

Transcript

John Herzfeld

J28

46m15s

Interviewer: I'm Lyn Cohen, and I'm from Nashville. And you are...

John Herzfeld: I'm John Herzfeld, living in Nashville for the last 50 years about.

Interviewer: When were you born and where were you born?

John Herzfeld: I was born in Berlin, Germany on the 17th of November 1906.

Interviewer: And you're married?

John Herzfeld: Yes.

Interviewer: Where did you meet her? Where was she born?

John Herzfeld: I met my wife in Chicago. She was living in Nashville, but it was in Chicago. I met her there.

Interviewer: What year did you meet her?

John Herzfeld: Well, it was about 1941.

Interviewer: 1941. So, were you in the United States?

John Herzfeld: I came in 1940.

Interviewer: In 1940. When you were growing up, what was it like to be Jewish in your town?

John Herzfeld: At that time, I believe there was no difference.

Interviewer: It was fine.

John Herzfeld: It was perfect normal, like everyone else.

Interviewer: Describe what it was like. What was life like then?

John Herzfeld: Well, I grew up and went to school with everybody else. I mean, elementary school, high school, college, medical school.

Interviewer: So, you were treated fine? There was no—

John Herzfeld: No—

Interviewer: You didn't feel any difference?

John Herzfeld: No discrimination at all at that time.

Interviewer: What kind of education did you receive?

John Herzfeld: I'm a physician.

Interviewer: So, you were able to study what you wanted. Did you receive Jewish education in any way, anything that was religious? Or, was it fairly—

John Herzfeld: No.

Interviewer: It's pretty secular then.

John Herzfeld: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Were you involved in any youth movements?

John Herzfeld: No. I was very much involved in sports. I went to sports club.

Interviewer: Was it like the United States now?

John Herzfeld: Hmm?

Interviewer: Was it like the United States now? Does the way our children are growing up—

John Herzfeld: Quite.

Interviewer: —you grew up that way?

John Herzfeld: Same way.

Interviewer: So, you can see it all over again. You can see that we are all involved in sports.

John Herzfeld: Very much in sports and always was.

Interviewer: Did that time feels like now? I mean, was it—

John Herzfeld: Pardon me. I didn't understand.

Interviewer: Was it...were the times then like the times now?

John Herzfeld: Just as the normal child, normal growing up, normal studying.

Interviewer: How did the Nazis' rule in Germany first affect you? How did you—

John Herzfeld: Well, I tell you I had graduated, but in all Europe, I think, in Germany, you are graded as a physician, but you do have to make an extra exam to get the title of doctor, and I was in between in those periods. You have to write a thesis, but I was in between those periods. I was in an internship. I had to finish that first, and after the first few years of my internship, I would have to switch one out of the rotation and that was when Hitler...he was in between, and I couldn't go anywhere. I just couldn't do anything.

Interviewer: They wouldn't let you finish, they wouldn't let you study?

John Herzfeld: No. Not finished. I mean—

Interviewer: What year was that?

John Herzfeld: That was in '33.

Interviewer: So, you were right in between finishing?

John Herzfeld: Finish...I mean, I had finished the studies. I just needed internship and an extra examination for the title of doctor.

Interviewer: And you couldn't do it.

John Herzfeld: And I couldn't do it.

Interviewer: They said no because you were Jewish.

John Herzfeld: I couldn't do it. I could not get into any hospital to work, so I just could sit around. That's the only thing I could have done.

Interviewer: How did that feel?

John Herzfeld: Bad. It was awful. I got out very fast. You see, I finished my rotation at the end of March, and I left Germany on the 20th of May, 1933.

Interviewer: So, you had, really, almost no choice. You had to leave in order to finish up.

John Herzfeld: If I were to do anything, I had to leave.

Interviewer: Did you have to leave your whole family then? You left your whole family behind?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. Yeah, I went by myself.

Interviewer: How old were you then?

John Herzfeld: I'll figure it out. Twenty-seven.

Interviewer: That was a big journey for a 27-year-old.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I was even only 26 since my birthday's in November.

Interviewer: Did you have any feeling of Hitler or what was going on? I guess, you said you couldn't do anything.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I mean otherwise I had no...nothing personal happened to me, only just I couldn't do anything. I could not go on.

