Kurt Rose
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Interviewer: Tell me your full name again.

Kurt Rose: My full name, do you want my middle name?

Interviewer: Sure.

Kurt Rose: Kurt Arthur Rose.

Interviewer: Okay. Mr. Rose, tell me what life was like before you ever heard of Adolf Hitler, what it was like growing up in Hanover, Germany.

Kurt Rose: The earliest recollection I have of course are those of my family. And my father had a butcher shop, and he made what he called new kosher, or kosher-style sausage and shipped it to at least a dozen places all over Germany. He had representatives there and they sold it and that was a sort of a sideline for them. He owned a building in downtown Hanover until 1938. So my first recollection was of course that of home. During the '20s, I was much too young to have heard of Adolf Hitler, but when I came to be 13 years old, my bar mitzvah was July the 1st, but I remember distinctly on March the 1st, the Nazis had a boycott of all Jewish businesses. My father sold not only to Jews, but also to Seventh Day Adventists. Unlike in this country they would eat any pork, but they would eat beef and veal and poultry. So a good many of father's customers were Seventh Day Adventists, and I remember that on March the 1st, we had stormtroopers outside of the store. This was a corner building. And we had shutters, which we led down at night, so during the day March 1st, the shutters were down. And a few times someone would knock on the office door, on the back side so to speak, and they'd knock on the door and they expressed their regrets as to why this boycott was taking place and told my father they would still trade with him. And that was an encouraging sign, of course no one then could have predicted what was going to happen later on in the 1930s.

Interviewer: Well, let me make you go back just a second. Before the boycott when you were growing up like in the '20s, the boycott was in '33?

Kurt Rose: '33.

Interviewer: Okay. Before that, what was life like for you and your friends? I mean, was it a very pleasant life, did you have a lot of things, were you struggling? Was there a lot of Jewish influences on your life? What was

life like, if you can remember, prior to your bar mitzvah age?

Kurt Rose: There were a lot of Jewish influences, yes, because we would go to the synagogue regularly on a Saturday morning rather than Friday night, and, of course, we never would miss the High Holidays and that was an occasion when everyone had to dress up, including silk hats. And I remember my father wearing a silk hat. And the family would go together, but the women would sit upstairs. It was, I guess, what we would call an orthodox synagogue by today's standards.

Interviewer: And life with your friends and stuff, was it like it is here?

Kurt Rose: Well, my best friend was a Christian, and I wrote to him during the early 1940s and got the letter back and said that he died on the Russian front. He was in the German army. Now, he was a genius. He was an artist, so was his father. He would have…if he lived in this country, he would have drawn a comic strip and made a fortune. We were very close, and I had several Jewish friends, but I was closer to him than I was to anybody else. His name was Hans Otto Jung, and of course he and his family have vanished from the earth. Other than that…

Interviewer: Was life, I mean in terms of material things, Germany was pretty…people were doing pretty well, were they not? I mean you had…were you struggling? Was your family struggling when you were growing up?

Kurt Rose: My father had a good business. It does not mean that he did not have at times financial worries, because he bought this four-story building with apartments and another, a shoe repair shop in it. And of course you had to make payments, then he had to take out a second mortgage, so just like he had to buy out his brother. His brother was a partner, and for some reason or other, his brother wanted to leave or my father wanted him to leave, so my father…This was my father's business and I guess he felt that he could better conduct that business by himself. And maybe it was because my brother and I were getting older and he thought of us. Had it not been for Hitler, there's no doubt about it, I would have been in the meat business, absolutely.

Interviewer: So had your father already bought out his brother by the time this boycott took place?

Kurt Rose: That was in the '20s, yes.

Interviewer: So the boycott took place March 1st, was that the same day as your bar mitzvah or the same week?

Kurt Rose: No, July 1st was my bar mitzvah, so this was before then.

Interviewer: And then how did life change after that boycott? Was that the first sign of the Nazis in your life?

Kurt Rose: Almost, I would think, yes. Up until that time, the Germans had a president called von Hindenburg, and he was an old man and getting pretty senile. And there was so much pressure on him due to the fact that the Nazis had amassed a goodly number of votes in the national elections, that in January of '33 he had to appoint Adolf Hitler as the chancellor, which is like a prime minister. After that time, I think that things began to go down gradually. There were more and more restrictions. The Germans are excellent at legislating hatred and diminishing the role of the Jews who had an important place in German society. There was a good deal of integration. German Jews were proud of the fact that they had participated in the First World War, my father was. He belonged to something that would be the equivalent of the Jewish war veterans, here, today, in this country.

