK: Oh, yes.

TL: —and then they sent you to Europe.

HK: Yeah.

TL: Okay. Were there any other locations that they were supposed to send you? Because you mentioned that you were cho—that you wanted to go to Europe.

HK: Yeah. No, no, no, that's it. We went—my outfit went to Europe.

TL: Okay. Okay. And can you tell me why you wanted to go to Europe? You talked—

HK: Well, I wanted—yes. I wanted to get even, yes.

TL: Okay, all right. And then we've talked some about—

HK: (inaudible).

TL: Go—please—

HK: They tried—they tried not to send you to Europe.

TL: Okay. Why is that?

HK: I guess they thought maybe there would be a lot more trouble, you know?

TL: Okay. Where were they going to send you instead?

HK: I don't know. They could have sent me to Japan or God knows where.

TL: Okay. Did you request to go to Europe?

HK: Pardon?

TL: Did you ask to go to Europe?

HK: Yes.

TL: Okay.

HK: And my colonel said, “If we’re going to Europe, you’re going to Europe.”

TL: Okay. And then you talked to us—we walked through the experiences that you had in the military in Europe. You talked to us some about meeting—going back and seeing your uncle and hearing his story, and then you also talked to us some about the liberation of the camp. And then—once the war ended, you talked to us about your return to the United States. So, what I want to ask you is: you’ve a very interesting story that starts with being a Jewish child who is experiencing anti-Semitism and who experiences Kristallnacht, you went on the Kindertransport, you then became a liberator of a camp, you have this very broad experience. Looking back, how do you feel about that now?

HK: Well, I was glad that I was there, that I could help to liberate the camp, but sometimes (inaudible) what was I really doing there—to see this—to bring it—to bring the whole thing back, you know? Same thing happened to my fath—my grandfather and my mother and my brother, and it was just a horrible sight. I would have been better off if I wouldn’t have seen it, I think. But I wanted to see it.

TL: Okay. And you talked to us some about after the war and meeting your wife and being in the United States, and some of your job that you did here by owning the gas station. What I want you to do, if it’s okay, is just tell us some about your life with your temple. You talked to us about the preschool that was started. You’ve been a member of the temple for how long, now that you’re in Florida?

HK: Twenty-five years.

TL: Twenty-five years?

HK: Yeah. Yeah. At least twenty-five, could be twenty-six.

TL: Okay.

HK: I came to the temple, I think, just two or three months before the rabbi came.
(laughs)

TL: Okay. And you—

HK: And I—and, you know, I really don't know why I didn't go back on another job. But I got busy with the temple and I liked it so I said, "Why change?" You know?

TL: What roles did you play in the temple?

HK: Well, the main thing—that I was on the board for one thing, and I was running bingo, which was the income. Period. And then—the kids.

TL: Okay, I guess my last question for you is: after everything you experienced, and then being with these children with this preschool, what message would you leave them with?

HK: What? What?

TL: What message would you give these children from your experiences?

HK: You know, they're too young to tell them anything; they wouldn't understand, you know. But just a background to see how they're treated, you can tell how they're treated at home. Like I said to you this morning, they come at eight o'clock and go home at six [o'clock]. You know, that's tough on them, but this place is a whole world change. You know, today, if you want to send your kid to preschool or something, both mommy and daddy have to go to work. It wasn't like that years ago.

TL: All right. Well, thank you very much for everything, for sharing with us.

Part 2 ends; part 3 begins.

TL: We have invited Mr. Krieger's son, Jeff, so maybe if you'll start talking to us and read us the piece that you've written on the experience.

JK: Well in 1997, I was going through a career change and had decided to leave the automotive business and go back to school for a masters in counseling. At that time, my parents were—had moved down here and came back for a visit, and he—they were invited to a reunion of this farm school, the Gross-Breesen school, and he asked—one of the requests before that visit was that they put together a little bio of what they had been doing since the war. And my father sat me down and for the first time opened up about

his experience with that farm school, and then leading to the army and then, ultimately, being part of a unit that liberated a concentration camp. At that moment just—something happened to me—I guess, to use a cliché, the light went on, or just—it was a moment that was very powerful. So, I went up to my room and then wrote this poem. And I entitled it “Victim of Survival,” and I wrote this through his eyes—me experiencing what he experienced through his eyes.