Interviewer: Was that happening to other people also? Did it affect your parents?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. My parents are not quite yet at that time.

Interviewer: So, just you. What did they do? Did they—

John Herzfeld: My father was a physician. He lost his position in insurance company at that time. See, I was gone. I don't know too much if they lived—

Interviewer: So, he lost his job?

John Herzfeld: Pardon me?

Interviewer: He lost job?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. He lost and couldn't go on. He still could do a private practice but he never had done too much of that, so that was all of it.

Interviewer: Did they want you to leave? Did they encourage you to—

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes.

Interviewer: They didn't want to leave. Did they want?

John Herzfeld: No. They didn't want to go at that time. Well, they wanted to know where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do, but I could not... had no way to go to the United States. I always intended to go to the United States, but I have no way to get there, and I had a connection which made it possible for me to go to Italy. And there, I had to...I mean, I could not get work but I could finish my studies there to get finally and make my title as doctor.

Interviewer: So, you did do that.

John Herzfeld: I did do that, and I had some friends in the university clinic there so I worked occasionally to assist in eye surgery. It was a profession there but that was about all I could do.

Interviewer: But as a Jew, you are allowed to work and go to school in Italy?

John Herzfeld: At that time, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: It was still open.

John Herzfeld: Yeah.

Interviewer: It was still okay.

John Herzfeld: There was no difference there, Jew or non-Jew. A foreigner couldn't ask to go to work there. Only that.

Interviewer: So it's just that you were a foreigner.

John Herzfeld: I just did a little volunteer work at the clinic and got paid sometime for surgery but, generally, I had no money.

Interviewer: Yeah. How did you survive?

John Herzfeld: At that time, my parents sent me a little once in a while.

Interviewer: So, you lived on what they could send you—

John Herzfeld: I lived in Italy in all, but first in Padua. I studied there. I got the exam and I lived in Naples. I had to make a state board examination there, but then I just was sitting around and waiting for a chance to go to United States. See, my brother-in-law who was a physician, too, he had the connection in Chicago. He got the visa card and he went to Chicago in...it must have been 1936 or 1937, and I was in Naples at that time, and my sister, I mean his wife, and there daughter, my niece, she stayed for a little while in Capri close to Naples until they could...until my brother-in-law could get them over there. And then, I just had to sit and wait until they would be ready to get me a visa.

Interviewer: How did that feel just...

John Herzfeld: Terrible, nothing to eat and nothing to do. It doesn't feel good. I tell you that.

Interviewer: So, you had to wait around, and you knew you couldn't go back.

John Herzfeld: No.

Interviewer: Did you ever think of going back to your town?

John Herzfeld: The first 2 years, in '34 and '35, twice, I went back to Berlin for a visit. At '34, it was my father's 70th birthday so I went there, and then I went back for a week in '35 but that was it. It was the last time I was in Germany.

Interviewer: That was the last time you ever saw them?

John Herzfeld: No. My mother...my father died in '39—

Interviewer: In his home?

John Herzfeld: —of cancer in Berlin.

Interviewer: In his own home, was it?

John Herzfeld: No. I couldn't go back home.

Interviewer: Yeah.

John Herzfeld: And my mother finally got to Chicago. They got a visa. She came out. I don't know how she got out. It was over Sweden that somebody helped her to get out but all by herself, and she was certainly aged then, and then she went to my sister and brother-in-law and finally stayed with them, so they all lived in Chicago.

Interviewer: So, your immediate family all got out.

John Herzfeld: My immediate family and my father died and the rest of my family is...they're all out. She's my only sister. Yeah.

Interviewer: They were all safe, was there any...when you go back to your town, did you notice any, for the non-Jewish population, did they seem to care? Did they know what was going on?

John Herzfeld: Oh, in '34, '35?

Interviewer: Did you feel anything? Was there anything—

John Herzfeld: Well, there was...I mean my fraternity, which was a mixed one, was closed up because—

Interviewer: Because it was mixed?

John Herzfeld: A mixed of...quite a few Jews in there, so they were closed, and I had to get out of the sport club. I couldn't have gone back in there. I mean, I didn't intend to stay anyway. I mean I was just visiting there. I was...but didn't belong there anymore.