Interviewer: But he fought for Germany?

Kurt Rose: He fought for Germany in World War I for four years with untold suffering and deprivation, and then when Hitler came to power he got his thanks, "You're not really a good German," he was told. And the Jewish war veterans of course tried to combat that and show everybody that yes, they were patriotic, they loved the "fatherland". And I think my father was deeply hurt as were millions of others. By this accident it was incomprehensible. He felt he was a good German. He gave four years of his life. He almost died in 1918 of influenza which swept the world. And as I said it was hard for him to understand what was happening I think.

Interviewer: So how did these political changes and this brainwashing that you're kind of describing, how did it affect your life, first the boycott, but things were pretty mild then, right?

Kurt Rose: Things were pretty mild.

Interviewer: How did it start changing? When did you see some signs?

Kurt Rose: In the early '30s they began a move toward enlisting Christian young Germans in the Hitler youth, and once they became inculcated with the Nazi propaganda, they had no hesitation to mistreat Jews.

Interviewer: Even kids? Kids to kids?

Kurt Rose: Even kids, yes. And I remember distinctly that I might have been 14 or 15 years old. I was in high school and some of my classmates would gang up

on me in the schoolyard during recess and try to beat me up and kick and so forth.

Interviewer: Because you were Jewish?

Kurt Rose: Because I was Jewish, for no other reason. And I was fair game as were all other Jewish boy. I remember a young man named Walter Hartung, and he's in this picture. This is a class picture at an outing and he took up for me. He was a big six-footer even then. And he took up for me and I remembered his name. It's the only name I really remember of all my classmates.

Interviewer: Where is he on that picture?

Kurt Rose: He's over here on the right.

Interviewer: On the right, the last…

Kurt Rose: Yes, on the right. He's wearing knickerbockers. They were in style in those days. And my sister was in Germany recently in '88 and she found him and she talked to him on the phone. I got his address and I wrote him. And he's a Baptist. And I remembered that he was a Baptist and I remembered his name. He sent me a letter in English and I know now that that was a real task for him. He said, yes, he is the Dr. Walter Hartung. He has a PhD in the natural sciences, I guess, of some kind, like a biologist. He said, yes, he was indeed a Baptist, and he says, "It was a long and difficult time and especially during the wartime," I'm quoting his letter, "when I have to be a soldier. In 1945, I came back wounded from Russia to Hanover that was like a miracle. All the time after study," what he's saying is that all the time you put in for studying and getting a degree, "I was engaged in an old factory in Hanover." So that was a little bit beneath his rank. This is what he's trying to say, "We are members of the Baptist church and we have a good relationship with the Jewish congregation in Hanover." That's what he said in his first letter.

Interviewer: Did he ever remember what happened back in those schoolyard days?

Kurt Rose: I don't think so. I don't think so.

Interviewer: But he remembers you.

Kurt Rose: He remembers me. He remembers my last name because the Germans are so formal that the German teachers when they call you they don't say Kurt, they say Rose, always the last name. And he remembered the last name. I wrote him again and told him that my daughter Robin and I were planning on a trip to Germany, sort of to trace my roots. Although we

have been very fortunate, we've been able to do it with the help of a cousin in Israel going back to the 15th century. The rabbi, Judah Loew (sp) 0:12:54.7 of Prague who was known as The Maharal. He is one of my ancestors. So we think we're very lucky. And I know where my mother was born. I know where my grandmother was born in my mother's side. That's really the purpose of my going there, not just to see the sights, which may be very beautiful and no doubt are, but to trace my roots.

Interviewer: And you're going to see this childhood friend who tried rescuing you from the hands of these—?

Kurt Rose: That's right. You make it sound very dramatic, but all I know is it was kid stuff. There was nothing serious except the one night that we were on an outing, and we had this sort of retreat. And we would stay there, we would sleep there and we would eat there and we would go out on trips. And then one night they tried to pour castor oil down my throat, unsuccessfully, I think I spit it out right at them so they weren't very successful with that. Pranks, I think, but they were based on hatred, which is easy to understand, that's all that they were reading and hearing and that's all that they were being taught in the Hitler youth, hatred. The other side of the coin is that there is today in Germany and certainly in this country a reservoir of good will, which we can tap and which we can sustain, Christians who are really living by their religion and who do not hate. This Dr. Walter Hartung in the next letter said, and this is in German, I'll try to translate it quickly. "It is possible that the end of September this year," this is 1990, "I will fly to Israel. As Baptists we have a good connection in Israel, particularly in Jerusalem. And recently we celebrated Israel days at our church. The people from Jerusalem who came to see us told us about the difficulties in Israel, and we pray now that God will protect the land of Israel." And this is the sentiment of a German who fought for the Germans in World War II and whom I consider a great friend, and I look forward to seeing him again in a few months.

