

**Transcript:**

Leon May

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Interviewer: This Ruth Tanner and I'm interviewing Leon May. It's May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1990. Leon, what I'm interested in finding out about as I mentioned to you is the story of the May family sponsorship of at least 200 German Jewish refugees to Nashville from your perspective, from that of your father, and your grandfather, anyone else you'd like to mention and feel is important in this effort. And with that, if you could tell me about your family's ties to the town of Hochst, Germany near Frankfurt.

Leon May: Well, my grandfather was born in Hochst, Germany which is near...a small country town close to Frankfurt on Main and he came to this country when I think he was 19 years old in 1880. He was one of six boys and six girls. It was a remarkable family for health, all 12 lived to maturity, which was most unusual in those days, and a number of them came to this country around the same time. My grandfather came, I think one even went at some point to South Africa but there were quite a few left and consequently, we had quite a large family left in Germany and my grandfather kept up with them. I think he visited there, I believe, in 1906 and again in 1913 and then 1928. And that time, I was a little boy but I was with them because all of that was before the Hitler period.

Interviewer: So you were there...you yourself were there in 1928?

Leon May: 1928. Now, I don't remember much of that. We did go to Hochst and I have one or two memories of Hochst from that time. As a little boy, some trouble I got into. Mischief was my memories primarily of that, but we were there later too. I did go to Germany with my parents when I was a teenager.

Interviewer: When was that?

Leon May: Well, we went in 1934. My father was a great traveler. Loved to travel plus there was a reason too. He was trying to get people out and that was part of the reason for going. We went in '34, again in '36, '38, and '39, and I was with them on all those occasions.

Interviewer: Wow. Can you remember from those visits in the mid-30's when Hitler had come to power and Nazis were certainly on the move as a political force? Do you have recollections of anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish incidents or were you told incidents by others that you can recall and relate to us?

Leon May: We visited in Germany, I know, I think the first time was '36 and again in '38. I think that's the only time we actually went into Germany itself. In '36, I remember going to Stuttgart which was where the American consulate was and they want to go see the consulate in connection with trying to get some people out. And one of the things I remember about it, there's nothing to do with antisemitism and such but the whole city was decorated with flags everywhere, much more than you would see here in this country anywhere on the Fourth of July. It was no special day. This was just the way it was all the time and of course everywhere, you saw people in uniform, one type of uniform and not—

Interviewer: Nazi flags?

Leon May: Nazi flags, yes. And they did never bother us, the only instant I can remember, I think that was in '38, we visited in Hochst and because it's a small town so when somebody out of town was coming there, particularly foreigners, they're aware of it and we walked over to, I believe, the cemetery and maybe the...it was Jewish cemetery and maybe the synagogue, I'm not sure of the synagogue. And a little while later, some officials came and we were taking some pictures, we weren't supposed to and they confiscated our film. Actually, we had not taken any pictures of it. That's the only thing I remember where they bothered us. At this point, they still weren't bothering Americans. Particularly, we were there in '36, they were particularly nice because that's when the Olympics were being held in Germany so we had personally no trouble. And remember, all of these was before Kristallnacht. Even in '38, that Kristallnacht, this was in the summer, that occurred in November so the worst had not started.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea of the size of the...the rest of the population of Hochst and then the Jewish population?

Leon May: No, I really don't know. I would guess there's a few thousand. I don't know how many Jews were there.

Interviewer: In your visits in '36, '38, '39, how would you describe the atmosphere in Hochst or in Stuttgart or anywhere, you know, if you want to speak about other places, among the Jewish Residents?

Leon May: Well, they were of course anxious, extremely anxious and I can remember, my grandfather whose name was Jacob, everybody would call him Uncle J. Some of these people were no relation whatsoever but they were...anything they could do to get some kind of relationship, gave them a possibility of getting out and the...let's say I was...well in '38, I was 16 and a 16-year-old kid is not that involved. I was certainly well aware of things and I guess I was a fairly serious kid at the time but still, I was a teenager.

Interviewer: Hmm-hmm.