Interviewer: Yeah.

John Herzfeld: That was all I noticed.

Interviewer: Did anybody seem to say you should be able to...I mean, did people seem to notice what was going on or there was no real...a murmur.

John Herzfeld: I didn't have any connection with anything except my family and I had just two visits.

Interviewer: So, you were really gone when you left?

John Herzfeld: That was it.

Interviewer: That was it.

John Herzfeld: That was it.

Interviewer: And you were glad to be out.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. See...and then...let me see what's next...I still had my German passport and then there was expiration. I don't know when that was expired. I think it expired about in '37, and so I went to German consulate and wanted it renewed and they come and say to me, "You there." I was [unintelligible 0:11:31.6] I mean, not German anymore for several years already.

Interviewer: Because you were in Italy? So, they wouldn't give you a passport.

John Herzfeld: I didn't have any German papers anymore. Did I show you that?

Interviewer: Yeah. Show us the passport. How did you get that passport?

John Herzfeld: Well, they told me about it in Italy. I mean, the American consulate who told me what to do with that, to apply there.

Interviewer: So the American consulate told you how to get that passport, the Italian passport?

John Herzfeld: Well, they said...yeah, I think. That's it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Show your picture, too. That's so neat. Is that good?

Male: If you will just let him hold on to it.

Interviewer: Sure. That was how many years ago? That was 1937? Did you get in '37.

John Herzfeld: It was in 1939, I think, I don't remember exactly. No, 1940.

Interviewer: You got in 1940. So, what happened? You were in Italy and you were waiting to get out.

John Herzfeld: Right.

Interviewer: How did it happen? How did you get out?

John Herzfeld: Finally...then, see, the war had already started in Germany, and I did...Italy was not in the war yet, so I was pretty peaceful there. I mean, I was with my colleagues ... but I couldn't do anything there, didn't have anything much to eat, but I was not personally involved...until, I do not know what the year exactly -- it must have been 1938 or something like that -- Hitler came visiting Mussolini in Rome, and I was in Naples at that time. They put all...there were several, I was not the only German Jew living there now—they put all of us in the state penitentiary, I mean not a, just to, I would say, interned.

Interviewer: In 1938, they put you all in state penitentiary?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. It was the time while Hitler was in Germany. They were afraid that one of us could do something to Hitler. So, I was in there...it was about a week.

Interviewer: They were afraid that somebody would assassinate him so they put everybody in the penitentiary?

John Herzfeld: Every German Jew was...all over Italy especially in Naples, they were—and Rome.

Interviewer: How did they round you up? How did they find you?

John Herzfeld: Everybody had to register with the police in Italy. We didn't stay in Italy without being known.

Interviewer: Did they make an announcement you all have to go to the penitentiary within a few days?

John Herzfeld: No, one night a policeman came and picked me up where I lived.

Interviewer: How did that feel?

John Herzfeld: It didn't feel very good, but I knew it wouldn't be too bad because at least I had a pretty good—I was put in the hospital section of the penitentiary.

Interviewer: Because you were a doctor?

John Herzfeld: Because I was a doctor, and one of my friends who was a doctor in the clinic knew the doctor as person, so they put me.

Interviewer: They made sure and see you were okay.

John Herzfeld: I was okay. I mean, I was in prison but I could—

Interviewer: You could walk around?

John Herzfeld: In the cell.

Interviewer: So you're in a real cell, could you eat? Did they give you food?

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah. I was taken care. I was okay.

Interviewer: But in just a little cell by yourself, were you by yourself for a week?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I was in a hospital cell. I mean that was the section that they put me. Then, when Hitler left, I was sent home again.

Interviewer: So then you got released.

John Herzfeld: It was about a week. Yeah. I don't know how long it was.

Interviewer: A week in prison. So, now, you can say you know what that's like.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I mean if any prisoner at that time had it was good as I did, it wouldn't be too bad.

Interviewer: So, it wasn't so bad.

John Herzfeld: It wasn't bad. I had better food there than when I was living by myself.

Interviewer: I was wondering if you didn't get more food. So, it wasn't a bad—

John Herzfeld: No, no. That wasn't bad.