Interviewer: That's absolutely fascinating. Now, in those days when you were in high school, junior high, was it a steady rise of this hatred and anti-Semitism, and when did it finally come to a real hilt where you knew that it was going to be very serious.

Kurt Rose: As much as I could understand about the developments, in 1937 the Nazis became very serious, and as I said previously the Germans are very good at legislating things. Everything has to be legal, you see. There were limitations placed on educational opportunities for Jews. The owning of property, et cetera, et cetera, so I could see that coming and so could my parents. And during 1937 in February, I remember distinctly getting a letter from Fred Goldner Sr. (sp) 0:16:42.3 from Nashville, and he was my

mother's first cousin. Dr. Fred Goldner who lives here has a son. Dr. Fred Goldner's grandmother and my grandmother were sisters, so his father and my mother were first cousins. And Fred Goldner Sr. was in the jewelry business, Goldner 617 Church Street, and he asked my parents if they would send me to the United States that I could live with them. And things had gotten to be pretty serious then, and I don't think my parents hesitated very long.

Interviewer: You mean this people in Nashville sensed what was going on there or read about it?

Kurt Rose: Yes, I think they read about it in the paper. The *New York Times* especially was very thorough in coverage. There were no television stations of course. There was radio. And Fred Goldner had a sister; her name was Hortense Foyer (sp) 0:17:56.9. Do you know Henry Foyer (sp) 0:18:00.6 at Barrymore Gift Shop on Hillsboro? Okay.

Interviewer: I know the store, but I don't know him.

Kurt Rose: Actually, Fred Goldner Sr.'s sister, Hortense Foyer, carried on a conversation, a correspondence with my mother for many years, even if they only wrote once or twice a year, like Rosh Hashanah maybe. And my mother had that habit of keeping in touch with cousins. So when things got to be very serious, I'm sure that my Aunt Hortense, I know that to be a fact, said her that her brother Fred Goldner, "If you want to do something, my cousin Johannah," or Hannah, "has been writing me and you might want to consider bringing over one of your boys," and that was I. So this had happened.

Interviewer: Before that happened, in addition to what happened to you as a student, the pranks as you called it, what happened to other members of your family as a result of the Nazi rise to power. Did anyone ever go to a camp?

Kurt Rose: My immediate family did not go to a camp, not at that time. This was 1937. The people who were sent to the camps went a good bit later, maybe beginning in '39 and '40. And I did lose several uncles, aunts, and cousins in the concentration camp.

Interviewer: How did your family avoid that fate? What happened, let's say, do you remember Kristallnacht?

Kurt Rose: I don't' remember Kristallnacht, but my brother does very vividly, because I came here in June 1937 to Nashville. My parents and brother remained in Hanover and by November '38, which is the Kristallnacht, Crystal Night, they had already been offered an opportunity also to come to

Nashville, because of my cousin Fred Goldner. So they had…my father sold his building with the business in it for the price of the two mortgages, which left him nothing, but there was no choice. He had to liquidate everything he had and he sold it to a non-Jew naturally, because Jews couldn't buy anymore property. So he was lucky just to unload it and during Crystal Night that building was not harmed. Not one window, nothing.

Interviewer: Was your house affected?

Kurt Rose: Now, where were we?

Interviewer: We're talking about Kristallnacht. Now, was your family's home affected by it?

Kurt Rose: By that time my family had moved into my father's building and occupied one of the apartments, this was my father, mother, and brother. But during the Crystal Night, November 9, 1938, my mother was out of town. My father and brother knew what was going to happen. I think that there was something in the air, there must have been things on the radio and the newspapers that morning, so they were prepared. And then I think they must have gotten news that the synagogue in Hanover burned, which was, I guess late afternoon or that night. They thought it would be best if they left their apartment, and my father and brother took everything they had other than the clothes and the furniture, put their belongings in a strong box, in a paper bag, and started walking the streets. Their first impulse was to visit my father's oldest sister, and the Nazis weren't really interested in people like that, not at that point. And they started walking in that direction and as time passed it got to be late and things began to die down and it was a little quieter then. And when they returned they found out that the SS had come for my father, or at least wanted to know where he was. And the shoe repair shop that my father had been renting out to for so long and I remember it very well. There were some people in the shoe repair shop and they said to the SS men that, "Mr. Rose is on a trip. He's out of town." And I suppose that saved his life possibly. They may have taken him off.