Leon May: And the people were...well it was different...I'm just getting over a cold, excuse my coughing. Now, it depended somewhat on the circumstances of people even then. For example, people who are...the ones who probably got it worst were those who were very well off. I mean, worst in that they were more reluctant to leave. They have more to lose. The people that we brought over earlier by and large were not those as well off as some of the later ones. In particular, one of my grandfather's brothers, Moses was his name, and he was very wealthy. My grandfather came from a poor family but they were country folks, just a little town, none of them had anything but he had been extremely successful and was a multimillionaire, which in the 1930's...and which was of course extremely wealthy. And he didn't...my father and grandfather kept saying, "Come on, get out," but he didn't want to do it. First of all, the Germany Jews relatively felt a certain security. They were kind of like, we here in this country are today. They just didn't think that could happen in Germany. Certainly, no one ever foresaw the extent that would happen but that they didn't...they thought, well, he'll outlive Hitler, that's what he sort of felt and he was reluctant to come. Others were more willing to come and particularly, they were anxious to get their children out. The first ones, I don't really remember and I don't know that they were the first ones my father and grandfather and uncle signed for, but were Erna and Lilly Conn. Erna Conn now is Erna Preis, married Fritz Preis and Lilly is Lilly Levy. All still Nashvillians of course. They were about 18 or 20 at that time and they came over here. They actually lived with us for a year or two and they worked at the hosiery mill. That was one thing that we were fortunate in that we could provide jobs for so many of these

people. Only, they would let you bring people out if they weren't going to be a burden. That's one of the things they were always afraid, that were going to be a burden. But if you're able to take care of that and say we were able to give many of them jobs. They weren't such great jobs but they were jobs that they could make a living because no one got much pay in those days. Another thing with the Germany Jews, we're somewhat fortunate, the quotas in those days were based on the makeup of the population, something like 1880, 1890 in this country, it was done really in this country to make it where southern Europeans, Jews, because most of the Jews came from this country late, and the Italians and others came to this country late. And therefore, at this time, they chose 1890 as the time or 1880, I don't know the data actually. It was discriminating against these areas, but there were always a lot of Germans and the Germans, and the French, and of course the English, the Scotch and those, came to this country early and therefore there was a good quota for Germans.

Interviewer: So with high quota numbers for Germans?

Leon May: Germans yes. So the Germans had the chance to come here because of that if they could get a sponsor.

Interviewer: Okay. I'd like to come back Leon to a couple of things that you mentioned in terms of your father and your grandfather. When did they first...several questions really and I should probably do them one at a time but I'll give you the gist and then we'll come back. When did they first begin to provide affidavits of support and for whom and were these people basically relatives? Were they only relatives, I guess that's—

Leon May: Well, I remember in 1934, the summer of '34 when we went to Europe, we went to Strasbourg, we did not go into Germany and Paula Conn and her mother came over there to meet us because they wanted to find out about their daughters and granddaughters who had come, Erna and Lilly, so therefore, if my memory is correct, already in early '34, they must have at least brought the Conn girls out.

Interviewer: And they were relatives?

Leon May: They were relatives, yes, and say my father...this grandmother of theirs was a sister of my grandfather.

Interviewer: And as the affidavits progressed and the numbers grew and grew, my understanding was, and please correct me if I'm mistaken, that eventually, they extended to non-related individuals and then even to people who were not from Hochst, that is non-related, non-Hochst residents.

Leon May: Yeah, well, I don't...because first of all, a lot of the people were not actually from Hochst anyway. Family had scattered some...I would say this uncle that I was saying, he lived in Frankfurt, the Conns lived in a little town called Ehrfelden and so they weren't necessarily from Hochst at all. Not too much of the family was left there, I don't think it did at that point...but yes, they...first of all, on any kind of relationship you could...many of the people were not blood relatives. Now, two or three that I have mentioned were but a lot of...for example, you mentioned Elsa Frank, her name was Elsa Herzfeld as I recall, she was from Hochst but she wasn't actually...I don't think any relation...if it was, it's so distant but if they could get some connection and she was one of the people that was brought over here and she also worked at the hosiery mill for a while. I might say that no person was ever a burden on us either. They all managed to take care of themselves. Now, in some cases, we got them started with not the greatest jobs and hosiery mill didn't pay great salaries but it was a living.