Interviewer: —experience. You weren't depressed. There wasn't that kind of—

John Herzfeld: No, no. I knew it was just temporary. I knew that.

Interviewer: So, as soon as they left Italy, you were out? They let you all out? They let everybody—

John Herzfeld: Yeah, everybody to where he was living.

Interviewer: That's incredible. So what happened—

John Herzfeld: So, that went on until 1940. I mean, I was always waiting for my relatives in Chicago. They had to get me a visa, get my visa. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

Interviewer: So you were just waiting for them?

John Herzfeld: Just waiting. And finally, I knew that it was very, very close that Italy was going to enter the war. But in that camp, I certainly would have been unable to leave anymore. So, I just sent a cable over there. "War is eminent. Please send ticket." And then, finally, the ticket came, and I got out on the last ship. It was to Manhattan, the last ship to leave Italy at that time. At the same time, one of the Italian's cruise ships was supposed to leave. It was a [unintelligible 0:17:31.2], I think. It didn't go anymore that day, so you saw how close the war was. But the day, our ship arrived in New York, in the harbor, that day, it was the 10th of May, I think, Italy declared war on the United States. So, that was how close that shave was.

Interviewer: Did you feel really anxious? Did you know, I mean, did you have a feeling that you were scared?

John Herzfeld: Sure. I mean, you didn't see that *War and Remembrance* film, did you?

Interviewer: Yeah.

John Herzfeld: But they showed us what happened to the Jews in the Italy is they did the same thing as they did in Germany. So, if I would have stayed there, that's where I would've ended up. So, really, it was the last moment that I could get out.

Interviewer: When you were in Italy, did you have an idea of what was happening to the Jews in Germany?

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: You knew.

John Herzfeld: I mean there were newspapers. I mean they didn't have it as explicit, besides, I still was, as long as my mother still was in Germany, I mean, we wrote.

Interviewer: So she knew what was going on? She told you.

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. I knew what was going on.

Interviewer: But she was able to escape being in a concentration camp.

John Herzfeld: No.

Interviewer: She never had to. She got out. Did she leave around...you left in '40?

John Herzfeld: She left earlier. As I said she was already—

Interviewer: In Chicago.

John Herzfeld: Let's see, it was in '37. You see, it was...

Interviewer: Oh, so she left much earlier.

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah.

[INTERRUPTION 0:19:09.1 to 0:19:09.8]

Interviewer: You had to know somebody here.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. You had to get somebody to give you an affidavit.

Interviewer: We know that you are related to the...we can bring that up again. There are so many questions. You answered so—

John Herzfeld: Yeah. If it's the May family, I have nothing to do. My wife's maiden name is May. They knew the Mays, but they are not related.

[INTERRUPTION 0:19:39.5 to 0:19:49.7]

Interviewer: You said that your family in Chicago helped to get you out. They sent the—

John Herzfeld: Yeah. They sent the affidavit.

Interviewer: The ticket.

John Herzfeld: They sent the—

Interviewer: The affidavit. Once you got to Chicago, did you know people that you could then do that for? Could you do that? What did you think of—

John Herzfeld: No, because I wasn't...

Interviewer: You weren't a citizen.

John Herzfeld: I didn't make enough money. I went into internship in Chicago and in residency there, and then—

Interviewer: Did you have to do it all over again?

John Herzfeld: No. No. I had to take examination. I mean, I had to study for those and got the examination for the license for the internship and the residency, and then I went into service.

Interviewer: You did go in the service. Did you live with your sister, your brother-in-law and your mom?

John Herzfeld: Until I went to service, yes.

Interviewer: So, you lived there together until you went to the service

John Herzfeld: Right.

Interviewer: And then you went into the United States Army.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. See, I wasn't a citizen yet. So, I went in as a private.

Interviewer: What year was that?

John Herzfeld: That was in 1942.

Interviewer: What happened in the army?

John Herzfeld: I was like everybody in the army. I went to medical basic which was fun and then we went to a little hospital unit. And finally, it was time to get the citizenship, fast while I was in service. So after two years, I finally got my citizenship after another year, and then I got my commission as a 1st lieutenant.

Interviewer: I see you became a 1st lieutenant. Did you ever think about going back to Germany?

John Herzfeld: No. I would have liked to go over there but they sent me to the Pacific.