As a Jew born in Germany, religious persecution forced me to leave in 1938.
I was an adolescent consumed with anger.
As a soldier in the United States Army Special Forces, religious freedom allowed me to return.
I was a man filled with pain.
Confusion grew from the chaos that surrounded me, yet I found myself with focus and a purpose.
Clearly this mission, late in May 1945, would set me free from my world and rage.
But nothing from either my past or my present had prepared me for the misery yet to unfold.
Innocence had helped me to hold onto hopes that my family and friends somehow survived their own internment.
Now, experience helped me to hope that my loved ones perished early in their miseries.

I had always thought that denial was a sign of weakness, but why couldn't this all be nothing more than my mind playing morbid tricks?
Recently, I often question my faith in the higher power—the definitive answer now awaited me in this Nazi death camp.
Only spiritual strength could have sustained Jewish life here.
Joy in believing I had rescued these survivors, giving them back life, was distorted, realizing with horror that this atrocity was committed with total disregard for life.
Moments of self-pride turned to embarrassment as I reflected on periods of self-pity.
My sense of accomplishment was immediately crushed as I attempted to carry some of the weight they were burdened with.
I wondered why, although I had always been able to express emotions and feel compassion, as I was greeted with tears—I was too numb to shed one.
How quickly I realized a fragile line had existed between invincibility and vulnerability.
But how long it took for me to see it.
As I learned about the sanctity of life from those who had little left in their tortured bodies, I was taught a powerful lesson from souls who had no strength to speak.
The energy in my arms that had never failed me during violent battles now trembled as I offered serenity while holding death in my arms.
The legs that carried me for days without rest now buckled remaining motionless.
While walking skeletons reached out for me.

My battles leading to the liberation of this Bavarian death camp in the woods of

Gunskirchen were of little valor compared to their desperate struggles.
For my efforts I received medals as sign of my heroic actions in the face of
overwhelming odds.
How fortunate I was to have survived this hell.
How unfortunate to have witnessed it.
I was not a war hero, just a lucky participant.
Avoiding death in battle may imply a clear victory; clearly there were no winners in this
confrontation, only survivors.
Often my thoughts centered on where my destiny would lead me. I was eager to start a
new way and different traditions.
From piles of corpses I gained tremendous awareness of my Jewish heritage and a
direction.
Returning to America I was desperate to renew old ones.
As I share the Holocaust story with young people I realize and accept my destiny.
The passion that fueled my warrior spirit had to be redirected towards finding peace.
As I helped the injured, I knew I would need time to heal.
As I buried the dead, I fought with my emotions.
I rejoiced at having a second chance at life.
Was distressed knowing part of me had died.
Those images never fade.
Time only heals—seems to intensify them for the future.
So, through the years, I've lived my life as one of the victims of survival.

TL: (to HK) Mr. Krieger, hearing that, how do you feel about that?

HK: Well, I—

TL: Do you feel like it's—

JK: I think it was more helpful to me, writing it, because it opened up a lot of doors and it
kind of connected some of the dots. Growing up, that there were so many questions, you
know, so many elephants in the room that no one wanted to talk about. So, this gave me
an opportunity to ask questions and to get some answers and kind of really start a process
in me that allowed me to begin to understand what they had gone through.

TL: So 1997 was the first time that anything had actually been said about this experience.

JK: Right. And then I went—I think the following year I actually went to one of these
reunions and participated in that and that was full of emotion and I sat there and just kind
of took it all in. But it also gave me the opportunity to speak with—there were several

other second generation people there: peers from my generation, who I met for the first time. [We] started to share our stories, and I realized that, “That’s how I felt,” and, “That’s what I went through.” So, it was finally good—you know, it was helpful to me, because when I was growing up—I’m first generation born in this country. I didn’t know too many others that—most of my friends that I had grown up with, most of the people that I knew through his line of work had been second, third, fourth generation, had been here for many generations, so I really didn’t have an opportunity to share that experience with too many other people. And, being an only child, there was no sibling to bounce it off of. So there was that whole component.