Interviewer: You mean he was…and really at that time he was just wandering the streets—

Kurt Rose: Wandering the streets.

Interviewer: —of Hanover with your brother?

Kurt Rose: With my brother, that's right.

Interviewer: That's amazing. Now, was the destruction in the town as bad as we've all read about? What did they do? Did they break windows and—?

Kurt Rose: They broke windows and the store windows, some were just gigantic pieces of glass, and one rock would do that and they broke that. And they broke all kinds of glass and they broke the glass in the synagogue and they set the synagogue on fire. I have a picture of the synagogue.

Interviewer: Yeah, show us that.

Kurt Rose: Let me see. This by the way is a book called The Jews of Hanover, and this was financed by the city of Hanover and two or three corporations, and it was written by man named Peter Schultze, and I know he was Christian. But he did a lot of research and I found out that the Jews of Hanover had lived there for 700 years. The earliest date that they can prove is 1292. And this is a picture of the synagogue. There were 5000 Jews in Hanover in those days.

Interviewer: Before the war?

Kurt Rose: Before the war, in the '30s. And today, there are about 250, most of them old people. So this is the synagogue that was set on fire that night, along with many businesses and homes.

Interviewer: Show us those pictures on page 60…page 60 where you had the…

Kurt Rose: Okay. This is…you can still see the smoke. This is the synagogue after it was set on fire and completely destroyed. The dome was toppled and there was nothing left except a pile of rubble.

Interviewer: Did you go to the synagogue?

Kurt Rose: Yes. This was where I went to pray, to services.

Interviewer: It wasn't the only synagogue in the town, wasn't it?

Kurt Rose: Yes, it was. The only other place of worship was some East Europeans who had a very small room upstairs nearby and had their own services there, but it was possibly no more than 50 people.

Interviewer: So they burned the synagogue, the broke windows. Did any other people, you know or any other family, were they beaten up or carried away by the Germans at this point?

Kurt Rose: I don't really know.

Interviewer: Was that when they started transporting people?

Kurt Rose: I think that at that time they would select people who they thought had money and maybe take them away for questioning. No one knew the word concentration camp then, and there weren't any. So I think that they were very selective, and about that time my two uncles in Hanover who had a trade magazine called the Master Tailor. This was the big magazine for tailors, there were a lot of tailors in Europe and they were very well to do. I think by that time, they had just left for…one of them for Luxemburg and the other one for London, so they could see the handwriting on the wall.

Interviewer: And after Kristallnacht, what did your family do? Like you were already in the United States at this point, correct?

Kurt Rose: I was in the United States, yes.

Interviewer: What did the rest of your family do? How did they get out?

Kurt Rose: Well, my sister was brought to the Washington DC area in 1938 before the Kristallnacht. My parents and brother were to come here in January '39, which they did. Those who had no connections of any kind whatsoever stayed there, and sadly enough we couldn't bring them over. And one by one I think they perished, in various concentration camps. I lost an aunt, Lily Heiner; an uncle, Max Rose, and his wife Sophie, my father's brother, the one who was his partner at one time, a cousin named Hannah, and little by little those people who did not come to the United States or to Israel. A first cousin of mine went to Israel to Kibbutz in 1936 and I remember that distinctly. First, he had to learn agriculture before he could go. And he's still in Israel today.

Interviewer: But your parents…Kristallnacht was November 9th, they left within a year after that to come to…?

Kurt Rose: Oh they left within two months.

Interviewer: So that night, was that a turning point for them? Was that…when that night when your father missed them by just hours, did anything else ever happen to him or to your mom at the hands of the Germans?

Kurt Rose: No.

Interviewer: So after that night they started making plans to come to the United States?

Kurt Rose: That's right, yes.

Interviewer: What was actually the deciding factor? What was the clincher that finally just they said, "That's it we're leaving?" Your family saw the writing on the wall and then decided to get out. And you said the Goldners sponsored you.

Kurt Rose: Right.

Interviewer: How did the rest of your family come and did they come to Nashville also?

Kurt Rose: The Goldners also made the necessary arrangements for my parents and my brother. And so I lived with the Goldners from June '37 until January '39 when my parents came, and then we moved into an apartment on West End Avenue, where Mrs. Winner's is today.