Interviewer: So, they didn't send you to be a liberator. What happened in the Pacific? What did you do?

John Herzfeld: I just saw the war in the Pacific.

Interviewer: You saw the war.

John Herzfeld: There was a field hospital first and then it was an infantry regiment.

Interviewer: Did you want to fight? Did you feel like you wanted—

John Herzfeld: I volunteered for induction.

Interviewer: So, you did that because you want—

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I wanted to and I knew I could get my citizenship and could get to do something like that. I think I ordered the United States to — for me to go in.

Interviewer: Did you feel a lot of anger like you really wanted to fight and get rid of the Nazis?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I just wanted to send over that way.

Interviewer: But that would have been fine.

John Herzfeld: I was in the United States. At that time, I spoke fluently German, fluently Italian so they sent me to the Pacific.

Interviewer: So, you wanted to go back.

John Herzfeld: Yeah, yeah. I would have loved that.

Interviewer: And fight.

John Herzfeld: Right. I was a medical officer in the Army, I would have gone but I had to go wherever they sent me. You went to service, right?

Male: No. That's par for the course for the government, someone who is fluent in German, fluent in Italian, they send them...

Interviewer: Well, with real understanding of what's going on there.

Male: I think it's kind of weird.

John Herzfeld: Yeah.

Interviewer: When you were here, were you struck by the real difference in life in the United States, and you'd been all over your—

John Herzfeld: Well, it's hard to say. I would know if the life would be much different in the normal European life before Hitler. I don't think it was too much different.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, you were very happy then when you came to the United States. It was a good life again.

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah. Sure was.

Interviewer: And so the impact of Hitler, the impact that Hitler had on you...

John Herzfeld: Well, just cut off my life and I had to make a new one.

Interviewer: Two times. Italy and again in the United States. What is that making a new life, how did you face that? Was that a scary thing?

John Herzfeld: No.

Interviewer: Is it something that's a challenge for you?

John Herzfeld: I'm kind of an easy going, so it wasn't too hard for me.

Interviewer: And you never gave up. You became a doctor.

John Herzfeld: Oh, no. I could have given up in Italy, but I didn't.

Interviewer: It never really stopped you.

John Herzfeld: Uh-uh.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the people that did stop?

John Herzfeld: What do you mean?

Interviewer: In Germany, the people that you got to leave, how about all those people that he did cut off their lives? I mean that he stopped.

John Herzfeld: Yeah, it sure did. I mean they ended up in the concentration camps, so they died. I have no close relatives but some cousins, some acquaintances disappeared. I never heard from again.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you were lucky or the timing was right?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. Time was right because for me, I mean, I wouldn't have to leave Germany that fast. I wouldn't have to, but for sure I do. Couldn't sit around there.

Interviewer: No, you had to leave.

John Herzfeld: Because it was the...it's the only way, the best way...it's the only way for me to go there.

Interviewer: So, you took the signs and you made sense of it. You said, "I have to go."

John Herzfeld: Right.

Interviewer: Were there lots of people that just stayed and sat around like you said. You don't like sitting around. Did lots of people just sit and wait for it to get better?

John Herzfeld: I'm not sure about that, but I imagined there were some, but I really...I'm not sure. I couldn't tell you for sure.

Interviewer: Was it hard for you to get to Italy then, or was it very easy? Could you just leave?

John Herzfeld: No. First, I went to England from Germany. I had some acquaintance there. But there was no chance for me to do anything, go on anything, it would have been very hard to finish my studies there. Soon, a relative of mine opened up an occasion in Italy, in Padua. He knew a professor. He sent me a recommendation for that. That was the reason I went to Italy. That was the right choice then.

Interviewer: So, you had to have a contact there in order to get it.

John Herzfeld: Pardon me.

Interviewer: You needed to know somebody there who could get you a contact in order to even study there. So you could have gotten stopped.

John Herzfeld: Once I got in, my professor, he helped me to get into the university.

Interviewer: Did you have to work very hard to get out? Could you see yourself having been stuck in Germany? Did you have to work on contacts to get out? Was it a hard struggle?

John Herzfeld: No. That wasn't hard. No, not at that time since I got out fast.

Interviewer: So, it was easy.