Interviewer: I will come back to that. What happened to your Uncle Moses, did he come eventually?

Leon May: Yes. Well, what happened there on Kristallnacht, he and his son-in-law were arrested and they paid heavy fines and got freed but that convinced him. And they arrived, probably the spring, their whole family, including his two granddaughters who grew up here, Ellen and Irene Moore, who no longer live here but did grow up and go to Vanderbilt, they came in the spring of '39, so they didn't get out much of here. Had they waited much longer, they wouldn't been able to get out and I'm sure they'd all be dead now.

Interviewer: So to your knowledge, all the May, the direct May relatives--

Leon May: No, there were two of the older sisters, an Aunt Leni and an Aunt Yetcha, that was her name. Aunt Yetcha was Paula Conn's mother. Paula Conn is...there's quite a few descendants of her right here in Nashville including Linda Zeitlin. But anyway, they, these were two old ladies, probably 80ish at that time and they came out by themselves and that was rather an ordeal for two old ladies in

those days to do that. They were restricted weren't they? They had about four dresses on or something I think, just trying out more clothes. I don't know that they were so strict but that's one of the things I remember about them leaving.

Interviewer: To go back to the affidavits, I have heard that...and you say you're not sure of the number but I heard that the May family brought 210...provided 210 affidavits over a period of...from 1934 on. Do you know when it stopped?

Leon May: Well, it would have stopped in '39 because that ended it, with the war.

Interviewer: I want to ask you, what I hope is a more profound question. What motivated your father and grandfather to extend themselves to this degree do you think?

Leon May: Well, my father was, as you know, a person that felt very deeply about saving the Jewish people and he was a relatively early Zionist, particularly considering his background coming from a reformed German Jewish background that was not the kind that produced Zionists but it did. In his case, it did. And they were fortunately in a position where as I say they could help because of having the hosiery mill and they spent...my father spent a great deal of his time involved in this. I haven't mentioned my Uncle Dan, I don't think Dan was involved in this that much but as Dan used to jokingly say he had...that my father had one big advantage over him, he had a hardworking brother and it was Dan who was running the hosiery mill in this time which gave my father the leisure to do these things. So Dan, well, he didn't probably do...the work on this was an important part of it too.

Interviewer: Do you remember being a part of the family discussions between your father, your uncle, and your grandfather on the whole question of rescuing these people, of providing them a place of sanctuary?

Leon May: Well, I don't really know there were any philosophical discussions, it was just a think you did. These, first of all, in many cases were relatives and in some cases rather close relatives. And of course I was aware of it and say we had two of them living when I was 12 years old, came to live with us, Erna and Lilly, so I was well aware of the situation. And in fact, in my senior year, there was a young man, Walter Strauss, who is a relative of Ernest Freudenthal no relation to us who came and stayed with us in our home. My father liked to learn foreign languages, for instance learning French and this young man had been in Switzerland and spoke excellent French and my father was hoping that he would

pick up some French from him but he never did speak French to him I don't think.

Interviewer: I'd like to turn for a minute and talk about the effects of providing these affidavits in Nashville if that's okay with you. I looked over, I think, what had been the State Department form that specified the criteria, the financial criteria for a sponsor and just to simplify, it said that the sponsor had to assume financial responsibility for the individual sponsored. I'd like to know from you what this meant in real terms? For example, did it mean paying their passage, finding them a place to live?

Leon May: I don't know—

Interviewer: You mentioned the jobs, I'd like to come back to that.

Leon May: Yeah, I really—

Interviewer: So, you know, that sort of thing.

Leon May: Uh-huh. I really don't know, I don't remember us having to...I wasn't aware of it, let's put it that way, if we did have...if it ever cost us anything. It certainly was not...I don't think any great cost I don't believe. As they say...I was a kid and so it could have been...but to say, we were in a fortunate position of being able to supply many of them with jobs but a lot of them never came to Nashville. A lot of these people, I just never even knew. Some stayed in New York and perhaps other places. I've heard of people that said "Oh, your father brought me over here." I never knew existed.

Interviewer: So they didn't have to come to Nashville?

Leon May: No, no, evidently not.

Interviewer: I see.

Leon May: I presume because they didn't all come to Nashville.