Interviewer: What was it like reuniting with your family knowing what was going on in Europe at that time? Or did you know being in this country, did people know about the camps at that point?

Kurt Rose: I don't think they knew about it then, no. No, I felt at age 18 and a half, I felt like an older brother to my father, because I could speak English by then, and my brother had to learn, my father and mother had to learn. All that was on my mind then is to make a home for them and for us, and that's the way it was. That's what was uppermost in our mind. This was at the tail end of another mild depression, which was called the recession in '37.

Interviewer: What was it like to be in this country as the war unfolded and you read, I imagine over the years you started hearing more about what was going on in Europe and what was happening to the Jews. What was it like being here and hearing the stuff and were you aware of it as time went on?

Kurt Rose: Oh yes, sure. I remember distinctly Pearl Harbor. That morning a radio…this famous announcement by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And the draft I think had already started, and it became more and more an important facet of our daily lives. And I was drafted and turned down because of my eyesight and I still don't know to this day why they didn't use me in some capacity as an interpreter or some desk job. I even went to the navy and volunteered early one morning at seven o'clock. I think it made the papers, I don't know where the clipping is, but they didn't want me. So my brother was drafted and he served in the corps of engineers and he went to the, I think it was called the India-Burma-China Theater of War. So he's a veteran, my brother was. I worked for Sam Levy and Company, that was my first job, a wholesale shoe house, and then I went to work for BG Amusement Company, that was a chain of Negro Theaters, and I became a manager and was sent to Mississippi to manage the theater

in 1945. So during those years I worked for BG and my father tried to find a job and he did in a packing house, in his line.

Interviewer: And all the while the war was raging and the Jews and other people were being annihilated in Europe, how aware were you? And I don't mean just you, I mean the Jewish community, people in general.

Kurt Rose: I don't think there was much awareness. I don't know when I first heard the words concentration camp; I wish I could remember, I don't.

Interviewer: So there wasn't a sense that you had escaped something terrible, or was there?

Kurt Rose: Oh yes, there was a sense that I had gone to a better life; there was no doubt about that. Yes, even a hundred years ago, if you could go to America, if you had a cousin or an uncle in America that was the thing to do in Europe.

Interviewer: And when your family came, how difficult was it, since they came in '39, right?

Kurt Rose: Uh-hmm.

Interviewer: How difficult was it to get the paperwork, the documents they needed at that time? Was it still—you could still leave when your parents…

Kurt Rose: Yes, you could leave, but you could take very little with you, but they brought all their furniture and clothes, and it was all packed in a big crate called a van. I think the British called it a lift, all in one big crate and that's the way it was transported, it took some time to get here.

Interviewer: And the Germans gave them the documentation, the passport?

Kurt Rose: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: So that was before the clamp really came down.

Kurt Rose: Well, we were very lucky, that's right. Not everybody was that lucky.

Interviewer: Did you ever consider going anywhere else besides the United States, or was it because you have these relatives and friends in Nashville, was that the only reason that it was just not a discussion. I mean did you…this was the only place to come to from your family's perspective?

Kurt Rose: When my parents received the letter from Fred Goldner Sr., I don't think there was much debate of that where to go, because it was almost like

going to the Promised Land. Israel did not exist then. It was Palestine, but as I said one of my first cousins went there after he studied agriculture. He's the only one in the family who went there. Well, no he's not, there's one other in Haifa, who was a family genealogist on my mother's side, so we did have some people going to Israel. But most of us, nearly all of us who survived came to the United States.

Interviewer: You mentioned a sister?

Kurt Rose: Uh-hmm.

Interviewer: Now, there are three of you, your brother or your sister, where was she? Did she come with your parents too?

Kurt Rose: No, she came during the summer of '38. A friend of hers made arrangements for her to come to the Washington DC area, Maryland, and she started life there as a governess and she will celebrate her 50th year wedding anniversary this September.

Interviewer: And she stayed in that area and never came back with the family?

Kurt Rose: She stayed in that area. Right.

Interviewer: Okay. Now, you spoke English, I take it, shortly after your arrival in the United States?

Kurt Rose: I learned very quickly in the Goldner household.

Interviewer: What about your parents and your brother, how long…?

Kurt Rose: My brother also learned English rather quickly. My father was 60 years old when he came here and my mother was 48. And they had a lot of difficulty learning English. But my father could read the papers and understand. He could not speak fluently ever, but he was always interested in, later on, television. He would watch everything. I remember he watched the first man set foot on the moon, and that was in '69 and he died two years later.