John Herzfeld: Same as there were no problems here.

Interviewer: It was still easy then.

John Herzfeld: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. When you look back at all the changes and all the feelings that you had, what was the main, the dominant feeling, the main feeling with all this transition, moving, and change? What was the main impact?

John Herzfeld: Well, as far as looking back, as far as Germany, Hitler, it was rage. But, I was always happy and a great optimist, so I always thought everything would come out all right eventually.

Interviewer: So you were really angry but you knew that you could make it work. You probably trusted yourself very much.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. Oh, yeah, sure, I had to adjust a lot.

Interviewer: And trusted your own instincts and resources and you never stopped trying to become a doctor.

John Herzfeld: Right. I had finished in Germany. There only was a title. It was all I needed.

Interviewer: So, you did it over and over again so you had to re-do it in Italy?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I had to...I mean, Italy, it took me a little over a year, almost two years to get it all done. And then here in the United States, all I needed to make...to take a state board and to get a license in one state. I got the license in Illinois. For that, I had to take the exam and I had to have one, at least one year of

internship, but it's right, and then I stayed for residency. At that time, that was all. It was time to go into service.

Interviewer: What do you think of some of us who, I guess, in our generation or in this new generation, in my generation, we may give up a little easier. Do you have some wisdom, words of wisdom to tell us?

John Herzfeld: No. The only thing I can tell: try to stick with it.

Interviewer: You did.

John Herzfeld: I did.

Interviewer: You certainly did and the times were not with you. That had to be an incredible mountain to climb. You had countries in your way.

John Herzfeld: It wasn't easy but I always looked forward. Well, it would be all right. Many times.

Interviewer: Maybe doctors need that kind of optimism. That's truly wonderful. Did you give that to your grandchildren? Did they have that?

John Herzfeld: I hope they do. One has graduated from Princeton this year. The other one is a freshman in Virginia.

Interviewer: So, when you approach your own job, everything that you've done here, what kind of doctor are you? What do you practice?

John Herzfeld: Well, I'm semi-retired now. I worked for 30 years for the United States Veteran Administration after I came out of service, and then I worked for the State a little, and then up to now, I'm working for the Plasma Center. And just a couple of weeks ago I went part time.

Interviewer: Did you work for the VA for a reason? Were you very affected by—

John Herzfeld: Well, see, I had no, really, not much money or anything like that. I kind of liked that idea, so I applied and I went that. See, I got here, got to Nashville, really, because my wife, as I said I met in Chicago, and she lived here. Her family lived here, and so I ended up here after the war and started at the regional offices here and then the Veteran Hospital for 30 years.

Interviewer: Do you think that some of the reason you worked with VAs in that hospital was your experience in your life with war?

John Herzfeld: I like the idea to have certain amount of regular life, I mean, as a boy, is to get into practice—

Interviewer: Private practice.

John Herzfeld: —not knowing how it was going to be. I had no experience at that.

Interviewer: So you could have a normal life, normal hours.

John Herzfeld: My army life carried over into VA life.

Interviewer: Yeah, it makes sense.

John Herzfeld: I hope.

Interviewer: Did you ever go back home, back to Europe?

John Herzfeld: No, I never have.

Interviewer: Do you want to?

John Herzfeld: It's a little late now. I'm too old for that now.

Interviewer: Were you ever interested in seeing it again?

John Herzfeld: I'd like to go but I don't think it's going to happen.

Interviewer: You would like to go?

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: How about with the East and West coming together? How does that, the wall...come tumbling down?

John Herzfeld: Oh, yes. That was great.

Interviewer: Do you feel like it's great?

John Herzfeld: Yeah. I think it's great because...I mean Berlin...Berlin was such a beautiful city. It used to be. Not anymore since the war, after the war, not, but then there was the war. It was terrible. I didn't have anybody that I knew. Families were separated, couldn't get together.

Interviewer: And you loved the city?

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: So to see it again would bring back all kinds of memories, feelings?

John Herzfeld: It would if I would go back, but I don't think I will anymore. Not at my age.

Interviewer: The country back as a whole again, what do you think that means for us? For Jews? For the world?

John Herzfeld: I'm a little doubtful, but I don't think it will ever happen like it was before. I mean, I don't think it can be ever be done.