Interviewer: Interesting. I'd like to know a little bit about the May Hosiery Company since I thought maybe that would give us a perspective to talk about too. Your grandfather founded it?

Leon May: Yes. About 1896, he was living in Laconia, New Hampshire and that's where my father was actually born although he moved to Nashville when he was four. And he bid on making hosiery at the state penitentiary and got the bid. He had never been in the hosiery business and that's how the May family got to Nashville. He started out at the penitentiary. He later moved it outside.

Interviewer: So, your grandfather brought, obviously his young children and that was your father and Dan.

Leon May: Well, Dan was not yet born, Dan was born in Nashville.

Interviewer: He was born in Nashville.

Leon May: Yeah, at that time.

Interviewer: But by the mid-30's, how many employees were there in May Hosiery excluding the German Jews?

Leon May: Well, it was the mid...I don't really know in the 30's too much. I would say it was a few hundred probably. It was a very labor-intensive type industry particularly at that time. There wasn't much automation and there were probably, I don't know, more than probably 20 Germans working there at one time. I don't imagine there were more than that.

Interviewer: Hmm-hmm.



Leon May: And they would work there for a while and then often find something else. Many of them started there. Someone like Ernest Freudenthal worked there one time.

Interviewer: But it was really part of your father and grandfather and uncle's idea that as part of being sponsors, if they wanted to come to Nashville, they had jobs in the hosiery mill?

Leon May: Yeah, well basically, I think that was true.

Interviewer: In terms of the other kinds—I mean, we're very accustomed today to think of assistance in terms of food and housing and that sort of thing. Did the established Jewish community in Nashville take up any of that? Did they help the German Jews who came here?

Leon May: I don't think it was organized to the extent that it is now. The community wasn't that organized. The funds that were raised were minimal in those days. I don't know really what the community as a community did. There were people who did and I'm sure there was some organization behind that. I've heard Henry Sender talk about the first two people he met here or my mother and Hanna Mae Weinbach and so they were all up here. Now, Henry and his father were not someone that we happen to sign for someone else, I can't remember who, signed for Henry and his family.

Interviewer: Do you think that the refugees who came, regardless of who provided the affidavit, were welcomed here and do you think that the people extended themselves to them?

Leon May: Well, I think...I'd say things were just not as organized as they are now but I think in general, yes, there was an acceptance of these people. I don't think and say things just weren't organized the way they are now where they've got a setup for driving and all kinds of things with the Russians coming today. There's one other thing that is not directly related to this but I guess with be somewhat involved as far as the Holocaust and say, in 1939, we went to Europe. My father was a delegate to the World Zionist Congress and also Hannah Kirchner was also a delegate to that congress. And this occurred on the...as it turned out, it wasn't known of course at the time, it was organized right on the eve of World War II. And I remember, it was quite a lot of excitement at the time and these...but this was the World Zionist Congress so you had some of the leaders, the world

leaders of the movement there. Weizmann, Ben-Gurion, [unintelligible 25:28] I guess was still around. All the big names that we know now that have created the state of Israel were there at this meeting. And no one realized the great tragedy that these people who a large percentage were from Poland or places like that, Romania, when they left there and it broke up, let's say the war was just so imminent, this was the end of August, broke up and those people of course went back and most of them to their death. So, a rather traumatic situation that we didn't know about, how traumatic it was. I remember I was...at the time, had just turned 17 and we had some of the great rabbis of this country were delegates to this thing and they were just all wanting to run to get out of Europe. Yeah, they seemed rather scared that I can remember as a kid commenting, they just don't have too much faith or they wouldn't be this scared. But we were due to sail on a French ship on the first of September [unintelligible 0:26:43.2] France which was the day the war actually started.

Interviewer: Was there a feeling at the congress that as you recall that people needed to be rescued immediately? Did it increase the sense that you had to find countries of refuge for the Jews of Europe?

Leon May: Well, I don't know...as I say, I attended some of the night sessions and say I was 17, I don't know what the...first of all, I couldn't speak to many of the people and I wasn't that involved, but...because no one at that time realized what would happen. I don't think anyone foresaw that the final solution, so-called final solution.