Interviewer: Wow. When you settled here—and he found a job in the same field he worked in Germany, he was in the meat business?

Kurt Rose: For a while he had his own little butcher shop in a part of a grocery store that some people named Erlich had opened on Church Street. I forget the number. I think it was in the 1500 block. So for a while he was again in the meat business. Somehow I think the store closed up and so that didn't last, and then after that he was lucky to get a job in a packing company

called Smith Packing Company, where there was a foreman named Wolfe and he spoke German. So he came from Germany, so my father sort of felt that he could work with him and he could. And he worked there just long enough to be entitled to a social security.

Interviewer: Besides the Goldners, who else helped your family, whether it's with job, money, finding a place to live, was it the Jewish community, was it just people in general?

Kurt Rose: That's a good question. We did not have a federation in those days. If I remember correctly, the Temple Sisterhood was very active. And arrangements were made for newcomers to take English lessons at Watkins Institute and I remember going there. I didn't go over there for a very long because I felt that I'd learned enough English by then, but I switched over to two different kinds of classes, one was bookkeeping and the other was public speaking. So the Temple Sisterhood, particularly under the guidance of Gertrude Weinstein who was the mother of the surgeon Dr. Bernard Weinstein who died a few years ago, she was very beloved and she took a lot of interest in…she was not the only one, but she took the lead, Gertrude Weinstein. That was Mrs. Joe Weinstein. And the efforts to help newcomers were not as well organized or as sophisticated as they are today, but they were being made, and without that, everyone who just came here would have had a much harder time.

Interviewer: And did you continue religious practice the way your family had, you know, you had showed us that old synagogue, when you came to this country, did your family still go to the synagogue here?

Kurt Rose: When I came, I went to the temple, the old Vine Street Temple. And Fred Goldner was the past president of the temple. And I was impressed with the…well, simplicity is the wrong word. The services left a profound impact in that I could understand everything, by then I could understand English. It was not in Hebrew which was rather difficult for me even though I learned Hebrew from the time I was six years old, but it wasn't a language that I was really well-versed in. In those days, there were only a few Hebrew prayers in a reformed temple and I felt at home at the temple. By 1939, I became vice president of the temple youth, so I tried to get involved because I felt that I owed somebody something and this was what I wanted to do, be active in the temple youth and I was 19 years old then.

Interviewer: We were basically talking about your resettlement in this country, and one of the things I never got to ask you really was what your most dominant feelings were during that period. You mentioned that it felt like a new life and you were happy is the impression I got.

Kurt Rose: Definitely.

Interviewer: But what other feelings did you have during that period as you watched your family settle, was life better here?

Kurt Rose: Oh it definitely was, absolutely. There was a slight change in the type of food I was used to. My Aunt Ida, Fred Goldner's wife, Ida Weinberg Goldner, was a very good cook and had a good cook in the kitchen too. It was a very exemplary family life in the Goldner family. And the thoughts that were uppermost in our mind once my parents came was to become good Americans and whatever that would involve, have a steady job. That was worth a great deal in those days because everyone still remembered the Depression. To learn English, to learn American ways, and hold a good job, and to take care of my parents because they were not youngsters then.

Interviewer: How long did it take before you and your family really felt at home? Especially your family, because you were young, you probably adjusted quicker.

Kurt Rose: I adjusted very quickly, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kurt Rose: Yes.

Interviewer: But how long was it? And what was going on in Europe, by the time your family felt at home and realized what they had missed?

Kurt Rose: I wish I knew historically accurate facts as to dates, then I could answer your question.

Interviewer: I don't know if we even need a year, but was it…did it take months or years before you really felt at home and…

Kurt Rose: I think the immediate impulse at the end of the war was to say, "Now, we can go on with our normal lives." There were no longer food stamps or ration coupons, and there had not been any building to speak of like commercial buildings in downtown Nashville or new home's being built. But then in '45 and '46, things took off and Nashville began to expand and the blossom, so to speak. And everyone I think wanted to become part of that. But I left in 1945 to go to Mississippi and I spent 30 years there, and got married and raised a family, five daughters. So that was a good part of my life, 30 years.

Interviewer: And at what point did it become apparent to you what had happened in Europe and what you had missed? When, was it after the war, when

information started filtering back, about really the Holocaust aspect of what had happened?