Interviewer: You don't think there would ever be another Hitler?

John Herzfeld: I don't think so.

Interviewer: Why?

John Herzfeld: Well, I think that, first of all, the German people have learned enough, I think. See, the generation now, they didn't live at that time, but they knew, have learned what happened. I think they know. I don't think they're going to...anything like that could happen again.

Interviewer: Are you in touch with any old friends?

John Herzfeld: No, not anymore.

Interviewer: You lost—

John Herzfeld: I have nobody over there anymore.

Interviewer: But you kind of have a faith that they understand that they did something they should never do again?

John Herzfeld: I hope so.

Interviewer: And you didn't feel it when they the strength is back again, the country being a whole. You didn't say, "Uh-oh."

John Herzfeld: I don't think.

Interviewer: You said it's going—

John Herzfeld: I don't think the Germans want it anymore, and I don't think anybody else would let them. The European community is much too united now in strength.

Interviewer: Do you think it could happen anywhere? Do you see when you said that we are living like pretty much and growing up pretty much like you did then? For your grandchildren and for my children, and for us, do you see that there could be a monster like that? I mean, he was a monster.

John Herzfeld: He sure was. No, I don't think anything like that can—

Interviewer: Ever happen?

John Herzfeld: No.

Interviewer: Because we know?

John Herzfeld: We know. Everybody knows.

Interviewer: You don't think the denial was so great or that it is great now?

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah. You know there are. Some...you cannot tell anything. They won't learn. But they are a minority. I don't think that can happen...will get into anything like that.

Interviewer: Did you ever have feelings here like you did then when you had, literally, to run from your own town, or leave your own town? Do you ever have feelings here that...or see signs or feel that kind of discrimination or antisemitism ever in America? Did you ever have that feeling that you must have had when you had to leave and you were treated so badly?

John Herzfeld: No. I have not noticed it here.

Interviewer: So you've never felt—

John Herzfeld: I'm sure it exists a little bit but I had no personal knowledge of any.

Interviewer: So the feelings have never come back again?

John Herzfeld: No.

Interviewer: Those feelings of...what were they when you were put in prison, and when you couldn't finish becoming a doctor, what were those feelings?

John Herzfeld: What do you mean? In Germany?

Interviewer: Yeah. What was the feeling to feel it again?

John Herzfeld: I don't think anything could ever happen again.

Interviewer: That would make you feel that way?

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Kind of like you weren't...like you didn't count, I guess. So, becoming a doctor and raising a family and having a wife that loves you has given you a life that has a lot of meaning.

John Herzfeld: Very much meaning, the best life I could have.

Interviewer: Do you think that because of all that you went through, you value it all more?

John Herzfeld: Pardon.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you value all you have now more because of what you went through then? Did it give you something?

John Herzfeld: It gave me some more strength too.

Interviewer: More strength. So, it did give you strength.

John Herzfeld: It is true. I think so.

Interviewer: Did it give you anything else? Did it give faith in anything, in God and in Judaism and yourself?

John Herzfeld: I don't think it has changed me in that way at all.

Interviewer: When it comes to believing in God, do you feel like you do or that affected any way?

John Herzfeld: I don't think it has affected it any.

Interviewer: Do you have a strong belief?

John Herzfeld: Not a strong belief, no.

Interviewer: Did what happened in Germany affect your belief?

John Herzfeld: No.

Interviewer: You're a doctor, so that must affect your belief. You see a lot. So, if all of these gave you that strength to accept and appreciate, did doctoring do as much of that as what had happened before?

John Herzfeld: I think so.

Interviewer: Okay.

[INTERRUPTION 0:38:32.5 to 0:38:35.8]

Interviewer: ...story because I want you...if we missed it.

John Herzfeld: No. I told you. I told you all I know.

Interviewer: We hit the hot spots. If you had a message to leave for your grandchildren or for people in Nashville or whoever will see this tape from your life, from what happened and all the history you've seen, what would that be? That's a hard question.

John Herzfeld: Yeah, very hard. I think for my side of it, be optimistic like I am, and always try to see the best in everything.

Interviewer: In people, even after what you saw, look for the best.

John Herzfeld: If it is bad, you throw it away and forget it. I just always try to see the good things.