Interviewer: Let me go back to the affidavits and something else that you had mentioned. You mentioned some other people that had come here with the assistance of other Nashvilleans. Were you aware of other Nashville families or even a committee of people perhaps that were also sponsors of others and brought them in the kinds of numbers your family did?

Leon May: Well, there was no one that brought them in that kind of numbers, but I think for example Alvin Corman, who was Beck Raskin's father, I remember he signed for some. Those were some. Perhaps that...and I don't know whether my father influenced him to do that or not because these were relatives of ours. My mother and Alvin were first cousins. And of course, if someone else could sign, it was better because we had signed for so many and perhaps that was why he signed, I don't know for sure but there were others, for example, the Westfield family, they had some relatives here and the whole family was brought here. Kurt Rose, who we saw today, he was related to the Goldeners, and I guess they signed for him. So other people were doing things. I don't

think anyone did anywhere approaching the scale but there were others that had relatives and things that were trying to help.

Interviewer: From your point of view, did the refugees that you have known, make a successful transition to life in Nashville?

Leon May: Well yes, I think by and large, very successful. Naturally, the older you are, the tougher it was. For example, I mentioned this great uncle of mine Moses May that it was very difficult for him. He was a man of 70, he had, I'd say, been a very wealthy man that lived really in luxury in Europe and to be brought to Nashville and live in the Parkview apartment which was no...it was not the lap of luxury by a long shot. One of the things that got him was the heat, getting used to that. I can remember when we visited in Germany, I think it was one of the trips there, that the temperature happen to hit a hot day in Frankfurt, it got up to about 90. He didn't even bother going to work. That was just too hot to work. And then to come to Nashville in the days prior to air conditioning, it was tough on him even just that one thing. But he made the best of it and he was never complaining that this is terrible over here. He was delighted and just thankful that he was here. And I think most of them made a very good adjustment and as you know, most of them have been contributors to society. No person that I know of ever caused us any problem or any burden financially or otherwise that I'm aware of, that I ever heard of so I don't think you could ask for more. And it wasn't set up in those days the way it is now that we have for the Russians where the community is helping. Most of them had to hack it on their own, somewhere they did, and we also must remember, when they were coming here, this was right during the depression, jobs were tough to get. So it was in bad economic times as well so I think they deserve a great deal of credit for the way they did adapt and I'd say it was particularly difficult for older people as you would expect.

Interviewer: Let me ask you a question that we've been asking some of the others, do you feel that your personal contact and in a sense, your relationship to this whole project is unique but did your contact with the rescue of these people changed you in a perceivable way? Do you think that you look at people or events in life differently because of your family's commitment to helping other people, to saving other people really?

Leon May: Well, I think you are a product of your family, a product of your environment and what you experienced in life. Had I not gone through this, I think it would have perhaps been a little different. I'd have a different perspective but it's hard for me to say...but I'm sure it's bound to have had an influence on me.

Interviewer: Well, let me take it a step further then, do you think that you raised your children differently knowing what you knew perhaps as opposed to someone else in Nashville who might not have had that information, that knowledge?

Leon May: Well, that's hard for me to say. I really don't know. It certainly had an influence on me. How that I translated to my children, I don't know because obviously, they don't have the same feeling as a...it hasn't affected them, this whole thing. They grew up in a totally different world than I did. I grew up before World War II and they grew up after World War II and so just a different world.

Interviewer: Do you think there were any negative consequences to your family and I'm talking about your father and grandfather and uncle perhaps for sponsoring so many people? Was there a backlash for them?

Leon May: Well, as I say, I don't know of anyone that ever caused any real trouble. I mean, I'm not saying that...I'm sure they're worried about things at times but I certainly don't know of any backlash or anything and they're not really negative. Whether there was any resentment at the hosiery mill of these people coming out, I don't know. It certainly never caused any labor problems or anything like that but I don't...and I say, there wasn't that many at any given time and they weren't given any cushy jobs. They just got in there and they had to do the dirty work just like anybody else had to do. They weren't given any special treatment. They weren't given good jobs or managerial jobs, anything like that. They just did the routine labor and I say hosiery in those days in particular was much hand labor and that's just what most of them did. They didn't have it easy.