Kurt Rose: I suppose that it only served to intensify my feelings of wanting to be as good a Jew as I was capable of being, and I don't mean to preach but to sound in anyway superior, but that was the reaction. We're thankful to be here, we're still Jews, let us be the best kind of Jews that we can. My parents kept Friday night, Sabbath. I went to temple…I enjoyed going to temple, I still do today. It gives me a good feeling.

Interviewer: And when you were, especially in Mississippi, but here too, did you ever encounter any anti-Semitism that brought back memories of what you went through in Europe?

Kurt Rose: Indeed I did, yes.

Interviewer: Where?

Kurt Rose: In Meridian. I went through the Civil Rights struggle of the early '60s during which time I once met Michael Schwerner. Does the name mean anything to you? He's one of the three people who was killed and buried under the earthen dam in Philadelphia and Mississippi, which is 30, 40 miles from Meridian. And I remember Michael Schwerner coming to my theater, the first white person to integrate it.

Interviewer: In Nashville?

Kurt Rose: In Meridian.

Interviewer: In Meridian?

Kurt Rose: Uh-hmm. I remember after that Mrs. Schwerner came down from New York and using the phone trying to find out about her husband, no one knew what had happened then. And I remember the naval air station near Meridian, they recruited sailors, put them on busses and they went through the countryside trying to find these three Civil Rights workers.

Interviewer: And it brought back some of the same feelings from Germany?

Kurt Rose: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Not only that, but two or three years after that, a good friend of mine, one of the leading citizens of Meridian named Mayo Davidson, was asked by the police, who had infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan, to leave his home, he and his wife, for them to leave their home this Saturday night that there was going to be trouble. And it was a Nazi Ku Klux Klan sympathizer or member who planted 29 sticks of dynamite at his bedroom window, and as he approached the house without his

headlights on, the Meridian police, much to their credit had infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan, they were on a little hill across the street and they asked them to stop. He got out and dropped this dynamite, but didn't light it or whatever, got back in the car, went down the hill, and the police was chasing him, and the woman companion with him was another fanatic from Jackson Mississippi, she was killed and he was injured and put in jail later on. One of the men working for me in the vending business, by that time I had a little sideline, I managed the theater and started a vending service, and one man working for me was on the jury to convict a man who was implicated in the bombing of the religious school building of the temple in Meridian, Mississippi.

Interviewer: And all this to a guy who grew up in Germany and remembered seeing this. Were you afraid that you would come to a country that was going to wind up like Germany? Did that ever go through your mind, or did you feel secure?

Kurt Rose: It's amazing that I wanted to continue living there. And it is a popular conception that this is the worst part of the United States, Mississippi. That was not altogether true. But once a month, some of the civic leaders met at an Episcopalian church, and these were leaders of the chamber of commerce together with some blacks, and I was on that committee. And we met, trying to arrive at ways to create a better feeling, interracial feeling in Meridian. This was before, during, and after this trouble. So I felt that I could wring my hands and we could just stand idly by, or we could participate in doing something about it. And today, I guess, things are very calm now, but they're calm in a different kind of way. Out of may 150 or 200 Jews in 1945, now they're 56 Jews left in Meridian, Mississippi.

Interviewer: And you had similar statistics for Hanover, and you talked a little bit about that there are some good feelings on the part of some Germans and there's a reservoir of love, I think was the phrase you're using, I'm just wondering, did you ever go back?

Kurt Rose: No, I have not gone back yet, but I'm planning to. And if you'd ask me this question five years ago, I would have said, "Hell no." However, my sister found this man who went to high school with me, and she talked to him and we started corresponding, and he and I are going to meet this September. I'm going to take my youngest daughter with me, Robin, and we are going to first Paris that's where she wanted to go. Understandably so…to Paris and then we're going to Frankfurt, Germany. And that's the area when my mother and grandmother was born on my mother's side and then to Hanover, and then to Neustadt where my father was born, and to a place called Petershagen where my great-grandfather was born.

Interviewer: That's wonderful. Now, let me ask you this. You said at one point you would never have gone back, what changed?