Interviewer: Let go of the bad things. Look for the good things and make it work the best you can.

John Herzfeld: Right.

Interviewer: And you became a doctor, a healer, really, somebody who heals people and tries to make things better, and so you've done that all your life.

John Herzfeld: I think so.

Interviewer: And when you saw really bad things, you'd let it go. You knew it existed.

John Herzfeld: Yeah.

Interviewer: But you let it go. Okay.

Male: Tell me a little bit about what it was like. I have a real hard time trying to imagine what it would be like to come to the realization that I have to leave my home where my family was. It's real hard for me to imagine how things could become that bad to come to that realization. What were some of the things that happened that, you know, were those benchmark things for you to make a decision that I've got to leave my home. I've got to get to another country somewhere?

John Herzfeld: It was very, very hard to leave them. They were left home because I studied one semester in Freiberg out of Berlin. All the time I was in Berlin so I never had been out of there anyway so it was extremely hard for me to be away, but I knew it had to be done. There was no hope for me there.

Male: Was it difficult to understand what was happening to you and your family and your friends?

John Herzfeld: Yes. I mean, it was so unexpected and so completely new. And of course, my life had been the same as anybody else in Germany. There was no discrimination or anything before.

Interviewer: That had to hurt really deeply. I mean that had really hurt.

John Herzfeld: Sure.

Interviewer: That's a big rejection.

John Herzfeld: I mean my friends in the sport club, they are gone. I mean I couldn't go there anymore. I couldn't do anything anymore—that hurt.

Interviewer: So everything was closed off to you because you were Jewish.

John Herzfeld: Right.

Interviewer: That's the rage.

Male: Was it a gradual process or is there some event that really made the difference for you?

John Herzfeld: Well, it got much worse after I was out already. Well, you know you hurt from the Kristallnacht...really that was when the worse thing came, but I was out long before that, so I could...twice could go back for a week of vacation.

Interviewer: Were you afraid to go back?

John Herzfeld: No, not at that time.

Interviewer: You weren't afraid.

John Herzfeld: Not at that time. You see because I left not because I was persecuted or handled or anything like that, but because I just couldn't do anything. That was my reason to leave right away.

Male: Did you try to do anything before you decided, well, I just got to leave. Did you try to fight it in anyway?

John Herzfeld: Well, at first I tried, if I could get into a hospital to complete my intern year, in a hospital, but—even there was a Jewish hospital in Berlin and they couldn't take me either.

Interviewer: So you kept trying and then you knew you had to go.

John Herzfeld: Yeah. When I saw that, within a few weeks, I was gone.

Interviewer: So, now, part of the message would probably be, you did look for the good. You did. You looked for what you could do.

John Herzfeld: Yeah.

Interviewer: And now, you probably, in your life, to not be able to do is not good. For you, doing and being a part of things is probably everything.

John Herzfeld: Oh, yeah. I mean, I could not see a life for me. First, I didn't know how bad it would get. I never expected that bad as it really came out there. But just for me just to...not having a way to work as a physician and be a physician there, I mean, that was it.

Male: Was that a real battle within yourself to almost turn your back on your homeland?

John Herzfeld: I hated to leave, yes.

Male: But you just had to.

John Herzfeld: I had to. I felt I had to.

Interviewer: Or you wouldn't be here now. You'd be a dead man.

John Herzfeld: Yeah, I would be. Yeah.

Interviewer: Probably.

John Herzfeld: Right.

Male: What do you think would have happened to you if you just stayed?

John Herzfeld: I don't know. I may have eventually I would have ended up in a concentration camp, I imagine.

Male: But when you left that fear, it wasn't quite there.

John Herzfeld: No, no. I didn't know anything about it at all yet.

Interviewer: But he is a doer and so he knew he had to do.

John Herzfeld: I knew.

Interviewer: And you also keep looking for ways to make things work. That's what a doctor is.

John Herzfeld: Yeah.

Interviewer: It makes sense. It's a wonderful story.

John Herzfeld: Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you.

John Herzfeld: You're welcome.

Interviewer: I think you've given us a lot.

Male: Thank you very much. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

John Herzfeld: No. Thank you. That's enough.

Male: Thank you so much.