TL: (to HK) Mr. Krieger, can I ask you why did you wait so long to share your experience with your son?

HK: Well, you know, you don’t want to talk about it, because it was bad enough the way it was. And I just felt like the less you talk about it, the better off you are.

TL: Okay.

JK: But I will say that one of—looking back, one of the really important lessons I learned from them, without them ever having to lecture me about it, was to never discriminate, to embrace people for who they were. And we had—I lived in a very culturally diverse community, and although there was a pocket of—there was a small—very strong Jewish community, the city that we lived in was culturally diverse, racially diverse, and I grew up being friends with every ethnicity you could think of. They were always welcome in our house; there were never limits to who I could be friends with or who would we employ. So, that lesson, I learned early in life, and it was not—that concept was not something that was shared by everybody I grew up with. We had a gas station in what you might want to call a blue-collar environment; there was a lot of prejudice, a lot of racism, within that community and it was not tolerated in front of us as a family. So, that was important.

TL: And, as a child that grew up with parents that survived the Holocaust, you’re talking about the diversity in your community. But do you remember, maybe outside of that immediate community, experiences of anti-Semitism yourself?

JK: Absolutely. Again, growing up with families of other ethnicities and religions, there were always comments. You know, one of the more common stereotypes about Jews is that they’re cheap and they like to bargain. Growing up, I used to always hear, “He Jewed me down,” meaning that they talked someone down on the price of something or they tried to get something for nothing.

There was—I also struggled with a lot of my peers. Jewish peers were—with all due respect, were nerds. (laughs) You know, they were not blue-collar people. So, there was a lot of that type of prejudice in my community. “Your father is—what does your father do for a living?” “Well, he owns a gas station.” Well, most of my peers, there were doctors, lawyers, professors, CEOs. But I never lacked for anything in my lifetime. And so, there was that kind of discrimination, which really to this day bothers me, because there’s still so much of that out there.

So, there was that type of discrimination. Once I got into the working world, there was still times where I knew people were not hired based on the color of their skin. In my case, I did lose one job. I was hired by this gentleman—I won’t mention his ethnicity or his race, but when he found out that I was Jewish, he found a reason to terminate me. So, it still exists in this world. It’s out there.

TL: (to HK) You have shared your story with your son. Do you continue, now that you’ve shared it with your son, to share your story?

HK: Yeah, with my wife—my wife has to get in on the out—

JK: No, what—

TL: Can’t hear—

JK: I think what your asking is, does he share his story? He goes and he has spoken to two youth groups, to religious school groups, to visitors to the Florida Holocaust Museum. But, as you can tell, it’s getting harder and harder to put the thoughts together. So, that’s why it’s important for my generation to keep the story—keep the message going. But it gets—it gets harder and harder to find an audience. So, that’s why a project like this, I can really support and appreciate. But I’ve gotta tell you that, as a Jewish community, my personal feeling is that we need to do a much better job of celebrating their lives and educating the younger generations about what their sacrifices and what their experiences were. Because it really—until you really sit down and try and understand it, you can’t even wrap your arms around it. That’s how overwhelming it is.

TL: We’ve been talking about this school that Mr. Krieger went to. Can you tell us anything about the school or about—since that was your first experience—

JK: Well, when I—yeah, at first I thought it was—my first reaction, when he told me about it, was that it was some type of a labor camp that Jewish children had to go to. It was quite the opposite. It was something that you had to be—that you had to apply for; you had to be accepted with really strict criteria as to who is allowed in and who is not. And once they got there—it was really a movement, it was a philosophy, a way of life for young Jewish children and adults so that they would be able to become leaders in the world. So, there was emphasis on skill build—on using your hands, on using your—being physically fit, morally straight, having appreciation for the arts, and really communicating.

One of the most amazing things is that one of the gentlemen that went to Gross-Breesen ended up stay—and then went into the U.S. Army—ended up being—staying in the army, career. Ended up being—he retired a general, is he? Colonel.

HK: Colonel.