Interviewer: And when they could, then they found other work, if they—

Leon May: Gradually many of them did, yes.

Interviewer: In thinking back over that time, are there things you would have hoped were done differently by your family, by others? It's sort of a hypothetical question but it was a traumatic time and sometimes we feel like we can learn from our own past experiences, were there things that you thought might have gone better or...I don't know.

Leon May: Well, I don't really know, there are many things, in retrospect, I guess you could always...we look back upon the whole situation, pre-World War II, and now we talk about with the Russians, we want to get them out because we don't want that to happen to them what happened to the Germans and the Polish Jews. We maybe learned something. I don't hope and don't think it will go that far in Russia. No one envisioned...no one could have imagined that Germany would do what they did, to go that far, the so called Final Solution, to literally try to destroy all the Jews of the world and they came close to doing that in Europe.

Interviewer: Did your family, it's something I'm thinking as we're talking, ever that your father, grandfather, uncle, ever receive any public recognition for bringing so many people here, that you're aware of anything—

Leon May: I don't remember any public recognition. It has been mentioned many times but and so you say, you were aware of it but there was never...in those days, they didn't...it wasn't the gimmick to honor people so much. Now, as you know, every week, they're now honoring someone in the Nashville community that's a somewhat old fundraising gimmick now. In those days, they didn't do that.

Interviewer: One of the things that struck me, I only looked at that recollection that Dan May has written that you have there and the book that was written about your father, *Foot Soldier in Zion*.

Leon May: Yeah.

Interviewer: There's no mention at all of their rescue efforts and I was very surprised. I remember Rosemary saying to you, don't you let be modest so I'm trying to pin you down here. There's no record that I'm aware of, maybe you are and can change my—

Leon May: I guess, I'm just thinking, it has been a long time since I read the book on *Foot Soldier in Zion*. I thought that was mentioned there but maybe you're right, I don't know. That was of course mainly about my father's work in the Zionist movement.

Interviewer: Yes, I know.

Leon May: That was the main thing, but I thought it was mentioned but you may be right.

Interviewer: And another question that I had thought about was, was there a cap on the number of people the family could sponsor? Someone told me it was 210 and I don't know--

Leon May: I don't know if that's many or not. I don't know. I don't know whether there was and say, I think in some cases, my father tried to get other people and where I mentioned one about Alvin Corman, I'm not sure that that's the case but I think that's very likely the case that these were mutual relatives and therefore would be better to have someone else sponsoring them, but I'm not even sure that that is true in this case.

Interviewer: I wanted to ask you about something that I had heard about recently and that is that I wondered if you are aware that there's a delegation from Hochst of non-Jews coming here in October 1990 to visit with their so called Jewish refugees and I was wondering how you feel about that visit?

Leon May: Yes, I am aware of that. Hedy Lustig told me about that because she was over there and that's what precipitated when they visited there. Well I had been...some Jewish people have said they would never go to Germany. I have been to Germany since World War II and in 1965, I took, at that time, my two older children with us and we went to Hochst and I tried to show them and we toured a fair amount of Germany and I did want to make one point though, I also took them to Dachau. I wanted them to see what did happen also. The Germans that we met were very nice and everything else but I wanted them to understand that what had really happened at one point. I just sort of feel there's no way the Germans who were responsible for this could be forgiven, but I don't hold the Germans forever. Naturally, it has an effect upon you but I'm not one of these people that would say I would never go to Germany, I obviously did go and I don't feel an animosity particularly towards people who were not alive or were so young that they certainly couldn't have done anything. And I don't believe every German that was even an adult at that time was...felt that way that each would have gone out and kill the people. I don't think they were all that way. Unfortunately, they let themselves be led along these lines and can't be excused completely because of that. So, I intend to try to be nice to these people. I think they're trying to do the right thing. I think after World War II, Germany tried to make amends. You can't make amends for killing millions of people. You can only try to do the best that you can so I think, you know, I'm a little leery right now of the reunification of Germany. Anybody

that grew up and was in World War II I think would be to some extent. But I think the Germans had tried to make amends and have been decent citizens of the world since World War II. So, I intend to be courteous to these people and to be friendly with them and I think they're trying to be so I think we should try to reciprocate.