Kurt Rose: The authorities in the city of Hanover, quite like many other municipalities, are inviting former residents or citizens. They like to call them citizens. To come back and in many instances to be the guests of the municipality for a certain period of time, and my sister took advantage of that. The first time she went, she felt a little ill at ease. She went, for instance, to the cemetery where my father's parents were born, my grandparents, and that section of the cemetery was bombed out. American bombs which was a necessity. Much of Hanover was destroyed including the building that my father owned, which was pretty well in the heart of downtown Hanover. Now I'm curious, and I do appreciate the fact that the Germany authorities are trying to do so much, not to repair. I don't see how you can say, "I'm sorry, I wish it hadn't happened…" Their intent on teaching about the Holocaust in the German school, much as we try to emphasize it here. It's true that maybe some 30 years ago there was a woman teacher from Hanover who taught in the school where I went. In those days it was not co-ed, now it is. She claimed even then that there wasn't any such thing as the Holocaust. So she tried to brainwash people in Meridian, Mississippi and tell them, "Oh there wasn't that much to it. There weren't anything like that," and I remember that.

Interviewer: But you think the people in Germany today believe there was one and accept it?

Kurt Rose: There's been a great change, yes.

Interviewer: Did you ever try to make contact with members of your family? I know your immediate family was lucky, they all got out.

Kurt Rose: Right.

Interviewer: But other people that…did you ever or your parents or your brother or sister, did anybody ever try to contact family members that weren't lucky enough to make it out?

Kurt Rose: I think my parents must have concluded that weren't…none of them left.

Interviewer: Do you have any other family that made it to the United States who started off in Europe?

Kurt Rose: Yes. I have two cousins, one of whom has died on my mother's side. And I have several cousins on my father's side; they live in California, New York and Florida.

Interviewer: But the ones that didn't leave Germany, you never had contact with again?

Kurt Rose: No, not any of them.

Interviewer: Are there any that you know actually went to camps?

Kurt Rose: Yes, several I would say, at least close to 10.

Interviewer: From which towns?

Kurt Rose: Uncles, aunts, and cousins. I had a great aunt, this is the sister of Fred Goldner's grandmother and my grandmother's sister, and her name was Bobbette Spier, who was 84 years old. And in 1942 was going to be picked up by the Nazis, ostensibly to be taken to a concentration camp, and she committed suicide at age 84. I just found that out fairly recently. Her granddaughter lives in Palo Alto today, and her great-grandson lives in San Francisco. And I don't think they knew very much about their grandmother or great-grandmother until fairly recently, all of these things have come to light.

Interviewer: When you go back to town, you're going to see the new synagogue, is that right?

Kurt Rose: Yes, I have a picture of the new synagogue, and I think that the best available information is that there are about 250 Jews, this is it; 250 Jews remaining there, and mostly old people. This is a new building as you can see and very modern looking.

Interviewer: Nothing remains from that old synagogue.

Kurt Rose: No.

Interviewer: Is this one on the spot of the old one?

Kurt Rose: No, it's out somewhere. Same thing as building the temple here I think, way out somewhere.

Interviewer: You know, I'm just wondering what effect the experiences you had in that hometown and what you saw of Nazism, has it had any effect on the way you've raised your children?

Kurt Rose: Well, I would say that I'm lucky that most of them are very conscious of being Jews and practice Judaism in their own way. One or two of them are very active in the synagogue or temple and I think that I've done what little I could to instill that feeling in them, and I hope that it will carryover until the next generation.

Interviewer: Is there any other message that you would like others who might see this tape maybe years from now to remember about your experiences in Nazi Germany and coming to this country. Is there something you would like people to remember?

Kurt Rose: I think that it's a good idea to practice something right here and that is to support those who are in one way or another fighting anti-Semitism. We need to tap that reservoir. We need to encourage that sort of feeling. And having found a man who went to school with me, who says that he's a Baptist and has good relations with the Jewish congregation and that they recently had a program about Israel given by Israelis or by people living in Israel at least. And he says among others that "we are praying that God would protect the land of Israel." This is a German and this is the German who took up for me when the Nazis ganged up on me, and that's significant.

Interviewer: So people should remember and they should fight anti-Semitism in any form.

Kurt Rose: I think there are several organizations that do that. There are many ways that you can fight anti-Semitism. One good way would be to set a personal example, which is, you know, not always easy to do. But if one engages in participating in communal activities and in organizations that contribute to a better life in the United States and a better understanding about minorities, that's one thing all of us can do. And of course to be good Jews to the best of our ability, and each one of us has a different way of looking at that and a different way of interpreting, but what it means to be a good Jew. You have to have it in your heart and certainly after experiencing what I did, this is paramount in my life. I don't want to sound sanctimonious, but it's very, very important to me. Possibly next to my family and the United States and the feelings I have about the country, this is of the utmost importance in my life, to be a good Jew.

Interviewer: That's it. Well, we are done.