JK: Colonel. Colonel. I'll never forget this. He went to—he ended up retiring as a full-bird colonel with a thick German accent. I mean, he never lost his accent. But the most amazing thing was, in that very room right there, right before he passed away, he came to visit my parents. And he said to me—here's a guy who's been—war was his life. And he said to me, "I went through World War II, I went through Korea, I went through Vietnam," and he said the most difficult thing in his life was what he went through liberating a couple of the camps. "And that whole experience," he said, "nothing that will ever be as painful as—" and he sat there and he cried like a baby. I was blown away. He passed several months after that, so I'm glad I had the opportunity to get to know him. But, you know, there was a guy who never lost—he had the utmost respect for this gentleman, Curt Bondy, who was the director of the school, and to him, he was an idol. All of them—I mean, you all felt that way about this guy. He had a vision, and unfortunately, he ran out of time, because I think he could have been—he had some wonderful ideas. Bad timing.

All these people from the school, that I met, went on to be very, very involved in their communities. That's one thing that he didn't mention, and that I learned from him, is that—give back to the community. He was—growing up, he was involved in all sorts of service organizations. He was involved in his Service Station Dealers Association—Service Station Dealers Association. So, helping other people new in the business, giving back, was an important part of that lifestyle. That was another message that was promoted at the school. The older I get, the more I see what an impact that school has had on my life. So, it's an interesting process.

TL: Have you been to either Israel or back to Europe?

JK: I have.

TL: You haven't?

JK: I have. They have been back.

TL: Okay. Can you tell us some of your experience of going back?

HK: well—

Della Krieger: Can I say anything when he's here?

TL: Should—

DK: We went together.

TL: Well, I'm thinking—what I would like to do is maybe bring you on camera in just a minute, if that's okay.

DK: Now?

TL: In just a minute, if that's okay with you.

DK: Well, you asked a question. I—

HK: When we went back to Germany, I always enjoy going back to my little hometown.

JK: It's interesting, you bringing that up. I mean, I feel cheated in several ways. One is that going back to my childhood, for obvious reasons, it wasn't really a good idea to teach your child German in the early fifties [1950s] and mid-fifties [1950s]. So, I never

learned the German language, although they spoke it. (coughs) Excuse me. They spoke it when they didn't want me to understand what they were talking about. And the second thing is that I've never gotten back to Germany to see my roots. So, growing up, I didn't have grandparents, didn't have—had one uncle, no first cousins. It was really—that family experience wasn't there. Although I've always wanted to get back there and put my feet on the ground where they stood, it's just never happened. But I'm glad that they went back.

TL: I think it's interesting that you brought that up. That was going to be one of my next questions for you, is the experience of not only growing up as the child of two Holocaust survivors, but also the experience of not having the grandparents there and the extended family there. So, what is that like as a child? And then, as well, how did you deal with that with your own family?

JK: It's—it has—it's had both good and bad impact. I'm not gonna go real deep with that one, because it's not the time or the place for it, but I will say it's had an impact, and let's just leave it like that. It's had an impact.

TL: Okay. So, what I would like to do is I want to bring Mrs. Krieger on camera. But before I do, is there any last message you would like to share for upcoming generations or anyone who might see this?

JK: I think the message, the message that I feel most strongly about, again, is—I see a lot of people in the Jewish community, and other communities, trying to isolate themselves in order to perpetuate their culture or their religion. It kind of—we have this extremist movement going on to a large part, and obviously what's going on in the world today is a prime example of how that kind of diversity can—and extremism—can rip apart the fabric of everything. But, on a much smaller scale, I'd like to see just more people embrace each other for who we are. That sounds so kind of cliché-ish, but every day I see situations where people lose an opportunity to expose a little bit about themselves, make themselves a little more vulnerable, open, compassionate. And if we keep up that path, it's gonna be a more difficult world to live in than it already is.

And so, if we can learn anything from my parents' generation, it's that you have to fight the fight. There's no question about it. When the fight—when the line's drawn in the sand and it's a matter of good versus evil, you have to be willing to step up, and I don't see that happening anymore, I really don't. I see more people bury their head in the sand, look the other way, rationalize it, defend it, excuse it, rather than meet it head on and say “Okay, there's right, there's wrong, and you need to pick a side.” I think that lesson has been lost along the way and that's the one message I would want to keep going.

TL: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate you joining us.

JK: You're welcome.

End of interview