Interviewer: Did you serve in World War II?

Leon May: Yes, I was in the Navy for three years active duty.

Interviewer: In Europe?

Leon May: No, I was in the Pacific.

Interviewer: The Pacific. In terms of your family...going back to the family again and it's role in bringing so many people to safety and freedom here, is there a message, sorry I touched the camera, is there a message, it's sort of a phony word but, in that that you think other people...you'd want to share with other people?

Leon May: Well, I don't know the message. I think one of the messages which we think have learned from this experience is that the worst can happen. I'd say no one can imagine how terrible that a thing would be if anything can happen and when there's a chance to save people, we should save people. Now with the Russians, we have this opportunity and I think the community realizes that so I think we have learned something from the experience.

Interviewer: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to add?

Leon May: Well I think we covered it fairly well. Say, as you can appreciate my...I'm not like some of these other people who are being interviewed who experienced it themselves. I was strictly on the periphery and I was a kid, so my knowledge of it and my experience is not as deep as others who really experienced the Germans and others who you are interviewing, lived through it themselves. I did not live through it myself. I was here in Nashville and I was just like the rest of the kids growing up here.

Interviewer: I mean, following that up and I wasn't really intending to ask you, but once the war began, was your awareness down of what had all those years, those visits with your father, did it make your awareness more acute do you think of—

Leon May: Well, my father was a man of great foresight. I mean, that's probably why in spite of his background, he was a Zionist. And say he came from a background, the temple of his...of the earlier...the turn of the century did not produce Zionist and that was...and the German Jews were not the best product...potential products either for it and yet he became a Zionist early on. And he recognized the danger of Hitler in the early days of Hitler and said he should be stopped. I can remember at the time of Munich in 1938, they asked for the congregation to stand up and pray that peace had been...this was after Munich actually, a few day, this was right at the time and my father refused to stand up. He said this isn't peace, this is going to lead to war. And so, during the war, my father was a hawk, extreme hawk. I mean, he felt that we were going to be in it sooner or later and we should do something right away. So he was very pro-English for example in the days when England stood alone and that we should help do everything to help England. And might say, after World War II, he was for stopping Russia. He believed that Russia was a great menace and so he was a man of great perception. Unfortunately, I'm afraid I don't quite inherit that.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like he was a most unusual person. When did he die?

Leon May: He died in May of '74. He was 81 at that time. That was the only time in his life he was ever in the hospital.

Interviewer: Would you like to show us images from the...

Leon May: Well, I don't know that there's anything in particular in this. I just brought it along. This is sort of a semi-family history that Dan May wrote and it really doesn't relate at all to, as you have mentioned, to what you're talking about. This was written supposedly to his grandchildren trying to tell them about his family. There were a few pictures in here and I don't know that there's anything really...I think there was a picture of the house in Hochst I believe, but I don't know whether I can even find it. Well, I don't think really...yeah, here's the family home here, a picture of it, this is about 1928 the way it looked. This over here is about the way it looked in 1913. I'd like to say it was a manor. It was a very modest country home in Europe going back centuries. I think my family lived in that house since 1690 and I can remember on one of our trips to Europe when we went to Germany probably in '36. We visited...there was a young man



who...a German refugee, he had come to this country, had come to Nashville, we had no connection with him and we visited in some small town, his family there, his parents. And over the door was a date of 1500 and something and I remember, I was sort of saying to myself here, Adolf Hitler who was an Austrian says these people aren't German and they have lived in this one house, the family, for four centuries.

Interviewer: Oh.

Leon May: Ruth, I want to do is, since we seem to be winding up, I think what you all are doing is very worthwhile and something that, not so much what I have to say, but in particular, some of these people who went through it themselves and experienced some of the Holocaust or at least part of the earlier part of the German persecution. I think it is important to document that for the future.

Interviewer: I agree but I also think that if your family and others like you hadn't provided those people with a place of refuge, we would have many, many fewer stories to tell today. And your role of that, your families role of that—

Leon May: Well, I can take pride in it for my father and grandfather and uncle. I had...because of my age, I had very little to do with it of course.

Interviewer: I think we're all set Mark? You want to do the pictures again?